PUTA LIFE

SEEING LATINAS, WORKING SEX

JUANA MARÍA RODRÍGUEZ

PUTA LIFE

BUY

JUANA MARÍA

PUTA

SEEING LATINAS,

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DISSIDENT ACTS A SERIES EDITED BY MACARENA GÓMEZ-BARRIS & DIANA TAYLOR

RODRÍGUEZ

WIFE

WORKING SEX

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS DURHAM AND LONDON 2023

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Printed in the United States of America
on acid-free paper ∞
Designed by Matthew Tauch
Typeset in Portrait Text by
Copperline Book Services

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-
Publication Data
Names: Rodríguez, Juana María, author.
Title: Puta life : seeing Latinas, working
sex / Juana María Rodríguez.
Other titles: Dissident acts.
Description: Durham : Duke University
Press, 2023. | Series: Dissident acts |
Includes bibliographical references and
index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2022039256 (print)
LCCN 2022039257 (ebook)
ISBN 9781478019497 (paperback)
ISBN 9781478016854 (hardcover)
ISBN 9781478024118 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Hispanic American women
in mass media. | Women in mass media. |
Sex workers in mass media. | Prostitutes—
Public opinion. | Feminist theory. | BISAC:
SOCIAL SCIENCE / Feminism & Feminist
Theory | SOCIAL SCIENCE / Human Sexuality
(see also PSYCHOLOGY / Human Sexuality)
Classification: LCC P94.5.W65 R63 2023
(print) | LCC P94.5.W65 (ebook) |
DDC 305.48/868073—dc23/eng/20221121
LC record available at
https://lccn.loc.gov/2022039256
LC ebook record available at
https://lccn.loc.gov/2022039257

Cover art: Self-portrait by
Vanessa del Rio.

Duke University Press gratefully
acknowledges the support of the
University of California, Berkeley,
Townsend Center for the Humanities,
and the Andrew Mellon Humanities
Research Fund, which provided funds
toward the publication of this book.

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TO ›

Gabriela, Loanna, Claudia, Ángela, Jacqueline, Sylvia, Marsha, Tamara, Felicia, Isabel, Dolores, Micaela, Guadalupe, Carlota, Juana, Juana María, Leonarda, Félix, La Conga, La Madrileña, Adele, Lulu, Lola, May, Lupe, Beatríz, Lena, Ana María, Vanessa, Isabel, Carmen, Amalia, Canela, Norma, Rosa, Genoveva, Aurelia, Raquel, Sofía, Paola, Sonia, Reyna, Carmelita, Leti, Lupe, Esther, Ángeles, y Adela

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book was conceived in an instant to surface a word that was always there, but it was produced through the slow, meditative exercise of sitting with images and words between the demands of an overburdened life, translating the feelings they conjure into a book to hold. I was joined in this regular writing ritual by two of my most cherished friends, amantes de lengua e imaginación: my forever academic boo, Emma Pérez, who inspires me to live out my best adventures; and Achy Obejas, my discerning queer Cuban critic and confidant. Once I began writing and sharing, I benefited from a crew of friends and interlocutors who made the work better and kept me moving forward. My sister-comrade Leigh Raiford is a coveted reader and my emergency evacuation plan; she added life to this project, and that made all the difference. Judith Butler was one of my earliest academic supporters; today I revel in their warm friendship, their easy kindness, and their everyday brilliance. Over the years, Caren Kaplan and Eric Smoodin have shared copious amounts of food, scholarly insights, and personal counsel with me, and I plan to spend a lifetime repaying their many acts of generosity. My friendship with KT Thompson has realigned all I know about intellectual intimacy and care; I am happy to keep learning. Nicole Fleetwood is a beautiful, bountiful source of motivation and encouragement; she helps me reimagine what academic work can do and inspires me to live out loud. Julian Carter is a queer creative beloved who is known to appear out of nowhere, like a rainbow, to share wild ideas. As a femme friend and a world-making scholar, Beth Freeman offers me regular life-affirming lessons in the immense design of things. The imprint of my queridísima homie Xandra Ibarra and our many conversations about the politics and flesh of puta life permeate this work; gracias, mujer. Manuel Cuellar, Giancarlo Cornejo, and Iván Ramos each contributed to this project in both tangible ways, through gifts of language and bibliography, and intangible ways, through the affections they generously bestow on their

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former teacher; they are each trusted readers and valued friends. My most lavish thanks to la divina Marisa Belausteguigoitia, who always adds the D.F. sizzle; to Amalia Cabeza for her powerful scholarship on sex work, her many years of friendship, and her generosity in sharing both; to Deborah Vargas, a longtime friend and fellow sucia lover; to Laura Gutiérrez, who made my Mexican adventures extra magical and whose insights on rumberas were so generative to my thinking. Love and propers to Marcia Ochoa, who has long loved and supported my puta ways and is always there for the afterparty; and to Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel, my perfect match and a phenomenal friend. #Bi4Bi love and pink appreciation to mi queridísimo Mauricio Ilan Carrión for bringing new meaning to care, cake, and planetary light. My thanks to Julia LaChica, who keeps making my world more beautiful, and to Claire Jeannette for bringing the calm and clarity. These extraordinary humans have each supported me in my efforts to live my best puta life. I am overwhelmed with gratitude for all the ways they accompany me in the everyday urgency of surviving the present and finding joy in the cracks.

I had the pleasure of working with three extraordinary research assistants on this project—Michelle Velasquez Potts, who accompanied me on an archival trip to Mexico (a.k.a. the Femme Empowerment Tour); Marlyn Zuno, a Berkeley undergraduate who was outstanding beyond belief and helped me stay organized, focused, and on schedule; and Jacqueline Serrano, who provided me with a great start to organizing an unruly archive. Un saludo caluroso to Victoria Soto, a young scholar at the Universidad de Puerto Rico en Rio Piedras, who helped me out in a pinch by sharing her own extraordinary research. All are a testament to the power of Latina brilliance and public education. A solidarity shout-out to my fellow writers on Writing Every Day, where we keep showing up for ourselves, each other, and the practice. Translation is its own love language; special femme appreciation to Aspa Chalkidou for making me glow in Greek; Sabine Fuchs for introducing me to German butches and femmes; and mi querido Santiago Castellano por tantos gestos bonitos.

As a graduate student at Columbia University, I had the distinct pleasure of watching porn and discussing visual representations of sex in a class taught by Anne McClintock; her daring and her influence helped make this work possible. The friendships that I formed during my time at Projecto ContrSIDA por Vida (PCPV) remain some of the most impactful of my life; love to all the PROJECTO putos, putas y putes on both sides of queer heaven. I offer gratitude and glory to the genius of Samuel R. Delany; his

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work changed my understanding of what written language could do and what a sexual life could be; I remain a student of his presence. The brief, quirky, and queer friendship I shared with Lauren Berlant was a heady thrill: Rest in Brilliance. I still miss José Esteban Muñoz, but I imagine him hovering nearby awash in the gossip and grime of it all, looking for someplace else to go. Love and ease to my given family on both sides of the many borders that separate us. My beautiful, kind, smart, and loving son, Mateo, is the gift that keeps giving, the baby turtle that is always swimming at my side. Thank you for all the ways you love me.

As friends and scholars, the following people have buoyed me when I needed to believe: José Quiroga, Jillian Hernandez, Margaret Rhee, Alani Hicks-Bartlett, Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, Milena Britto, Marco Antonio Flores, Larry La Fountain-Stokes, Santiago Castellanos, Joshua Javier Guzmán, Christina León, Summer Kim Lee, Julia Chang, Jaime Cortez, LaMonda Horton-Stallings, Mireille Miller-Young, Kemi Adeyemi, Kareem Khubchandani, Tavia Nyong'o, Cole Rizki, Jessica Pabón-Colón, Lázaro Lima, Laura Luna, Jennifer Tyburczy, Ricardo Ortiz, Susan Stryker, Patrick "Pato" Hebert, Roy Pérez, Cathy Davidson, Anita Mannur, Dean Spade, Leticia Alvarado, Alexandra Rodríguez deRuiz, Macarena Gómez-Barris, Diana Taylor, Raquel Gutierrez, Moi Santos, Ricardo Bracho, SA Smythe, Jina B. Kim, Jafari Allen, Alison Kafer, Ren Ellis Neyra, Josh Kun, Ronak Kapadia, Ianna Hawkins Owen, Susana Vargas, Leticia Sabsay, Greta LaFleur, Nguyen Tan Hoang, Sara Kessler, Mary Pat Brady, Anwar Uhuru, Dredge Kang, Debanuj Dasgupta, Anna Elena Torres, L. B. Johnson, Mayela Rodríguez, Maya Sofia Oliver, Fred Moten, Ann Cvetkovich, Karen Tongson, Eng Beng Lim, Kyla Wazana Tompkins, Micha Cárdenas, David Findley, Ara Wilson, Cathy Hannabach and the exceptional team at Ideas on Fire, Gabe Rosenberg, Harris Scott Soloman, Ulrika Dahl, Paul Joseph López Oro, María Teresa Mendez Baiges, Isaias Fanlo, and Diego Falconí Trávez. Warmest greetings and gratitude to the new friends I found in Berlin: Sin Morgana, Sabine Hark, Halil Dk Sugar, Ben Trott, Berit Ebert, Ben Miller, Thomas Castañeda, Carol Scherer, Caitlin Hahn, Amy Kurzweil, Bertrall Ross, Joy Milligan, Ladee Hubbard, Lan Samantha Chang, and my beloved Channing Gerard Joseph.

At UC Berkeley, I benefit from the friendship and good cheer of so many wonderful colleagues. Extra special thanks to Abigail DeKosnick, Dareick Scott, Poulomi Sahar, Damon Young, Julia Bryan-Wilson, Wendy Brown, Mel Chen, Michael Cohen, Nadia Ellis, Natalia Brizuela, Brandi Cantonese, Kris Gutierrez, Lisa Garcia Bedolla, Salar Mameni, Raka Ray, Cris-

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tina Mora, Roshanak Kheshti, Laura Nelson, Eric Stanley, Raúl Coronado, and Ula Taylor. Unending thanks to Keith Feldman, who exemplifies the spirit of collegiality. Working with Sandra Richmond has transformed my relationship to the ugly details of administrative life to make everything better; no words can account for all the ways her labor makes my own possible. Dewey Saint Germaine, Laura Jimenez-Olvera, Charisse Dyer, Uilani Hunt, and Latonya Minor all work hard to brighten the halls where I work.

Teaching makes you smarter. Endless gratitude to the many students whose engagement has enriched my own in innumerable ways; special thanks to Caleb Luna, David Pham, Fernanda Cunha Rivera, John Mundell, Sofi Chavez, Alan Pelaez Lopez, Jess Dorrance, Juliana Fadil-Luchkiw, Lázaro González González, Juan Manuel Aldapa Muñoz, and Julia Havard.

On Twitter and in the world, I have been schooled by a whole host of sex workers and their advocates who have helped keep it real, urgent, and relevant to the daily assaults on sex worker lives, protections, and dignity that happen around the world every day. Special love and deep appreciation to Courtney Trouble, Dorian Katz, Jiz Lee, Jessica Sage, Cris Sardina, Olivia Snow, Lola Davina, Lexi Dark, the Desiree Alliance, the Global Network of Sex Work Projects, Casa Kúa, Hydra Cafe, El/La Para TransLatinas, and the many local chapters of Sex Worker Outreach Projects.

