# Queer Traffic

## SEX, PANIC, FREE TRADE

Jennifer Tyburczy


BUY

**dissident acts**

A series edited by
Macarena Gómez-Barris and Diana Taylor

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JENNIFER TYBURCZY



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*¡From Palestine to Mexico, all the walls have got to go!*

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## ABBREVIATIONS

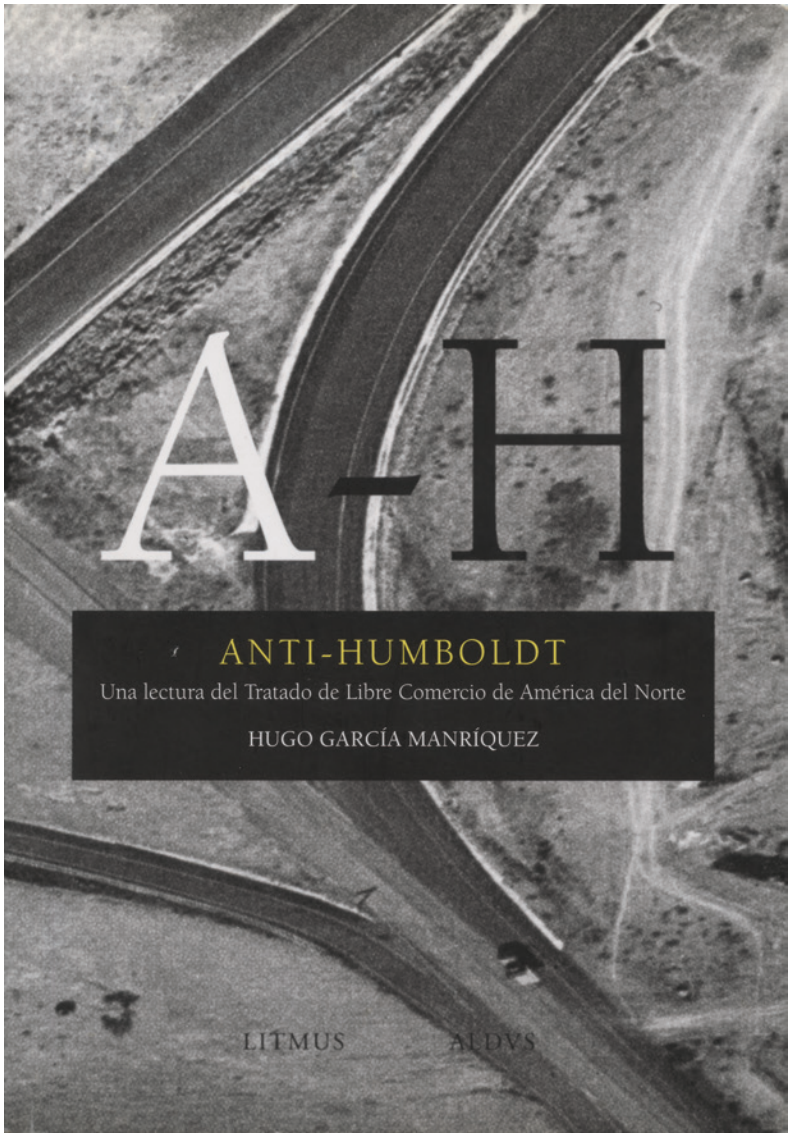
| | |
|---|---|
| BDSM | bondage and discipline, domination and submission, and sadomasochism |
| CBP | US Customs and Border Protection |
| CUSFTA | Canada-US Free Trade Agreement |
| CUSMA | Canada-US-Mexico Agreement (also known as USMCA and T-MEC) |
| EU | European Union |
| EZLN | Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Zapatistas) |
| FBI | Federal Bureau of Investigation |
| FTA | free-trade agreement |
| GATT | General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade |
| IMF | International Monetary Fund |
| INEGI | Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (National Institute of Statistics and Geography) |
| INTERPOL | International Criminal Police Organization |
| IP | intellectual property |
| IPR | intellectual property rights |

| | |
|---|---|
| LGBTQ | lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer |
| MERCOSUR | Mercado Común del Sur (Southern Common Market) |
| NAFTA | North American Free Trade Agreement |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| PAN | Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party) |
| PRD | Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Party of the Democratic Revolution) |
| PRI | Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolution Party) |
| PSA | public service announcement |
| TLCAN | Tratado de Libre Comercio de América del Norte (NAFTA) |
| T-MEC | Tratado entre México, Estados Unidos, y Canada (Treaty between Mexico, the United States, and Canada) |
| TRIPS | Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights |
| UNAM | Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (National Autonomous University) |
| USMCA | US-Mexico-Canada Agreement (NAFTA 2.0) |
| USTR | US Trade Representative |
| WTO | World Trade Organization |

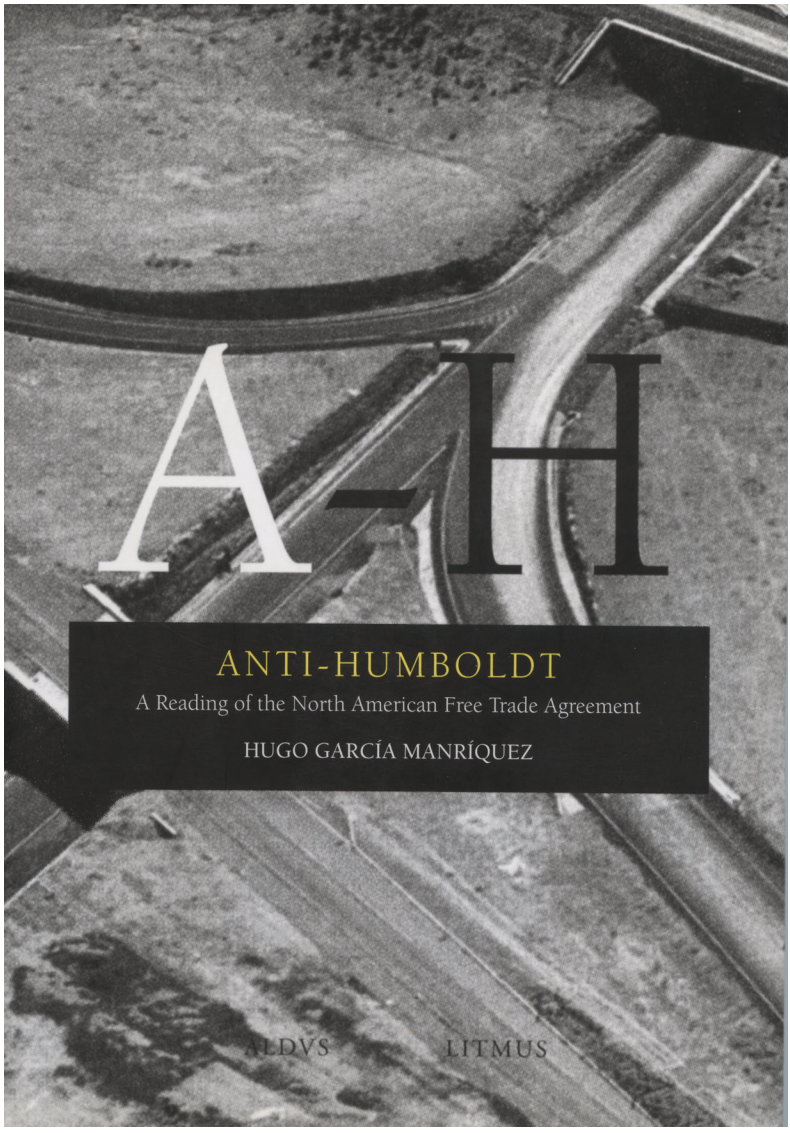
# PREFACE

## NAFTA's Bottoms: An Opening

How you hold Hugo García Manríquez's poetry book determines who is on top and who is on the bottom. His bilingual translation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (in English, *Anti-Humboldt: A Reading of the North American Free Trade Agreement*; in Castellano Spanish, *Anti-Humboldt: Una lectura del Tratado de Libre Comercio de América del Norte* [TLCAN]) uses a book design that assumes the position—top or bottom but never a switch (see figs. FM.1 and FM.2).[1] To produce this bilingual and bi-positional artifact, García Manríquez's 2014 poem works through the official English- and Spanish-language documents of the agreement (which are also the US and Mexican documents), with a title, "Anti-Humboldt," that refers to the nineteenth-century German explorer and naturalist Alexander von Humboldt, a symbol of colonial knowledge production against whom his poem performs its titular oppositional "anti." Through a poesis of disorganization and erasure, García Manríquez's poem unravels NAFTA and, with its seemingly anachronistic title, locates NAFTA's origins in the history of European expansion in wealth, knowledge, technologies, and commodities. The placing of the documents in vertical hierarchy, one inverted by the other, an inversion that highlights how language differences create conceptual ghosts and make some terms pregnant with meaning, performs the incommensurability of the two documents and how, in many ways, it thinks against itself, undoes itself in translation.




**FM.1** Hugo García Manríquez, front cover of *Anti-Humboldt: Una lectura del Tratado de Libre Comercio de América del Norte* (Litmus Press, 2014).




**FM.2** Hugo García Manríquez, back cover of *Anti-Humboldt: A Reading of the North American Free Trade Agreement* (Litmus Press, 2014).

The performance of free trade depends on the claim, made in NAFTA itself, that "the English, French, and Spanish texts of this Agreement are equally authentic" (NAFTA, article 2206). This performance obfuscates the gaps in translation and the unequal power dynamics and colonial histories that always already dictated the terms of what was called, in the document's English name, "an agreement," and in its Spanish name, "*un tratado*," or treaty. Although "treaty" and "agreement" are collapsed as synonyms, and most international law experts do view the terms as interchangeable, *treaty* is a more specific term of legal binding between two or more states for a necessary or vital matter, while *agreement* is a more generalized term for a mutual agreement between parties. These terms and their nuanced yet ignored differences harken back to another pivotal moment in US-Mexico relations: the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, in which Mexico was forced to cede 55 percent of its territory to the United States. The collective memory of Guadalupe Hidalgo, often viewed by the transnational left as NAFTA's other imperialist bookend, oriented Mexico away from collaboration with the United States. Not even a century and a half later, however, then-President (and NAFTA signer) Carlos Salinas de Gortari embraced international trade and foreign investment, thereby sealing Mexico's asymmetrical "special relationship" with the United States. NAFTA kicked the door open to a new era during which Mexico would be coerced, through the ongoing accumulation of foreign debt, to participate in the hemispheric designs of the United States. The transnationalization of the ongoing War on Drugs and the Plan Mérida initiative, where, under the guise of combating drug trafficking, Mexico militarized its southern border with Guatemala to stem Central American migration, are two notable examples of the wide-reaching changes NAFTA provoked. Following García Manríquez's poem, I want to bracket these mismatched translations beyond their literal meaning to show how NAFTA and TLCAN perform as two intimately related yet frictive documents of the negotiations themselves and *as* performances that rehearse two overlapping and at the same time competing concepts of free trade (figs. FM.3 and FM.4).

The instantiation of NAFTA/TLCAN in 1994 might be viewed as a climax, the money shot of colonial and neoimperial capitalism whose linguistic and applied contradictions engendered an intimate slippage between the two documents, their interpretations, and applications. As García Manríquez's poem makes clear, NAFTA is not only one document and, despite its attempts to force harmonized sameness, there is no one way to read NAFTA. Embracing but also moving beyond an approach to such documents as texts, I pro-

pose that we view the translations of NAFTA/TLCAN as cultural artifacts of free trade. This view allows us to ask, what do we learn from cultural flows such as translations and, in the instance of NAFTA/TLCAN, willful *mis*translations, as their terms of engagement shift and get adapted across borders? My hope is that this conceptual extension of what is considered the object and objective of free trade can help to make sense of a paradox in which the rhetoric of antiglobalization can be harnessed by, in one instance, the Zapatistas and left Chicana writers such as Cherríe Moraga, who described NAFTA as "the final surrender of the Mexican people's sovereign rights to land and livelihood" (1993, 229), and, in another instance, by Donald Trump, who in 2016 declared NAFTA "the worst trade deal maybe ever signed, anywhere" (Presidential debate, Hofstra University, September 26, 2016). NAFTA/TLCAN, as demonstrated through García Manríquez's placement of the two, one on top of the other, reveals the division of these translations into hierarchies of power, determined by their colonial histories, and the real-world violences that can emerge in the language gaps. At the same time, he gives his readers an opportunity to envision the queer potential of their intimate comingling. These gaps, made to appear and at other times disappear throughout the poem, are not just legal loopholes. Rather, they are openings within which to "dive from a harmonizing codification" (García Manríquez 2014, 75) and resist the fragmentation of our worlds, and all of us in them, into disposable commodities.

When it comes to conversations about global domination, broadly speaking but particularly in terms of the economy, Mexico is often cast as the bottom, what Octavio Paz has called *la chingada*, or the fucked. In attributing to Mexico the state of being fucked, Paz would have us view Mexico as the sexually penetrated and denigrated other, owing to Mexico's entwined colonial history with Spain, France, England, and the United States. Paz's theory of *la chingada*, found in his iconic book *El laberinto de la soledad* (*The Labyrinth of Solitude*), describes a positionality for understanding Mexico's twentieth-century identity. One of the book's essays, "Los hijos de

FOLLOWING PAGES:

**FM.3** Hugo García Manríquez, *Anti-Humboldt: Una lectura del Tratado de Libre Comercio de América del Norte*, NAFTA/TLCAN preámbulo (Litmus Press, 2014).

**FM.4** Hugo García Manríquez, *Anti-Humboldt: A Reading of the North American Free Trade Agreement*, NAFTA/TLCAN preamble (Litmus Press, 2014).

