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Santa Barbara

Queer Migrations: LGBTQ Migrant Latinx Women Re-Creating Home(s)

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Feminist Studies

by

Sandibel Borges

Committee in charge:

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September 2017

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September 2017

Queer Migrations: LGBTQ Migrant Latinx Women Re-Creating Home(s)

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by

Sandibel Borges

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When my family and I migrated to the United States back in 1999, I had no idea what our lives would be like eighteen years later. I have infinite gratitude to my parents and siblings for their presence, their *lucha*, their voices and vision of the world. I would not have written this dissertation if it were not for my mother, father, sister, and brother. My mother has always been a role model. She is a strong and powerful woman who has shown me what it is like to fight, survive, and live. My sister Olga has always been there for me, from the moment I was born. I look up to her and our connection is deeper than words can capture. She saw me struggle in the last stages of my writing and always had the right and supportive words to say. I am grateful to my father, who started migrating to the United States when I was one year old, and whose love for and commitment to his family kept him going. My "baby" brother, Edgar, has always shown great courage growing up as a young Brown man in a predominately white environment. I am grateful to him for turning around our roles of older-sister/little-brother, and supporting me in difficult moments. My partner Bren had nothing but encouragement and support for me during the research and writing stages of this dissertation. Her constant reminder of how important it is to believe in myself and in my work lifted me many times.

As a self identified queer Mexicana migrant, it is a dream come true to have had the opportunity to work with other LGBTQ migrant Latinxs, hear their stories about their search for home, and in some cases share my own story with them. I will always remember a time when I approached a queer muxer community organizer in Los Angeles, California to tell her about my project. Worried that I would come across as an academic that exploits

marginalized communities, I said I was invested in honoring and respecting *their* stories. She smiled and said, "ponderosa, you are one of us."[1] I experienced a deep connection with each one of the narrators I interviewed and I am grateful for their time and the space that they offered this project. I am grateful that they trusted me with their stories of struggle and fierce survival. I am also grateful that they welcomed me into their homes, their communities, and their hearts as they spoke of violence but also of joy.

This dissertation is the product of hard work, countless conversations with mentors, colleagues, friends, and family. It is also the product of much self-reflection in these last eight years. My dissertation committee as a whole had an important role as I completed my research and writing. Inés Talamantez pushed my thinking and analysis on home and its distinctive values for the dislocated. Eileen Boris encouraged my thinking in challenging the narrative of the "feminist waves." Karma Chávez, who without really knowing me trusted my work, cautioned me against representing Latinxs as a monoracial group. My Chair, Grace Chang supported and pushed my thinking to further complicate how the government uses the image of "good" immigrants. Dr. Chang has been much more than an advisor. Her mentoring and her human, grounded, and fierce spirit reminded me of the important work that can be done within and outside academia. Dr. Horacio Roque-Ramírez left us before I could finish writing. This dissertation is for you, Horacio, for the work that you inspired me to do, for your generosity, ethical mind, talent, and love for your students. I am forever grateful to my mentors from my undergraduate years at Washington State University, Marian Sciachitano, Linda Heidenreich, and José Alamillo, for remaining in my life after all these

[1] "Powerful one, you are one of us."

years. Marian Sciachitano and Linda Heidenreich kindly provided their time and advice as I prepared for the job market.

This work would not have been possible without the support and recognition of the Esther Ngan-ling Chow and Mareyjoyce Green Dissertation Scholarship, from Sociologists for Women in Society, and PUEG from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). The commitment of the Chow and Green Scholarship to women from underrepresented groups and Women of Color scholarship allowed me to conduct research in Mexico. The Gender Studies program, or PUEG, at UNAM housed me as a visiting scholar in 2014-2015, connecting me with scholars and activists in Mexico City. My PUEG mentor, María Elena Jarquín, generously offered her time and resources with me, introducing me to migration scholars and activists, and inviting me to take part in various events.

The loving, grounded, critical, human spirits of Tara Villalba, Karen Hanna, Delores Lola Mondragón, my very close and dear crew of women of color graduate students all these years have literally kept me alive. They have taught me the importance of finding and honoring my voice. Our conversations over wine and our “Filipino goodbyes” transcend this institution. Thank you to Cristina Serna, for sharing her thoughts, ideas, and resources and for paving the way for me as a woman of color in academia. I am grateful to Danielle Stevens, Abby Aguilar, Sweets Underwood, Arelí Ariana, and Annie Alexander, who I met at UC Santa Barbara, for their trust, their loving presence, and their honesty. I know our friendship and connection will last a lifetime. I learned and continue to learn everyday from them, their kind hearts, and critical minds. The Women of Color Circle and WORD (Women of Color Revolutionary Dialogues) were both imperative in fighting the isolation that is too common and real in an institution that was never built for women, queer, and trans people of

color. We found each other. The mere act of looking at one another and spending a few hours together every week was enough to regain our humanity. My friend Kai Linke's support during graduate school will always stay with me, too. During my time in Mexico I was fortunate to meet many incredible souls: Marifer Chávez, Valerie Leibold, Emma Álvarez, Marithé Solano, Sofía Carbajal, Coco Magallanes, Vane Fernández, David Bello, Ana de Lynch, María Elena Jarquín, Natalia Herrera, and Pedro Nolasco. Infinite thanks for changing my life in powerful ways. It is an honor to be part of yours.

I dedicate this work to the many muxeres with whom I spoke and who felt comfortable enough to share their stories, and to the many womxn I did not have the opportunity to talk to or meet. It goes to all the LGBTQ migrants of the world, who keep crossing borders—emotional, spiritual, and physical. You are not alone and you are not invisible.

I look back to thank that thirteen-year old girl who arrived in the United States, scared and without knowing a word of English. I look back to play in my memory how she endured institutional racism, heterosexism, and classism within the education system throughout the years, and who thought a Ph.D. was completely removed from her reality. Sandibel, *lo hiciste.*

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ABSTRACT

Queer Migrations: LGBTQ Migrant Latinx Women Re-Creating Home(s)

by

Sandibel Borges

This dissertation examines the experiences of migration, displacement, and homebuilding among LGBTQ Latinx migrant women in Los Angeles, California and Mexico City, Mexico, including migrants who returned to Mexico by choice or deportation. I conducted oral histories in both cities, while also doing participant observation at various events, gatherings, and conferences.

Both, Los Angeles and Mexico City are significant for this research. On the one hand, Los Angeles has some of the highest numbers of Latino immigrants in the United States, where neoliberal policies have increased the exploitation of immigrant labor. On the other, Mexico is one of the countries of origin of many Latinx migrants in the United States that has been directly impacted by transnational neoliberal policies, resulting in more internal and transnational migration. Historically, migrants from rural areas relocated to Mexico City, which currently is the destination of many U.S. deportees.

My dissertation demonstrates that LGBTQ imaginings of community are essential in creating survival strategies from displacement. Such imaginings may mean finding home with family but also with other transnational migrants and/or LGBTQ individuals. Queer migrant Latinx women do not only create spaces of belonging in familial terms, but they

engage in making new affective spaces based on collective experiences of surviving systemic violence, including racism, exploitation, xenophobia, anti-LGBTQ sentiments and policies, sexism, and classism.