Special thanks to Ken Wissoker for his belief in this project and to the hardworking staff at Duke University Press for their help moving it along. Eternal gratitude to dedicated librarians and archivists everywhere, but especially to Lillian Castillo-Speed and the entire staff at the Ethnic Studies Library at the University of California, Berkeley; to Ilya Oehring and the enterprising librarians at the American Academy in Berlin; and to Natalia López López of the Instituto Nacional de Salud Pública in Mexico, who was a wellspring of warmth, collegiality, and invaluable research assistance.

This work was nurtured by provocative engagements with audiences at the American Academy in Berlin; Brown University; California College of the Arts; Columbia University; Indiana University; Miami University; New York University; Northwestern University; Rutgers University; San Diego State University; Smith College; Tufts University; Universitat Central de Catalunya; University of California, Riverside; University of California, San Diego; University of California, Santa Cruz; University of Georgia; University of Illinois; Universidad de Málaga; University of Maryland; University of Miami; University of Michigan; University of Oregon; University of Texas; Washington University; Wesleyan University; and Yale University. At Berkeley it was supported by the Latinx Research Cen-

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ter, the Center for Race and Gender, the Othering and Belonging Institute, a Project Grant of the Townsend Center for the Humanities, and the Andrew Mellon Humanities Research Fund. The final manuscript was completed while I was in residence at the American Academy in Berlin. Equal parts exhilarating and restorative, my stay in Berlin was a gift of time and release from the usual pressures of academic life that changed me in the best ways and cast new horizons for whatever is next in my own puta life. Finally, I offer gratitude to the luminous wisdom of the Universe that one dark night reached back to touch my outstretched hand and remind me of all the ways we remain united in its radiance.

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INTRODUCTION

Puta Life: Seeing Latinas, Working Sex takes as its subject a range of texts that silently or loudly attach the word *puta* to a face, a form, a fugitive gesture captured in a frame. As an intellectual project of inquiry and imagination invested in exploring this enduring figure of latinized feminine excess, this book probes a wildly capacious and curiously curated collection of images to search for the ways that Latina sexual labor becomes a visual phenomenon. Sex workers hold a special place in the visual archive—they function as the unnamed muses and mistresses to a host of mostly male artists and photographers. In the archives of criminalization and social welfare, the puta's face is presented as a warning, a subject of state and social surveillance. In the realm of popular culture and media, sex workers function as an endless source of prurient fascination; the puta's voice narrates the cautionary tale of dangerous desires or the titillating details of those who get paid to do something most of us do for free. As archetypical figures, putas function as screens for a whole host of anxieties and desires about money, sex, and power. Encumbered with the double burden of being desired and vilified, sex workers function as an endless source of inspiration and concern for those who wish to possess, rescue, or venerate them; to know the sexual secrets they harbor or the indignities they have endured. Crafted in the crevices between image and voice, the real and the imagined, *Puta Life* asks how stigma sticks to flesh.

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Erving Goffman (2009) begins his influential treatise *Stigma* by reminding us that stigma emerges as a visual phenomenon. According to the Greeks, stigma refers to "bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier" (1). Conceived of as a "bodily sign," a visual marker of deviance, the social stigma that attaches to sex workers is intended to be seen, visible to those publics authorized to cast judgment. But in order to be recognized, viewers must be instructed in what to look for, trained in identifying aberrant sexuality. Visuality is what binds the social stigma of sexual deviance onto the body of the sex worker, but it also allows all of us who fall under the scrutinizing gaze of moral judgment to become suspect carriers of the moral deficiencies sexual labor is intended to represent. The sexualized availability and aberration that is forever attached to racialized bodies crystallizes in the archetype of the puta. This book, formed in the interstice between visual and textual forms of biographical representation, asks: What does it mean to be the visual target of gendered scrutiny and racialized surveillance? To be the source of so much fantasy and speculation? What does it mean to live a sexual life in public? To be seen and assumed known?

La "P" de Puta

Puta's most recognized translation is the English word *whore*, and like *whore*, it is most frequently used as a slur to shame and stigmatize, intended to castigate rebellious forms of sexual expression, particularly in feminine subjects. As a word, *puta* can stand in for sex worker, prostitute, hooker, slut, or bitch, and sometimes it is used to simply mean woman. When it is gendered in the masculine as *puto*, it can reference male sex workers but most frequently collapses into simply a synonym for faggot, another femininized subject of unrestrained and shameful sexuality. But reader, you already know this; the Spanish word *puta* needs no translation. Like the word *macho*, that other term for excessive latinized gender, *puta* has already entered the official lexicon of American English; the *Oxford English Dictionary* tells us so: "puta, n. In Spanish-speaking countries or parts of America: a prostitute; a promiscuous woman, a slut." And like those it is intended to describe, the word *puta* has been known to circulate. As an intended insult in any language, the word itself packs quite a punch. Pronouncing it requires you to push out your lips to force out the air of the "pu" followed by the hardest "ta" that presses tongue against teeth.[1] As an oral performance, the

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word is often spit rather than spoken, hurled in the direction of the suspected violator of gendered propriety.[2]

The quotidian uses of the word *puta* occupy a conflicted, contradictory, and at times comical space in both Spanish and Portuguese, and the complexity of its signification serves as an apt metaphor for the ways feminized gender is understood in Latin America and its diasporas. By itself, *puta* can be used as an intensifier to express frustration or anger at a situation, similar to the way *damn* or *fucking* might be used as an adjective. Gendered in both masculine and feminine forms, it can serve to cast a negative inflection, *puto trabajo* (damn job) or *puta policía* (fucking police), but the word can also signify something quite wonderful, depending on context. A phrase such as *¡Qué puta suerte!* (What fucking luck!) can hold either a very positive or a very negative connotation depending on context, in ways that mirror the context-driven meanings that the phrase might hold in English. One of its most popular forms is *hijo de puta* (son of a bitch), or frequently *hijo de la gran puta*, which adds an additional element of grandeur in its invocation of abjection. The phrase *puta madre* combines the terms *whore* and *mother* and brings together the binary designations to which Latinas are routinely assigned and functions precisely in this contradictory fashion, where *puta madre* can be used to mark something that is extraordinarily good or extraordinarily bad.[3] This contradictory range of potential registers of signification is central to constructions of Latina sex workers and Latinas who work sex. As a category of human subjects, putas are activated discursively as objects of scorn and social rejection but also as spectacular fantastic projections of corporeal desire and sublime sexual possibilities.

Despite the decidedly derogatory associations of the word, many sex worker activists in Latin America have taken up the term *puta* in an effort to reappropriate the word's significance. Gabriela Leite, the grand dame of the sex worker movement in Brazil, states, "Eu gosto da palavra puta desde sempre. Eu acho uma palavra sonora e quente" (I have always liked the word *puta*. I think it is a word that has a nice sound and it's hot) (fig. I.1).[4] As an activist, Leite understood the power and significance of claiming puta as an identity, arguing that "precisa ter identidade, aí a gente muda alguma coisa" (we need to have an identity, then we'll change something) (Murray 2013). In 1996 San Francisco feminist performance artist Loana Valencia, known as La Sinvergüenza, or shameless one, coined the acronym P.U.T.A., Porque Usted Tiene Animo (Because you have spirit/courage), defining *puta* as "a woman who loves sex and is *never* afraid to admit it" (1996).

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FIG I.1 › Gabriela Leite in the documentary *Um Beijo para Gabriela*, 2013.

FIG I.2 › Mural in front of the offices of the Programa de Estudios de Mujer y Género at the Universidad de Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras, 2017.

As with the resignification of the word *queer*, these activists and artists have taken up the word *puta* as a symbol of their refusal to be shamed and as a way to claim a politicized identity. As with *queer*, the linguistic possibilities for *puta* resonate expansively, even as subtleties emerge within specific local vernaculars (fig. I.2). For example, the slogan "Puta feminista" activates a double valence by transforming an invective imagined as very bad, a fucking feminist, into something very good, a feminist puta. Once again, two feminine subject positions imagined as being opposed to one another are united and related: puta feminista. Similarly, the slogans of the sex worker rights movement frequently rework offensive phrases to highlight the hypocrisy of systems of gendered sexual control: for example, changing the

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ever-popular insult *hijo de puta* (son of a bitch) by declaring, "Las putas insistimos los políticos no son nuestros hijos—solo utilizan nuestros servicios" (Putas insist politicians are not our sons; they only use our services).

As sex workers have crafted a political identity deserving of civil rights, some have also sought political office to highlight the ways they have been disenfranchised.[5] As early as 1991 Claudia Colimoro, a sex worker and feminist organizer, ran on the slate of the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (PRT, Revolutionary Workers' Party) during the 1991 Mexican parliamentary and municipal elections on a platform that included the decriminalization of sex work and protection for people with AIDS (Kuppers and Thow 1993, 93).[6] In 2010 Leite ran for a congressional seat in Brazilian parliament with the slogan "Puta deputada" (Puta congresswoman). When Ángela Villón, a sex worker and founder of Miluska, Vida y Dignidad (Miluska, Life and Dignity), Peru's first organization advocating for sex workers, ran to be a congressional representative in Peru in 2016 and again in 2021, she defined herself as "una puta decente" (a decent puta) who wanted to represent Peru's sex workers and make Congress into a respectable brothel, to foreground the corruption and duplicity of the state (fig. I.3).[7] In one interview, Villón appears with her now adult son, an aspiring musician, who declares that he appreciates all the ways his family has benefited from his mother's economic contributions. In another interview, Villón proudly declares, "*Puta* es sinónimo de libertad" (*Puta* is a synonym for freedom) (AP Archive 2016). Like these other women, Jacqueline Montero, another former sex worker, who was successfully elected to the Chamber of Deputies in the Dominican Republic, refused to be shamed for her work or her life (fig. I.4). Instead, in an early political rally she declared, "I come from sex work, and this is my power. This is not a weakness" (Ashly 2021). In her successful campaign, she situated these demands within a larger framework of sexual autonomy and protection for vulnerable communities, tweeting out a photograph of herself at a Pride event with the words "feliz con la cominidad [*sic*] GLBT" (Montero 2017). Once elected, Montero introduced legislation against the discrimination of LGBTQ communities, sex workers, and people with AIDS. As political candidates choosing to elevate issues of gendered violence and state impunity, these figures offered a face, a voice, and an experience that exceeded the fantasy and gossip that surround puta life. By taking up the name, they refused the stigma.

When activated politically, putas seem happy to claim LGBTQ rights as part of their party platforms; however, most contemporary mainstream LGBTQ organizations remain less enthusiastic about supporting the decrim-

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FIG I.3 › Ángela Villón's campaign flyer, 2016.