## PREÁMBULO

Los gobiernos de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos (México), de Canadá y de los Estados Unidos de América (Estado Unidos), decididos a:

REAFIRMAR los lazos especiales de amistad y cooperación entre sus naciones;

CONTRIBUIR al desarrollo armónico, a la expansión del comercio mundial y a ampliar la cooperación internacional;

CREAR un mercado más extenso y seguro para los bienes y los servicios producidos en sus territorios; REDUCIR las distorsiones en el comercio;

ESTABLECER reglas claras y de beneficio mutuo para su intercambio comercial;

ASEGURAR un marco comercial previsible para la planeación de las actividades productivas y de la inversión;

DESARROLLAR sus respectivos derechos y obligaciones derivados del Acuerdo General sobre Aranceles Aduaneros y Comercio, así como de otros instrumentos bilaterales y multilaterales de cooperación;

FORTALECER la competitividad de sus empresas en los mercados mundiales;

ALENTAR la innovación y la creatividad y fomentar el comercio de bienes y servicios que estén protegidos por derechos de propiedad intelectual;

CREAR nuevas oportunidades de empleo, mejorar las condiciones laborales y los niveles de vida en sus respectivo territorios;

EMPRENDER todo lo anterior de manera congruente con la protección y la conservación del ambiente;

PRESERVAR su capacidad para salvaguardar el bienestar público; PROMOVER el desarrollo sostenible;

REFORZAR la elaboración y la aplicación de leyes y reglamentos en materia ambiental; y

PROTEGER, fortalecer y hacer efectivos los derechos fundamentales de sus trabajadores;

HAN ACORDADO

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PREAMBLE

The Government of Canada, the Government of the United Mexican States and the Government of the United States of America, resolved to:
STRENGTHEN the special bonds of friendship and cooperation among their nations;
CONTRIBUTE to the harmonious development and expansion of world trade and provide a catalyst to broader international cooperation;
CREATE an expanded and secure market for the goods and services produced in their territories;
REDUCE distortions to trade;
ESTABLISH clear and mutually advantageous rules governing their trade;
ENSURE a predictable commercial framework for business planning and investment;
BUILD on their respective rights and obligations under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and other multilateral and bilateral instruments of cooperation;
ENHANCE the competitiveness of their firms in global markets;
FOSTER creativity and innovation, and promote trade in goods and services that are the subject of intellectual property rights;
CREATE new employment opportunities and improve working conditions an living standards in their respective territories;
UNDERTAKE each of the preceding in a manner consistent with environmental protection and conservation;
PRESERVE their flexibility to safeguard the public welfare;
PROMOTE sustainable development;
STRENGTHEN the development and enforcement of environmental laws and regulations; and
PROTECT, enhance and enforce basic workers' rights;
HAVE AGREED as follows:

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la Malinche" (The children of Malinche), unpacks the bottom/top relationship between the Indigenous woman who came to be called Malinche (also known as Malintzín and Malinali, her Indigenous names; or Doña Mariana to the Christians) and the conquistador Hernán Cortés. In calling Malinche and her offspring *chingada*, Paz suggests that Indigenous peoples in Mexico (*los pueblos originarios*, the original peoples) literally got fucked by the arrival of the Spanish to the Americas. From this act of getting fucked emerged the fabled beginning of *mestizaje*, a racial mixture between *el chingón* (he who fucks, who is on top: in this instance, the white Spanish conquistador, Hernán Cortés) and she who is fucked or rendered bottom (Malinche as a stand-in for *los pueblos originarios*). Cast as the sometimes victim, sometimes hero, and sometimes traitor of Mexico for performing the roles of translator (slave?) and lover (survivor?), she is pitied, honored, and hated, even as the legendary roots of *Mexicanidad* and the racial politics of *mestizaje* rhetorically hinge on a history of sexual acts between Indigenous and Iberian bodies. The circulation of *mestizaje* as a concept and a performance of hybrid identity, as Licia Fiol-Matta has shown in *A Queer Mother for the Nation*, depended on the assimilation of Indigenous difference, the occlusion and erasure of Blackness, the adulation and celebration of Eurocentrism and whiteness, and "matrimonial eugenics" that policed sex, concentrating on those bodies with reproductive capabilities (2001, 82–83). Embedded within this mythic racialized identity story, *Mexicanidad*, while seen as the "bottom" in the free-trade threesome that NAFTA summons, contains a multitude of subject positions that go beyond the binary of *el chingón* and *la chingada*. As we shall see in the pages that follow, bottoms can be bratty, switchy, toppy, and full of (sexual) power.[2]

As one of the Americas' infamous power bottoms, Malinche remains a frequently cited figure in the Mexican cultural imaginary, but outside Chicana feminist reclamations of her as *chingona* (she who fucks; badass woman) (e.g., Alarcón 1983; Alcalá 2001), she is most often invoked in everyday and patriarchal speech as *malinchista*, a term that denounces those who seemingly prefer foreign cultural production to those objects *hecho en México* (made in Mexico). The message encoded in the term *malinchista*, a derivation of *malinchismo* or the traitorous attraction to the foreign to the detriment of the nation, points to the ongoing popular prevalence of seeing the Mexican condition as one of *la chingada*. Charges of *malinchista* (being like Malinche) and marking one's body with the signs of another culture gradually took on new contours in the years following NAFTA's passage, when more foreign goods, particularly from the United States

(but not always made or assembled there), flowed through the formal market in monumental volume and with great speed. Mexico's pornographic proximity to the United States, conjuring Mexican autocrat Porfirio Díaz's oft-cited national lament "pobre México, tan lejos de dios y tan cerca de Estados Unidos" (poor Mexico, so far from god and so close to the United States),[3] is marked, then, not only by its geographic situation "below" or "under" Canada and the United States but also by NAFTA's rendering of it as the penetrated nation.

Mexico is portrayed as the penetrable exception to the ecstatic register within which the Anglo dominance of North America's impenetrable economic body is otherwise performed. In other words, the ecstatic register is the one where free trade is transcendent across three nations, even though only two (colonizing) nations benefit from it. Perhaps mirroring the gendered, raced, and sexed politics of *mestizaje* and its obscuring of certain racial histories of struggle, the arrival of free trade in the 1980s and 1990s among the formerly protectionist nations of the United States, Mexico, and Canada summoned a new regionality, the NAFTA-created expanse of "North America." For a time, this view of a collective North American region relegated the nationalist charge of *malinchista* to the pre-NAFTA past. Nation-states, if not always their people, embraced abstract claims to freedom and progress that could be embodied through the trappings of culture, but only in connection to the colonial conditions of cultural flows. When translated through the body politics of sartorial style and irreverent appropriation, drinking Coca-Cola or wearing a pair of Levi's jeans was no longer considered *malinchista*.

Rather than always already assuming the pathological penetrability of Mexico within the free-trade market, what J. K. Gibson-Graham problematizes as "the scene of abject submission" (2006, 94), I prefer to cast *malinchismo* as an embodiment of what Juana María Rodríguez calls "Latina longings" expressed "through a gesture of submission, a submission that engulfs, transforms, and redeploys that which sought to subjugate it" (2014, 93). Thus in this book, I don't seek to reclaim the *malinchista*; instead I want to wage a queer critique of the charge of *malinchismo*, a critique that thinks beyond the nostalgic return to a romanticized pre–free trade or pre-conquest world. Beyond the positing of her sole recuperative value in reproductive life as mother (to the nation or biological children), and in line with Chicana feminists who have explored the radical potentials of viewing *malinchismo* as an antipatriarchal interjection akin to lesbianism (Alarcón 1989; Moraga 1983), I too refuse Paz's depiction of her as "una figura que representa a las

indias, fascinadas, violadas o seducidas por los españoles" (a figure that represents the Indigenous, fascinated, raped, or seduced by the Spanish) (1959, 78). Instead, I am interested in how Malinche, alongside other female, feminine, femme, and/or feminized figures who have been accused of being traitors to the nation under colonial and capitalist imperatives, uses sex and sexuality as tactics of subversive (mis)translation.[4] She does so not merely to survive but also to find, foment, and take pleasure through everyday practices that exceed resistance. Indeed, throughout the book, I look to explicit sex as a tactical means of perverting free trade's performative (and normative) desires. Following performance artist Jesusa Rodríguez, who enacted a wily and sexy version of Malinche as "the first cunnilingual translator of Mesoamerica" (2003, 232), the *malinchista* of free trade does not always and everywhere translate in service to the colonizer. Rather she uses the tongue to divert the course of colonialism's fantasies, one of which is free trade. As performance artist Carmelita Tropicana once cheekily said, "You've got to be multilingual. I am very good with the tongue" (in the film *Carmelita Tropicana: Your Kunst Is Your Waffen* [1994]).

In other words, Malinche is not Karl Marx's prostitute, what Marx held up as the quintessence of capitalist exploitation. She is more akin to Roderick Ferguson's revision of Marx's "whore" as the "black drag-queen prostitute" (2003, 1), strutting her stuff along the Christopher Street pier in Marlon Riggs's film *Tongues Untied* (1989). She is pushed to the dangerous margins of the city by so-called urban renewal projects engineered by Rudolph Giuliani, first in New York and then exported through his hired consultancy in Latin American cities such as Rio de Janeiro and Mexico City (Davis 2013; Mountz and Curran 2009). Since the time of Marx and the inception of capitalist critique, then, the view that sex work is "only a specific expression of the general prostitution of the laborer" (Marx and Engels 1988, 100) sets the expressly sexual woman, whether she be queer, cisgender (cis), straight, or transgender (trans), vulnerable to the charges of dupe, slut, predator, parasite, failure, and victim.[5] The long history of erotophobic discourses that manufacture sex panics around sexual labor and commerce can be traced throughout the Malinche archive: hegemonically, she can only ever be cast and remembered as a betrayer to the *pueblos originarios*.

But talk that conflates all sex work with the ultimate form of capitalist labor exploitation is more well traveled than the women it claims to care about. Sex and trade, then, share a particular kind of relationship to power, one that cannot be sufficiently analyzed using the same tools that other NAFTA scholars such as Alyshia Gálvez (2018) have honed when examin-

ing the cultural influences of, in the instance of her study, the dumping of US government–subsidized corn into Mexico; nor can sex and trade be examined solely through the scholarship on illicit flows (e.g., drugs, guns, animals) that constitute both the underworld and the byproduct of trade liberalization. In this body of literature, the circulation of sexual goods and labor is either overlooked or evacuated from conversations on the licit flow of banal items such as car parts, dairy, or corn or else it is lethally reduced to yet another criminal flow. *Queer Traffic* seeks to build on the literature of free-trade flows to bring to light the sex of seemingly nonsexual trade, while also showing how the particularities of sex on the move require a queer performance studies lens that attends to the materiality of the body and that values pleasure, sexual deviance, and gender dissidence as indispensable nodes in the global struggle for race, class, and disability justice.

In her elegant treatise *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (2015), Lisa Lowe details how trade is one phenomenon that can show us how the intimate bringing together of nations (or in her study continents) along the axis of what is assumed to be an almost Maussian gift-exchange exercise in international friendship belies the asymmetrical power relations that trade both reflects and produces. While Lowe and other scholars have seized on "intimacy" as both a subject and a heuristic for understanding how global economic relations influence contexts of human relatedness, this book uses sex—the explicit, raw, and messy kind—to rethink the concept of free trade. In keeping with queer and feminist scholarship on intimacy "that undo[es] familiar connotations about 'private' life by emphasizing its historical and social situation" (Wilson 2012, 32), I take the work on sexuality and globalization to a fleshier level of inquiry to embrace the potential desire for such imagined and embodied "bottomness."

This is not just any bottomhood. Queer scholars and artists have thoroughly reclaimed bottomhood as a site of power and pleasure that recycles shame and abjection (Fung 1991; Nguyen 2014; Scott 2010; Stockton 2006), refuses the absolute link between masochism and the abdication of control (Musser 2014), expands notions of receptivity for femme lesbian and queer sexuality (Cvetkovich 1995; the film *Untitled Fucking* [2013]), and positions anality as a productive model for thinking about sexual subject formation in Latin America (Calderón/Flandes 2016; Falconí Trávez 2021; PachaQueer 2016; Pelúcio 2014; Pierce 2018; Sáez and Carrascosa 2011). Xiomara Verenice Cervantes-Gómez (2020, 2024) has even resituated Paz's essay to think about the ways in which homosex, the sexual binary *pasivo/activo*, and the cis-centric logic of *lo chingado* (the sexual bottom, the fucked) and *el chingón*

(the sexual top, the fucker) determine the contours of the Mexican nation-building project and the vertical hierarchy of world domination. NAFTA's bottoms are certainly penetrated—a receptivity pertinent to all three NAFTA nations—but they are not, necessarily, topped or dominated.

Stories about nation-states as tops or bottoms, as dominant or submissive, obscure how free trade's tentacles suction and squeeze everyday people both within and across national boundaries. These stories cover over the catastrophic abuses of power enacted by the United States and Canada against Mexico, as well as the intranational atrocities waged against embodied difference across and within the three NAFTA-signing nations. They reveal the transnational and subnational collaborations to exact such abuses under the banner of "friendship," a rhetorical flourish that greases the wheels of free trade and its fetish for market-led foreign policy and multinational corporations. In other words, "a view from the bottom" (Nguyen 2014) is a slippery vantage point but one necessary to traverse new terrain outside normative top/down argumentation waged both for and against NAFTA. It propels me to examine other objects, people, and their circulations already disqualified as inconsequential market actors or enemies of free-trade capitalism. I do so as a queer performance studies scholar to ask, how is NAFTA performed, and what does NAFTA want? How does NAFTA move culture, and how is NAFTA itself a cultural form that moves? I raise these questions both within the NAFTA document itself and through its adjacent policies with a particular focus on the performance of NAFTA and its myriad influences on sexual subjectivity and practice.

Certainly, the style of free trade promulgated during the 1980s and 1990s spread the proverbial legs of North America to all kinds of cultural flows in this trinational ménage à trois. In this book, I hope to add to the queer conversation on power and positionality to reveal how sex informs the coloniality of free trade from the 1980s to the present and how ideas about class, race, sexuality, disability, and gender often determine which kinds of embodied differences are regulated to *malinchista* status and thus propelled into highly precarious realms dictated by surveillance, criminalization, and death. Throughout, I celebrate those who have ingeniously repurposed, *rasquache*-style, the coloniality of free trade to forge nonnormative circuits of art and sexual exchange.[6]

*Queer Traffic* is thus aligned with those who break from the normative flows that free-trade infrastructures sanction as valuable and worthy of movement, even as it tracks the often-violent acts that are crucial performances of NAFTA-style free trade. I write this book for the *mayates*

and the *chacales*, for the *maquilocas*, the lesbian transfeminists, the *maricas*, and the Two Spirit; for the sex workers, the pornographers, and the erotic performers; for trans women, such as Alexandra R. DeRuiz, crossing the border in high heels (2023), and Roxana Hernández, who struggled to survive (and lost that struggle) in the hole at the Cibola County Correctional Center; for the traffickers in life-giving drugs; for the pill dividers and stockpilers; and even, in some instances, for *los coyotes* or *los polleros* (coyotes, chicken herders), slang terms for what the human security regime calls "human traffickers" and "people smugglers."[7] Following Cathy Cohen, I want to turn my attention to practices of deviance to act as a "witness to the power of those at the bottom, whose everyday life decisions challenge, or at least counter, the basic normative assumptions of a society intent on protecting structural and social inequalities under the guise of some normal and natural order to life" (2004, 33). While the United States, Canada, and Mexico rhetorically compete for who is most *chingada* by NAFTA, thereby weaponizing bottomness, I transcend this discourse to track a regional voice of dissidence and dissent across the imaginary coordinates of North America. I do so to uncover the fallaciousness of arguments made by the toxic white masculinity of the trinational and transnational capitalist class and to move beyond the essentialized gender constructs of Paz's essay to find pleasure, resistance, and solidarity in and with illegible, illicit, and illegal flows. As I write this in the fall of 2020 amid the COVID-19 pandemic, and the unflow that is global vaccine and therapeutics distribution, I invite a rethinking of the myth of global connectivity that NAFTA discourse sells. To follow the traces of NAFTA's sexual traffic unravels a queer tale, one that repurposes abjection into a radical and unruly otherwise to the cosmopolitan illusion of harmonized markets and transnational friendships under free trade.

This book went to press in the immediate aftermath of the 2024 presidential election. In the coming years, we will hear incessant talk about using tariffs as coercive foreign policy sticks to punish other nations, including Mexico and Canada. Panics over sex work, drugs (including abortion pills and gender-affirming-care), reproductive rights, and migration will be created and fortified. Rhetorically, these panics will be referred to as sex trafficking, drug trafficking, abortion trafficking, and human trafficking. They will consistently be invoked and framed as indisputable reasons to shut down the border, to build walls, to deport undocumented people, and to indict and incarcerate those who circulate life-giving and life-affirming medications and medical services. Trade experts may declare that unfettered free trade

has come to an end. NAFTA (now the USMCA) may or may not be abandoned, obliterated, or renegotiated, as it was in 2020. What won't change is the use of trade as a border regulatory schema to surveil and demonize the movement of people and goods considered anathema to the normative values of an increasingly fascist world. As this book revisits the struggles of people who forged rich sexual social lives amid contexts of violence and criminalization in the lead-up to this moment, the tactical and deviant practices you'll read about will, I hope, inspire us to collectively pursue a different and queerer future.

# Introduction

## SEX ON THE MOVE

I was genuinely surprised when the Mexico City office of the Secretaría de Economía (Secretary of Economy) responded to my email asking about the flows of sexual goods across the Mexico-US border. It was 2012, eighteen years after the North American Free Trade Agreement, or NAFTA, went into effect (1994). These men, most likely US-trained neoclassical economists, responded that my questions intrigued them and requested I meet with them at their offices in la Colonia Condesa.[1] I entered the towering glass and concrete building, had my bag scanned, and received a lanyard that marked me as *visitante* (visitor). After ascending to the designated floor, I was greeted by a room full of suited Mexican businessmen gathered around a desk too small for all of us to sit comfortably. Ignoring the discomfort, I restated my questions: how can we begin to map the circuits, quantify the volume, and review the styles and brands for, say, dildos imported into Mexico from the United States? After giving my inquiry some thought, they explained that it would be impossible. They told me that, unlike in the free-trade agreement (FTA) between the United States and Colombia, there is no "adult novelty" or "erotic sector" designation in NAFTA.[2] NAFTA, they explained, organizes objects by material. Thus, if we wanted to track the importation to Mexico of largely China-made, US-distributed dildos, we would have to wade through the glass, silicone, metal, VixSkin, and any of the other

materials that go into producing dildos in the twenty-first century. Dildos as such are never discussed in NAFTA. As a particular kind of sexual good, they become lost in thousands of different material descriptors. They exist in the shadows of NAFTA.