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INTRODUCTION

Queer Migrations: LGBTQ Migrant Latinx Women Re-Creating Home(s)

There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives

--Audre Lorde[2]

Our *real power* comes from the personal; our real insights about living come from that deep knowledge within us that arises from our feelings […]. Our feelings are our most genuine paths to knowledge. They are chaotic, sometimes painful, sometimes contradictory, but they come from deep within us. And we must key into those feelings and begin to extrapolate from them, examine them for new ways of understanding our experiences. This is how new visions begin, how we begin to posit a future nourished by the past

--Audre Lorde[3]

Borders have historically delineated the socially acceptable and unacceptable in terms of gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity for the United States as well as other nations. As Eithne Luibhéid points out in *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border*, immigration officials for years worked on identifying and penalizing gays and lesbians—and other people with "undesirable" sexualities—who tried to migrate into U.S. territory.[4] Simultaneously, the United States and other Western imperialist governments through neoliberal policies pushed people in the global South to migrate to countries in the global North, including the United States. Grace Chang, in *Disposable Domestics: Immigrant*

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[2] Audre Lorde, "Learning from the 60s," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde,* 2nd Ed. (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007), 138.

[3] Claudia Tate, "Audre Lorde | Claudia Tate 1982," in *Conversations with Audre Lorde*, ed. Joan Wylie Hall (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 91.

[4] Eithne Luibhéid, *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), ix.

Women Workers in the Global Economy, references the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, stating, "the extraction of resources by the United States and other First World nations forces many people in the Third World to migrate to follow their countries' wealth."[5] After witnessing the exploitation of their natural resources and of their gendered labor amid the worsening of their political stability by First World forces, many in the Global South have few options for economic survival. Migrating to the Global North and creating a new home becomes one viable option.

LGBTQ people are among the many who have historically migrated into and out of the country, but were largely invisible until recent decades. They have migrated for economic reasons like so many others, but also have sought escape from anti-LGBT violence.[6] Prior to 1990, being gay or lesbian factored into denial of entry based on "suitability" to cross U.S. borders. Only in 1990 were gays and lesbians (the only two categories from the LGBTQ community that were institutionally recognized) allowed to enter the United States.[7] The change certainly was a victory that began to de-stigmatize the

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[5] Grace Chang, *Disposable Domestics: Immigrant Women Workers in the Global Economy* 2nd Ed. (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016), 2.

[6] Juana María Rodríguez, *Queer Latinidad: Identity Practices, Discursive Spaces* (New York: New York University Press, 2003).

Timothy J Randazzo, "Social and Legal Barriers: Sexual Orientation and Asylum in the United States," in *Queer Migrations: Sexuality, U.S. Citizenship, and Border Crossings*, ed. Eithne Luibhéid and Lionel Cantú Jr. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 30-60.

[7] Eithne Luibhéid, *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

Lionel Cantú, *The Sexuality of Migration: Border Crossings and Mexican Immigrant Men,* eds. Nancy A. Naples and Salvador Vidal-Ortiz (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

classification of gays and lesbians as undesirables, but it also mostly benefited those who could afford to pay for a passport and who could prove economic stability to be granted a visa. In the mid-1990s, in an apparent shift, the U.S. began to grant asylum on the grounds of anti-gay violence.[8] Also in the 1990s, discourses about a particular group of privileged members of the LGBT community—white, U.S. nationals, cis-gender, and middle class—began to turn mainstream.[9] Some discourses pushed for the recognition by, and inclusion into, institutions, often prioritizing white, middle class, and cis-gender needs, utilizing the argument that they were just as respectable and good citizens as their white, middle-class, heterosexual counterparts, and were therefore deserving of the same rights.

Given the history of migration and dominant LGBT struggles in the United States, it is evident that neoliberal policies and discourses on a local, national, and transnational level, along with ongoing heteropatriarchal norms, are largely responsible for the invisibilization and displacement of entire LGBTQ migrant communities today. I thus lay out various ways in which LGBT migrant Latinx women living in Los Angeles, California and LGBT migrant Mexicana women returnees in Mexico City, Mexico have experienced displacement. I then

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Karma Chávez, *Queer Migration Politics: Activist Rhetoric and Coalitional Possibilities* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2013).

[8] Timothy J Randazzo, "Social and Legal Barriers," in *Queer Migrations*, 30-60.

[9] Ryan Conrad, ed. *Against Equality: Queer Revolution, Not Mere Inclusion* (Oakland: AK Press, 2014).

Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003).

Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore, ed. *That's Revolting! Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation,* 2nd ed. (Berkeley: Soft Skull Press, 2008).

consider the various forms of resistance to the displacement and institutional violence that narrators practice in their everyday lives.

Specifically, I examine the ways in which interconnections of gender, sexuality, class, and ethnicity are at play in different social spaces for transnational LGBTQ migrant Latinx women, not only as they experience violence, but also as they go through processes of healing and resistance. I explore: 1) How do systems of power manifest in the everyday lives of LGBTQ migrant Latinx women? 2) What is the impact of transnational migration on how LGBTQ/LGBTI migrant Latinx women understand "home"? and 3) What practices do LGBTQ/LGBTI migrant Latinx women engage to navigate different systemic forms of violence, such as racism, homophobia, poverty, patriarchy, and immigration control within a neoliberal social order?

A Note on Migration

In answering the questions above, I look closely at contemporary history of migration. When SB 1070 was passed in Arizona in 2010, it reinforced the already-existing criminalization of undocumented immigrants by federal police. It sent a clear message that as a state it actively supported racial profiling for their deportation. Immigration Customs Enforcement, or ICE, already having institutional support and authorization to stop and question people if officers had "reasonable suspicion" that they were undocumented, now required local police to do the same. In other words, local police now had legal permission to stop racialized bodies that they thought were immigrants, particularly from the Global South. Other states passed similar bills in the following years, including HB 87 in Georgia, HB 56 in Alabama (also known as "Arizona on steroids"), and SB 20 in South Carolina.

The resulting large waves of deportations were certainly not the first time that removals occurred in the United States. Cybelle Fox, in *Three Worlds of Relief*, documents the wave of deportations during the Great Depression in the 1930s, following the crash of the stock market in 1929, when "more than 650 banks failed, taking with them the life savings of thousands of individuals."[10] Fox alludes to the scapegoating of immigrants as the reason for lack of employment. Between 1930 and 1932 alone, 54,000 migrants were deported—44 percent were Mexican and 20 percent southern or eastern European.[11] In different parts of the country "immigration officers raided dance halls, missions, hospitals, and prisons in an attempt to provide jobs for 'worthy citizens in need of employment'."[12] Fox establishes that the high number of raids that took place in Los Angeles were purposely well publicized to generate fear among undocumented people. Because raids were "too time-consuming and expensive," a "psychological gesture" was implemented, resulting in self-deporting.[13]

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[10] Cybelle Fox, *Three Worlds of Relief: Race, Immigration, and the American welfare State from the Progressive Era to the New Deal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 125.