FIG I.4 › Jacqueline Montero's campaign flyer, 2017.

inalization of sex work publicly. However, queers have always formed part of sex worker economies and the social movements to address the injustices leveled against them. Gay and trans sex workers were primary targets of the police raids that would come to be known as the Compton's Cafeteria riot (1966) and, later, the Stonewall riots (1969), foundational events viewed as igniting the contemporary LGBTQ movement in the United States. And even as sex workers like Sylvia Rivera, Marsha P. Johnson, Tamara Ching, and Felicia "Flames" Elizondo are frequently lauded as queer pioneers for their roles in these historic acts of resistance, their relationship to sex work remains under continual erasure in many contemporary accounts of their lives. After Stonewall, Sylvia Rivera and her friend Marsha P. Johnson went on to form Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR), a group whose mission included providing support services to other trans women and transvestites, many of whom were similarly engaged in sex work.[8] That erasure, born of a desire to appear more acceptable and respectable, was powerfully called out by Rivera when she addressed the crowd at New York City's Christopher Street Liberation Day March in 1973 (fig. I.5). In that speech, she railed against the ways those in attendance had seemed to have forgotten their "gay brothers and sisters in jail," speaking directly to ways the emerging gay and lesbian movement was intent on ignoring the criminalization and police violence that surround sexual commerce. In a later

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FIG 1.5 ‣ Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries at the Christopher Street Liberation Day March, 1973. Photograph by Leonard Fink. Provided by The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Community Center.

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interview, conducted by another transgender icon, Leslie Feinberg (2017), Rivera stated, "We always felt that the police were the real enemy."

Police violence is often the culminating result of how social stigma gets codified into state policies and local disciplinary practices, and this is powerfully evident in relation to the treatment of sex work. Nevertheless, laws regarding the commercial exchange of sex and their application vary widely within the Americas, and often within individual countries. Unlike in most of the United States, sex work is generally not illegal in Latin America, even as many municipalities and countries actively regulate the commercialization of sex work by using zoning laws to establish red-light districts, requiring sex workers to register with municipal health departments, enacting prohibitions against the establishment of brothels, and prohibiting sex workers from accessing worker benefits and social resources from the state where these are available.[9] Even in a political climate like the United States, where notions of individual freedom are canonized, entrepreneurialism is exalted, and commerce is king, sex work is never framed as an expression of corporeal autonomy, sexual freedom, or promising commercial opportunism. In *The Political Imagination of Sexual Freedom*, Leticia Sabsay (2016, 97) writes, "Sex work is an area that marks the limits of what we understand as sexual freedom and democratic ideals, highlighting the sociopolitical models of sexual respectability and the exclusionary imaginaries that configure hegemonic notions of diversity, recognition, and autonomy." What does not change, across the hemisphere, and perhaps across the world, is that sex workers are always seen as a stigmatized population that must be identified in order to be criminalized, controlled, or disappeared. Even when they are begrudgingly accepted by law, they must continue to be scorned by society, limited in their freedom to extract money from their bodies.

The hypocrisy that defines sexual morality saturates the scene of sexual regulation and control. Because, despite the ways they are routinely vilified and shunned, historically sex workers throughout the Americas have also been imagined to form part of the fabric of everyday life, part of the necessary social structure that organizes gendered life under patriarchal rule. Brothel owners, one of the few occupations that offered economic independence and power to women, were once recognized public figures who might wield a measure of political and social clout, if not public respect. For example, Isabel Luberza Oppenheimer (1901–74) owned two prosperous brothels in her hometown of Ponce, Puerto Rico, from the late 1930s until the mid-1960s that were well documented in the local press, and she

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FIG I.6 › Isabel Luberza Oppenheimer, also known as "Isabel la Negra," ca. 1920.

eventually became something of a local icon (fig. I.6). Dubbed "Isabel la Negra," she has been celebrated in music, literature, and folklore, and today a street sign commemorating her is located in the neighborhood of San Antón, near her once famous brothel—Elizabeth's Dancing Club.[10] But as with so many putas, the origin story behind Isabel's turn to sex work, the source of both her wealth and her local fame, is mired in the calamity of love and loss across the borders of race and class, ensuring that any perceived economic power that sex work might afford its practitioners be mired in shame and stigma.

In the canons of Latin American letters, the prostitute as tragic protagonist reaches back to the 1902 naturalist Chilean novel of urban despair and moral degeneration that bears my first name, *Juana Lucero*, by Augusto d'Halmar.[11] Here, written in a masculine voice dripping with self-absorbed pity, heavy with the melancholic weight of impossible longing, d'Halmar ([1902] 1998, 225) writes of the aesthetic beauty buried deep in the interior of a puta's soul: "Y ni ese aire ni esa luz hacen distinciones entre el alma de un poeta o de una prostituta" (And neither that air nor that light make distinctions between the soul of a poet or a prostitute). The famed Colombian Nobel laureate Gabriel García Márquez titled the last novel

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he was to publish *Memoria de mis putas tristes* (*Memories of My Melancholy Whores*) (2006), even as putas figure prominently throughout so much of his work, most notably in the short story "La increíble y triste historia de la cándida Eréndira y de su abuela desalmada" ("The Incredible and Sad Tale of Innocent Eréndira and Her Heartless Grandmother") (2005). That story tells the sad, tragic, and magically fantastical story of a grandmother prostituting her granddaughter to repay an impossible debt, and the many lovers who try to rescue the young woman from her doomed existence.[12] And of course, *telenovelas*, that most popular form of Latin American entertainment, have long used the tragedy and allure of sex work as a narrative standard because, even when it is not seen as a crime, sex work is always seen as a disgrace, a cautionary tale that needs telling and that everyone wants to hear. As early as 1986, Brazil broadcast the wildly popular eighteenth-century historical drama *Dona Beija*, which was remade in Colombia as *Doña Bella* in 2010. In fact, in recent years we have seen an explosion of films and television shows that feature sex work. In Brazil, *O Negócio* (2013–18), *Me Chama de Bruna* (2016–19), and the latest entry in the sex worker genre, *Rua Augusta* (2018–), have all garnered national attention. The Colombian *Sin senos no hay paraíso* (2008–9) was a sensation throughout the Spanish-speaking world and spawned numerous spinoffs. In the United States, fictional series such as *The Deuce* (2017–19), *The Girlfriend Experience* (2016–), and the American–British collaboration *Harlots* (2017–19) have emerged alongside an outpouring of documentary projects such as *Cathouse: The Series* (2005–14), *Hot Girls Wanted* (2015), and *OnlyFans: Selling Sexy* (2021).

The other side of romanticized sensationalism, however, is misery, exploitation, and depravity. In discussions of "white slavery" of the previous centuries or the current media frenzy around sexual trafficking, the hysteria that revolves around sexual labor is generally organized around a discourse of youthful innocence and victimization that is always racialized and gendered. When young women of color turn to sex work, they are deemed the promiscuous and immoral products of perverse sexual cultures that don't respect the sanctity of marriage, the moral virtue assigned to monogamy, or the value attached to virginity. These discourses affirm the heightened human value of young, white, able-bodied women and the fetishization of virginity as they deny the other social and economic circumstances that lead diverse people to sex work. In the United States and Europe, the language of sexual trafficking has been powerfully marshaled to make all sex work subject to increased state and public surveillance. And

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discourses around trafficking are particularly perilous because they are so easily appropriated to restrict migration itself.

In her indispensable text on the subject, *Sex at the Margins: Migration, Labour Markets and the Rescue Industry*, Laura María Agustín points to the ways that migrant sex workers form part of larger unprotected informal economic sectors such as farm laborers, domestics, service workers, and street vendors that rarely receive the kind of sensationalized attention as sex work. Like my own text, she focuses her attention on women "because women provoke the scandal" (2007, 11).[13] She writes, "Women who cross borders have long been viewed as deviant, so perhaps the present-day panic about the sexuality of traveling women is not surprising" (40–41). More disturbing still, recent US-based ad campaigns designed to enlist the public to end sex trafficking frequently list the Department of Homeland Security, the same federal department responsible for immigration enforcement and deportations, as the organization to call if you suspect someone is being trafficked.[14] In recounting the personal and structural factors that drive women to migrate, Agustín reminds us that "the myriad possibilities for being miserable at home are forgotten" (45). As social projects of reform, addressing the quotidian harms of everyday misogyny always seems less compelling than rescuing the ideal of a girlish sexual innocence that so few of us ever experience. In their emphasis on protecting youth and innocence, these campaigns seem to imply that sex workers disappear after the bloom of youth expires—that they assimilate into respectable or impoverished lives or that they meet predictably tragic ends. This compulsion to protect the innocent also serves to condemn those deemed guilty, allowing concerned citizens to wallow in the prurient details of youthful female sexuality while ignoring the exploitation of other migrants or the everyday violence that women, girls, and other feminized bodies of all ages are subjected to at home and abroad—familial violence, domestic violence, police violence, state violence, or the ongoing benign neglect that comes from being seen as wholly disposable.

When not viewed as hapless victims, sex workers are depicted as manipulative sexual agents, diseased and dangerous social parasites from which the public needs to be protected.[15] In her essay "Ruminations on *Lo Sucio* as a Latino Queer Analytic," Deborah R. Vargas (2014, 724) offers lo sucio as a way to account for the dirty sensory pleasures of nonnormative sexualities of those "deemed collateral genders within a social world invested in the fiscal benefits of normative sexual intimacies." Not only are putas imagined as "collateral genders," imprudent and dangerous, but sex with

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sex workers is imagined to be dirty, shameful, and taboo and often desired for precisely those reasons. That sex work frequently engenders contact across differences of color, class, age, size, or ability forms part of the visual scandal, producing the juxtaposition of two bodies that are misaligned in the cultural imagination of acceptable erotic pairings. Moreover, sex work's structure of negotiation and the possibilities it offers for sexual explorations that exceed social norms around appropriate sexual partners and practices make all sex work inherently queer, adding to both its allure and its vilification. Nevertheless, sex work exists within particular dominant structures of exchange, in which one person offers a service and the other person purchases it. It is still work for one person and a commodity for another. Standing outside the gates of normative sexuality, reproductive citizenship, and demure expressions of gender, putas are always imagined as sucias, "always weary of the heteronormative temporality of love as defined by guarantees, for-sures, and forevers" (Vargas 2014, 723). Instead, sex work functions as outside heteronormative marriage (even when sex workers are married) but also adjacent to it, as the understood release valve for the tedium of monogamy. Even as they might be stigmatized as women not worthy of being wives because they charge for their affections, they are also rarely recognized as workers.

When sex enters into the desires of capitalism, an ordinary human activity becomes transformed into something else. For some, sex is perceived as a basic necessity, something that one must acquire at whatever cost the market dictates and the paycheck affords. For others, sex can become a kind of luxury service: sex so special it is worth paying for, offering a precious opportunity to luxuriate in the forbidden and fantastic. The sex that is presumed to transpire in sex work is never about reproducing normative demands organized around seduction, romance, monogamy, marriage, procreation, and durational care even as it might flirt with these as performative postures. While all the prevailing racialized gender norms of every era are replicated and perpetuated within these sexual economies, sex work is also a place where niche markets for all that falls outside societal norms can also thrive. Color, size, age, ability, and the particularities of embodiment matter—but so too do attitude, style, and experience. Putas understand that their desirability is always dependent on the marketplace of sexual possibilities, of finding the right audience or client for the particular attributes they possess or are able to perform. Putas, more than most, also understand that desirability and appeal change with time: the materiality of the body and the bounce that collagen provides fade with age; joints start

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to break down along with possibilities for pleasure, even as the sexual tricks we have learned and the erotic imagination that worldliness provides fuel new possibilities.