In 2020, eight years after meeting with these businessmen, I came across a 2010 US *Customs Bulletin and Decisions* document that reviewed the singular case of the "Finger Vibrator." In this document, officials of the US Customs and Border Protection (CBP)—one Gail A. Hamill on behalf of Myles B. Harmon, director of the Commercial and Trade Facilitation Division of the CBP—address Sylvia Perreira of Eagle Global Logistics, a subsidiary of the global supply management company CEVA Freight, LLC. The letter's objective was to inform "Ms. Perreira" that there had been a ruling where the tariff classification for this "Finger Vibrator" had changed from "heading 8543, Harmonized Tariff Schedule of the United States ('HTSUS'), as 'Electrical machines and apparatus, having individual functions, not specified or included elsewhere in [chapter 85]'" (4) to "heading 9019, HTSUS, specifically in subheading 9019.10.20 as 'Massage apparatus'" (6). Unlike anything else I had read in, on, or about free trade, this ruling gets explicit. It defines the Finger Vibrator not only physically but also in regard to its corporeal use-value:

> The article concerned is the Finger Vibrator. The product measures approximately 2 inches long x .75 inches wide. It consists of a soft, silicone plastic, finger-shaped housing. The back of the device incorporates a ring shaped band which is placed over the user's finger. Within the housing is a battery-operated, electric vibrator mechanism. The Finger Vibrator is activated by pressing a button located on the bottom of the device. . . . [T]he Finger Vibrator's function is to provide a massage for "intimate personal pleasure." (US Customs and Border Protection 2010, 4)

The letter goes on to cite the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s definitions of "massage" as "the rubbing, kneading, or percussion of the muscles and joints of the body with the hands, usually performed by one person on another, esp. to relieve tension or pain" (5) and of "apparatus" as "the things collectively in which this preparation consists, and by which its processes are maintained; equipments, material, mechanism, machinery; material appendages or arrangements" (8). The CBP official even assigns body parts to which this "massage apparatus" can be applied, explicitly listing the "abdomen, feet,

legs, back, arms, hands, face, etc." (5). Of course, "etc." is not an explicit identification so much as it is an implication of what cannot be spoken—the genitalia, nipples, anuses, and perinea against which the Finger Vibrator would most likely be applied for such "intimate personal pleasure."

Hamill went on to explain that the CBP's 2010 designation change and its attendant general rate of duty as "free" were reached after a series of Harmonized System (HS) Code attributions and revocations, which spanned the presidencies of Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. The CBP letter goes on to state that, despite CBP's "reasonable efforts" to find related rulings in their existing databases, "no further rulings have been found" (2) and that the duty-free rate and its HTSUS designation "are provided for convenience only and are subject to change" (6). In other words, sex toys like the Finger Vibrator are never fully or permanently integrated into the harmonization system through which free trade adjudicates whether an object is deemed intelligible and therefore legitimate and legal within free-trade infrastructure. This case therefore illuminates one way in which sexual goods inhabit the liminal space between the licit and the illicit and remain vulnerable to the whims of the CBP and other administrative gatekeepers that decide what and how goods, ideas, and services flow under NAFTA.

Depending on your geopolitical orientation, when you think about NAFTA you might think about supply management and the dairy industry, Ross Perot and his "giant sucking sound" to describe US jobs heading south to Mexico, Trump and Justin Trudeau at the Group of 7 (G7) in 2018; or NAFTA's chapter 19 and antidumping, or the sunset clause. First Nations' rights might come to mind, or you might focus on *maquilas* at the Mexico-US border, Subcomandante Marcos and the Zapatistas, cultures of extractivism and Canadian mines in Mexico, labor rights, the accumulation of capital, and a living wage. You might think about borders, deportations and US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and people from other parts of the hemisphere migrating from conditions of great precarity or in search of the fictional "American (or Canadian or Mexican) dream." You might even look at your own body at this very moment, the clothes you're wearing, the brand of your shoes, the cellphone in your hands that you might glance at if you find this paragraph boring. Or perhaps you'll recall what you see (and don't see) at the grocery, the retail store, or that television series you've been pining away for but that's only available on Netflix USA.

To talk about NAFTA you don't, on the face of things at least, need to talk about sex. This book proposes, however, that paying attention to sex promotes a deeper understanding of NAFTA, the trade agreement's mundane

iterations, and its broader significance. An FTA in effect since 1994, NAFTA has had the capacity to create an intimacy between objects and bodies, closing the geographic gap between what was once a distant object to become a domestic mainstay in the home, the retail space, the workspace, the play space, dungeon, or sex club. At the same time, it keeps certain morally proscribed objects at a distance, holding them out as exemptions to the "free-trade" rule of a borderless world but only for the exchange of certain goods and services. In what follows, I wage a queer analysis of NAFTA to expose how free trade can build new borders and modes of surveillance, a moral moat of administrative law to erect a patriarchal and paternalistic security regime wherein the state takes on the feigned benevolent role of protector of the people. It does so in the name of "national security" and the "war on terror" to create exemptions to the free-trade ideology of unregulated trade. NAFTA's unaccounted-for, criminal, and disposable flows and exchanges provide a glimpse into what qualified as "treasonous," "seditious," and "terroristic" in a world before the events of September 11, 2001. NAFTA weaponized border politics and surveillance in new and controlling ways. With the policies and politics activated under NAFTA, sexual outlaws—their cultures, ideas, and objects—became collateral damage. Throughout the book, I take a performance studies approach to show how NAFTA positions sexual culture as a threat to free trade, even as the diverse cultural and social performances I analyze invent informal and renegade pathways to life-giving and pleasure-enhancing scenarios.

Historic associations between sex and the highly racialized and classed categories of the criminal propel sex toward an embedded and often-frictive intersecting circuit with illicit flows of exchange (as in the drug and arms trade), cultural movements driven by panic (as in the anti–sex trafficking "rescue industry"), and the "gray" and "black market" (as in practices of smuggling pornography and piracy). In contradistinction to the literature on illicit flows that often reiterates the binary of licit and illicit, I acknowledge their co-constitution. I therefore distinguish sex on the move as a particular kind of exchange, which is distinct from and yet related to the irregularity and unpredictability of global flows writ large. I don't employ this procedural tactic to recuperate sexual flows considered to be obscene, illicit, or illegal—on the contrary, I revel in the outlaw status of these sexual flows. Rather, I want to uncover how charges of the criminal foisted onto the movement of sexual culture serve to distract from the shadow economies most responsible for the misery that free-trade ideologies, and their attendant capitalisms, impose.[3]

I began this chapter with the vignette in Mexico City and my analysis of the CBP document on the Finger Vibrator to bring together the unlikely but peculiarly revelatory pairing of "sex" and "free trade." This pairing, I argue, exposes sexual culture on the move as a pivotal site of struggle in the era of late racial capitalisms, or, as it is most often referred to, neoliberalism(s). I use "neoliberalism" to indicate the multiple forms of capitalism that free trade promotes and polices across the 1980s, 1990s, and into the twenty-first century, even as my analysis is specific to transnational and subnational encounters within the three countries—Mexico, Canada, and the United States—that NAFTA attempts to "harmonize." Negotiating a variety of unexpected directions, I never assume neoliberalism to be a monolith or a totalizing phenomenon to explain all things. Instead, I use NAFTA to springboard into the wide range of influences that free trade, as an ideology, praxis, and policy, can have on flattening or outright destroying cultural formations of sexual difference.

The mid-1990s battles to get NAFTA ratified both by the three nations and by the US Congress innovated the concept of "harmonization." It is an international process of capital investment and accumulation that attempts to align, make similar, or make identical the regulatory requirements and governmental policies of differing geographies (Leebron 1996, 43; Nakagawa 2001, 1) while also defining "normative viewpoints about the world [that] must be brought into alignment" (Duina 2006, 5). When it comes to regulating sexual culture on the move, the harmonization process attempts to render sweet and pleasing those aspects of queer culture that can be made to sing with late racial capitalism's obsession with forms of pleasure and enjoyment that exclude disabled, genderqueer, Black, Brown, Indigenous, poor, and working-class subjects. That which cannot be harmonized is unintelligible to free trade under NAFTA. In this book, I show how free-trade policies have vast and enduring effects over the higher cultural, social, and economic value assigned to some bodies, body parts, and sex acts over others and how the very terms that dominate NAFTA's imaginary—harmonization, for example—are potent sites of meaning. I highlight how the alignment of certain body parts as joining together harmoniously reflects the sexual normativity of free trade as invested not only in able-bodied penis-in-vagina sex (and not other forms of sex or body parts, or the "etc.") but also in normative assumptions about what constitutes "good sex" (vanilla, coupled, in private, hetero) and "bad sex" (homo, trans, for money, solo or group, in public).

By "sex," I refer to the communicative, corporeal, and transactional activities of fucking and to certain embodied performances of intimacy and

eroticism that both uphold neoliberalism and overflow it. That is, these activities can be convivial with diverse neoliberalisms and their varied calls to pleasure-seeking subjects, but they can also traffic in unruly libidinal desires that escape even neoliberalism's wily and highly adaptive ideologies of white supremacy, settler colonialism, patriarchal heteronormativity, erotophobia, and the twenty-first-century embrace of certain gay and lesbian issues into what queer scholars have called "homonormativity" (Duggan 2004), "homocapitalism" (Rao 2015), and, in relationship to the so-called war on terror, "homonationalism" (Puar 2007). I want to bring close to this study modes of queerness that have come to be considered hostile to homonormative politics of pride and to the neutered spaces of bourgeois respectability that mainstream culture begrudgingly affords to "LGBT" experience. "Sex," Juana María Rodríguez argues, "whether in overt commercial exchanges, casual anonymous encounters, or intimate relations structured around love and care, continues to function as a kind of trade" (2014, 61). *Queer Traffic* tracks and traces collective forms of dissident living as non-NAFTA forms of trade and refuses to turn away from sexual practice as political, pivotal, and powerful, especially for those who love "bad objects" outside the charmed circles (Rubin 2011a) of hetero- and homonormativity. For this reason, and to dislodge bodies from categories that would assume a knowledge about them, I intentionally focus on sexual practices and performances and not categories of sexuality. As a praxis, sex goes beyond a categorical understanding of identity or even a set of orientations, geographically and phenomenologically understood, to focus on acts performed by bodies in contexts that are always already oriented toward, around, or in juxtaposition to objects as they relate to pleasure and desire. Sex can make that connection not just between the macro and the micro but also between the rhetoricity of official free-trade language and the fleshiness of the body. In its perceived excess, sex shows how FTAs are not policies far recessed from the structures and systems of everyday life. Rather, the spectacular surveillance technologies that arise to protect normative trade from deviant sexual culture are often packaged in a brand of theatricality performed in the service of sex panics. These panics scapegoat what Jeffrey Weeks, writing amid the sex panics of the early 1980s, called "Folk Devils" (1981, 14).[4] NAFTA, as I argue throughout the book, is a critical juncture in the long history of inventing sexual scapegoats and mobilizing fears and anxieties about cultural and social mobility that divert attention away from the actual problems of global flows and toward easily targeted social groups who are cast as immoral, degenerate, or predatory.

Queer is not synonymous with sex. This book, however, focuses on components of queerness that are explicitly sexual. It does so to illuminate how corporate/state collaborations fuel free-trade infrastructures that are fiercely rejected by labor, Indigenous, and environmental activists. It examines these infrastructures for how they selectively criminalize certain sexual acts toward punitive ends, even as it reserves the possibility for sex as a fount for what Macarena Gómez-Barris refers to as "submerged perspectives" (2017), or dissident acts of refusal to the violent order of extractivism and racial capital. The point is not only to queerly read NAFTA as a crucial moment in sexual cultural life but also to unravel and unsettle the performance of free trade at the sites of its many contradictions and loopholes.

Queer, I admit, is a vexed term for this book. I view the act of grappling with the applicability and functionality of *queer* in the Americas as a performance of irreverent refusal to the directives of neoliberalism and the historical tendency to apply Anglo-specific forms of queer theory to incommensurable contexts in Latin America. Going beyond a politics of disruption and discomfort, I join Mexican scholars such as Rodrigo Parrini, Siobhan Guerrero Mc Manus, and Alba Pons when they argue that "lo *queer* es una estrategia práctica y una manera de producir modos de existencia y formas de vida" (queerness is a practical strategy and a way to produce modes of existence and forms of life) (2021, 1). The use of queer (and *cuir* or *kuir* as phonetic and reformulated translations of the word in Spanish) must then morph and change according to the subnational micropolitics enacted by bodies on the ground and the circuits of exchange that connect them. Like other scholars grappling with *queer* across the Americas (Córdoba García, Sáez, and Vidarte 2005; Domínguez-Ruvalcaba 2016; Epps 2008; Falconí Trávez, Castellanos, and Viteri 2014; Pierce et al. 2021, 321–327; Russo Garrido 2020, 6–7), I pay attention to materiality and affect, mobilizing "queer" beyond a project of reading, to delve into how "the promise of a queer engagement is thus," citing Deborah Cowen, "in its potential for transforming relations of rule through the desire and occupation of those relations differently" (2014, 223). The challenge in doing a queer analysis of free trade is to balance the convivialities of queer with networks of power, to acknowledge the trade-offs, risks, and rules of engagement, and still revel in the ingenious ways that even those squashed by harmonization, the paranoid smoothing of the global flow, disturb, twist, and make strange the wide-reaching tentacles of free trade.

By "free trade," I specify the political and economic ideology intended to level transnational economies in allegiance to national markets, foreign

investment, and global exchange. This ideology reaches well beyond economic matters, or even the countries who sign on. Any form of capitalism comes into being through the performativity of economic dogma—the citation and repetition of market imperatives by powerful corporate and government actors, no doubt, but also through local and everyday performances of desire for certain forms of production, consumption, exchange, and circulation. In this book, I refuse the reification of mapped coordinates and dominant vertical hierarchies of scale, eschewing allegiance to the "nation," the national, and the seduction of the universalizing global to opt instead, following sexual geographers and queer diasporic scholars, for a regional, subnational, and transnational approach to tracing and tracking how sex moves across borders. Indeed, when I employ the terms *nation* or *nation-state* I use them as shorthand for settler-colonized entities bound by borders won through war, genocide, deterritorialization, dispossession, and histories of debt managed by international entities such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF).

To be sure, I sometimes write about the nation-state, and Mexico certainly serves as an anchor for my discussions; however, I do so only to contextualize the micropolitics of the subnational, a kind of *polygeography* that uncouples or dethrouples the hegemonic regionalities that FTAs summon into existence (e.g., North America). Rather than reify the trade blocs of free-trade geographies such as NAFTA, MERCOSUR (the Southern Common Market), BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, and, as of January 1, 2024, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates), or the EU (European Union), I favor other lovers, such as the intimate relations between Mexico and Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador (particularly in chapter 4). In other instances, I explore how sex and trade have more in common with other nonnational or nontransnational sexual geographies (particularly in chapter 1). This scalar multidirectional approach moves promiscuously, outside and inside, up, over, and through, from the top and from the bottom and back again, to upend colonial cartographies and formal capitalist economies by rejecting the normative hemispheric logic of privileging *el norte*.