[11] Cybelle Fox, *Three Worlds of Relief*, 127.

[12] Cybelle Fox, *Three Worlds of Relief*, 130.

[13] Cybelle Fox, *Three Worlds of Relief,* 128.

Policies ranging from actively importing immigrant, exploitable, and disposable laborers to then push them out in an attempt to keep the nation white and straight have predominated within U.S. history.[14] Not long after the Great Depression and the deportations that came with it, the Bracero Program contracted 4.6 million Mexican men from 1942 to 1964, fulfilling a shortage of laborers in the agriculture industry during wartime.[15] The term *bracero* comes from the Spanish word "brazo," or arm, to reference the manual labor that was extracted from immigrant Mexican men. Due to the exploitation and abuse that bracero workers endured from their employers, many went on to find jobs on their own, going from being contracted workers to undocumented migrant workers. The Bracero Program imported and exploited labor that is processed in and out of U.S. borders. Not surprisingly, deportation tactics followed several years later. "Operation Wetback" was implemented in 1954, utilizing mass deportations to removing workers. Patricia Zavella documents: "The INS apprehended 1,317,776 Mexicans in 1954 and 1955 and this campaign provided the basis for permanent funding for Border Patrol surveillance and deportation."[16]

The economic crisis in Mexico was the incentive for people to try to migrate back to the United States, often having to re-enter the country through the Bracero Program and

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[14] Grace Chang, *Disposable Domestics: Immigrant Women Workers in the Global Economy* 2nd Ed. (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016).

Patricia Zavella, *I'm Neither Here Nor There: Mexicans' Quotidian Struggles With Migration and Poverty* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

Cybelle Fox, *Three Worlds of Relief*.

[15] Grace Chang, *Disposable Domestics*, 95-96.

Patricia Zavella, *I'm Neither Here Nor There*, 29.

[16] Patricia Zavella, *I'm Neither Here Nor There*, 30.

becoming part of a continuous cycle of exploitation and surveillance. Migrants had no option but to agree to the dehumanizing and exploitable nature of such a program. Moreover, Zavella documents that precisely because deported workers could re-enter the country through the Bracero Program, the United States had Mexico's cooperation for the mass deportations. The Mexican government was invested in having contracted workers in the U.S. so the country's economy could benefit from migrants' remittances. In 1965, the Immigration Act of the same year was passed, emphasizing family reunification, which Zavella points out included, "spouses, unmarried children under twenty-one, and parents of adult U.S. citizens, excluding queers and distant relatives."[17] If LGBTQ migrants entered or re-entered the country, they must have utilized one of the accepted family roles, without revealing their queer genders and sexualities.

More than forty years later, during the Obama administration, from 2008 to 2016, migrants once again witnessed and experienced mass deportations. According to the Immigration Customs Enforcement website, 3,118,927 people were deported during the fiscal years 2008-2016.[18] The numbers are expected to be higher each year during the Trump administration. Exploitable labor is extracted out of deportable people, who are perceived as nothing but workers who can then be "returned" to places that were once their homes, but which are not anymore. Laws and proposals for the mass detentions and deportations of undocumented immigrants do not have explicit language that targets LGBTQ people in particular. Yet, LGBTQ migrants are in fact impacted and targeted, including those who

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[17] Zavella, *I'm Neither Here Nor There*, 31.

[18] "FY 2016 ICE Immigration Removals," U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, accessed February 20, 2017, https://www.ice.gov/removal-statistics/2016.

have authorization to live in the United States. The increasing racial profiling in the country and the heteronormative and heteropatriarchal policing of their genders of sexualities make them a vulnerable target. In 2015 United We Dream, the largest immigrant youth-led organization in the United States, sponsored a letter to former President Obama and Secretary Jeh Johnson, stipulating that out of the 11 million undocumented people in the country, 267,000 identified as LGBTQ.[19] This number derives from a study conducted in 2013 by the Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law, which documented the number of LGBTQ people who were in danger of detention and/or deportation during the Obama administration. The study found that an estimated 267,000 undocumented immigrants in the United States were LGBT-identified, while an estimated 637,000 documented immigrants were LGBT-identified. Many of those who have suffered the consequences of anti-immigration laws and sentiments include LGBTQ Latinxs who have lived in the United States for years, who created homes and communities of belonging in this country, and who are now being removed from them and displaced yet again.

A(nother) Call for An Intersectional Lens

In order to understand the life stories of LGBTQ Latinx migrants, an intersectional lens is necessary. Intersectional scholarship and activism are necessary now more than ever in order to avoid the too common alienation of people and communities who are already marginalized. Women of Color feminism has long advocated for intersectional lenses and

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[19] "#BreakTheCage: Stop the Detention and Deportation of LGBTQ Immigrants," Action Network, accessed May 2, 2017, https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/breakthecage-stop-the-detention-deportation-of-lgbtq-immigrants.

perspectives. In 1991, Kimberle Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality in, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," although many feminists of color had been theorizing the concept already.[20] The Combahee River Collective called it "Interlocking systems of oppression" in 1979 (published in *This Bridge*, 1981), and Audre Lorde famously said in 1982, "there is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives."[21] In the 1990s, Patricia Hill Collins named intersectionality as the "matrix of domination."[22]

In "Mapping the Margins," Crenshaw offered a critique of U.S. discrimination law, arguing that systems of oppression overlap. She analyzed the ways in which discrimination law only conceptualizes harm as occurring through separate distinct forms of discrimination, such as sexual discrimination and racial discrimination, but never accounting for how both could be taking place at the same time. The Combahee River Collective used a similar idea in the seventies to question the systemic violence impacting Black lesbian women's lives. It stated, "We realize that the liberation of all oppressed people necessitates the destruction of the political-economic system of capitalism and imperialism as well as patriarchy."[23] They

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[20] Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43.6 (1991): 1241-1299.

[21] Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement," in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Watertown: Persephone Press, 1981), 210-218.

Audre Lorde, "Learning from the 60s," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde,* 2nd Ed. (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007).

[22] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. (New York: Routledge, 1999).

[23] Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement," in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Watertown: Persephone Press, 1981), 213.

were clear that their struggle had to encompass a critique of capitalism, racism, and heteropatriarchy for their liberation.

In recent years academic critique, particularly within queer theory, claims that intersectionality is a theory based on fixed identities. Such critique, often dependent on European male theorists, demonstrates a lack of understanding as well as undermining of the theory of intersectionality that developed within Women of Color feminism.[24] As Karma Chávez puts it, "Kimberle Crenshaw's analysis of the erasure of women of color within political, structural, and representational realms demonstrates the particular ways that these women's experiences are negated without fixing the women or any others into such positions."[25] While activists and scholars have long proposed the theory of intersectionality and similar concepts before, some feminist and queer discourse and practice continue to push against it. The Women's March in January 2017 is an example of the urgent need for intersectional perspectives. The march was organized to protest Donald Trump's era of misogyny but was largely critiqued for prioritizing white, middle-class, and cis-gender women's needs.[26] The pink pussy hats that many wore during the march, and which became symbolic of it, reflected the cis-sexist and racist misconception that all women have vaginas

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[24] Karma Chávez, *Queer Migration Politics: Activist Rhetoric and Coalitional Possibilities* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2013).