Always coveted as much as they are scorned, putas are rumored to have a kind of elevated sexual magic, charismatic prowess, and serious bedroom skills that set them apart from other women; they are said to know how to captivate and control masculine subjects and everyone else. The providers of initiation and the holders of secrets, they are accustomed to being repositories for the shameful desires of others. It is no wonder then that sex workers occupy so much real estate in the furtive spaces of our erotic imaginations; they traffic in the promise of sexual pleasure and satisfaction as a form of leisure and entertainment against a narrative backdrop of shame and abjection. The price for their sexual freedom, however, is always imagined to be tragedy. In locating the roots of whorephobia, Lola Davina (2020) declares, "To civilians, [sex workers] don't seem 'real.' They're objects of fantasy, or revulsion, or some confusing mix of the two. Our humanity is obliterated." Davina's comment crystallizes how the fantastic projections cast onto sex workers are directly related to the real-world violence to which they are continually subjected.

Working Sex Work

Within the world of academia and public policy, numerous investigations of sex work have approached the subject from a range of disciplinary locations: local histories of prostitution; ethnographic studies of sex workers; legal, public health, and public policy approaches; and sociological studies of individual actors and social movements. In these accounts of sexual labor, the definition of sex work determines who is imagined as the object of inquiry; those that work in street-level sex work, pornography, strip clubs, massage parlors, and escort services are generally understood as performing different forms of erotic labor, even as the risks, labor, and legal status of these jobs differ dramatically across and within specific localities. Pornography, in all its varied forms, is also generally understood as sexual labor. But porn is a billion-dollar transnational industry that employs editors, distributors, writers, photographers, bouncers, booking agents, tax accountants, and landlords; are they sex workers too? If the definition of sex work is limited to those who exchange sexual labor for money, might we need to think more expansively about what constitutes sex? Would this include

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any number of dominatrixes whose only touch might be the sting of their words or their whips, or the arduous labor of OnlyFans content providers who have no flesh-to-flesh contact with their clients? If just "talking" about sex is considered sex work in one instance, are the vocalized sexual narratives we share within the context of a therapeutic exchange, a staged performance, or academic discourse also forms of sexual labor? And if we interrogate the limits and possibilities of the category of sex, might we also need to investigate what constitutes work, remuneration, and payment? How might the sexual labor we perform within romantic relationships, including marriage, also function as a kind of sexual labor, performed in exchange for social status, jewelry, or domestic harmony? Even in these noncommercial contexts, when is sex about mutual aid and shared pleasure and when is it a transactional exchange performed across uneven registers of power?

In recent years, there has been a flourishing of books that highlight the first-person voices and perspectives of current and former sex workers to define the meaning of their own lives.[16] What these texts make abundantly clear is that sex work is never a single thing even when it is always work. In the introduction to *We Too: Essays on Sex Work and Survival*, Natalie West (2021, 10) writes, "Without seeing sex work as work, sex workers cannot be seen as laboring subjects in need of rights, not rescue." This refusal of "rescue" also functions to call out attempts to study and represent the diverse conditions, attitudes, and motivations that define sex worker lives absent the voices and theorizations of sex workers.[17] In her contribution to the collection *Coming Out like a Porn Star*, edited by queer porn icon Jiz Lee, Zahra Stardust (2015, 305) asserts that they are "not a walking research project to appease the voyeurism and sexual tourism of middle-class careerist professionals who want access to our sexual communities while avoiding stigma and protecting their reputation." Stardust, West, Lee, and many others are themselves actively involved in writing and theorizing the conditions of their lives and their labor. This new generation of texts by and about sex workers makes a resolute effort to include the diverse voices of sex workers and former sex workers who are Black, Indigenous, nonwhite, immigrant, disabled, trans, homeless, queer, nonbinary, undocumented, and survivors of sexual and domestic abuse. The force and range of the stories recounted in these texts illuminate how varied the experiences of sex workers are, making clear how the terms, risks, and potential rewards of sex work need to be situated within the context of each individual's particular frame of reference. Like the biographical accounts I present in my own text, these

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first-person accounts refuse the false binary of happy hooker or hapless victim that have dominated public debates about the decriminalization of sex work and instead insist on the messy affective, material, and psychic realities these representational accounts leave out.

Addressing the stigma that surrounds puta life is also about addressing the stigma of those willing to pay the price for someone else's sexual labor. While some of these first-person accounts expose how sex work can be dehumanizing, exploitative, and too often seen as a license for nonconsensual forms of sexual violence, other accounts highlight how sex work can also be tender in its clarity of intimate care, lasting in its commitments, elevated and valued precisely because it is negotiated and paid for. Clients, always imagined as male, are generally portrayed as pathetic and undesirable losers rather than as people in search of sexual attention, satisfaction, or care. What might it mean to imagine that sexual touch might be something that those of us who are female or femme can also purchase, that those poorly equipped to navigate sex in the marketplace of normative desirability might also have a right to access? That rather than waiting to be asked for sex, or relegated to giving rather than receiving, those of us who are unchosen in these economies of desire can also seek out, negotiate, and value for ourselves the sexual pleasures offered by the touch of another? If we can agree that sexual labor, intimate erotic care, and those who perform it are valuable, might we allow ourselves to imagine that we too should have access to that care?

Inquiries, Investments, and Interventions

As a project of academic inquiry, my own text steers clear of making any truth claims about sexual labor or attempting to represent its many articulations. Instead, I am invested in exploring how these images are cast onto all of us who are female and femme, sexual and unashamed. Surrounded by an infinite archive of spectacular sexuality—putas exist in every small town and big city; they come in all sizes, colors, and ages—curating a visual dossier for its investigation becomes a random and imprecise affair. Be advised, the images and stories I have assembled are decidedly skewed, motivated as much by my own desire to find pieces of myself in the archive as by any futile interest in representing the possibilities that Latina sexual labor might conjure. I look not to unpack the intentions of those who dwell on either side of the lens, or to decode the secret meanings buried in the

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image, but because something in the frame has reached out to touch me. This is an academic project born of identification and desire, each chapter an opportunity to dwell in the fantastic and quotidian associations of puta life.

Constructing a visual genealogy of puta life allows us to see how and where this figure has emerged across historical and geographic sites. The images I have collected for this project span continents and centuries; they track the routes and traces of colonialism and empire to highlight the dominant aesthetics associated with puta life and offer glimpses into the erasures that they expose. In providing a visual referent for what a sex worker "looks like," images perform the visual terms of recognition and identification. On screen, the puta takes shape as a voluptuous, exotic, sexually alluring, racially ambiguous temptress; her corpulent flesh a corporeal marker of her abundantly licentious sexual appetites and her insistence on satisfying them.[18] However, the necessary visual counterpart to these figures who might be saved or seduced is the Black crack whore, la india puta working border cantinas, the down-and-out trans hooker—distorted, dehumanized figures deemed too damaged to warrant anything other than pity, those whose disappearance and death come to be expected as the inevitable order of things. These figures saturate the airwaves, despised as much for their race and poverty as for their vocation as sex workers.

Against these decidedly distorted projections of puta life, I probe the biographical encounters with the women we find there, washerwomen and porn stars, sexiles and strippers, starlets and masked wrestlers. As we roam through this archive of putería, this project attempts to remain attentive to the space that exists between what is known—a name, a location, words penned in a ledger or spoken to whoever asked—and what is unknown. We begin with photography, the techne of visual representation that ushers us into a scopic episteme of knowledge production. Where once gossip carried messages of who did what to whom in exchange for what, now it is the advance of technology that adds ever increasing layers of sensorial data about the sexual lives of others. Photography, promising the veracity of the real, comes to produce its own regimes of sexual surveillance and spectatorship, ones that reproduce the very power dynamics they instantiate. Photography fixes the fantasy of the sex workers into an image, a stance, a look, a gesture—offered as evidence of the puta's scandalized identity. As a static image, it allows us to stare fixedly on her face and form to ponder her hidden supernatural sexual powers or the imagined buried traumas that she carries.

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The image, codified through visual conventions, becomes the template that teaches us to see sexual deviance, desire, and daring and in doing so attempts to fulfill its role in identification. Technological innovations stitch additional layers of signification onto her form; the voice we might hear in a written account becomes animated in video or audio recordings, adding new sensory details to the perceivable presence of the subject framed in time. The photo shoot becomes a prerequisite for the feature profile of journalism; the graphic presence of the subject of life writing is taken as the necessary evidence of the veracity of their experience, and a prior reliance on testimonial translations is transformed into livestreamed accounts of political urgency. Today, in the digital age of sensorial overload, an endless stream of family portraits, "selfies," and visual documentation on social media function to produce an overabundance of highly curated biographical data, and life stories become told and retold through various multi-medial forms of documentation and archived across a range of platforms.

Even when surrounded by a cornucopia of images, a cacophony of words and information, what might these accounts reveal about the psychic contours of our own sexual lives, let alone that of others? Despite attempts to categorize its enunciations or decode its mysteries, the vagrancies of sexuality are imagined as unseen and unknowable, even as they are glimpsed in fleeting gestures and guileful looks. Invoking the mysteries of sexuality conjures the irrational logics of desire, fantasy, and fear, and an unruly carnal archive of memories and sensations, affirming Gayle Salamon's (2010, 47) assertion that "sexuality is a matter not of seeing but of sensing." But even as the secrets of sexuality are forever kept out of view, the desire to see and extract a hidden interiority remains entangled with our scopic desires. Sex workers, who must often live their sexuality publicly in order to exact a profit, are forever invited to satisfy the visual appetites for knowledge about sexuality, paid for a glimpse into the powers of seduction, charm, and erotic expertise they are rumored to possess.

If sexuality is envisioned as always on display and yet never fully seen, race functions as that which is imagined as always already known and available for visual capture. In her work *Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare*, Leigh Raiford delineates how "the visual field counts as one of the most difficult places to dislodge the relation between the biological 'fact' of race, the cultural 'truths' those bodies possess, and the technologies of vision that bind these two together in ways that erase their own labor" (2013, 235–36). Ethnographic portraiture has instantiated a particular fascination with the spectacle of sexualized racial difference and has installed its own visual con-

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ventions of representation rooted in the colonial archive.[19] For Latinas, for whom the fiction of race and its attendant material consequences exist in a register of meaning that is multiply coded by national imaginaries, historical context, phenotypical legibility, classed aesthetics, and ethnic stereotypes, "seeing" racialized difference requires us to inhabit the uncertainty that latinidad offers as a visual signifier.

The question of how we "see" latinidad remains particularly vexed for scholars of visuality, particularly absent linguistic cues or national markers. Latinidad, because it can include those marked legally or socially as Black, white, Asian, or Indigenous, and is very often a mixture of these elements, is always about reading beyond these readily produced categories of phenotypic difference and reading into the ways that localized racial logics emerge within the particularities of each encounter. Forged through colonial conquest, slavery, miscegenation, and migration, visual or linguistic markers that signal latinidad might be perceived in aesthetic, corporeal, and linguistic performances, but legibility already depends on access to specific cultural codes. Rather than an attempt to assign discernible truths about race, gender, or sexuality to the images I engage, I follow Nicole Fleetwood's (2011, 20) formative work in *Troubling Vision*, where she focuses instead on how "the markings and iterations of blackness are manifested through a deliberate performance of visibility that begs us to consider the constructed nature of visuality." Like Raiford, Fleetwood's insistence on exploring *how* meaning becomes attached to "bodies, goods, ideas, and aesthetic practices in the visual sphere" (20) helps us consider how as spectators we search for signs of racialized and sexual meaning, how we assign deviance or desirability, and how the visual uncertainty that comes to define both latinidad and sexuality merge in powerful ways through the figure of the puta.