NAFTA's fictive trinational union of "North America" represents one crucial moment in the scramble to divide up the world into those included and excluded from FTAs with Anglo-dominant countries in North America and Europe. The 1994 agreement made history as the first of its kind to bring into its rhetorical embrace a so-called developing nation, Mexico. In fact, some scholars of NAFTA claim that the FTA was always primarily about

Mexico.[5] In *Understanding NAFTA* (1996), William Orme explains that what NAFTA, the document, most wanted was to open Mexico to foreign investment. Although Mexico became indebted to the United States and other global institutions such as the IMF, the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the World Bank prior to the period I cover, I focus on free-trade practices in Mexico over the course of the last two Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) presidencies, under Miguel de la Madrid (1982–1988) and Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988–1994), and subsequent instantiations of free-trade harmonization into the twenty-first century across the National Action Party (PAN), the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), and the National Regeneration Movement (MORENA). However, even these processes cannot be easily separated out, as Amy Sara Carroll shows in her epic book *REMEX: Toward an Art History of the NAFTA Era*. For Carroll, "the NAFTA era" can be traced from Canada's and the United States' post-1960s restructuring and through "the transnational economic crises of the 1980s; the duration of NAFTA's negotiation beginning in the early 1990s; its protracted enactment from January 1, 1994 to January 1, 2008; and its post-2008 fallout effects, including extreme narco-violence and economic free fall worldwide" (2017, 8). As the 2018–2020 fireworks for the NAFTA 2.0 renegotiation alerted us, there is no "post" to what Carroll calls "NAFTAification" (8).

In the 1990s, NAFTA was only one of many FTAs that comprised an "almost craze in the sedate world of economics, springing up here, and there and everywhere" (Urata 2002, 21). While volatile and intense debate preceded and followed the signing of NAFTA, as well as the NAFTA 2.0 version (the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement, or USMCA), NAFTA was one of thirty-three new FTAs formed between 1990 and 1994 to be followed, between 1995 and 2001, by another one hundred FTAs (Duina 2006, 3). For its geographic breadth, NAFTA has been singled out as "undoubtedly the most impressive free trade area in place" (Duina 2006, 22). NAFTA's impressiveness, however, can also be measured by its reiterative citationality for any number of FTAs, the WTO, and their mechanisms that followed. Undeniably, NAFTA stands out for forging a global model that aggressively harmonized the notion of desirability and exchange value across vastly different geopolitical contexts and across drastically disparate cultures.

Thus on January 1, 1994, when NAFTA went into effect under Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari, some truly believed his proclamation that free trade would catapult Mexico into the so-called first world. Those in opposition, most notably the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN), along with the trinational coalition of labor and environmental

activists that anti-NAFTA sentiment historically brought into being, resisted the abstract promises of freedom that covered over what for them was NAFTA's situatedness in the "coloniality of power" (Quijano 2000). True, the North American Agreement on Labor Cooperation (NAALC) and the Commission on Environmental Cooperation (CEC), diminutively known as NAFTA's "side agreements," represent the meaningful consequence of the collaboration between labor, Indigenous, and environmental activists across the US-Mexico-Canada borderlands. They forged, at least in the global imaginary, a direct connection between labor, land rights, the environment, and international trade, topics formerly considered to have little if nothing to do with one another (Kay and Evans 2018). These side agreements held the potential for "a queerer approach to trade-related decision making" (O'Hara 2022, 36). Yet these side agreements have no legal teeth and therefore cannot be enforced.

In the United States and Canada, preferential FTAs became a priority in the 1980s and 1990s, though debates about free trade had been ongoing for over a century. As an FTA, NAFTA, arguably much more than the 1989 Canada-US Free Trade Agreement (CUSFTA) that expanded to include Mexico, can be viewed more as a "free investment agreement" than an FTA. It is no coincidence, then, that NAFTA becomes notable as much for what it leaves out as for its sheer breadth as a value-laden catalog of things, millions and millions of things, fragmented within a tome of a twenty–two-chapter document whose labyrinthian legalese leaves one awash in the compartmentalization of nearly every facet of everyday objecthood into bits and parts. Putting aside the weak, unenforceable, and unenforced NAFTA side agreements on labor and the environment, NAFTA is more accurately viewed as obfuscating the actual movement of bodies, objects, and ideas across borders, papering over issues of labor, immigration, the environment, racial justice, Indigenous populations and their lands, histories of slavery and colonialism, and disability, gender, and sexual inequalities.

Instead, NAFTA proceeds as though all three nations came to the table on equal grounds, as if centuries of land grabs, border militarization, security regimes, austerity measures, and land extraction had no bearing on how the document should be written, how the parties should enter such an agreement considering these pasts and presents, and what NAFTA would spell for the future. In this way, while NAFTA enters the historical stage during a time of new conceptions and applications of globalization as a term and of "free trade" as a performative political economic practice that creates certain pathways for people, objects, and ideas, its particular brand of

racial capitalism belies its historical ties to older forms of trade, such as the transatlantic slave trade and the pillaging of the Americas by European colonialists since the sixteenth century.[6] The almost simultaneous domestic gutting of social welfare by the Clinton administration, the revocation of the Glass-Steagall Act, and Operation Gatekeeper (Operación Guardián), whereby the Tijuana–San Diego border was militarized to stem migration and appease anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States (Nevins 2002), only begin to reveal NAFTA, and all of the trade-related policies it inspired globally, as a neoimperial and racist tool across the Americas and the planet. "Free trade is not about deregulation," says NAFTA expert Roger de la Garde, "but regulation of another kind" (as cited in Jones 1996, 348). This regulation, I argue, is certainly about the transnational movement of commodities and capital, but it is also about the movement of people both within and between the imaginary coordinates that bind the fiction of the nation-state and the racist and classist panics that can be fomented as people move across borders and boundaries of all kinds.

My conversations with the Mexico City businessmen and the CBP document on the Finger Vibrator thus unravel a variety of often disaggregated and occluded nodes about sex, culture, and free trade on which this book hinges. First, they both unfolded during a historical period where a new form of globalization—one marked by trade liberalization as the order of the day—took hold, globally speaking, but specifically in relationship to an agreement that conjures into existence a new regionality, the imagined community that we have come to know as "North America." NAFTA, with its fetish for offloading production and building up consumption, did not mark the beginning of free trade. Indeed, as Rosemary Hennessy and Martha Ojeda show, the road to NAFTA was driven by a much longer history in which Mexico incurred a tremendous amount of debt owing to "uneven economic growth generated by the history of colonialism" (2006, 1).[7] What they call "the first generation of free trade policies" in the mid-nineteenth century saw British and US goods flooding Mexican markets, exacerbating deficits and debts on the heels of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the loss of more than half of Mexico's territory to the United States. The signing of NAFTA in the 1990s marked a critical juncture in what Jodi Kim has so aptly called "debt imperialism" (2018) and ushered in the second generation of free-trade policies marked by a frenzy of countless other FTAs in the 1980s and 1990s.

My experiences with the Mexico City businessmen and the CBP document equally reveal how government bodies and nonstate capital entities, such as transnational corporations (TNCs), conspire in their (e)valuation

and circulation of cultural goods and the subsequent creation of political and economic infrastructures through which some goods, but not all, can "freely" flow. Infrastructure simply names that which is required for everyday activities to function (Wilson 2016, 249). Paradoxically, it is the very ubiquity of infrastructure that renders it invisible, a priori rather than created and maintained by abstract powers—such as free trade—that prioritize certain life activities and the movement of certain people, goods, and ideas over others. I root out the "embedded strangeness" of free trade (Star 1999, 379), its erotic investment in sexual normativity rendered invisible through its ubiquity, and the pleasures and desires of dissident sexuality that cannot be contained by such a system or that the free-trade infrastructural network unwittingly spawns.

The queerness of free trade is precisely that it isn't free, but rather an unstable "capital fiction" (Beckman 2012) that depends on the now-prevailing ideological fantasy that the market benefits everyone. Free trade regards some objects, but not all, as assimilable into global capitalism and therefore "legal" for importation and consumption. Sex serves as my primary heuristic to expose the lie that free trade is interested in the embodied experience of "freedom." It roundly refuses the model of freedom that is allegedly secured through global markets. Looking through the lens of sex is one way of exposing the myth of the "free" in free trade and its role in exporting a rhetoric of freedom that purports to be Western-originating, secular, and universal but that traffics in notions of liberal subjectivity based on a highly classed, raced, gendered, and able-bodied experience of white bourgeois cis-masculinity.

In the chapters that follow, I explain how NAFTA disciplines the movement of capitalism's indigestible objects with charges of "obscenity," "terrorism," and "trafficking," thereby creating new categories of "illegal" objecthood. Tracing NAFTA's sexual history uncovers yet another function of free trade: how the rhetoric of romance and friendship sold NAFTA as an obligatory and reciprocal circuit of both giving and receiving that damages the groups and people to whom objects marked as "obscene" are most pertinent. Ultimately as a free-trade performance, NAFTA capitalizes on human suffering, often caused by macroeconomic policies such as the Washington Consensus, as a profit-generating enterprise. Throughout the book, I show how flows under NAFTA invent new categories of "obscene" objecthood and "illegal" personhood by not only normativizing the separation of sex and the economy into discrete categories but also juxtaposing NAFTA's "bad objects" with more acknowledged ones such as avocados, car parts, and dairy products. Vibrators and dildos, unlike these other more

assimilable though not seamlessly celebrated NAFTA goods, simply move differently, existing on the edge of those new political infrastructures that free trade formalizes (not necessarily creates) after it is rhetorically and theatrically invoked.

So, even as the CBP ruling for the Finger Vibrator casts embodied eroticism as its "etc.," and even though, statistically speaking, it is "impossible" to track sexual commerce across borders ("not specified or included elsewhere"), sex on the move is, nevertheless, always suspect. It must be ratified by dominant institutions and provided a formal infrastructure to flow; even then, the changing mores of a particular time and place can reverse its course, erecting barriers to create blockages. Free trade has become one such infrastructure within which certain forms of normative sex can flow. At the same time, its attendant erotophobic roadblocks surveil and police any form of sex considered abhorrent to the morality of free trade at every checkpoint along the way in its journey through the gatekeepers of (sexual) commerce.

In the circuits through which culture travels, sex consistently emerges as a deviant and irreverent flow, the *queer traffic* of free trade. In conversing with actors ranging from bureaucrats to pornographers and in studying choreographies, social movements, and street vocabularies that crisscross the interdisciplinary textures of analysis indicative of a performance studies lens, the often disaggregated and unaccounted dialectical relationship between sex and free trade becomes demystified. From this interdisciplinary stance, sex on the move reveals its potential to illuminate the "disorganized capitalism" (Lash and Urry 1987) of all global flows *and* the movement of sexual culture as its own kind of flow, one that can disrupt market logics through practices performed in excess of resistance. In this paradigm, the presumed diversifying function of unregulated capitalism creates the contexts within which precarious subjects find themselves under attack, physically and culturally, or else, as in the case of sex workers, co-opted for transnational projects of "perverse humanitarianism" (Hoang 2016) that block and curtail movement across borders, nationally and normatively speaking. Thus, rather than impose an epistemological divide between capital and culture, I use sex to unsettle the performance of free trade and to expose NAFTA's investments in sexual normativity and how these investments have profoundly restructured sex and sexuality in the Americas, just as they have provoked alternative acts of dissent to a uniform sexual, social, and economic world.

The figures I discuss for the remainder of the introduction are strategically chosen to unravel the contradictions, complexities, and multiple temporalities of free-trade capitalism on the materiality of lived and imagined

experience. My aim is to debunk what Jodi Dean has rightly named the "consumer/criminal doublet" of free trade (2009, 63) and to concretize the urgency and politics of queer traffic as a project about life and death, about the murderous results of the kinds of extractive toxic masculinity that define US-Mexico relations of dominance.

## NAFTA's "Winners"

NAFTA's impact on everyday life is informed by one's class, race, and gender position. The populations I designate as NAFTA's "winners" intimately feel the effects of NAFTA with regard to their accumulated wealth, but they rarely recognize (or admit) NAFTA's role in this accumulation. To flesh out a segment of those whose lives ostensibly benefited from NAFTA, I turn to Daniela Rossell's controversial photography project *Untitled (Ricas y famosas: Mexico 1994–2001)* (The rich and famous) to study the ways in which her series provides otherwise unattainable access to how elite Mexican women blend conservative, progressive, and globalized narratives of consumption in their highly guarded domestic spaces. For this specific class of women in Mexico City, what it means to be heterosexual is a transnational concept, one in which women are expected to perform imported ideas about modern sexuality while maintaining some vague connection to the varying ideas about what constitutes traditional Mexican values. Rossell's series captures how privileged Mexican women perform sexual cosmopolitanism through neoliberal ideology in the insular and highly guarded space of the home. The series shows how conservative notions of gender and race continue to dominate the limited social identity of classed female heterosexuality in twenty-first-century Mexico City, often viewed as the beacon of both neoliberal modernization and politically progressive thought in the republic.

Speaking from her experience as the daughter of Mexican political and cultural elites, Rossell says of the subjects in her photography series, "Wealthy women in Mexico are prisoners of their houses, style and excess. Most of them live in the salon. They really want to look American, like what you see on TV, and they go to a lot of work to accomplish that. It's a kind of hell" (as cited in Centre for Contemporary Culture Strozzina 2010, 118). The homes of rich Mexican women are virtually inaccessible to outsiders. *Untitled (Ricas y famosas)* goes inside the formidable iron gates and past the heavily armed security guards to show how elite Mexican women furnished their homes and fashioned their bodies with imported luxury goods within the first seven years after NAFTA went into effect. Her series visualizes the

contradictory effects of neoliberal capitalism on elite women's sexuality and blurs the backstage/frontstage performance binary, to draw from Erving Goffman's work (1959), through the presentation of everyday privileged Mexican life in private, interior spaces. These displays occurred without an audience, but these women obviously knew they were being watched, and they set the scene and seized on recognizable conventions to perform a twenty-first-century version of Mexican female heterosexuality.

Rossell's subjects—often friends or relatives of her own affluent and powerful PRI family who had volunteered to be photographed—carefully chose how to present themselves to the camera. Coupling society portraiture and performance, in these photos Rossell's sitters unabashedly embrace their lavish domestic surroundings, signaling their nouveau riche status. Their ornate and overprotective environments, which often resemble children's rooms, fairy-tale scenarios, or natural history museums, suggest that the ways in which these women stylize their self-presentation risk fashioning them into objects of desire: just another garish house decoration or an expensive luxury good to be bought, traded, and sold, or, in the case of Mexico City's culture of *secuestro exprés* (express kidnapping), ransomed.

Consider, for instance, the two untitled photos referenced as *Inge and Her Mother Ema in Living Room* and *Medusa* (see figs. I.1 and I.2). In both images, women assume the space of their homes and are surrounded by what have become the stock decorations of the wealthy Mexican household: in one, the racist anti-Black figurines that circulate within the US antique market; in the other, the commodification of rural and collective identity–based Indigenous cultures as suitable for home décor but incompatible with neoliberalism's emphasis on the individual. In both these photos, sexualized femininity and the feminized space of the home are portrayed as something that does not necessarily belong to these women; rather, the photos show how their intimate and erotic lives have also become explicitly commodified, assigned value, advertised, commercialized, packaged, and consumed. More importantly, they reveal how racialized heterosexuality has been central to neoliberalism's transnational project. The long history of racism against Indigenous peoples and the long-standing refusal of Blackness in the imaginary of who is included in nationalist myths of *mexicanidad* (Mexicanness) and *mestizaje* recede to the background to become mere foils to the white beauty aesthetics of Rossell's sitters. The depiction of local racist populism with elite agendas stands out in the visual rhetoric of the photographs, which when displayed in a series do not simply evidence the primacy of race in the economy of female pleasure but through repetition produce the

I.1 Daniela Rossell, *Untitled (Ricas y famosas)*, 2000, C-print, 50 × 60 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Greene Naftali Gallery.

very effects that they name and describe. Perhaps the performative effect of these photographs when viewed together by art gallery spectators elicited such strong responses from the portrait sitters, some of whom threatened Rossell with lawsuits and violence after viewing them.[8]

When photographing her subjects, it seemed to Rossell "they had meticulously studied and memorized these roles . . . that say in detail what they were expected to do, how they were expected to stand, and to perform for a camera. And they seemed to be roles that were already written by someone else and for no one in particular. There was a feeling of 'this is going on, whether I'm here or not.'"[9] What "is going on" is the embodiment of the aesthetic and sexualized values of consumer culture and how those values depend on the construction of a feminine sexualized identity and the stereotype of racially inferior others, and vice versa; how the work is to be received by the viewer, however, is ultimately unclear. *(Untitled) Ricas y*

I.2 Daniela Rossell, *Untitled (Ricas y famosas)*, 2000, C-print, 50 × 60 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Greene Naftali Gallery.