Chávez analyzes Jasbir Puar's critique of intersectionality specifically.

[25] Karma Chávez, *Queer Migration Politics*, 58.

[26] Jenna Wortham, "Who Didn't Go to the Women's March Matters More Than Who Did," *New York Times*, Jan. 24, 2017.

and that all vaginas are pink. Meanwhile, some white cis-women felt that being asked to check their privilege was divisive.[27]

Single-issue perspectives will continue to undermine the lived experiences of individuals who face intersectional violence, while maybe creating something that looks like progress on the surface for those who already benefit from the systems in place. In agreement with Amy L. Brandzel in *Against Citizenship: The Violence of the Normative*, I ground this dissertation on the idea that "a (seemingly) racialized discourse is never just about race, and a gendered discourse is never just about gender."[28] A single-issue lens is therefore not only unhelpful, but it is harmful.

An intersectional analysis allows for a vision of how LGBTQ migrant Latinx women have been on the margins of migration and LGBTQ conversations. Keeping in mind the context of the mass deportations I mention above, the now years-long mainstream gay and lesbian struggle eventually led to the repeal of the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act, or DOMA, on a federal level in 2015. It also led to the repeal of the 1993 Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT) policy in 2010.[29] These laws had invisibilized gays and lesbians within the institutions of marriage and the military. Queer scholars and activists have offered important critiques of these dominant struggles.[30] They point to how discourses of inclusion, of normality, and of

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[27] Farah Stockman, "Women's March on Washington Opens Contentious Dialogues About Race," *New York Times*, Jan. 9, 2017.

[28] Amy L. Brandzel, *Against Citizenship: The Violence of the Normative* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016), 17.

[29] Karma Chávez, *Queer Migration Politics.*

being respectable contributing members of society had become one with neoliberal discourses. These, they suggest, sugarcoat policies that were directly impacting LGBTQ people who were not middle class, white, U.S. citizens, and cis-gender.[31] Their critiques are necessary as to maintain a focus on a liberation that is not selective, but one that looks at the roots of systemic and institutional violence.

I propose to take this critique with caution, understanding that LGBTQ migrants, as well as communities that are racialized and working poor, have always used institutions that are in place in strategic ways for their own survival.[32] Doing otherwise is often not feasible. While same-sex marriage does not change heteropatriarchal and hetero- or homo-normative violence, some people who live in precarious circumstances and who have access to the

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[30] Ryan Conrad, ed. *Against Equality*.

Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?*

Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore, ed. *That's Revolting!*

[31] Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?*

Dean Spade, *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law* (Brooklyn: South End Press, 2011).

[32] Robin D. G. Kelly, in "Congested Terrain: Resistance on Public Transportation," from *Race Rebels: Culture Politics, and the Black Working Class*, writes about Black passengers who resisted public transit segregation in Birmingham, AL in the 1940s. Kelley documents how Black women who worked as nannies would sit in the white-designated areas so that the white children for whom they provided care would not sit in the Black-designated seats. Doing otherwise would likely result in them losing their jobs. Kelley points to how this was a way in which Black women used institutionalized racism as a form of resistance to the racial segregation on public transportation.

Busha Rehman and Daisy Hernández, in *Colonize This! Young Women of Color on Today's Feminism*, write about their experience with institutionalized feminism. Their introduction to it was that which was white, western, and reinforced racist and classist assumptions. They then transformed their feminist views to one with a different vision, one that allowed them to see their mothers as warriors and feminists.

institution, will and have used it for survival purposes. Challenging the mainstream discourses that were exclusionary, and which went behind finally ruling DOMA unconstitutional, does not in any way mean that marginalized individuals and communities who use marriage—or the military—strategically should be shamed for it. When engaging in such acts of shaming, the violence that is already directed to those who are oppressed is ironically perpetuated and reproduced. Using marriage in strategic ways for survival is different from the mainstream discourse that marriage will bring equality to all, or that it will queer or disrupt the institution of marriage.[33] It does not erase the fact that mainstream gay and lesbian discourses and organizations/movements did not show solidarity with the struggles of trans people, migrants, or racialized poor and working class communities. An intersectional analysis is therefore necessary in the critiques of marriage as well.

It was not only mainstream gay and lesbian activism that was limited by single-issue frameworks and that was lacking intersectional analyses. What became institutionally known as queer studies and queer theory spiraled in the same direction. Black feminist scholar Cathy Cohen, in the anthology *Black Queer Studies,* refers to queer studies as predominately engaging in single-issue politics, not fully accounting for the intersections between sexuality and race, patriarchy, and class exploitation.[34] Similarly, Sharon P. Holland challenges the idea that dominant queer theory was the "pioneer" of critiquing identity politics, when Black feminist scholars and activists had already "questioned the myopic identity politics of civil

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[33] My many conversations with colleagues Karen Hanna and Delores Mondragón were key in shifting my view and accounting for how marriage can be, and is, used strategically for survival.

[34] Cathy Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" in *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*, eds. E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 25, 31.

rights and women's activist networks." What queer theory was now doing was "remaking discourse in the image of its rightful owners, whitewashing the product," Holland says.[35] Michael Hames-Garcia, too, offers a critique to dominant queer theory in his contribution to the anthology *Gay Latino Studies: A Critical Reader*. In writing about his experience as a graduate student in the early nineties, when so called groundbreaking queer theoretical texts surfaced, Hames-García states that the term "queer" does not signify a reclaimed term for him "anymore than *gay* does."[36] He documents the erasure of scholars of color, including Cherríe Moraga, Barbara Smith, Audre Lorde, and James Baldwin in the work of theorists like Teresa de Lauretis, Steven Seidman and Judith Butler. White queer theorists, he argues, often "list the texts by white authors first, followed by those by people of color—presumably because most queer theorists first read the texts in that order."[37] This indeed is more telling of white theorists' lack of knowledge and understanding of texts by scholars of color, than theorists of color following the work of white theorists.

The work of queer of color scholars in the last two decades has shaped the field of Queer of Color Critique. José Esteban Muñoz's theorizing of disidentification as a tactic of survival and resistance, Roderick A. Ferguson's critique of sociology as one that regulates sexual difference, therefore regulating Black American lives, David Eng's discussion of queer liberalism within a colorblind moment that erases—or attempts to erase—how

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[35] Sharon P. Holland, "Foreword: 'Home' is a Four Letter Word," in *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*, eds. E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), ix.

[36] Michael Hames-García, "Queer Theory Revisited," in *Gay Latino Studies: A Critical Reader*, eds. Michael Hames-García and Ernesto Javier Martínez (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 19.