In their eloquent introduction to a special issue of *Women and Performance Studies*, Joshua Guzmán and Christina León (2015, 272) offer lingering as a mode of engagement, "a granting of permission to slow down the work of understanding *latinidad* and instead to dwell in the space of its many times and places." Lingering as a method seems ideally suited to engage the multidimensional vectors of legibility that surround the convergence of sexual labor, visual culture, and latinidad that my wayward archive demands. As the images I encounter circulate across geographically and historically bound sites in Europe and the Americas, from Alicante to Havana, from Spanish Harlem to Mexico City, they become suspect vectors for representing subjective racialized experience. But if lingering serves as "an im-

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petus for us to rethink theory from the pleasures the aesthetic realm can afford," it also becomes an occasion to stare down the violence and abjection that cultural production also lays bare (Guzmán and León 2015, 274).

Puta Permissions, Puta Poetics

A puta methodology inspires capacious desires, but it must also wrestle with the limits placed by law and ethics. Whether as a photographer or as a writer, to think about representation is to think about the granting of permission: the stated or unstated permission to look, to linger, to record, to circulate, and to transform the meanings that images might convey. This project has been defined by permissions, ones that are free and accessible, and others that require payment to people or institutions who may or may not have secured their own permissions from models and subjects. Permission and consent serve as complicated synonyms for a process where one allows access to one's body and one's labor but perhaps also to one's intentions, yearnings, and agonies. Permissions last; they endure after the moment in which they are given, able to determine the medium and scope of where the image may travel or how it will be known. Copyright law tells us that permissions eventually expire, at which point we can take all that we want. The historical images in this book, produced in another moment under unknown circumstances, are burdened with this freedom to use freely. It is my task to hold these images of uncertain provenance more tenderly, to treat them with an additional level of care in the hope that in my own acts of recovery, the spirits they hold might recognize a kindred soul.

While these archival images, particularly those taken from the state's repository of criminalization, might seem to require another set of ethical imperatives to account for the social pressures and constraints that define the subject's entrance into the visual field, the truth is that many of the faces presented in this book were in one way or another compelled to appear, compelled by the state, compelled by virtue of the instructive gaze of another's technology of capture, compelled by economic forces and social restrictions to offer their image in exchange for shelter, money, and the possibility of a life. Therefore, as author, I have to account for the social pressures and constraints that define the puta's entrance into the archives of visuality; I am tasked with representing the contradictory truths of pleasure and violence, coercion and agency, conjecture and verifiable

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detail that I am able to gather from the documented remnants of puta life. In photography, it is the point of view of the photographers that is captured in the frame—their desires, anxieties, and motivations that are on display—even when they are serving as documentarians for hire. Much like the consent that one might offer within a sexual exchange, contractual or otherwise, our consent to be photographed never assures that we will be satisfied with the outcome or the feelings the image might inspire. Consent functions as a temporal construct; we consent to something that is about to happen, about a future that has yet to arrive, a future where the image might become a cherished paper memento held between aging hands or proof of a past we had longed to leave behind.

The temporal complexities of consent do not only apply to images, however; they also hover around the voices that have also been recorded to account for the subject's presence. In my text, scraps of biographical documentation are pieced together: sometimes there is a name, a marker of space and time; sometimes we hear a voice, answering a question or demanding an audience. While some of the women I present within these pages were obligated to give testimony, others stumbled into a scene of representation, ready or not, to deliver an account of their lives. At times, we hear the tiniest twinkle of her voice recovered in dusty folios; others silently smile and pose in front of the lens of someone else's camera; and there are those who enter the scene full blown in living, moving color, speaking directly to us—because sometimes putas have a lot to say. Yet, even when I have their words, I know that their language, like my own, is trapped within narrative frames shaped by an imagination of the possible, incapable of capturing the fullness of their lives, their aspirations, or their authorial intentions. An absence of all that they are, and the excess of all we might imagine them to be, hovers around any encounter. Even as this book is my attempt to hold the weight and promise of others' words and worlds with tenderness and care, attempts at representation invariably falter. Caught between this pressure to appear and the desire to be fully seen, I search for those moments where narrative voice and visual representation collide to spark something else, when the subject emerges to provide her own poetic projections of puta life. And in this encounter with the faces and words of others, known and unknown, I also reckon with my own affective attachments to these figures, my own associations, academic and otherwise, with the weight and possibility of puta life.

In her formidable essay "Venus in Two Acts," Saidiya Hartman (2008, 3) offers us "critical fabulation" as a means to craft an account of the fe-

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male slave that offers more than the scraps of documentation scattered in the archives of dominance, to write a "counter-history of the human, as a practice of freedom." In that essay, Hartman presents two questions that have guided my own methodological engagement throughout this project: "How does one revisit the scene of subjection without replicating the grammar of violence?" (4) and "How can narrative embody life in words and at the same time respect what we can not know?" (3). These questions warn us about the treacherous terrain of representation; they gesture to how our own authorial desires for something that might exceed the possible hovers over the words and images we might encounter in the pages of someone else's mapping of the world. If we understand that social relations take place within a field of power, Caribbean theorist Édouard Glissant invites us to rethink the underlying dynamics of our encounters with alterity. Glissant is less invested in being faithfully represented than in affirming his resistance to having his difference determined. In his text *The Poetics of Relation*, Glissant deploys the idea of opacity as a way to resist the move to know, comprehend, and capture the Other. He writes, "Agree not merely to the right to difference but, carrying this further, agree also to the right to opacity" (1997, 190). Yet, even as "respect[ing] what we can not know" and "the right to opacity" become the correctives for modernist fictions of transparency and knowledge production, these authorial practices stage the fraught encounter between what we might see in an image and the interpretive practices, born of our own scopic desires and horizon of possibilities, that we might bring to them (Hartman 2008, 3; Glissant 1997, 190).

In the "ruins of representation," there is feeling, the felt presence of a life that has left its trace in the archive; the scent of the subject's spirit that wafts out to bury itself inside us, the essence of a life force that endures.[20] Recognizing one's "right to opacity," acknowledging all that we will never know, does not assuage the desire to see ourselves represented or to find connection with the lives of others, near and far. And it does not lessen the risk of trying to do the urgent work of forming enduring political bonds with others. Judith Butler (2005, 136) writes, "We must recognize that ethics requires us to risk ourselves precisely at moments of unknowingness, when what forms us diverges from what lies before us, when our willingness to become undone in relation to others constitutes our chance of becoming human. To be undone by another is a primary necessity, an anguish, to be sure, but also a chance—to be addressed, claimed, bound to what is not me, but also to be moved, to be prompted to act, to address myself elsewhere, and so to vacate the self-sufficient 'I' as a kind of possession."

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Butler urges us not only to allow ourselves to be undone but to use the undoing of our singularity as an opportunity to act, to make our relation to the world about an ethics of engagement. That representation is flawed, that it is dangerous, that it is susceptible to causing harm, does not mean we should refuse its potential to change how we see ourselves, others, and the worlds we share. Because even when it fails in its efforts to depict what exists outside of us, representation offers an encounter with alterity capable of transforming how we know, feel, and move in the world. Formed in the chasm that the juxtaposition of image and voice pry open, the tension that binds interiority and surface together, my hope is that the staged encounters with puta life that my work offers will inspire us all to care more about the lives of sex workers and commit ourselves to reimagining the material and psychic conditions of their lives.

Against the rigid demands of knowledge production, *Puta Life* sways among the visual, the textual, and the haptic to reach for those traces of felt possibility that might inspire more ethical forms of relation and care. It offers an invitation to look and linger, not to know and understand but to feel and sense the weight of puta life, to be touched and therefore changed. In the process, this book enacts the ways these shadows and reflections of a life function as encounters with our own edges, swerving around the attachments, identifications, and traumas of our own corporeal embodiments and intimate histories. As a methodological mode of interpretation, abiding in the sensory spaces that feeling pries open performs its own refusal of transparency; it asserts a kind of knowledge production that is at ease in unknowing and a methodological reckoning with unruly practices of succumbing to sensation, memory, and imagination. Caught in the space between the right to opacity and the promise of critical fabulation, *Puta Life* performs the impasse between knowing and unknowing, between seeing and sensing.

Autobiographical Interlude

José Esteban Muñoz (2020, 51) reminds us that "our affect does not simply flow out of us but instead tells us a story about our relationality to ourselves and also to groups." In a book that is focused on the fascination and affective attachments that sex workers inspire and the impossible desires for recognition that representation offers, this brief pause is an opportu-

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nity for me to address my own puta life. Like so many other feminine subjects, by the time I became a teenager, I had already been warned about not dressing like a puta by my mother; hailed as a spic slut by my peers; ogled, pinched, groped, and treated as an object for someone else's pleasure by the adult men around me. In other words, I had already been assigned this category of female by the world and only had to decide my relationship to her. As a light-skinned Latina, I might have been able to pass into the white, working-class suburban ethnic community that my multigenerational Cuban family would eventually move into—except for my name, which would generally be pronounced as "Wuana do you wanna?"; except for my family who never learned English, placed a shrine to Santa Barbara in front of our house, slaughtered chickens in the yard, and hosted loud drunken Latin dance parties that always seemed to end with the cops at our door; except for my refusal of the rules of decent, delicate, and demure that were intended to define acceptable white American girlhood.

I came into sexuality in a moment after women's liberation and before AIDS, a time of sexual adventure and risk taking. Pornography was my guide and bisexuality my default position. As a teenager, casual sexual exchanges served as a kind of deliverance from the banality associated with high school romance, and I was lucky to have lovers—male and female—who were as eager as I was to explore the possibilities for pleasure that sex offered. I found an inner sense of power and control in my teenage ability to seduce others, especially older adult men, and associated sex not with the security of marriage and family but with the imagined erotic adventures promised by *Penthouse Forum*, *Playboy*, and *Cosmopolitan*. The porn of that era offered flat color layouts of airbrushed women spreading wide for the camera, talking about their hobbies and their major in college. Porn encouraged my youthful experiments with bodies and pleasures—adding props, positions, and a new vocabulary of filthy words to my growing repertoire of sexual experiences. But what intrigued me, then and now, were the stories—confessions of taboo encounters, sexual infidelities, office parties gone wild, unexpected pleasures with uninvited strangers, and the thrills suggested by new locations, new partners, and previously unexplored sexual practices. These stories, often inserted as letters to the editors and frequently narrated in a feminine voice, told of the exploits of women who had succumbed to the temptations of the flesh, who had strayed off the path to respectability, and who were writing the *Forum* editors to seek advice, absolution, or an audience.[21] These teenage sexual incursions to ex-

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perience what existed outside of heteronormativity functioned as some of my earliest adventure narratives of puta life and added an element of intentionality that worked to dislodge, or at least loosen, expectations about "natural" or "normal" sexual practices.