*famosas* shows how the culturally specific gender and race performances enacted by these women intersect with class-based performances that depend on localized consumption and dominant narratives of Mexican culture as well as globalized consumer culture and its idealized projections of sexualized femininity; but Rossell's photos can also be viewed as comments on Mexican sociopolitical conditions and the fetishization of wealthy women as objects of the male gaze, or as camped-up performances where the women take pleasure in citing the well-known tropes of commodified femininity.

The women who participated in *Untitled (Ricas y famosas)* embody the neoliberalized condition of sexuality for upper-middle- and upper-class women in Mexico City. They typify the emergence of a new stratum of female consumers defined through economic circumstances, transnational media, and the accrual of imported material things. Specifically, *(Untitled) Ricas y famosas* chronicles the influence of neoliberal economic policies on the forging of a feminine Mexican elite and how the signing of NAFTA simultaneously redefined Mexico's relationship with economic, beauty, and sexuality models from the United States. Based on racialized stereotypes, these models pit light-skinned Mexican women as aesthetic ideals against Indigenous-inspired dolls and Black figurines. These decorations act as temporal contrasts: the sitter is marked as cosmopolitan only through a juxtaposition with the pastoral depictions of indigeneity and antique Black figurines of "Americana" memorabilia positioned to indicate a denial of coevalness to the subjects referenced by these decorations.

The racialized dynamic depicted in the photographs highlights the danger of neoliberalism's paradoxical expansion and contraction of pleasure. Looking at the influence of NAFTA through the performance of portraiture and the furnishing of interior space illuminates the multiple and multivalent contradictions of free trade in Mexico and the transnational inequalities and differences that arise from new forms of globalization. Sex can certainly be subversive of capitalism—as a transformative desire that incites new economic forms and social experiences—but for the elite women in Rossell's photographs, this is rarely the case. They show how, in the NAFTA era, bourgeois class aspirations and white privilege create the context for feminine sexual pleasure. The market may create conditions within which Rossell's sitters can claim great cultural and financial capital, but that same market destabilizes and unmakes their erotic capital, leaving them only a small space among foreign models of sexual liberation, domestic structures of patriarchal heterosexuality, and global capitalist exploitation to enact and enjoy a commercialized version of sexual pleasure.

## Rough Trade

Trade has always been a queer affair. Any conversation about sex and free trade must therefore engage a conversation on the varied working-class, nominally male persons who constitute a set of erotic actors gathered under the label "trade." The sexual moniker "trade" can be traced to the seventeenth-century slang of female sex workers (Chauncey 1995, 69). In queer studies, it has become a quintessential term for illuminating the contradictions and complexities of sex versus sexuality, since it references sexual practices that don't line up with assumed normative identity categories. Depending on the time period in question, trade can denote heterosexual-identifying men who have sex with men for money, gifts, companionship, and/or for pleasure and who may (but not exclusively) play a penetrative role in sexual encounters, male hustlers or sex workers, or the men who pay for such encounters (Chauncey 1995, 70; Montez 2020, 66). In other words, "trade" signifies an ever-shifting array of people who exchange sex and sexual labor to negotiate their race, ethnicity, gender, and class status through informal economies of sexual commerce.

The connection between trade, as in free trade and international commerce, and trade, as in a play on gay terminology that encompasses a set of sexual subjectivities and practices, spins on the axis of a libidinal but asymmetrical power dynamic that "makes visible an exchange, a scene in which power differentials (of race and economic position particularly) operate but do so unstably" (Montez 2020, 65). This power dynamic has been explored for what it can tell us about queer desire, the hypermasculinity of US imperialism, and the consolidation of the nation-state (H. Pérez 2015, 2–3, 6); about artistic exchanges that both conform to and resist the classed and racialized normativity of the art market (Montez 2020, 61–82); and about the panic surrounding disruptions of commercial shipping and formal sanctioned infrastructures of global merchandising flows (Cowen 2014, 129–162, 197–232). I too regard trade queerly: it refers to market exchange and equally to the attractions and desires for lower-class, allegedly "straight" male sex partners. The performance of the hustle so indispensable to living under and after NAFTA and the contradictions and convivialities of queer desire with free-trade capitalism direct my attention to an expressly working-class subset of trade known as "rough trade" and even more specifically to the Mexican figure of the *chacal*.

The long queer history of the *chacal* dates to the sixteenth century, when, according to *chacalógos* (*chacal* scholars), he was described as a cruel and

even carnivorous predator.[10] According to Miguel Alonso Hernández Victoria, the literal meaning of the word, translated into Castellano Spanish from Turkish, Persian, and French, is "jackal" or "accomplice." Hernández traces the queer history of the *chacal* to the paranoia for racial purity via the *casta* system and New Spain's Inquisition, where certain people were labeled as sodomites and put on trial for their racial and class differences as well as for their nonconformity with colonial conceptions of sex and gender.[11] As a Mexico-specific "rough trade" character rooted in a long history of racialized desire, the *chacal* stereotypically describes a member of Black, Brown, and Indigenous populations who is poor or working class.[12] He embodies a kind of masculinity that is at once distinct from the stereotype of the capital-bearing, gym-chiseled gay man and indicative of another kind of "natural" beauty that has become eroticized and in many cases commercialized by gay men with cultural and financial capital within Mexico and the transnational circuits of sex tourism.[13] Today, the *chacal* has become a motivator for hailing the pink dollar in urban Mexican locales, with some gay bars in Mexico City and Tijuana, for example, inviting gay patrons to enter their space by promising queued-up bargoers *¡Ven por tu chacal!* (Come for your *chacal*!)

NAFTA certainly didn't invent the *chacal*. Indeed, Luis Zapata energized the desire for lower-class male hustlers as early as 1979 with the publication of *El vampiro de la colonia Roma*, often regarded as the first gay novel in Mexican literature. However, the *chacal* takes on new resonances as a commodity in the NAFTA era, a phenomenon at least partially inspired by the reentrenchment of Mexican nationalism in leftist artistic expression, as in the work of Nahum Zenil and Julio Gálan. The *chacal* became a fetish for neomexicanist artists at the same time that neoliberalism and NAFTA began to co-opt and sell sexual dissidence under the guise of acceptability, tolerance, and First World discourse. In other words, gay visual and literary interest in the *chacal* as an eroticized figure in Mexico collides with the exoticized circulation of this figure across the polygeographies of the subnational and transnational marketplace. In this marketplace, the *chacal* is both consumed and criminalized as he takes up a class position attractive to gay discourses and representations of desire and the class- and race-based xenophobia that structures free-trade capitalism, particularly in relationship to migration. The *chacal* is one of many figures caught in the snares of the consumer/criminal binary of free trade, both a fount of queer pleasure and a racialized thief who steals market pleasures from others, owing to the perception of his needy class status.

NAFTA has had a devastating impact on the lives and livelihoods of many Mexican people, and the *chacal* characterizes one subject that has explicitly and intimately felt the financial violence of the FTA. According to a 2013 report from Mexico's National Institute of Statistics and Geography (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, or INEGI), 1.7 percent of the country's inhabitants (1,340,000 people) make up Mexico's elite class.[14] Between 1992 and 2000, with the implementation of NAFTA, the 1994 tequila crisis (*el error de diciembre*), and multiple recessions, most Mexican households saw their incomes stagnate or fall, but Mexico's privileged elite, such as Rossell's photographic subjects, experienced income growth in the double digits.[15] In 2011, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reported that, since the 1990s and for all its member countries, the Gini coefficient, a standard measure of income inequality, had steadily risen, meaning that the household incomes of the top 10 percent grew faster than those of the poorest 10 percent; during this time period, the ratio for Mexico, at 27 to 1, was the highest of any OECD country (as a benchmark, the ratio in the United States was 14 to 1).[16] For rural and agricultural populations, in particular, the reform of the Mexican Constitution's Article 27 opened the land for investment and led to the decimation of the national farming industry in favor of Canadian mining, tourism, and transnational gentrification projects that ultimately transformed locations such as Cancún, Cabo San Lucas, and San Miguel de Allende into Anglo-residential and tourist enclaves. This reform was one of many chips offered by Salinas de Gortari to President George H. W. Bush in the lead-up to the signing of NAFTA in 1992.

In a 2013 interview with Hernández in Mexico City, I asked him whether and, if so, how NAFTA influenced gay culture in Mexico City. He went immediately to the *chacal* to answer my question. Here he talks about how the desire for the *chacal* can be seen as a market interrupter when it comes to what he calls "la óptica gay comercial" (the gay commercial point of view):

> ¿Y el chacal qué es? Es el hombre que sabe a tierra mojada, es el albañil, es el indígena; es el ranchero, es el proletario. Son todos aquellos cuerpos construidos a partir del hambre y la miseria, que simbolizan o se ven como algo bello: las facciones toscas del indígena, las facciones toscas del mestizo, los cuerpos que no son atléticos. Es el enamorarte y el volver a reinterpretar una belleza que existe, y esa es la propuesta, por ejemplo, de estos grupos de cazadores de chacales. Y es que a nosotros no nos gustan ni los güeritos, ni los bonitos, ni

los altos, ni los delicados. Nos gustan los rudos, los fuertes, lo que no es considerado desde la óptica gay commercial.

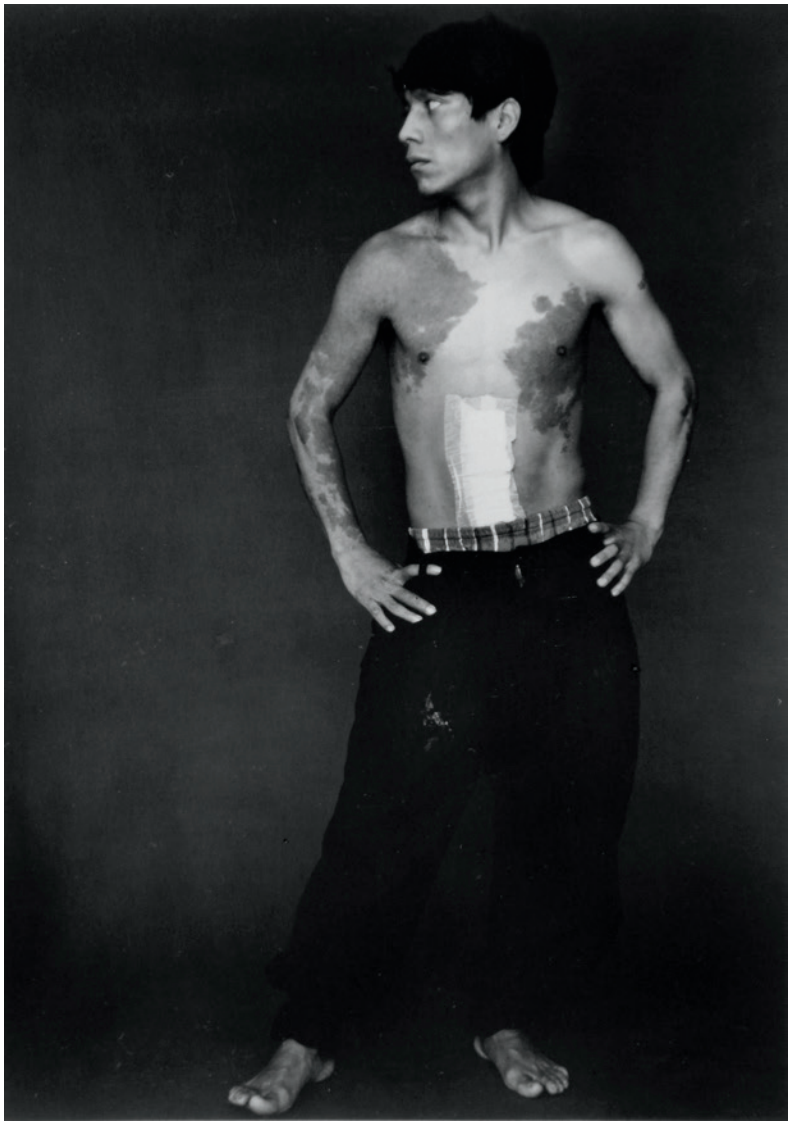
(And what is a *chacal*? He's a man who tastes like wet earth, the construction worker, the Indigenous man, the rancher, the proletarian. All those bodies built out of hunger and destitution, who come to symbolize or to be seen as something beautiful: the rough features of Indigenous men, the rough features of mestizo men, bodies that are not athletic. It's how you fall in love and once again how you reinterpret a beauty that does exist there, and that's the idea, for example, that drives these groups of *chacal* hunters. And the thing is we don't even like *güeritos* [light-skinned] or pretty boys or tall men or delicate flowers. We like tough guys, strong men, everything that is not valued through the commercial gay lens.)

One of many contradictions in the imaginary of the *chacal* is precisely this fetishization of that which a NAFTA world has demoralized and decimated. In many ways, then, this *chacal* moment harkens back to the persecution of those described in colonial times as "indios, "negros," "mulatos," and "moriscos" (Moors) (Gruzinski 1985). The *chacal* of the past and the *chacal* of today are both persecuted and marginalized. With NAFTA, Mexican foreign policy decisions and the US domination of formerly nationalized Mexican industries that had sustained laborers worsen the suffering of rural, Indigenous, and working-class people; at the same time, the *chacal* becomes a commodity within the global flows of gay desire and gay capital.

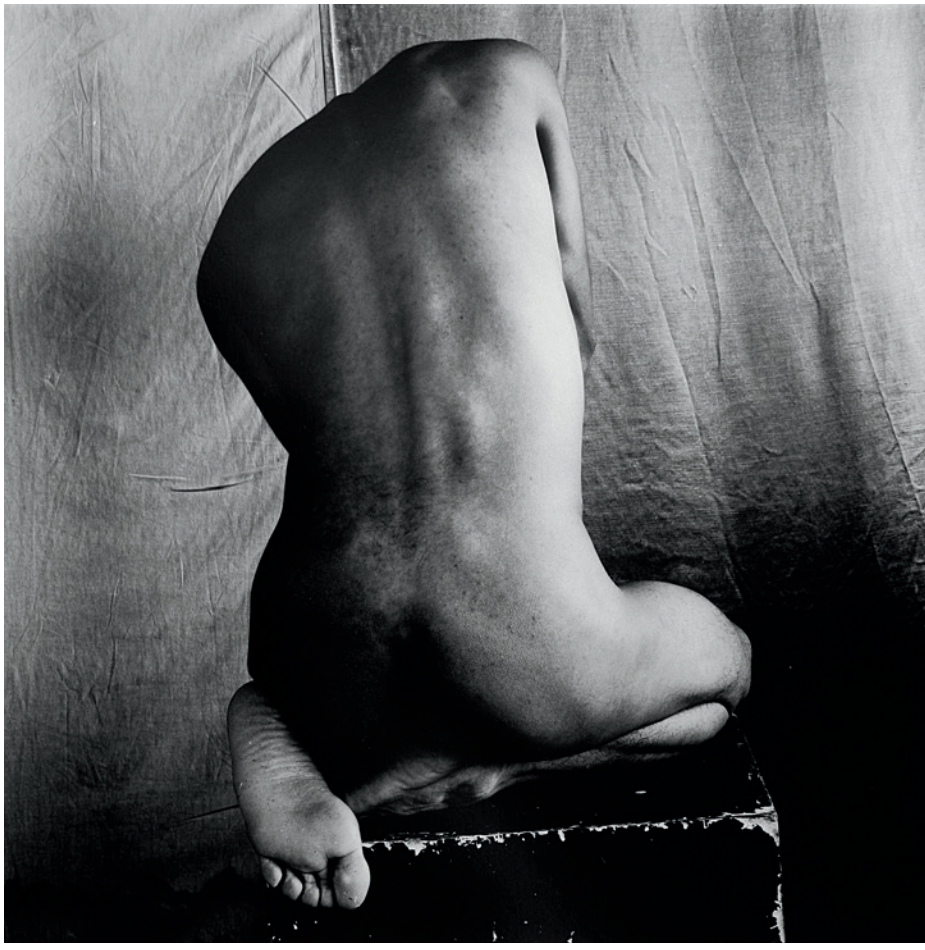
On the one hand, then, there's the well-heeled middle-class Mexican or the global sex tourist on the hunt for the *chacal*, and on the other are the Black, Brown, and/or Indigenous laborers who are the objects of desire, the temporary lovers or hustlers making ends meet in a NAFTA-devastated economy. In the mix and indispensable to a book that finds hope in sex practice and desire, Hernández's argument cannot be discounted: the desire for the *chacal* can and sometimes does interrupt the Anglo-dominant politics of beauty aesthetics and their many circuits of exchange; moreover, the desire for the *chacal* can destabilize the cultural and economic market logic of the pink dollar and the solidification of gay capital accumulating in popular Pride flag–waving bars, such as those in the Zona Rosa in Mexico City. The *chacal* won't be found in these bars but rather in the underground alternative economies of dilapidated cinemas, public parks, and working-class cantinas like those in the fierce nightlife cultures of Garibaldi.