[37] Michael Hames-García, "Queer Theory Revisited," 25-27.

sexuality intersects with race, class and globalization, Martin Manalansan's transnational analysis of queer and gay identities, in the specific case of Filipinos, and Monisha Das Gupta's critical analysis of South Asian labor organizations in the U.S. advocating for immigrants rights, without the rhetorical or practical use of citizenship, all offer important multidimensional critiques.[38] These works are among the growing scholarship of queer scholars of color who are utilizing an intersectional lens, often while speaking, theorizing, and analyzing from their own intersectional social positions. They are re-building and expanding critical intersectional scholarship where sexuality, race, gender, and class are analyzed within contexts of capitalism, globalization, neoliberalism, migration, and citizenship. These are also the works on which I build for this dissertation as I unpack the systems of migration, prison and asylum as well as the processes of return and deportation, but also the migration of queer theory into Mexico.

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[38] José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

David Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

Martin F. Manalansan VI, *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

Monisha Das Gupta, *Unruly Immigrants: Rights, Activism, and Transnational South Asian Politics in the United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

Queer Migration: Home as Resistance

These last two systems—migration and citizenship—constitute fields of their own. Scholarship on queer transnational migration, which I consider to be part of Queer of Color Critique, has pointed to different systems that are at play in the lives of LGBTQ migrants. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Lionel Cantú (not published until 2009) and Eithné Luibhéid were two of the scholars to shine light on queer migration.[39] Lionel Cantú's work on Mexican immigrant men's processes of navigating identities and communities in the United States, illustrates that gender and sexuality are often left out of the migration picture.[40] Intersections of sexuality, gender, race, class, and citizenship are very much part of the lives of Mexican immigrant queer men. Eithne Luibhéid's *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border* examines U.S. immigration control systems, exposing U.S. immigration as the "crucial site for the construction and regulation of sexual norms, identities, and behaviors since 1875."[41] Luibhéid makes a strong case for how the U.S. immigration system created the very sexual categories that it then regulated for immigration purposes, including wife, prostitute, and lesbian.[42] The analyses of both queer migration scholars were now providing critical insights on the intersections between gender, sexuality, and migrations. I borrow

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[39] Lionel Cantú was in the process of writing the book manuscript of *The Sexuality of Migration* when his sudden death in 2002 prevented him from finishing. Nancy Naples, who had served as Cantú's dissertation advisor, and Salvador Vidal-Ortiz, fellow graduate student who also works in the area of queer and Latino Studies, collaborated to co-edit and publish Lionel Cantús book in 2009 (Naples &Vidal-Ortiz, xvi).

[40] Lionel Cantú, *The Sexuality of Migration,* eds. Nancy A. Naples and Salvador Vidal-Ortiz.

[41] Eithne Luibhéid, *Entry Denied*, x.

[42] Eithne Luibhéid, *Entry Denied,* xi.

from their work as I analyze systems of migration, prison, and asylum, and how these impact the livelihoods of LGBTQ migrant Latinxs. More recently, Karma Chávez in "Identifying the Needs of LGBTQ Immigrants and Refugees in Southern Arizona," conducts research on the ground with communities directly affected by SB 1070 in Arizona, focusing on their access to different resources, such as healthcare, housing, and work.[43] Her work is particularly helpful as I look at LGBTQ migrant Latinxs access, or lack thereof, to resources, in Los Angeles and Mexico City.

A Global South approach generates further disruptions. Martin Manalansan and Gloria Wekker contradict the growing imperialist, west-centered, classist perspectives that LGBTQ people (how the west defines LGBTQ) could only be safe in the western world. They instead center the visions of non-western and transnational queer experiences. Manalansan critiques the coming out narrative as one that is western and privileged since, as one of his informants shared, if undocumented there are other matters to worry about or hide than being gay.[44] Wekker's work on *mati* life among working class Afro-Surenamese migrant women in the Netherlands complicates questions of naming and identity. The word *mati* "references someone who engages in sexual relationships with persons of the same sex and it is used for both women and men."[45] Wekker argues that white Dutch women associate *mati* with "tradition," while "lesbianism," in contrast, is perceived as "ideologically invested in 'equality'" in terms of income, age, and educational level, portraying *mati* as

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[43] Karma Chávez, "Identifying the Needs of LGBTQ Immigrants and Refugees in southern Arizona," *Journal of Homosexuality* 58.2 (2011): 189-218.

[44] Margin F. Manalansan VI, *Global Divas*, 33-34.

[45] Gloria Wekker, *The Politics of Passion: Women's Sexual Culture in the Afro Surinamese Diaspora* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 178.

"backwards."[46] Bringing forward the lived experiences and visions of LGBTQ people who have largely been made invisible, as well as their own identities and terminologies as individuals who do not fit the western, white, middle-class idea of gay, opens up spaces that allow for a greater vision of LGBTQ experiences and identities. Moreover, this Global South approach allows for a critique of western thought and theory that is migrating to the Global South and which is imposing a set of terminology and ideology that is not always relevant, culturally or linguistically. I offer such a critique in chapter four, arguing that the migration of queer theory into Mexico results in the re-marginalization of already marginalized communities, including migrant LGBTQs but also working poor communities. I thus align my work with LGBTQ migration and transnational scholars who use their work to create a foundation for bigger possibilities of understanding the systems that keep LGBTQ transnational migrants marginalized.

My work contributes to the scholarship on home by looking at how LGBTQ migrant Latinxs engage in processes of creating, re-creating, and maintaining home(s) within systems of anti-home in Los Angeles, California and Mexico City, Mexico. I refer to home as providing a sense of belonging and grounded-ness, while anti-home represents spaces of violence, exclusion, oppression, marginalization, and invisibility. While home can be both an imagined and a geographical space, Yen Le Espiritu points out that immigrants, "in this age of transnational flow of labor, capital, and cultural forms, are both spatially mobile and spatially bounded." Espiritu's work demonstrates that immigrants make use of memory about the homeland in the construction of their new lives and new homes.[47] Memory is certainly

[46] Gloria Wekker, *The Politics of Passion*, 225.

utilized among my narrators to feel at home within their new living context, exemplified in the act of speaking English or Spanglish among the LGBTQ migrant returnees in Mexico, as explained in chapter three, or putting up a Christmas tree like "back home," as discussed in the concluding chapter. However, building on Yen Le Espiritu as well as Gayatri Gopinath's work on the problems with reproducing a nationalist and heteropatriarchal diasporic South Asian home, in chapter one I point to the risks of using memories about the homeland to create new homes.[48] When Charlie, one of the narrators, was sent back to El Salvador by her mother to become heterosexual, her mother appears to show having had internalized the idea of home as one of heterosexual morality. Enduring a nationalist and heteropatriarchal home therefore becomes a great challenge for LGBTQ migrants in addition to the structural forces of anti-home outside their immediate homes, including systems of policing and surveillance, which I also explore in chapter one.

When discussing queer migration, David L. Eng challenges the correlation between home and coming out narratives. He argues that "coming out"—coming from the private to the public space—is often perceived as "coming home," or "arriving home."[49] His work is particularly helpful in chapter two of this dissertation, where I contribute to that critique by bringing forward the oral history of a self-identified Mexicana queer migrant muxer.

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[47] Yen Le Espiritu, *Home Bound: Filipino American Lives Across Cultures, Communities, and Countries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 3.

[48] Yen Le Espiritu, *Home Bound*.

Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

[49] David Eng, "Out Here and Over There: Queerness in Diaspora in Asian American Studies," *Social Context 52/53* 15.3 (1997): 31-52.

Furthermore, Richard T. Rodríguez's work challenges dominant queer perceptions of home.[50] While dominant queer discourses tend to reject family for being heteronormative, Rodríguez explores how queer Latino people incorporate the families in which they were born into the alternative kinship networks they then create. Rodríguez's analysis goes beyond rigid and strict definitions of families and communities to account for their fluidity and constant motion. Scholarship on "home" gives me the tools to analyze strategies of survival and resistance in the concluding chapter, while at the same time bringing forward and privileging narrators' descriptions of homebuilding.

Utilizing Women of Color feminism as my framework, this dissertation advances the scholarly work on transnational and queer migration, neoliberalism, and critiques of dominant queer studies by privileging narrators' narratives and deriving my conclusions through their own accounts.

Terminology and Methodology

Some of the terms that I have used thus far, and which I will continue to use throughout this dissertation are: womxn, muxer, Latinx, queer, LGBT, LGBTQ, LGBTI, and LGBTTTI. In some cases I will use the Spanish word "mujer" or "muxer" as a politicized way to emphasize that I am talking about Latinas. I use the letter "x" to replace certain letters in gendered words, such as "women," "mujer," and "Latina" to "womxn," "muxer," and "Latinx." I do so to highlight the complexity of gender and disrupt gender binarism. Some narrators in this dissertation do not strictly identify as female, but their gender identities vary depending on the circumstances, the space, and time. Gender identities range

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[50] Richard T. Rodríguez, *Next of Kin: The Family in Chicano/a Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

from non-binary, to trans women, femmes, to cis-women, while being differently impacted by the same heteropatriarchal system that boxes them all into the category of “woman.”

Furthermore, my use of the term *queer* varies as well. During my research I came to witness that the term can have different meanings, depending on the context and the situation in which it is being utilized. I therefore cannot offer one concrete definition of queer because my narrators do not always use it in any one particular way. When speaking about *queer*, the following image came to mind:

MEXICAN	ENGLISH
ORALE	I AGREE WITH YOU
ORALE	COME ON!
ORALE	BRING IT ON!
ORALE	YES
ORALE	HURRY UP
ORALE	THAT´S AMAZING
ORALE	I´M FLABBERGASTED
ORALE	THERE YOU GO
ORALE	OK
ORALE	EXORTATION
ORALE	IT´S YOUR TURN
ORALE	GO AHEAD
ORALE	I´M WAITING FOR YOU
ORALE	WATCH IT

VIA 9GAG.COM

Órale is a Spanish word used in Mexico in a variety of situations. Depending on the context, *órale* can signify from, “I agree with you,” to “watch it,” to “go ahead.” In my border-crossing and bilingual Mexican mind, I found the use of *queer* similar to *órale*. Some of my narrators use *queer* as an identity that gives them the space to not label themselves with categories that feel rigid, which can sometimes be the effect of identifying as gay or lesbian, for example. In these cases I use the term *queer* as an identity, but more as a social

position that some narrators occupied at the time of our interview, which can and does shift. Some narrators use *queer* as an identity in strategic ways and as a survival tool to find community with one another and therefore fight isolation. They utilize it to politically organize in similar ways from what Cathy Cohen suggests: as rooted in "shared marginal relationship to dominant power that marginalizes, legitimizes, and privileges" them.[51] Furthermore, I engage with the term as a tool of critique. Aligning with Driskill, Finley, Gilley, and Morgensen I use *queer* as an "oppositional critique of heteronormativity and an interest in the ambiguity of gender and sexuality."[52] I thus use *queer* to challenge heteronormative systems as, "a call to transform, rather than seek accommodation within existing social structures."[53] Inclusion into already oppressive institutions is therefore not a goal of mine. However, as mentioned above, I do not intend to shame anyone who uses institutions as survival strategies. Finally and importantly, I use *queer* as an adjective. When saying "queer migrations" I am referring to migrations that are not only and not always straightforward, heterosexual, and heteronormative. These are migrations that are also "messy" and complicated, so to speak. These are migrations that are *queer,* given the violent systems in place that target vulnerable populations.

In the context of Mexico, the term *queer*, as discussed in chapter four, is developing in ways that are dangerously imperialist, while in some cases it tries to accommodate the

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[51] Cathy Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens," in *Black Queer Studies*, 43.

[52] Qwo-Li Driskill, Chris Finley, and Brian Joseph Gilley, eds. *Queer Indigenous Studies: Critical Interventions in Theory, Politics, and Literature* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2011), 3.

[53] Eithne Luibhéid, "Introduction: Queering Migration and Citizenship," in *Queer Migrations: Sexuality, U.S. Citizenship, and Border Crossings*, eds. Eithne Luibhéid and Lionel Cantú Jr. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), x.

language, time, and space in which it is being used. That said, using *queer* when saying "queer theory," "queer studies," *teoría queer* and *estudios queer,* I am primarily using the term as a dominant academic ideology, which has increasingly become dominant, west-centered, and predominately white.

I do not use *queer* as an umbrella term to encompass all non-heteronormative identities. Ironically, doing so can exclude narrators who do not identify as queer, forcing a western construction of sexuality on those who reject it. Some of my participants identify as lesbian, bisexual, trans, gay, taking distance from the term *queer*, and focusing on the specificities of their non-fixed identities or social positions. I also do not use it as a verb. I am not queering my narrators' experiences or their views about sexuality, gender, and migration. I privilege the ways in which narrators in this dissertation—and people beyond this dissertation—define and understand their own identities, their own politics, and their own lives. I will therefore often use the acronyms LGBT, LGBTQ, and LGBTI, as well as the specific identities narrators use, to refer to non-heteronormative identities, rather than using *queer* as an umbrella term. I use LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans*) in contexts where I know my narrators explicitly do not identify as *queer*. Similarly, I use LGBTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex), and sometimes LGBTTTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Transgender, Travesti, Intersex) to specifically discuss the context in Mexico. LGBTI is the acronym that is most often utilized in Mexico, although LGBT is also used.

I utilized oral history and participant ethnography in both Los Angeles and Mexico City. At the request of some narrators, some first names used in this dissertation are real while others are pseudonyms. However, I do not always specify which are pseudonyms and

which are real throughout the text. I conducted eighteen oral histories of LGBTQ Latinx migrants in Los Angeles, whose countries of origin were El Salvador, Costa Rica, Honduras, Guatemala, Peru, and Mexico. Their migration status ranged from being undocumented, having been granted DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), being in the process of receiving—or having been granted—asylum, to being residents or citizens of the United States. Some were community organizers, college students, workers, and a combination of these. Most narrators spoke English, except two. Their ages ranged from eighteen to fifty years old. From the eighteen oral histories of LGBTQ migrant muxeres I conducted in Los Angeles, for the purpose of this dissertation I only use four (in chapter one and two), as a way to provide a space for these narrators to speak their truths at length.[54] These four narrators, while they all have unique stories, spoke of systems of power that impacted most LGBTQ migrant Latinxs I interviewed. Although I provide analyses of the systems that keep them marginalized, I intend for their own voices and perspectives to speak to their own experiences.