In high school, politics—of the feminist, anti-colonial, and revolutionary persuasion—arrived in the form of a Sephardic Jewish girlfriend with Communist parents. At fourteen, I joined the Young Workers Liberation League, the junior division of the Communist Party USA (Angela Davis was our fearless leader), and found another way to understand my family's complicated relationship to Cuba as well as the political climate swirling all around me. As I walked the hallways of my high school, alternately called a lezzie, a spic, a slut, and a commie, I was aware that I was leaving something behind, that there was a danger to being named, identified, singled out for exclusion from the civil society offered by high school life. Yet I sensed a certain power in not caring, secure in the knowledge that revolution was right around the corner, that a bright, colorful, queer sexual future was waiting for me if only I was brave enough to seek it out. Even as I would be frequently reminded by my very closeted girlfriend that homosexuality was just another manifestation of bourgeois decadence, coming into revolutionary consciousness and queer sexuality together instilled in me the belief that another world was on the horizon. I surmised that in exchange for respectability, a nice white middle-class boyfriend, and a future suburban life, I could have freedom, not just the pleasure of my own body but the self-assigned authority to explore the meanings and limits of my own desire, to change the rules of what the future could be. In my teenage imagination, the hypercommercialized projections of (white) women's liberation and sexual freedom offered by porn became intermingled with the revolutionary adventures of Assata Shakur, Emma Goldman, Angela Davis, and Lolita Lebrón. These were women who lived their lives outside the dictates of normative gendered expectations, who knew what they wanted, what they believed in, and who went for it, no matter the price. Now, the slurs that had once been used to define me became sites of identification and possibility, the very things I wanted to grow up to be. And so began my puta life.

Although I had started my sexual explorations with other switchy teenage lovers, once I made my way to the Warehouse, the local gay bar in Hartford, Connecticut, I started to develop more refined erotic attachments and began to seek out more experienced partners capable of providing me with the advanced lessons in sexual education that I craved. For me that meant older, more seasoned butch lovers, people who had spent time "in

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the life" and could introduce me to these new erotic worlds of carnal rapture; I was fifteen at the time.[22] Gay bars have long been sites where all sorts of underground sexual possibilities flourish, and the disco era brought with it a new sonic vocabulary for the queer sexual cultures that were exploding into public view. Lost in the beat of a funk-fueled dance floor, gyrating to Prince's "Controversy," Donna Summer's "Bad Girls," and Rick James's "Super Freak"—gay bars epitomized the dream of living otherwise. Many of the first dykes I met at the Warehouse worked the massage parlors and strip clubs around Hartford, and I was fascinated by these women who had sex with men for money, and with women for pleasure. To a radical feminist, this arrangement seemed like the most perfect kind of subversive gender rebellion, even if, according to my Communist comrades, sex workers would have to be reeducated after the revolution. Occasionally these women would bring their johns to the queer club to party in our underworld playgrounds fueled by desire, disco, and the dark. Some of these women became my friends, and others would occasionally become my lovers in the lust- and drug-fueled parties that seemed to happen every weekend. Part of that queer initiation process was a visit to a local sex shop. In a time before you could buy sex toys online, before streaming porn and internet chat rooms, local sex shops with neon xxx in the windows were where you went to buy dildos, poppers, and smut. Walking into these stores with the windows blacked out to protect the identities of those inside also served to remind you that you shared consumptive habits with those marked as lowlifes, perverts, queers, and freaks by dominant society.

These early lessons in sexual politics and the sexual communities that emerged around them further fueled my interest in those who got paid to have sex. As a young person already engaged in illicit and illegal sexual encounters—that is, underage sex with friends and strangers, sometimes for drinks or drugs, sometimes for a place to crash, and usually just for the thrill of it—I quickly learned that my sexuality had a value that could be traded. The summer before my senior year in high school, I was trying to save money for a road trip with my older butch lover and began to consider sex work as a fast cash option to supplement the savings from my minimum-wage job. Several of my friends from high school had already discovered that they could earn quick money giving blow jobs to the men who frequented the train station in downtown Hartford, and I admit it sounded tempting if somewhat scary. At twenty-five dollars a blow job, I wasn't sure the hassle and the risk were worth the money; as a teenager, I already had a lousy job I hated. As luck would have it, that summer I was solicited to

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engage in another kind of sex work, a kind of sexual labor that I would keep returning to throughout my life: I got paid to *talk* about sex.

After seeing more than a few of my friends drop out of high school because of pregnancy, or suffer through the ordeal of securing abortions, legal but still expensive, I started taking my classmates to the local Planned Parenthood clinic; I was their number one recruiter. That summer, Planned Parenthood offered me $150 to talk to parents and social workers about the sex I was having as a bisexual Latina teenager. I jumped at the chance. As a sexually audacious and politically empowered proto-feminist, I had expected that my first encounter selling my sexuality for cold hard cash would leave me feeling sexually empowered and liberated. But I admit that after two hours of sharing my experiences to aghast parents, troubled social workers, and concerned health providers, I went home feeling dirty and ashamed. That said, the money was good.

Moving to San Francisco in the mid-1980s, just as the devastation of the AIDS pandemic's devastation took hold, I encountered thriving sexual cultures and more queer bodies to explore them with. The AIDS crisis made talking explicitly about the sex we were having and wanting to have a matter of life and death and sparked public and private conversations around risk, vulnerability, and consent along with global movements that challenged the stigma that surrounds both sex and disease. Having already produced and exchanged dozens of dirty Polaroids with friends and lovers, when I was asked to pose for the raunchy and celebrated lesbian erotic publication *On Our Backs*, I was more than eager to sign on. To be clear, I didn't pose for money but just because someone asked, eventually enlisting my BFF Julia Sumi LaChica to join the photo shoot. There is a certain undeniable vanity associated with puta life, a kind of sexual audacity that assumes that others might be so beguiled by the sexy that you have to deliver that they would be willing to pay for it—as a photograph in a magazine, as a scene in a movie, or as a set amount of time in your company. However, the photos themselves were uninspired; it was an early nineties aesthetic of femme-on-femme sex. Sexually tame and visually mundane, we did not make the cover. The truth is there wasn't a whole lot of chemistry; we were best friends feigning sexy for the camera in our best thrift-store lingerie (fig. I.7).[23] The spread was labeled "Las Chicas," a reference to both her last name and a way to mark the scene as something other than white for a magazine that had a complicated relationship with racialized sexuality. There is nothing about the photographs that is particularly exceptional, but I do remember a certain femme sense of vanity when a

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FIG 1.7 › "Las Chicas" spread from *On Our Backs* magazine, July–August 1990. Photograph by Myra Fourwinds.

handsome butch approached me on the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (MUNI) and asked if I was the girl in the *On Our Backs* spread. During this time, and before and during graduate school, I also published an s/m-themed short story, led sex-positive workshops for Latinas for the HIV-prevention agency Proyecto ContraSIDA por Vida, wrote a sexy bilingual safer-sex guide for dykes, and generally found other ways to turn sexual experience and a willingness to be publicly perverse into a marketable skill. The truth is, once you succumb to the hail of puta, once you have had enough rumors, ex-lovers, and naked pictures circulating in the world, the stigma stops mattering as something that can be used against you, even as you notice all the ways it sticks to your skin.

My final year of graduate school, I moved to Iruña (Pamplona) in Spain's Basque region chasing love and foreign adventure, an opportunity to live an elsewhere I knew little about. Welcomed into a community of faggy Basque activists along with a few unshaved hippy heterosexual feminists, I became immediately self-conscious of all the ways I stood out visually and otherwise—phenotypically not that different from others in the Spanish state, my accent, my aesthetic, and my way of moving in the world marked me as mismatched from the available categories of female gender in the re-

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gion. My age marked me as no longer belonging to the category of señorita even as it was also clear that I had not ascended to the status of señora, that dignified, matronly figure seen throughout Spain with matching leather purse and shoes. Even after abandoning any semblance of high heels to navigate the cobblestone streets of my new ancient neighborhood, I didn't look the part of the environmentalist/Basque separatist/squatter/feminist/gay activist types who constituted my social sphere. I was also not Roma, that despised category that lives under perpetual suspicion and who are similarly identified by sartorial aesthetics, social practices, and geographic location. Because the voice hangs in the air, sending coded sensory signals to those within its range, in the market, in the club, on the streets, those around me knew I was from their colonized elsewhere—sudaca—like the telenovelas; others could name it more precisely, cubana, because they had already visited my island home and fallen in lust. In Spain, my voice served as an irrefutable marker of my difference—inmigrante, sudaca, cubana, puta.[24] During my year in Iruña, I was propositioned three separate times for sexual labor, including once by an older, slightly masculine woman who shyly approached asking how much. These encounters all happened in the daylight, based as much on my assumed status as an immigrant sex worker as by the audacity that is required to be a woman alone in public. But most times, I simply heard the word puta whispered around me—at the bakery, in the café, in the street—suggesting the sexual acts that I was invited to perform.

In Spain, as in other parts of Europe, immigrant women, particularly those marked as Black or from countries associated with the African diaspora—cubanas, dominicanas, brasileñas—are always assumed to be working sex, ogled with unrestrained lust and unquestioned sexual suspicion.[25] In fact, cubanas are so fetishized that we even have a sexual act named for us: *una cubana* refers to stimulating a penis by squeezing it between corpulent breasts.[26] In Spain, regardless of where I was in the city or what I was wearing, being identified as cubana meant stepping into a visual and auditory category that was firmly entrenched and totalizing. Moving back to an increasingly gentrified San Francisco, I rented an apartment in the Tenderloin, an area popular with sex workers and their clients, and I would be repeatedly asked—How much? In both places—here and there—I was identified by how I looked and where I was located in someone else's spatial mapping of a world of erotic possibility.

The truth is, I have been called puta more times than I remember. I have been called puta because of how I look and where I wander; because

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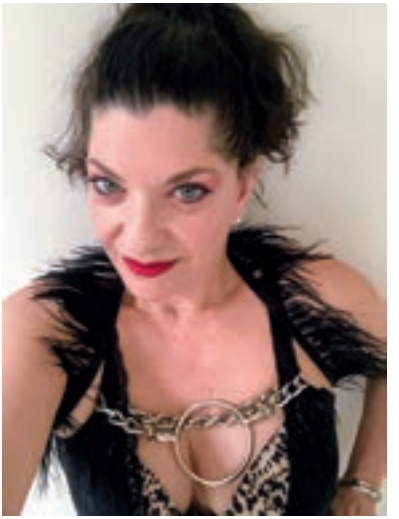

FIG I.8 › Author at the Folsom Street Fair, San Francisco, 2011.

FIG I.9 › Author en route to Kit Kat Club, Berlin, 2021.

of who and what I desire and because of who and what I refuse. And I have answered, cultivating an aesthetic and an attitude from the impossibility of being otherwise. Maybe you have seen me grinding out my puta passions on a dance floor, being scandalous with strangers at San Francisco's kinkiest block party or in a Berlin dark room (figs. I.8 and I.9), or documenting my amorous misadventures on the socials. More shameful still, perhaps you recognize my aging face from the numerous dating apps that I turn to in the hope of getting lucky. More likely, however, is that you have seen me on your campus lecturing about cybersluts, sodomites, sexual futures, or puta life, fulfilling (or not) your expectations of what a puta with a PhD and a government job might look and sound like. In fact, as an academic who has created a reputation for herself as a scholar of sexuality, I have been rewarded in unexpected ways for writing explicitly about my own erotic archive even as I have no doubt also been dismissed or excluded from other opportunities. These too are forms of sex work, and ways of working sex, pleasurable, profitable, and dangerous in different ways and to different degrees.