Lebanon-born and Mexico City–based photographer Pedro Slim captures these contradictions of desire and capital flows in his 1997 series *De la calle al estudio* (From the street to the studio).[17] In the series, young Black, Brown, and Indigenous men pose for the camera. All of them are shirtless (except for "Rogelio," who also holds a lit cigarette), and many of them are completely naked. Their facial expressions vary from intimidating or withdrawn, to jovial, coquettish, and enticing, to melancholic or resigned. One looks away from the camera entirely. They are thin, with their low-hanging jeans ready to fall from their narrow hips. Some are scarred; many are tattooed; others are pockmarked. One model ("Domingo") has vitiligo and a large surgical bandage over his stomach, suggesting an open wound underneath (see fig. I.3). Shirtless, barefoot, in jeans and plaid boxers, he has his hands on his hips, with a strong stance as he looks to the side, offering only his profile to the camera. In this photograph, Slim frames what Robert McRuer has aptly called "crip times" (2018), or the ways in which local and transnational policies such as austerity measures cause displacements that produce disability, precarity, and unpredictability. It points to the ways in which neoliberalism creates contexts of precarity and how disability must be central to our understanding of the uneven economic development wrought under NAFTA. Even so, the model's stance connects to how disabled people reclaim and reconfigure the term *crip*, historically a derogatory slur that derives from the word "cripple." As McRuer states, crip "has functioned for many as a marker of an in-your-face, or out-and-proud, cultural mode of disability" (2018, 19). Viewed through McRuer's nuanced theory of crip times, a theory that confronts both neoliberal austerity and foregrounds resistance to its economic and medical models, Slim's photograph eroticizes not merely the body of his subject but also that subject's "flamboyant defiance" (19) to the capture of a medicalizing, pitying, or subjugating gaze.

In other photos, however, Slim's emphasis leans more on a version of aesthetics aimed at recuperating his beleaguered subjects into commodities saleable on the transnational art market. Art critic and curator Olivier Debroise described Slim's method as "'recoge' en las calles de la ciudad de México y sus alrededores, a 'tipos populares' masculinos y los instala en el escenario sombrío de su estudio" ("collecting" masculine "working-class guys" from the streets of Mexico City and its surroundings, and he places them into the somber setting of his studio) (1997). In some of these black-and-white photos, Slim positions his models standing or sitting atop raised pedestals, bending over to touch their toes or crouching over their crossed legs, their backs and buttocks to the camera (see fig. I.4). Reminiscent



**1.3** Pedro Slim, "Domingo," *De la calle al estudio*, © 1994, gelatin silver print. Courtesy of the artist and CLAMP, New York.



**I.4** Pedro Slim, "Untitled," *De la calle al estudio*, © 2006, gelatin silver print. Courtesy of the artist and CLAMP, New York.

of Robert Mapplethorpe's *The Black Book*, though with noticeable differences (e.g., the inclusion of body hair), Slim's photos depict an ethically fraught sculptural style for photographing race, class, and disabled difference. Akin to how Kobena Mercer's analysis of Mapplethorpe's *The Black Book* advanced the idea of an ambivalent critical stance (1994, 171–220), I look to Slim's series to both acknowledge the deep roots of racial fetishism in its visual iconography and to recognize its potential to discomfort and disarm the homophobic viewer, personified for Mercer in 1994 by Senator Jesse Helms. While the discomfort of Slim's subjects is visible in some of the

photographs, the crux, Debroise argues, is "la perturbación del espectador, poco acostumbrado a que se la interpele de manera tan sútil y violenta a la vez" (the disturbance of the spectator, unaccustomed to being questioned in such a simultaneously subtle and violent way) (1997). As Mercer argues for the Black men whom Mapplethorpe photographed, men Mercer describes as "a distinct collective subject in the late-capitalist underclass," Slim's use of raised platforms might similarly be viewed as positioning his subjects "onto the pedestal of the transcendental Western aesthetic ideal" and "a deconstructive move [that] begins to undermine the foundational [white supremacist] myths of the pedestal itself" (200). *De la calle al estudio* certainly disrupts the expectations of heteronormative viewership and the exclusion of lower-class Mexican men from white-dominant conceptions of beauty; yet, at the same time, in placing his nudes, his disrobed *chacales*, on raised platforms he uses a common museum-display technology that objectifies for sale on the transnational art market.

Scholars such as Laura G. Gutiérrez have rightly claimed that "sexual permissiveness in cultural representation and in public discourse has found a sort of ally in neoliberalism in the context of Mexico" (2010, 7). Without attempting to recuperate Slim's series for some social justice cause, I instead position Slim's photographs as quintessential to the times of NAFTA. His photos give the viewer an opportunity to think with and through the contradictions of gay capital in NAFTA's wake. Slim's photos ultimately reveal the intimate connection between sex and trade and the ways in which sexual desires for nonnormative subjects such as the *chacal* can become complicit with capitalist imperialism and a turn toward the nationalistic, even if these desires grew out of subcultural, deviant, or underground histories of cultural consumption.

Today, if one considers how Trump leveraged NAFTA to catapult himself to the presidency in 2016, the radical potential of desiring those most devastated under NAFTA becomes more complicated. After descending the Trump Tower escalator to announce his candidacy, Trump reiterated his long-standing criticism of NAFTA, stating his "intention to renegotiate NAFTA or withdraw from the deal under Article 2205."[18] With this threat, he rewrote histories of power as they relate to the three NAFTA trade partners. He seized on a right-wing version of what Wendy Brown has called a "sense of woundedness" (1995), in which "American" identity is understood to be screwed by NAFTA and particularly by Mexico, embodied in Trump's much-maligned cast of caricatures, such as opportunistic *maquila* workers and "bad hombres." In doing so, he played into long-standing and growing

xenophobic misconceptions about an "invasion" at the US southern border and into false claims that migrating peoples play central roles in smuggling drugs and guns into the United States and in depleting public services while committing violent (sexual) crimes.[19] Trump recruited the well-worn tool of charging certain social groups with sexual deviance to distract from his and his cronies' nefarious economic activities. He also played into the broad disappointment with NAFTA, across the political aisle, to use race, sex, binary conceptions of gender, and a predatorial depiction of Brown working-class masculinity to foment a panic about a plethora of illicit cultural flows, arousing the ethnonationalist frenzy that catapulted his presidential campaign to victory in 2016.

What with their sagging pants, their tattoos, their dark skin, and visible indigence, Slim's *chacales* could be made to visually match the ethnonationalist stereotype of "bad hombres." When Trump fabricated his "bad hombres" and "rapists," his words caught fire not because he was inventing these ideas, but because sex, cast in racist and antipoor terms, is ingrained in racial capital's approach to adjudicating the encroachment of foreign investment. Trump sold his "bad hombres" to the electorate to continue to fuel the very lucrative project of blocking the movement of men who look just like Slim's subjects. A strategy as old as the slave trade itself, Trump's positing of migrating men of color as sexual predators, as threats to the purity of the nation and white womanhood, demonstrated his ongoing interest in stoking sexual panic for marshalling political and economic power.[20]

Sexual panics emerge to do something for the politics of the moment, such as fuel the NAFTA surveillance state. They are not a product of but are activated by free-trade discourse and policies. The specific surveillance apparatus that NAFTA 1.0 (1994) innovated, and NAFTA 2.0 (2020) extended, shields those most integral to the process—the governments, lawmakers, and criminal punishment enforcers—from being surveilled themselves. It enlists the participation of everyday people to do the surveillance work of the state by teaching them how to identify certain visual markers of difference considered worthless to global trade. The surveillance infrastructure redirects our attention away from its architects and toward contrived figures such as "bad hombres," or Trump's rough trade. NAFTA led to an uptake in all kinds of surveillance directed at stemming the flow of certain goods and bodies. It created illicit forms of capital and cultural flows and "illegal" categories of people that came to be viewed and treated not as trade, but as traffic(k).

One of this book's primary aims is to unravel and undo the criminalizing technologies that arise from ethnonationalist rhetoric. I join "queer" with

"traffic," rather than "trade," to explicitly crisscross scholarship that does the indispensable diagnostic work of uncovering past and current structural violences with studies that focus on resistances and refusals. I transit, dare I say traffic(k), in the gaps between extreme forms of violence enacted through neoliberal appeals to individual freedom and responsibility and the richness and dexterity of sexual subjects who escape the snares of the "special bonds / *lazos especiales*" that the NAFTA preamble announces.[21] Refusing to push away that which free-trade ideology has labeled "criminal," "terrorist," and "obscene," *Queer Traffic* analyzes the sexual panics that implicitly and at times explicitly fuel the surveillance of sexual subjects and objects on the move.[22] It revels simultaneously in the boldness, and at times raunchiness, of the sexual material culture in question as well as in the illicit performances of production, consumption, and circulation that guide its path.

The disaggregation and ideological displacement of sex from transnational policies such as FTAs function as a weapon for the radical right (sometimes in collusion with the left) to create sexual panics that imbricate carceral and market infrastructures. Discourses that accompany sex on the move are mobilized and deployed to create surveillance policies on pornography, homosex, sex work, migration, medications for sexually transmitted infections (STIs), to list only a few of the topics I discuss in this book. These paternalistic, colonial, and carceral policies purport to save but only control and further exploit labor through optics that target vulnerable populations such as sex workers. Ultimately, they diminish the possibilities for nonlucrative pleasures that are not marketable or saleable through international trade. These discourses go beyond language to congeal in actual domestic and transnational policies that do all kinds of surveillance and policing work to divert attention away from the structural violences that NAFTA has wrought on Indigenous, working-class, poor, female, femme, trans, and Black and Brown peoples across the polygeographies of the NAFTA borderlands. Throughout the book I emphatically attend to the friction of sex on the move with formally criminalized flows—not to further criminalize the latter flows but to trouble the ways in which sex can be employed to invent new remunerative categories of criminal practices and identities that can be integrated into the surveillance infrastructures that NAFTA innovated. I thus apply *queer traffic* to a multiplicity of actors and actions to show how sex panics invent criminal targets charged with being the enemies of free trade, and thus of every normative consumer. I also apply it to the unsanctioned cultural movements of goods, bodies, and ideas that resist, transform, or

refuse the consumer/criminal binary that free-trade capitalism requires to seduce us into participation.

## Queer Traffic

The etymological history of the word *traffic* reveals the suppleness with which it has been applied across articulations of capital ideology, from the beginning of the slave trade to the White Slavery panic of the twentieth century to what anti–sex trafficking activists call "modern slavery." I look to the genealogy of *traffic*, its applications and circulations, to track different articulations of capitalism and their noncapitalist modes so as to uncover the ways in which the term persists in creating binary distinctions between licit and illicit flows. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the term, as used in sixteenth-century Europe, as "the commercial transportation of goods or commodities on a large scale from one nation or community to another for the purpose of buying and selling; commerce," or more generally, "the buying and selling or exchange of goods and commodities for profit; trade, business." Less than a century later, *traffic* was directly applied to sex workers, not coincidentally during a time of urban panics that inordinately connected contagion and disease to prostitution. The *Oxford English Dictionary* then found that regional nineteenth-century usages of the term indicated something considered "worthless or insignificant stuff; rubbish, trash" and certain populations as "worthless or disreputable people; rabble."[23] This book embraces these different definitions, which show how the term has been used to reflect and solidify binarized categories of morality. In other words, *traffic* always already encapsulated burgeoning taxonomies of objects and bodies into categories of deviant or normal, licit or illicit, criminal or citizen, taxonomies always fluctuating with the ever-evolving and globalizing reach of racial capitalism and the settler colonial state.

By bringing close, rather than pushing away, other criminalized pathways, queer traffic is a mode of circulatory performance that unsettles panics about the circuits through which sex travels. The criminal of free-trade binary thinking is an ample and ever-cunning category that contains anyone or anything deemed useless to participation in the pleasures of the global market. As Jodi Dean explained, "The criminal figures the ever present threat of loss, the losing that the fantasy of free trade disavows" (2009, 68). These subjects and their objects, their spaces, and their desires can never be harmonized into free-trade markets and therefore must be expelled for fear

that the neoliberal fantasy of free trade be revealed as such. The imposition of the criminal onto licit and legal circuits of sexual culture, and onto those bodies who engage in production and consumption practices considered to be illicit and illegal, rubs against cultural expressions on the ground. In these spaces, racial, class, and gender power dynamics are forged not only within the frame of the object in question or in practices of consumption that surround that object but also in the very circuitry that characterizes its movement, not from one place to another but through the "nexus of cultural production that defines the things, places, and practices within its loops" (Novak 2013, 18). It is the underground, alternative, and stigmatized routes through which these objects and bodies travel that render them queer traffic as opposed to trade.

Queer traffic(k) rubs up against these other pathways to analyze the panics that implicitly and at times explicitly fuel the surveillance of sexual subjects and objects on the move.[24] I flirt with the addition of the "k" in the gerund traffic(k)ing to signal the ways in which a theory on queer traffic requires some deep play with illicit categories of (sexual) criminality. I do so to push back against the ever-proliferating use of "trafficking" as a term that often does more to incarcerate the same subjects it purports to "rescue." Historians Julia Laite and Philippa Hetherington rightly question trafficking as a "moving signifier that hides as much as it reveals" (2021, 7). Similar to them, I employ *queer traffic* to investigate "trafficking" as a term with "little useful explanatory power, other than the way it reveals the socio-political contexts in which it was deployed" (8). Throughout the book, I am critical of the discourse of anti–sex trafficking and its policing and criminalizing uses against sex work(ers), migrating people, and the movement of sexual culture. This is not to say that involuntary prostitution and sexual exploitation do not occur, but rather to highlight how the malleability and imprecision of what I call "sex trafficking talk," and its sedimentation in national and transnational policies, flattens colonial and neocolonial histories and covers over the damaging influences of free trade (Tyburczy 2019).