During my time conducting fieldwork in Los Angeles, California, I also attended events on the various intersections of migration, gender, and sexuality. Some events were organized by communities highly involved in the UndocuQueer movement, which was created by and for queer undocumented youth. Other events, gatherings, and workshops were organized by CHIRLA, the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles.

In fall 2014, I relocated to Mexico City to conduct oral histories and ethnographic work, while serving as a visiting scholar at UNAM, the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. I interviewed five LGBTI migrant women who had returned to Mexico, voluntarily

[54] I plan to use all other interviews when I publish this dissertation as a book. I will also use some of the interviews in peer-reviewed articles.

or by deportation. It was much more difficult to find people to interview in Mexico City than in Los Angeles for several reasons. As a Mexican migrant living in the United States, I had not been in Mexico in almost eleven years. I therefore had no networks or contacts that could in some way assist me in connecting with LGBTQ/I returnees and start a "snowball" method. While the Gender Studies program at UNAM informed me about different events, gatherings, groups, and organizations in the city, they did not have connections with groups or organizations that worked with LGBTQ migrant returnees specifically. Every time I attended a gathering, I faced the same situation: conversations about genders and sexualities did not address migration, and those about migration did not address genders and sexualities. Gender was addressed in terms of men and women migrants. Undoubtedly, such discussions are important and necessary, but I noticed a gap that did not address LGBTQ migrants at all. It was not until I attended a conference by Los *Otros* Dreamers that I began to meet LGBTQ people who had been migrants in the United States, and who were now living in Mexico via deportation or their own decision to return. This was also where I confirmed my suspicion that LGBTQ migrant returnees were certainly in Mexico City (and other parts of the country), but there were more urgent matters they needed to attend in their personal lives than attending conferences or being interviewed. I was in touch via email with two women; one identified as trans and the latter was a cis self-identified lesbian woman. However, due to their time constrains we were never able to meet in person, or to speak on Skype or phone.

Los *Otros* Dreamers is a project that documents the experiences of migrant returnees in Mexico.[55] It provides different resources and information to *retornados,* or returnees. The

[55] Jill Anderson and Nin Solis, *Los Otros Dreamers* (Ciudad de México: Offset Santiago, 2014).

name of the project originally came from many of the youth who were deported back to Mexico and who, if they had stayed in the U.S., would have benefited from the Dream Act. In the last several years, however, it has shifted to emphasize that all migrant returnees can also dream in Mexico. I attended additional academic and non-academic talks about migration, including gatherings organized by Migrantes LGBT, who are a group of Central American migrants residing in Mexico. They are primarily men who migrated to Mexico. Some had intended to migrate to the United States and could not cross the U.S.-Mexico border. I also conducted ethnographic work at different self-proclaimed queer performances and gatherings in the city, organized by Casa Gomorra, Musas de Metal, Groupo de Mujeres Gay, and Diana J. Torres la *Pornoterrorista*.

I follow in the steps of oral historians Horacio Roque Ramírez, Dolores Bernal Delgado, and Maylei Blackwell. They use oral history as a way to disrupt the dominant narratives of migration and sexuality that leaves out queer migrants, the Chicanx movement that tends to centralize Chicano men and leave out Chicanas, and the feminist waves that present women of color feminism as responding to white women, when feminists of color had been offering critiques outside the waves narrative.[56] I, too, aim at disrupting dominant narratives of larger systems of power, such as systems of migration, neoliberalism, heteropatriarchy, and western conceptions of gender and sexuality. History is developing as

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[56] Horacio Roque Ramírez, "Memory and Mourning: Living Oral History With Queer Latinos and Latinas in San Francisco," in *Oral History: Public Memories*, eds. Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008).

Dolores Bernal Delgado, "Grassroots Leadership Reconceptualized: Chicana Oral Histories and the 1968 East Los Angeles School Blowouts," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* 19.2 (1998): 113-142.

Maylei Blackwell, *Chicana Power! Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011).

we speak, erasing the lived experiences of LGBTQ migrant womxn, including Latinxs. The purpose of this dissertation is to work against that very erasure and to have narrators' own voices speak to the systemic violence that keeps them marginalized and which, as Audre Lorde would put it, never meant for them to survive.

This work is not only a contribution to queer and transnational migration, but it is also a methodological contribution to women of color feminism, taking my conclusions through my narrator's insights, and through my narrators' experiences that are too often neglected in the macro presentations of migration, genders, and sexualities. Moreover, my use of oral history is not only to contradict normative narratives, but it is also a feminist methodology about listening. I borrow from *Fleshing the Spirit: Spirituality and Activism in Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous Women's Lives*, edited by Irene Lara and Elisa Facio in this particular use of oral history. Contributors to that collection speak of listening to the voice of trauma (Berenice Dimas), to the body and its experiences (Brenda Sendejo), and to the inner self (Irene Lara).[57] I, the researcher, listened to my narrators' *historias* when they spoke of crossing borders, sexual violence, deportations, exclusion based on their non-normative positions, and the trauma that comes with all these experiences. This approach has deep roots in Women of Color feminism. Audre Lorde once said,

> Our *real power* comes from the personal; our real insights about living come from that deep knowledge within us that arises from our feelings […] Our feelings are our most genuine paths to knowledge. They are chaotic,

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[57] Elisa Facio and Irene Lara, eds. *Fleshing the Spirit: Spirituality and Activism in Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous Women's Lives* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014).

> sometimes painful, sometimes contradictory, but they come from deep within us. And we must key into those feelings and begin to extrapolate from them, examine them for new ways of understanding our experiences. This is how new visions begin, how we begin to posit a future nourished by the past.[58]

Similarly, Cherríe Moraga spoke about a theory in the flesh, “where the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity.”[59] *This Bridge Called My Back* was a prime example of politicizing intersectional personal experiences by women of color. The legacy of women of color feminism that prioritizes personal experience is what drives this dissertation to continue to theorize based on the very personal insights of those who are directly impacted by institutional and systemic violence. This dissertation is an attempt to bring to the forefront the voices of queer migrant Latinx women so readers can hear *from* them how *they* experience migration, anti-immigration policies and sentiments, deportations, return to Mexico, desires to migrant, dominant ideologies, community-building, and their day-to-day struggles in Los Angeles and Mexico City.

Chapters

This dissertation is divided into four chapters, plus the introduction and conclusion. Chapter one, “Stories of Survival: LGBTQ Migrant Latinx Women in Los Angeles,

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[58] Claudia Tate, “Audre Lorde | Claudia Tate 1982,” in *Conversations with Audre Lorde*, ed. Joan Wylie Hall (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 91.

[59] Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Watertown: Persephone Press, 1981), 23.