The differences matter. While this project is invested in dismantling the stigma that surrounds sex work by highlighting the wide variety of practices that constitute erotic labor, it is also committed to challenging the hi-

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erarchies that assign differential moral and legal value to that work. While I have frequently been able to extract monetary value from my sexuality in a variety of ways, because I have never been economically dependent on criminalized work to pay my rent or feed myself or my child, I have never had to fear being arrested for doing my job; I have never been denied citizenship, a job, an apartment, or state benefits for engaging in sex work; I have never had my assets seized because they were procured through illegal means; I have never had my bank account or social media accounts closed because I was suspected of engaging in illicit activity; I have never had to worry about my adult son being arrested for procurement because he benefits economically from my work selling sex. These are some of the current realities faced by sex workers worldwide, made more pernicious and obscene through laws such as SESTA/FOSTA in the United States (Stop Enabling Sexual Trafficking Act / Fight Online Sex Trafficking) (2018) that make websites responsible if third parties post ads for illegal activity on their platforms, including consensual adult sex work.[27] In the United States, the shutting down of websites offering sexually explicit material on Backpage, Craigslist, Tumblr, and Patreon, and a brief ban of the website OnlyFans, has accentuated the precarity of sex workers seeking out sources for independently controlled income and has resulted in more dangerous working conditions for all involved in the industry.[28] The result of these bans reach far beyond commercial sex work, impacting the creative production of all sexually explicit artists and performers, including those whose art practices might not be recognized as connected to sex work, and numerous artists have already had their accounts blocked (Holmes 2021). The laws and regulation that surround commercial sex work function to discipline the sexual expression, pleasures, and possibilities of all of us, but the harms they inflict are always differentially experienced, governed by the preexisting hierarchies of power and privilege that swirl all around us.

Puta Mourning, Puta Life

Drawing on a language of affect and aesthetics to bear upon understandings of gender, age, race, sexuality, labor, ability, and migration, *Puta Life* aims to intervene in public policy debates around the criminalization and stigmatization of sex work by foregrounding the lives and experiences of women whose work has been sex. In this way, it joins Amnesty International, the United Nations, Human Rights Watch, and the World Health

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Organization to support the decriminalization of sex work worldwide and to argue that laws that criminalize sex work put those involved in the sex industry at increased risk of a variety of harms. Today, sex workers face a worldwide epidemic of violence and murder; sex workers are routinely hunted and harmed by those who understand that the value of their lives is, more often than not, deemed negligible, insufficient to warrant concern, let alone protection or justice.

The stigma that conditions the violence against sex workers is the same stigma that structures the response to those violations. Whether in discussions of the Asian American female victims of a mass shooting at massage parlors in Atlanta; the ongoing drama of missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada and the United States; the unsolved femicides in Juarez, Mexico, and the global South; or the incessant murder of transgender women in the streets of every urban capital, at the moment of their death, so often the victims' relationship to puta life hovers around the circumstances of their violent ends. For some, any association to sex work becomes a way to discount the violations to which so many are routinely subjected, concluding that because the victims were engaged in intimate forms of labor, because they were on the street dressed a certain way, because they were out alone at night, because they were drug addicted or poor, because they knowingly stepped into a car or an alley to work, because they consented to sex with a stranger, the violence committed against them is to be expected, if not deserved.[29] For others wishing to solicit outrage for the crimes committed against them, any connection to sex work must be denied or dismissed in order to "humanize" the subject because as social outcasts, sex workers are too often perceived to be beyond the pale of human connection.[30] In these cases, suggesting that the victim's involvement in the sex trade might be connected to the violence committed against them is deemed as disrespect for the dead because even in death the indelible stain of sexual labor endures. Therefore, this book also harbors another guttural meaning for puta life. As a response to puta vida, a fucking life, a life defined by condemnation, violence, and contempt, I offer the possibility of puta life, an affirmation of the beauty, value, and spirit of putas everywhere.

If this introduction has been focused on the place of putas in the cultural imagination, including my own, part I of the book digs into the roots of that psychic implant, offering two chapters that explore the historical currents that bind sexual labor to visuality: in the first case, by diving deep into the archive of the Mexican state to witness the coming together of

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state regulation and biopolitical technologies of capture; and in the second, to trace the aesthetic motifs about racial and sexual deviance that coalesce to produce a visual representation of puta life. Part II then shifts to offer three distinct, more intimate, case studies that foreground first-person accounts of some of the many women who work sex—archival encounters with different women in different locations, representing decidedly different kinds of sexual labor. Here, readers might note an uncanny connection between this author and those I have elected to feature. Like myself, those I profile in these chapters are all well past their sexual prime. Like the brief stories I have shared in this introduction (as well as those I have kept to myself), their biographical accounts of puta life are narrated from the vantage point of advancing years, described and written from the security of having survived their pasts. As I engage the distinct and contradictory temporal dimension of both photography and biography, I insert the undertheorized dynamics of aging into discussions of gendered and racialized sexuality.

In these chapters, I rummage through these visual archives of puta life, not to offer any comprehensive account or representative sample of the different facets of sexual labor but because their faces and their words had something to say to me about my own relationship to puta life. In the first of these chapters, I look at the larger-than-life figure of Vanessa del Rio, a Cuban–Puerto Rican from the Bronx who went on to become an international porn sensation. I grew up watching her films at the xxx drive-in of my youth, so Vanessa has always been a Latina femme icon for me, but studying her life, taking seriously her theorizations of sex and violence, power and submission, allowed me greater access to my own understanding of the terror and thrill that these terms inspire. It was Vanessa del Rio—and the many ways I felt an affective kinship with her through her life narrative—who brought me to this project; it was Vanessa who inspired me to probe the cultural associations projected onto sexual labor, and my own associations with puta life.

The second archival case study considers the loose collective of women associated with Casa Xochiquetzal, a home for elderly sex workers in Mexico City. This chapter was motivated first and foremost by the visual surprise of seeing photographs of the naked bodies of older women, women who reminded me of the older women in my own life, and the older woman I am becoming. Shifting the lens from the purported glamour of pornography to aging streetwalkers in the Mexican metropolis foregrounds the harsh realities faced by sex workers who work the street, as it reveals how

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so often these women's lives had already been shaped by gendered stigma, discrimination, violence, and globalized politics that culminate in localized neglect. Charting their biographical recollections across the different registers of an archive of representation that seemed to multiply every few months, I became focused on exploring how narrative frames shape the affective relationship between those in front of and those behind the camera. Spending time with their faces and their stories and taking seriously the relationship between image makers and their subjects forced me to reflect on my own practices of representation, to mark those moments when I felt the gulf between the women I studied and the woman I am widen, as well as reflect on unexpected moments of identification and connection.

In the final chapter, I look at trans activist Adela Vázquez, who has been working sex all her life, even as, like most people engaged in sex work, she only exchanged sex for cash for a brief part of her life. Adela is my friend, my age mate, mí paisana, another Cuban immigrant and an inexhaustible storyteller, who is frequently given opportunities to represent her own puta life to whoever is interested in hearing. Despite our similarities, our lives have been defined by different structures of the possible, determined as much by history, desire, and the privileged particularities of our own embodied forms. In these final three chapters, even as I try to press the words of these women against the images and narratives that have circulated around them, I also try to expose the ways—as subjects and critics struggling to assign meaning to the myriad ways that sexuality shapes our lives—we remain trapped within webs of mediation. Our language, what we are able to say about ourselves and others, is always encumbered and enlivened by our horizon of possibilities, the worlds we can imagine. That all our attempts to represent ourselves and others will never fully satisfy all that we wish to share does not diminish the gesture of reaching out to open ourselves to another, the promise that touch offers to transform us. Who we are shapes how we tell stories but also impacts how we listen to them. Our understanding—experiential, affective, and academic—of the worlds in which actors move and actions transpire functions as our available resources for meaning making, each complicated and partial, each imbued with its own biases and assumptions. But this project also asks you, the reader, to sit alongside what lies outside meaning, to open to sensation and feeling, to join me in a femme practice of friendship and mutual care. In sharing my own erotic and ethical sensibilities, I invite you—the one reading, watching, listening alongside me—to think about the sexual messages and memories that have accompanied you to this page, a dialogic academic

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exercise in exploring the creation of sexual meaning and what might lie beyond it.

This book came looking for me, whispering the word *puta* as the word that cannot be named, to name the thing that we cannot be, to name that to which we have already been condemned. To this word I add life, the possibility of a life that will exceed the word and remake it. These encounters with the putas I have profiled, so like and unlike myself, have allowed me to grapple with my own messy feelings about violence, pleasure, and care; about my aging body and my ageless desires; as well as my own stubborn attachments to representation and recognition. My wish, full of utopian yearnings, is that in addressing the stigma that surrounds sexual labor, we might begin to redefine sexual politics in ways that tend to the harms of police violence, state surveillance, and the censure of sexual expression; that we might quell the murderous violence of everyday misogyny and nurture the sparks of carnal beauty and courage that are everywhere pouring out into the streets to demand the right to own our bodies; the right to live free from stigma, violence, and harm; the right to know care. Bold in its political aspirations, tender in its queer feelings, this book is my homage to those whose lives have been marked by the regulatory power of puta life, an opportunity to engage in the reparative potential of images and stories so that we might see ourselves, and each other, anew.

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NOTES

Introduction

1 Curiously, the *OED Online* provides an audio file for the word that replaces the hard middle sound of the Spanish "t" with a soft "də," "pudə," which completely deflates the sonic power of the word, making it sound closer to *pura*, or pure, rendering it almost comical. See *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "puta, n.," accessed August 5, 2020, http://www.oed.com.

2 The debates about the etymology of the word *puta* register their own terse tensions—either tracing it back to the benign feminine form of the Latin word *putus*, meaning boy, or alternately suggesting its origins relate to the Latin *pūtidus*, meaning rotten, spoiled, or fetid.

3 In *Labyrinth of Solitude*, Octavio Paz (1994, 75) famously performs a deconstruction of the word *chingada*, the fucked one, and names the Mexican people "hijos de la chingada," where *chingada* serves as a synonym for *whore*. See also Norma Alarcón's "Tradductora, Traditora" (1989), which speaks back to Paz.

4 Leite organized the first national gathering of sex workers in Brazil in 1987; five years later, she organized Davida, one of the first activist groups in Latin America to advocate for the rights of sex workers. In addition to the Murray documentary *Um beijo para Gabriela* (2013), see Lenz 2014.

5 For an indispensable historical account of sex worker movements in Latin America, see Cabezas 2019. Despite the contemporary examples offered here, Amalia Cabezas rightly locates the origins of the sex worker movement in Latin America in the nineteenth century, a discussion I take up in the following chapter.