One such actor often discussed in connection to the precarity-inducing influences of NAFTA is the female *maquila* (factory) worker. Feminist scholars have long made convincing arguments about why gender is crucial to conversations of free trade, particularly for females working in free-trade zones on the Mexico-US border (Gaspar de Alba and Guzmán 2010; Ojeda and Hennessy 2006; Salzinger 2003; Wright 2006). Apart from the noteworthy example of Rosemary Hennessy's book *Fires on the Border* (2013), which discusses erotic relationships among women workers as some of the affective

fuel of labor organizing (what she calls "passionate politics"), these studies largely avoid talk about sex, as it has so often been used as a tool to silence and blame *maquila* workers, at work and upon death. While border towns such as Juarez and Tijuana became free-trade zones in the 1980s, nearly a decade before NAFTA, the murders and disappearances of *maquila* workers reached a crescendo after NAFTA and the almost simultaneous Operación Guardián (Operation Gatekeeper). In 2006, under the transnationalization of the War on Drugs, which exacerbated what Rossana Reguillo (2011) has called the "narco-machine," or an infrastructure of violence that she likens to Nazi prison camps, these numbers again grew.[25] While the countless Mexican feminist scholars have tirelessly and bravely studied *feminicidios* on the border and throughout Mexico, "there has been no systematic accounting of victims or accountability by the authorities, which results in only more confusion, more impunity for the perpetrators, and less chance of resolution" (Gaspar de Alba and Guzmán 2010, 10). This lack of accounting for these lives, and cultural narratives about women's pathologies, creates and sustains normative social relations that assume the incompetence of poor, female, and Indigenous subjects as economic actors. Sayak Valencia (2010) has aptly named this scenario *capitalismo gore* (gore capitalism), or the specificities of precarity in Mexico as they intersect with the performance of toxic masculinities. In her now widely translated book, Valencia demonstrates how the normalization of epistemic violence in Mexico has shaped subcultures, such as *narco* cultures, that seize on the spectacularity of death as a quintessential practice of economic motivation dependent on deregulation, entrepreneurship, and the neoliberal promise of economic success. In this context, *narcos* become the quintessential neoliberal capitalists and *maquila* workers the ultimate in disposable surplus populations. For Valencia, NAFTA, particularly with regard to how the agreement reconfigured labor, reaffirmed the violences of the heteropatriarchal system and steered Mexico down a "sinuous road that led to Mexico's descent into gore capitalism" (2015, 131).

Deceased *maquila* workers came to be regarded as *maquilocas*, a term invented to disparage murdered *maquila* workers, some of whom are young, Brown, Indigenous, and originally from the south of Mexico and therefore have no familial network (other than other *maquila* workers). The *maquiloca* is a fictive subject created by the white heteropatriarchy that undergirds free-trade capitalism and by the infrastructural pathways of the violently imposed process of smoothing over disparate economies. Her sin is movement, the audacity to migrate to the north, to seek a life and a livelihood. Murdered or disappeared *maquila* workers in places such as Juarez

and Tijuana are, upon their death, described as sexually licentious women with uncontrollable desires or as sex workers who, the logic of the *maquiloca* demands, put themselves in the position of being murdered, raped, or disappeared. According to Alicia Gaspar de Alba and Georgina Gúzman, while still alive, victims are cast as "'*las inditas del sur*,' the little Indian girls from the south of Mexico—poor, dark-skinned, and indigenous-looking" (2010, 1). In death, they are described as a "few dead prostitutes" (2). The adjudication for her death is sex, and pathological desire in general. She was driven mad by the *maquila*, the story goes. Morally insane and made sex-crazed by the lascivious urban lifestyle on the border, she relinquished her traditional values and their classed, raced, and gendered roles. Her money only goes toward vices. She drinks too much. She wears the wrong things, articles of clothing that "ask for it." She walks down alleys that are too dark, too late at night. She dares to live a life where she is read as alone, disposable, without community. The charge of *maquiloca* encourages the act of not accounting for these deaths: seduced by the neoliberal tenet of personal responsibility, the dead paid the price for their own failures, heeding the multinational demand for cheap labor in the *maquiladora* industry. An assemblage of state and nonstate actors commits these acts of gender, race, and class violence; however, it is the privileging of investment under NAFTA's policies and across a wide range of border economies that forges the context of murder, rape, and death. Writing about a NAFTA context of *feminicidios* and how they are staged in theater, Patricia A. Ybarra rightly asserts that "neoliberalism is a serial killer" (2018, 105).

I want to divert *maquiloca* discourse, rerouting the antisex, antimigration, and anti-Indigenous interpretation of the *maquila* worker as the pathological *maquiloca* to ruminate on the queer crip potentials of *la loca* and her positionality at the edge of free-trade capitalism. *Maquiloca* is coded language for prostitute, and *loca*, which means "crazy" or "madwoman," points toward the risks associated with women's independence and freedom. It also connotes sexual deviance and a perspective on sex as a "disreputable disability" (Mollow 2012) that attaches itself to anyone read as female, femme, or feminine presenting. As Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes shows in his monumental book *Translocas*, the reinvention of that which has been used as an insult has a long feminist and *cuir* history in the Americas (2021, 28–44). La Fountain-Stokes's use of the term transloca resignifies *loca* to admiringly refer to "insane women, effeminate homosexuals, drag performers, or transgender subjects" who "tread a dangerous ground . . . make and break allegiances, and . . . redefine meanings and sensibilities" (2, 18). Historically,

*maquiloca* labels those cis women who dared to migrate alone for work at the border. Conceptually it means to pathologize all female, femme, and feminine-presenting people and their desires to move as madness, as foolish dalliances with deadly forms of sexual danger. The use of *loca*, or the madwoman, in *maquiloca* has never been repurposed for its proximity to queerness, but in this book, I want to put some pressure on feminist accounts that have too quickly aligned sex work and pornography with the narco-machine and sex trafficking to recast the figure of the *maquiloca* as an actor who desires the freedom to move, sexually or otherwise. In fact, movement and circulation is what free-trade discourse promises but rarely delivers for the sexual subjects that this book holds most dear.

To save the *maquiloca* from the madness she embodies and invites, both the political left and the right collaborate in fomenting sex panics, such as the global anti–sex trafficking panic, which result in national and transnational policies that actually stunt her movement and her activities. To do this, she must remain a pitiable subject, one who is sexually innocent and nonsexual and whose sole recuperative value is to be interpreted as mother and nurturer, rather than human being and sexual subject. What if the *maquila* worker were living *la vida loca*? What if she engaged in sex work to supplement her earnings? What if she is also trans and immediately clocked as "sex worker," regardless of how she earns her money? What if she embodied all these risks and was killed? Does that adjudicate her killing? By playing into free-trade capitalism's binary system of licit/illicit, legal/illegal, criminal/consumer, feminist scholars who immediately align pornographers, sex workers, pimps, and consumers of sexual materials with "human trafficking" actually work against the desires of the potential *maquila* worker to migrate, to work, and to be a full and dignified sexual subject, no matter how raunchy, audacious, or flagrant her sexual practices might be to an academic or activist audience.

By ceding sex to free-trade capitalism and its long-standing tool of "public morality" and "obscenity" exceptions, such analysis plays into the neoliberal fantasy of deserving and undeserving victims and reiterates the free-trade paradigm of success as mere survival and sexual and erotic cultures as frivolities for which there is no time, energy, or resources. These frivolities become opportunities to amplify already-existent structures of criminalization based in racialized gender inequities and the embodiment of difference. The blurriness of "trafficking" provides easy and always available leverage to criminalize a whole host of legal activities such as migration and sex work. Subjects such as the *maquiloca* became the refuse of licit and legal

trade between nations, the disposable rabble who could not be organized, neither by the slave traders and the conquistadores nor by government-co-opted labor unions such as the Federation of Mexican Labor (CTM), which divided poor laborers from the middle-class sector and acquiesced to NAFTA's local and transnational policies and practices. Chased by panics about insatiable appetites out of control, the *maquiloca* represents one free trade–invented figure fictionalized through the same heterocispatriarchal and racist norms that militarize the infrastructures through which queer and trans bodies, objects, and ideas are smuggled in or blocked from moving across borders.[26]

Following the cue of the disparate band of sexual and gender outlaws who make up *Queer Traffic*'s interlocutors, I look to the gaps and margins of the NAFTA documents, their mistranslations, and their potential loopholes to focus on those who attempt to evade free-trade infrastructures and forge different pathways for sexual culture on the move. Focusing on sex reveals free trade's fault lines and invites me to track and trace unaccounted-for flows of cultural production at the edge of neoliberalism's seemingly all-encompassing reach. To do so requires an alignment with sex workers, pornographers, and others deemed sexual deviants who live, breathe, produce, consume, and circulate disruptive forms of sexual culture well beyond the confines of the homonormative or the pleasingly queer. I traverse underground sex cultures that may on their face seem disconnected from other queer lives and cultures. At other times I recount experiences with sexual subjects who have been claimed as "victims" so as to foment sex panics, which hijack the struggles of the subjects they claim to care about and instead discipline unruly bodies and their movements across borders. I therefore trace queer flows of sex and culture through the shaping of trade law, particularly NAFTA as a site for the invention of new categories of obscenity and "illegal" personhood through the classed and raced designation of the "criminal." In these practices of abjection I find the contradictions of late racial capitalism and the pleasures and perils of *queer traffic*.

Queer traffic refers not only to things, people, and practices but also to the pace and velocity of free trade, or what I call *NAFTA time*. This concept attends to movement across space as well as to the tempo of movement through time. Indeed, queer traffic is a method for simultaneously negotiating multiple temporalities and polygeographies to reflect the nonlinearity of sex on the move and its varied circuits. It extends queer scholarship on time to alight on moments of sexual and temporal dissidence that make a mess of the free-trade policies and infrastructures that control global flows. Queer

traffic, then, is both a theoretical and a methodological tool with which we can "recognize how erotic relations and the bodily acts that sustain them gum up the works of normative structures we call family and nation, gender, race, class, and sexuality identity, by changing tempos, by mixing memory and desire, and recapturing excess" (Freeman 2010, 173).[27] It provides a flexible mode for following sexual trade, for moving erratically across the NAFTA years, in both the lead-up to and the ongoing aftermath of 1994.

If there are two temporal poles that bracket the tempo of NAFTA time, they are the disorienting breakneck speed of the whirring *maquila* conveyor belt and the tedious and exhausting wait of the Central American migrant for their asylum petition number to be called.[28] In this book, the erotic pleasures experienced while dancing, flirting, and sometimes just smoking a cigarette are diversions from exploitation. They disrupt NAFTA time, adjusting its pace and tempo, but not (always) for political or activist reasons. Using sex to alter the pace with which trade travels is not necessarily productive; on the contrary, it can be a relief from the pressure to always and everywhere resist.

To become attuned to the pace and rhythm of these pathologized practices of exchange and consumption, my methodology had to remain supple, flexible, and multimodal. To study the imbrication of sex and trade economies, I employed mixed methods from both the humanities and the humanistic social sciences. Over the course of ten years, I conducted participant observation and community-based participatory research and more than one hundred interviews with leading academics, activists, and artists who specialize in the diverse cultures of sex, labor, trade, the economy, performance, and visual art across Mexico City, Tijuana, Toronto, and Vancouver. Qualitative research and auto-ethnographic reflections are complemented by archival research conducted at el Centro de Investigaciones sobre América del Norte (CISAN), the Centro de Documentación y Archivo Histórico Lésbico, and the Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo (all in Mexico City); the Sexual Representation Collection at the Bonham Centre for Sexual Diversity Studies (University of Toronto); The ArQuives: Canada's LGBTQ2+ Archives in Toronto; the Archivo de el Colegio de la Frontera Norte (Tijuana); and the Mexico-US Business Committee (MEXUS) collections at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History and the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection (Austin, Texas).

Throughout the book, I cast a wide net to uncover the relationships among free trade, sex panic, and NAFTA. At times direct, at others indirect,

the unfettered connections I make between sex and NAFTA, both preceding and following the implementation of the agreement in 1994, can more faithfully be seen as ripples and dispersions in the waters of free trade, rather than one-to-one causal relationships. To do so, I juxtapose scenarios such as the Finger Vibrator and my interactions with the Mexican businessmen that began this introduction with practices of smuggling, piracy, pill dividing and stockpiling, "overeating" the colonizer's food, and the harboring of migrant peoples at the edges of the vertiginous flows of free trade. I analyze these queer traffic practices engaged by my interlocutors, and sometimes by myself, as performances of access to the material goods and lived experiences that they/we desire. I follow crossborder and intranational circuits of cultural production, which range from audiovisual, print, and digital pornography; US-imported food stuffs; HIV/AIDS drugs and treatments; and sex toys and other erotic accoutrement. I draw inspiration from labor, environmental, and Indigenous rights advocates to present a story of how an international trade agreement nominally about the movement of goods and capital has had and continues to have such a profound material influence on the level of the body. The stories I tell can be found nowhere else. They bring together two objects of study—free trade and sex—that have been purposefully disaggregated from each other in the name of security and in the anticipation of a normative consumer who is assumed to be uninterested in, disgusted by, or too easily corruptible to enjoy in the production, consumption, and circulation of dissident (sexual) acts and the objects that pertain to them.

## Queer Traffic: A Twisted Route

Each chapter celebrates a queer traffic praxis, one in which actors negotiate the limits of free-trade capitalism in relation to questions of access, pleasure, mobility, and embodiment. To highlight the distortions of history through the nonlinearity and multidirectionality of NAFTA time, my chapters are intentionally out of chronological order. The book begins in 2012–2013 (when I began my research); works backward through the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s to cover the lead-up and immediate aftermath to the CUSFTA and NAFTA; and then jumps to 2015–2018, the years that set the stage for the NAFTA renegotiations that began in 2018. In chapter 1, "Porn Pirates," I examine how illicit reproductions—pirated and pornographic media—get swept up in panics of theft, terrorism, and sex trafficking. NAFTA innovated the now-global parameters for what constitutes intellectual property (IP) law infringement, and I zoom in from this transnational regime of regulation

to focus on a non-NAFTA form of exchange at the Tepito market in Mexico City. The "porn pirates" are the men who sell pirated pornography at their booths in Tepito, a "tough neighborhood" point of sale that has contributed to pornography's false reputation in Mexico as illegal contraband. These porn pirates intervene in transnational and subnational panics around explicit sexual media in two ways: they render accessible pornographic productions that are either too expensive or too taboo for working-class peoples to buy and consume; they also eroticize an aesthetic of female embodiment within the films that disrupts the circuit of a dominant US-porn industry based in California and obsessed with thinness and whiteness. The close of the chapter extrapolates the lessons learned from the display of the pornographic archive at Tepito and the myths about pornography as a vehicle for sex trafficking and addiction.

Chapter 2, "Importing Degradation," travels to Toronto and Vancouver to examine how, in the lead-up to and aftermath of the CUSFTA in 1989 and NAFTA in 1994, the Canadian government enabled Canada Customs to search, seize, and in many instances destroy queer, trans, and Black print material destined for gay, feminist, and leftist bookshops. It shows that NAFTA's opening of borders to the "free" flow of goods actually operationalized and weaponized existing local and domestic governance (i.e., the Butler Law, the Customs Tariff Act, and the Criminal Code) to regulate and render "obscene" sexual cultural production that failed to match rhetorical and normative claims to national (Canadian) citizenship. I argue that Canada's anxieties over the cultural dominance of the United States reached a crescendo in the CUSFTA/NAFTA years and inordinately focused on queer cultural materials. I combine interviews with sexual radicals on the ground fighting Canada Customs in the 1980s and 1990s with archival research conducted at The ArQuives and the Sexual Representation Collection at the Bonham Centre for Sexual Diversity Studies at the University of Toronto, all of which attest to the surveillance and panic cultivated to stem the tide of queer materials into Canada.

In chapter 3, "Sex, Drugs, and Intellectual Property Law," I reexamine the influence of NAFTA's chapter 17, the agreement's IP provision, on the fiction of pharmaceutical scarcity of antiretrovirals in the years following NAFTA's signing. The pharmaceutical invention of antiretrovirals occurred synchronically with the implementation of policies regarding IP law in NAFTA. This IP law, developed by NAFTA architects, was then taken up by the WTO and exported globally. In other words, the fight for HIV+ sexual health in the 1990s spurred multinational pharmaceutical corporations to

innovate IP law, using NAFTA as a testing ground. These laws and policies became instruments of death, killing countless HIV+ peoples across the NAFTA borderlands and beyond. Queer and trans sex are scapegoated as the cause of disease and contamination, while NAFTA creates and imposes scarcity onto the circuits through which antiretrovirals and other drugs could flow. I diagnose NAFTA as a necropolitical infrastructure of sex and death and transit through Tijuana and Mexico City, where I met groups of activists and artists creating informal networks of care and aesthetics to counter the scapegoating of queer sex as the cause of illness and death.