6 In San Francisco, Margo St. James, another iconic sex worker advocate, ran unsuccessfully for San Francisco's Board of Supervisors in 1996. St. James is credited with starting the organizations COYOTE (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics) and WHO (Whores, Housewives, and Others) and later founded the St. James Infirmary in San Francisco, a "peer-based occupational health and safety clinic for sex workers of all genders" that continues to this day. St. James died in 2021 (Kukura 2021).

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7 The group is named Miluska in honor of Villón's friend and colleague who was murdered while working in 1998.

8 For more on Sylvia Rivera, including STAR, the organization she cofounded with Marsha P. Johnson, see La Fountain-Stokes's (2021) powerful portrait of her life as a street hustler. See also Gan 2007. For more on the Compton's Cafeteria riot, see the film *Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton's Cafeteria* (Silverman and Stryker 2005). For more on the sex workers in the LGBTQ movement, see Shah 2011–12; for more on the role of queers in sex worker movements, see Chateauvert 2015.

9 See the Institute of Development Studies' "Map of Sex Work Law" (n.d.), an indispensable guide for understanding legal approaches, law enforcement, and characteristics of enforcement related to sex work around the world.

10 See Frances Aparicio's *Listening to Salsa* (1998, 45–56), in which she discusses a popular plena (a traditional Puerto Rican musical form) that references Luberza Oppenheimer alongside readings of two literary references to this story. Those two short stories—"Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres," by Rosario Ferré (2000), considered the First Lady of Puerto Rican letters; and "La última plena que bailó Luberza," by Manuel Ramos Otero (1979), known as one of the most celebrated openly gay writers of Puerto Rico—represent the broad-ranging reach of this iconic figure. Another historical Afro-Latina sex worker and madam who became enshrined in popular culture is María de la Caridad Norberta Pacheco Sánchez of Cartagena Spain, known as Caridad la Negra (1879–1960). Her life served as the inspiration for Darío Fernández Flórez's 1951 novel, *Lola, espejo oscuro*, which was later adapted into a film of the same name (Merino and Sáenz de Heredia 1966), as well as other cultural texts of tragedy inspired by her life. My given name, in honor of my grandmothers and the patron saint of Cuba, is Juana María de la Caridad, marking this as one of numerous instances of finding an echo of my name in the archive. Both of these historical figures have incredibly well sourced Wikipedia pages that provide more biographical details. See also the Heaux History Project, a twitter account (@HeauxHistory) and Patreon website that documents Black, Brown, and Indigenous erotic labor and sex worker history (Heaux History Project, n.d.).

11 This is not to claim that this is the first novel that deploys this trope, just to suggest its long history within the genre regionally. The figure of the prostitute with a heart of gold is rooted in the mythologized biblical legacies of Mary Magdalene.

12 Eréndira and her heartless grandmother also make an appearance in García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

13 It bears emphasizing that within my own text, the term *woman* refers to anyone who uses that term to define themselves.

14 See the Department of Homeland Security's "Blue Campaign," accessed December 22, 2014, https://www.dhs.gov/blue-campaign. This approach is further complicated by a policy of "Continued Presence," a temporary immigration sta-

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tus that provides some relief for those who may be potential witnesses, making "victims" eligible for such government relief programs as those offered to refugees and thereby incentivizing the use of the term. On her blog, *The Naked Anthropologist*, Agustín (n.d.) uses the term *rescue industry* to name an "ever-larger social sector dedicated to helping and saving prostitutes, sex workers, fallen women." She argues that by "defining women as victims Rescuers find their own identity and meaning in life."

15 See LaShawn Harris's (2016) insightful book *Sex Workers, Psychics, and Numbers Runners*, in which she delineates how the criminalization of sex work in the early part of the twentieth century was used as a tactic of racialized and gendered control and exploitation and details how African American women created underground economic and social systems of support.

16 These include *We Too: Essays on Sex Work and Survival*, edited by Natalie West (2021); *Porn Work: Sex, Labor, and Late Capitalism*, by Heather Berg (2021); *A Whore's Manifesto: An Anthology of Writing and Artwork by Sex Workers*, edited by Kay Kassirer (2019); *Hustling Verse: An Anthology of Sex Worker Poetry*, edited by Amber Dawn and Justin Ducharme (2019); *Revolting Prostitutes: The Fight for Sex Workers' Rights*, by Molly Smith and Juno Mac (2018); *Coming Out like a Porn Star: Essays on Pornography, Protection, and Privacy*, edited by Jiz Lee (2015); and *Playing the Whore: The Work of Sex Work*, by Melissa Gira Grant (2014). See also the helpful guide *Thriving in Sex Work: Heartfelt Advice for Staying Sane in the Sex Industry; A Self-Help Book for Sex Workers*, by Lola Davina (2017). In Spanish, see the recent texts *Puta Feminista: Historias de una trabajadora sexual*, by Georgina Orellano (2022), and *Prostitución/Trabajo Sexual: Las Protagonistas Hablan*, edited by Diana Maffía and Claudia Korol (2021). In Portuguese, the anthology *Feminilidades: Corpos e Sexualidades em Debate*, edited by Daniele Andrade da Silva et. al (2013), includes several first-person accounts from sex workers.

17 There are several helpful guides that attempt to directly address best practices for academics researching and teaching about sex work. My own work is indebted and informed by these efforts. See specifically the incredibly comprehensive "Sex Worker Syllabus and Toolkit for Academics," compiled and curated by Heather Berg, Angela Jones, and PJ Patella-Reya (n.d.), which defines best practices and offers extensive readings. See also "Sex Work Centered Guide for Academics," by the collective Support Ho(s)es (2021), which also publishes guides for media and journalism professionals, health and wellness professionals, as well as a sex work–centered guide for writing to incarcerated populations.

18 See Caleb Luna's (2022) important work on how fatness comes to be associated with sexual excess. See also Yessica Garcia Hernandez's (2021) work on gordibuenas and the erotics of fatness.

19 Several new collections have taken up the role of photography and visual culture in colonial mappings of the world. See the excellent volume *Ethnopornography: Sexuality, Colonialism, and Archival Knowledge*, edited by Pete Sigal, Zeb

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Tortorici, and Neil L. Whitehead (2019); *Orientalism, Eroticism and Modern Visuality in Global Cultures*, edited by Joan DelPlato and Julie Codell (2016); and *Photography's Other Histories*, edited by Christopher Pinney and Nicolas Peterson (2003). See also *An Eye for the Tropics: Tourism, Photography, and Framing the Caribbean Picturesque*, by Krista Thompson (2007); *Camera Orientalis: Reflections on Photography of the Middle East*, by Ali Behdad (2016); and *Vision, Race, and Modernity: A Visual Economy of the Andean World*, by Deborah Poole (1997). Malek Alloula's *The Colonial Harem* (1986) remains a touchstone for the field, as does earlier work on Native American photography compiled by Lucy Lippard in *Partial Recall: With Essays on Photographs of Native North Americans* (1993).

20 The phrase *ruins of representation* is borrowed from Gerald Vizenor's (1994) book *Manifest Manners*, a gift of language from my dearly loved teacher that I return to again and again.

21 The essay "Erotic Storytelling: Sexual Experience and Fantasy Letters in *Forum Magazine*," by Dee L. McEntire (1992), considers these letters as a form of folklore for documenting sexual experiences.

22 Readers should be reminded that at the time, the legal drinking age was eighteen and many gay bars were controlled by the Mafia, which had little interest in policing age or other illegal activities. I make brief mention of the Warehouse in *Queer Latinidad* (2003, 153) and *Sexual Futures* (2014, 103–4). The mood of that moment is also relived in my poem "Brujería" (2015).

23 It bears mentioning, in the interest of greater transparency and as a commentary on queer sexual cultures, that Julia and I *had* been sexual playmates for a minute and that we are still best friends.

24 *Sudaca* is a slur used to designate women from Latin America.

25 For example, see García-Peña's (2015) "Translating Blackness" for the ways that Black Dominican women articulate their experience of racialization in Italy.

26 See *Urban Dictionary*, s.v. "cubana," accessed August 5, 2021, https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=cubana.

27 See Albert et al.'s (2020) "FOSTA in Legal Context" for a sociological account of these effects. They conclude: "The result is that people in the sex trades, who work in legal, semilegal, and criminalized industries, have been forced into dangerous and potentially life-threatening scenarios. Many no longer have access to affordable methods of advertising and have returned to outdoor work or to in-person client-seeking in bars and clubs, where screening of the type that occurs online is impossible, and where workers are more vulnerable to both clients and law enforcement. These effects have been most impactful on sex workers facing multiple forms of marginalization, including Black, brown, and Indigenous workers, trans workers, and workers from lower socio-economic classes, who are prohibited from or unable to access more expensive advertising sites that may not be as impacted by FOSTA" (1089–90). For a more personal account of how the stigma surrounding sexual labor informs the lived possibilities of those in academia, see Mistress Snow's (2019) powerful piece in the

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Chronicle of Higher Education about how coming out as a sex worker to her academic adviser impacted her as a graduate student.

28 The *New York Times* reported, "OnlyFans has become a source of income for two million creators, including sex workers, during the pandemic. The company said it had helped to democratize sex work, in part by letting creators effectively run their own businesses and own the content that they post on the site. Creators have collectively earned more than $4.5 billion since OnlyFans started nearly five years ago, the company said" (Lorenz and Lukpat 2021).

29 In the notorious Robert Pickton case in Canada that involved the murder of forty-nine women, mostly Indigenous women and most from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, one woman managed to escape Pickton's grip, slashing his jugular vein in the process, and entered the police station near death with multiple stab wounds before falling unconscious for four days. That night in 1997, both Pickton and his victim lost more than three liters of blood, and both were treated in the same local hospital; the key to the handcuffs she was still wearing was found in Pickton's pocket. But because the victim was a sex worker and a heroin addict, "the Crown considered the woman too unstable to testify"; charges against him were eventually dropped, and his killing spree continued for thirteen years (Culbert 2010). Coincidentally or not, during that same time period, fashion photographer Lincoln Clarkes was also luring heroin-addicted sex workers from Vancouver's impoverished Eastside to pose for his camera. Clarkes (2002) eventually published a book titled *Heroines*, which included images of Pickton's victims, another contribution to the photographic archive of puta life. See also Shari Huhndorf's (2021) essay "Scenes from the Fringe: Gendered Violence and the Geographies of Indigenous Feminism," which opens with a discussion of the Pickton murders and explores the response of Indigenous feminist artists to the larger ongoing epidemic of missing and murdered Indigenous women.

30 In media reports of the 2021 massacre at massage parlors in Atlanta, there was considerable back-and-forth about whether the victims were actually sex workers, an attempt to distance these women from historical associations of Asian women as sexual servants and massage parlors as sites of sexual commerce. What we know for certain is that the six murdered Asian American victims were between the ages of forty-four and seventy-four. Soon Chung Park was seventy-four, Suncha Kim was sixty-nine, Yong Ae Yue was sixty-three, Hyun Jung Grant was fifty-one, Xiaojie Tan was forty-nine, and the youngest, Daoyou Feng, was forty-four—confounding stereotypes of who is employed at these facilities.

One. Women in Public

1 I am indebted to the warmth and collegiality of Natalia López López, chief librarian at the Instituto Nacional de Salúd Pública and dedicated conservator

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