The several months I spent alongside lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer (LGBTQ) migrants traveling to and through Tijuana, many with the hopes of gaining asylum in the United States or forging a life in Tijuana, are the topic of chapter 4, "Dancing *Punta* on NAFTA Time." This chapter expands what we think of as activism and attends to the granular details of LGBTQ migrants passing NAFTA time. From birthday parties, to smoking cigarettes, and especially to dancing the Afro-Latinx, Afro-Indigenous, Garifuna dance form *punta*, these everyday practices arose as sexy and potent ways to deeply play with their often-interminable waits at the Mexico-US border. NAFTA's violent influences on border security regimes and the landscape of the border contextualize the many dangers of pausing in Tijuana to wait but also uncover the commitment of queer and trans migrants to create moments of pleasure despite growing ethnonationalist sentiment about and attacks on their persons. In so doing, migrating LGBTQ people fashion their own terms of their waiting through ephemeral performances of pleasure that steal from NAFTA time.

The frictions, overlaps, and divergences of the social performances I explore in these chapters defragment how everyday actors marshal the power of aesthetics to interrupt transnational, subnational, and regional free-trade policies. Just as social performers aesthetically respond to NAFTA, Canadian and Mexican cultural performers also directly and indirectly take up the topic of NAFTA to rehearse other forms of living. NAFTA's cultural performances uncover free trade's sexual proclivities and its connections to the social performances of consumption, production, and the circulation of certain normative forms of embodied sexualities.

To reflect on the activation of queer traffic aesthetics throughout the book, and to disorder my own pace, tempo, and destination, a brief performance art *desviación* (deviation) follows each chapter.[29] This focus on anti-NAFTA and NAFTA-adjacent performance art and my contextualization of these performances in relation to NAFTA as a policy and ideology

further illuminate the non-NAFTA aesthetics of the social performances discussed throughout the book. These cultural performances, directly related to NAFTA, or that I read in connection to NAFTA, show how aesthetics cohere objects of analysis typically considered discrete.

Collectively, the performances speak to the ongoing relevance of NAFTA to contemporary Mexican and Canadian performance artists and the ways in which the FTA invents normativities as they relate to indigeneity, (dis)ability, gender, race, and body size. They attend to the slippages and mistranslations of NAFTA and now the USMCA and look to embodied performance to overcome language's limitations for analyzing (and understanding) NAFTA. The performances I discuss in these deviations—including those by César Martínez Silva and collaborator Orgy punk; by Erika Bülle Hernández; by Lechedevirgen Trimegisto; and by Montreal-based 2boys.tv in collaboration with performance artist Alexis O'Hara (Montréal) and Richard Moszka (Mexico City)—employ aesthetic choices for bringing into action regional queer/*cuir*/*kuir* and anarchist cultures in the ongoing wreckage of neoliberal projects throughout the Americas. From chains and masks to nipple rings, bondage collars, erotic piercings, and rubber fetishes enacted through the kink persona of the gimp, these performances all use sex and sexual play to perform in close proximity to but not in step with the horrors and abuses of NAFTA time. While all the performances employ kink attire or practices to wage a political critique of the fantasy of free trade, many of them also have something to say about rehearsing life differently during the "crip times" of NAFTA. Though aesthetically and methodologically distinct, these crip performances question free trade's tendency to flatten or harmonize difference. They talk across debility and disability, its connections and divides, to propose and walk audiences through tactics for disrupting market logics in everyday life. The point is to show not how neoliberalism disables but rather that neoliberalism's debilitating forces produce disabilities by making precarious populations available for injury (Puar 2017). They acknowledge the NAFTA borderlands as sites of violence, surveillance, and panic while also embracing how sexual subjects endeavor to carve out contexts of pleasure.

From porn pirates in Tepito to obscenity smugglers at the Canada-US border, underground circulators of hormones and antiretrovirals, and queer and trans migrants dancing *punta*, *Queer Traffic* honors those who have creatively negotiated the formal pathways of surveillance and panic that characterize free-trade policies. Throughout the book, I highlight what NAFTA does alongside the embodied possibilities that people carve out in the times and spaces of NAFTA. The social and cultural performances this

book covers offer a multifaceted set of queer traffic tactics that interrupt the politics and policies of free trade. The stakes of these everyday performances, overtly or implicitly, are the very power over embodied life that NAFTA, as an instantiation of capital's colonial history, enacts and extracts. To meet that power, from top to bottom, to bottom up and back again, the people I met in doing this research taught me, shared with me, the methods they employed in these scenarios. These queer traffic methods show how an aesthetics of the body apply well beyond the stage, the gallery, the museum, and the art market to spill out across these different arenas and encounters.

At its most optimistic, this book hedges a kind of hope for queer culture and aesthetics to dream of other forms of living that go beyond mere survival, despite the destruction and devastation of late racial capitalism and the ongoing horrors of colonial decimation. The belief that life could be lived otherwise emerges from my encounters with people on the ground who reroute the pathways through which they can engage in sexual economies of exchange. I follow these pathways that evade the surveillance apparatus of the state and center those communities and individuals who assume some of the biggest risks in negotiating the sexual and affective contracts and policies implicit in free-trade ideology.

# NOTES

## Preface

1 By *switch*, I mean to refer to the versatility of a sexual subject who assumes and desires dominant and submissive (top/bottom) positions during sex. The term *vers* is sometimes used interchangeably with *switch*, though the latter emerges from BDSM cultures and practices, and for that reason I employ it here.

2 Here I draw from Michel Foucault's theory on the multidirectional flow of power in the second part of his first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1978).

3 The saying is (in)famously attributed to the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Mexican dictator Porfirio Díaz, though the origins of this phrase cannot be officially traced.

4 For a museum exhibition that reconsiders how Malinche has been historically cast as a traitor, see *Traitor, Survivor, Icon: The Legacy of La Malinche* (Lyall and Romo 2022).

5 For a thorough history of the sex worker in political economy and Marxist discourse, see McClanahan and Settell 2021.

6 *Rasquache* is a Nahuatl word that means "leftover" or "of no value," and *rasquachismo* is a form of creative expression invented by Chicana/x/o artists and art theorists to describe something that has been recycled and repurposed, a kind of aesthetic politics from below. See Ybarra-Frausto 1989.

7 "People smugglers" is the term used by Interpol (https://www.interpol.int/en/Crimes/People-smuggling). NAFTA is one of many international treaties that provide indirect platforms for transnational police cooperation, and Interpol is one such organization that coordinates those police activities.

### Introduction

1 See Babb 2001. Even though these businesspeople were all male, Mexico has a quota system wherein half of the representatives must be female. This binary quota system continues the occlusion of trans, nonbinary, and genderqueer subjects in government work.

2 Free trade of sex toys between the United States and Colombia is technically listed under "Health and Beauty," but unlike the flow of these materials between the United States and Mexico they are also given a designated Harmonized System (HS) Code. The HS is a standardized numerical method of classifying traded products, thus rendering those objects with an HS code intelligible to free-trade infrastructures. For more on free trade and sexual commerce between the United States and Colombia with a focus on sex toys, see Alice Boyd, "US Trade Deal Brings Cut-Price Sex Toys to Colombia," *Colombia Reports*, November 22, 2011.

3 For example, consider Kimberly Kay Hoang's book *Spiderweb Capitalism* (2022), where she shows how transnational capitalist elites participate in highly developed shadow economies that largely go unseen.

4 For a germinal text that also grows out of and responds to the sex panics surrounding pornography, sadomasochism, and pedophilia, see Rubin 2011a. Also see Halperin and Hoppe 2017.

5 Orme and others argue that NAFTA was also about Japan, insofar as, at the time of the FTA frenzy in the 1980s and 1990s, Japan had dominated the discourse of the global economic battle to be the world's most powerful nation. Japan is no longer in that category, with some experts arguing that Japan's decline in birth rate, and the subsequent aging of its population, is the (sexual) reasoning for Japan's falling out of the vertical hierarchy of world power. NAFTA can also be viewed as a response to predictions of power consolidated under the then-burgeoning European Union.

6 Abu-Lughod (1989) historicizes the beginning of world trading systems in the thirteenth century. For a historical perspective via China, see Rofel 2007, 190–194.

7 See Thornton 2021 for a Mexico-centric account of global economy governance and its history from the Mexican Revolution through the 1970s.

8 The identities of the participants in *(Untitled) Ricas y famosas* were intended to be anonymous, but outrage grew when newspapers identified

some of Rossell's sitters as the children of PRI politicians. Some of the photographed reportedly threatened to sue the artist after seeing the work and book reviews that described their homes as "vast kitsch palaces." She received threatening messages and emails, was called a "traitor" and "self-loather," and has since kept a low profile. At one point she sent an actress to perform as her at book signings. See Ginger Thompson, "The Rich and Famous and Aghast: A Peep-Show Book," *New York Times*, September 25, 2002, http://www.nytimes.com/2002/09/25/international/americas/25MEXI.html.

9 SFMOMA (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art), "How Daniela Rossell's Photographs Came to Be Viewed as Images of Mexico's 'Poster Girls of Corruption,'" 2012, https://www.sfmoma.org/watch/how-daniela-rossells-photographs-came-to-be-viewed-as-images-of-mexicos-poster-girls-of-corruption/.

10 The study of the history of the term and figure of the *chacal* spans the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and it includes work by notable writers such as Violeta L. de la Rosa, Carlos Monsiváis, Juan Carlos Bautista, Olivier Debroise, and Salvador Novo. See Hernández Victoria 2011.

11 For more on the documentation and archiving of sodomy as one of many "sins of nature," see Tortorici 2018.

12 See Rodolfo N. Morales S., "Chacales, príncipes de la fauna urbana," *Del Otro Lado* (Mexico City) no. 1, January/February 1992, 58–61, Centro de Documentación y Archivo Histórico Lésbico, Colectivo Sol Collection. For this article, Morales S. conducted "una investigación exhaustiva de los chacales en el Distrito Federal" (an exhaustive study of *chacales* in Mexico City) (58), where he engaged in "una investigación participante donde el autor ha convivido, con-bebido y compartido experiencias" (a participant study where he hung out with, drank with, and shared experiences) (58) with fifty men he labels as *chacales*. The answers to his questions, which he presents as statistical percentages, debunk the employment, class, and race assumptions that often circulate with the *chacal* stereotype. Indeed, *chacales* can be "choferos, soldados, taqueros, gaseros, y polícias" (drivers, soldiers, tacomakers, gasoline attendants, and police officers) (60), but they also work for private companies, for the government, and as students. Additionally, he reports that while *chacales* are often assumed to be "moreno" (dark-skinned), the men he hung out with "han demonstrado una amplia gama de tipos raciales y variedades" (have provided evidence of a wide range of racialized types and varieties) (59).

13 For an ethnographic study of gay sex tourism within the context of Brazil, see Mitchell 2015. On the relationship between the development of gay tourism in Mexico and Mexican sexualities, see Cantú 2009, 97–117.

14 "México, país de clase baja: Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI)" [Mexico, lower-class country: National Institute of Statistics and

Geography], *Animal Político*, June 12, 2013, https://animalpolitico.com/sociedad/mexico-pais-de-clase-baja-inegi.

15 Nathaniel Parish Flannery, "What's the Real Story with Modern Mexico's Middle Class?," *Forbes*, July 23, 2013, https://www.forbes.com/sites/nathanielparishflannery/2013/07/23/whats-the-real-story-with-modern-mexicos-middle-class/?sh=36d1659d1d42.

16 OECD, "Divided We Stand: Why Inequality Keeps Rising," 2011, 21–44, https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/2011/12/divided-we-stand_g1g1483d.html.

17 Slim exhibited these photographs in at least two gallery exhibitions, one of which was titled *Rough Trade: Art and Sex Work in the Late 20th Century*, CLAMP, August 2–September 22.

18 Article 2205 of NAFTA allows the parties of the agreement to modify the agreement with the consent of the other members, or to withdraw after giving six months' notice.

19 As numerous studies have shown, most drugs and guns pass through official points of entry, and people migrating into the United States have significantly lower crime rates than the general US population. For example, see Light, He, and Robey 2020.

20 Trump's vigilantism and his use of racist stereotypes of Black and Brown men to foment sex panics reaches back at least to his involvement with the so-called "Central Park Five." See the miniseries *When They See Us* (2019).

21 For the original 1994 NAFTA preamble in its English version, see https://www.italaw.com/sites/default/files/laws/italaw6187%2814%29.pdf.

For the 2020 NAFTA (USMCA) preamble in English, see the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR), https://ustr.gov/trade-agreements/free-trade-agreements/united-states-mexico-canada-agreement/agreement-between.

22 For the use of "queer traffic" as a way of reading US literary history of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries anthologically, see Hurley 2010.

23 For another use of the term *traffic*, see Gayle S. Rubin's germinal essay "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex" (1975). Rubin's main title is drawn from Emma Goldman's 1910 article of the same name, an article in which she critiqued the moral crusade of what we now call the White Slavery panic. Critical trafficking scholars trace the origins of the present-day "modern slavery" anti-prostitution movement to this period. For Rubin's pro–sex work reflection on her earlier essay's title, see Rubin 2011b.

24 For a critical stance on sex-trafficking discourse and representations in Mexico, see Jiménez Portilla 2022. For the ways in which global laws, transnational policies, and cultural flows play into sex-trafficking panics and carceral approaches to "rescue," see Agustín 2007; Bernstein 2018; Hoang and Salazar Parreñas 2014; Mitchell 2022; Shih 2023; and Vance

2012. In *Panics without Borders* (2022), Gregory Mitchell uniquely situates his book within the field of performance studies to examine the sex trafficking myths that surround global sporting events and the transnational discourse of sex trafficking as one rooted in white supremacy.

25 For a cultural study that situates media representations of the war on drugs within a long history of consolidating state power and marginalized resistance, see Marez 2004.

26 On the ways in which post-9/11 surveillance policies in the United States shape and regulate the category of transgender, see Beauchamp 2019. For a study of how state surveillance practices are structured on anti-Black racism, see Browne 2015. On the particularities of the surveillance state as it pertains to sex trafficking, see Musto 2016.

27 For the ways in which "queer time" disrupts normative conceptions of reproduction, family, and capital and labor flows, see also Halberstam 2005 (1–21) and Muñoz 2009 on "straight time."

28 Owing to the common usage by my interlocutors and to migrating people's identification with "migrant," I'm using this term throughout the book.

29 A hat tip goes to Gayle S. Rubin and her monumental reader, *Deviations* (2011).

### Chapter 1. Porn Pirates

1 *Pambazos* are sandwiches filled with chorizo and potatoes and bathed in guajillo salsa.

2 *Güera* is a classed, raced, and gendered term, used in formal and informal retail spaces to address the potential buyer with the privilege of whiteness (fair haired and light skin, or even "blonde"). The term is specific to "women's" purchasing power, thereby recognizing a particular individual as being a potential buyer with money to spend rather than an interloper or a potential thief in the retail environment. In other words, women of any skin color may be called *güera* with the cultural assumption that any woman visually identified as having the means to buy what is on sale wants to be associated with lighter skin. For a reflection on the moniker *güera* in Chicana communities, see Moraga 1981, 27–34.

3 Aguiar's extensive ethnographic research on the criminalization of piracy in Mexico is largely focused on the San Juan de Dios market in the Mexican city of Guadalajara. His research (2010) has shown how President Vicente Fox's declaration of a "war on piracy" in 2003 further installed piracy as a top priority in Mexico's security agenda and led to more than six thousand raids and seizures in 2006 alone. His research (2012) also covers the 2008 Mérida Initiative signed under Felipe Calderón and George W. Bush,