California," analyzes migration, prison, and asylum as systems that produce and perpetuate violence in the lives of LGBTQ migrant Latinxs living in Los Angeles, California. I bring forward the oral histories of Charlie, Camilx, and Bamby, as I discuss how capitalism works in conjunction with heteropatriarchy, racism, and exploitation to keep LGBTQ migrant Latinxs invisible. Chapter two, "Not Coming Out, but Building Home: An Oral History in Re-Conceptualizing a Queer Migrant Home," presents the story of a self identified queer Mexicana migrant, whose embodied experiences contradict the idea that "coming out" is a "coming home." She instead demonstrates how she builds a sense of home through the conditions under which she lives, challenging the erasure of queer migrant narratives within dominant discourses. Chapter three, "Queer Migrant Women Returnees: Survival Strategies and Home Building in Mexico," presents the oral histories of four LGBTQ Mexicana women who were migrants in the United States and who were living in Mexico City at the time of our interview. The four oral histories present how U.S. immigration control has been shaped by neoliberalism, criminalizing and deporting LGBTQ migrants. Their voices demonstrate resistance to the systemic violence they encounter, while engaging in processes of homebuilding in their everyday lives. Chapter four, "*Queer, Cuir, Joto, Marica?* Creating Discursive Queer Homes in Mexico," is based on my participant ethnographic work in Mexico City and my analysis of online primary sources, such as Facebook pages, radio shows, recorded talks, and artists' websites. From my ethnographic work, I analyze a Día de los Muertos party at a self-proclaimed queer space called Casa Gomorra, Judith Butler's influence in Mexico, and the politics behind publishing translated feminist texts from English into Spanish. I argue that the *estudios queer* and *teoría queer* growing in Mexico are becoming an elitist and imperialist field of study, not providing a home of resistance to those

who face intersectional marginalizations. Finally, I conclude this dissertation with a note on home and homebuilding as a practice of resistance to the systemic violence to which LGBTQ migrant Latinx women are exposed in their everyday lives.

CHAPTER 1

Stories of Survival: LGBTQ Migrant Latinx Women in Los Angeles, California

On October 19, 2013, the UCLA Labor Center published the video, "Dream Summer-Queer Cohort" on Youtube.[60] In it, viewers get a glimpse of Ana's story—a self-identified queer immigrant muxer. The video shows streets and murals of San Francisco, California, taking us through a journey with Ana, who rides a bus while briefly telling her story as a migrant in the United States. The scenery quickly changes as she recounts her experience using public restrooms, where her gender presentation has always been policed for being masculine presenting and for using the "wrong" bathroom. As the camera shifts to the Castro, the "gay district" in San Francisco, Ana narrates, "In Northern California, queerness is trendy, yet normative gay districts do not cater to my needs as a young woman, low income, undocumented laborer, and student political activist."[61] Ana's story, as someone with intersectional experiences, needs to be made visible as to point to the many forms of systemic violence she and other LGBTQ migrants face.

In this chapter, I analyze systems of power that perpetuate violence in the lives of LGBTQ migrant Latinxs. I document the voices of three LGBTQ migrant Latinxs who, at the time of our interviews in fall 2013, were residing in Los Angeles, California: Charlie, Camilx, and Bamby. The first two, Charlie and Camilx are pseudonyms. While they all

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[60] "UCLA Labor," Youtube, accessed February 13, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-1YH_SKUGBY.

[61] "To promote leadership development for immigrant rights leaders, strengthen commitment within organizations to advance the rights of immigrants, build a multi-generational social-justice movement, encourage intersectional organizing and provide resources for participants to fund their educational goals."

share the social positions of LGBTQ, women-identified (at the time of the interviews), migrants, who are from the working poor, the womxn in this chapter do not represent *all* LGBTQ Latinx migrants living in the United States. Nonetheless, their experiences do demonstrate a great deal about how systemic violence works, and the ways in which it is embedded in societal norms and institutions.

Practicing what Cherríe Moraga calls "theory in the flesh," the narrators' own words provide the theory necessary to explain their lived experiences with systemic violence. Moraga defines theory in the flesh as, "One where the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity."[62] With that definition, in the following pages I discuss how the systems of migration, prison, and asylum have impacted Bamby, Camilx, and Charlie in their constant search for home and sense of belonging. I argue that these three systems represent an anti-home for all narrators. This chapter, then, speaks to how migration, prison, and asylum work in conjunction with heteropatriarchy, racism, and exploitation to keep LGBTQ migrant Latinxs invisibilized and removed from possible resources, often resulting in oppressions within family and society norms.

Navigating Queerness in Transition

All three narrators have engaged in the process of identifying with non-normative genders and sexualities. Martin Manalansan reminds us that it is not possible to only look at genders and sexualities individually without understanding how these are "disciplined by social institutions and practices that normalize and naturalize heterosexuality and

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[62] Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, Eds, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (New York City: Kitchen Table Press, 1981), 23.

heterosexual practices including marriage, family, and biological reproduction by marginalizing persons, institutions, or practices that deviate from these norms."[63] All narrators speak to their experiences with gender and sexuality as these intersect with various social positions of race, class, ethnicity, and citizenship, while also navigating different transitions and processes of home searching and building.

Charlie

Charlie was thirty-three years old at the time of our interview. She was born in El Salvador and migrated with an aunt to the United States at the age of nine. Her mother was already in the United States when she migrated. At age twelve, she had to return to El Salvador for a couple of weeks to then re-enter the U.S. and receive her U.S. residence permit. As a teenager, when she told her mother she was attracted to women, her mother sent her back to El Salvador again for a year. Charlie, at the time of our interview, identified as Latina and Salvadorian, as female, and lesbian.

Charlie narrates having had crushes on girls from a young age. However, she never disclosed them to anyone, including herself. She believes her mother had suspicions when Charlie was in middle school, often asking tricky questions so she would "confess." When Charlie was fifteen, during a meeting with the school counselor, she finally told her mother she was attracted to other girls. Being with another adult made her feel less afraid to say it to her mother. She said it all in English too, always finding it more difficult to share feelings in Spanish. The following day after coming back from work, her mother told Charlie to "pack

[63] Martin F. Manalansan IV, "Queer Intersections: Sexuality and Gender in Migration Studies," *International Migration Review* 40.1 (2006): 225.

[her] things." She was sending Charlie back to El Salvador for one year as a measure for Charlie to become heterosexual.

> I begged her to please *please* don't send me back [to El Salvador]. She wasn't nice about it either, she was kind of a dick, very like, "You need to go back and you know, you're gonna be in a different environment, you're going be able to do some spiritual research, and you're going to go to spiritual retreats, it's going to be like one long retreat and then you'll be back." And I was like, "But when? I don't want to go back there, I want to be here with you." And she was like, nope. So I went back and I was really distraught for weeks. I was living with my grandmother, one of her daughters, her husband, her kids, and the son of the aunt that brought me here [to the U.S.], who she also had to leave behind when he was three. Eventually I went to school, and of course, it was an all-girls Catholic school… […] Only a couple of my friends in school knew [that I liked girls] there, a couple of my really good friends. There was this one girl, she was a couple of grades below me, and she was obviously a dyke. I mean, she had the walk and everything. She was a cool little kid but she got caught in the bathroom doing something with some girl, and at the beginning of the day in school they would line us up in the basketball court and of course they totally shamed her, you know, they talked about what an act against God that was.

Charlie was surprised at how different cultural norms around women were in El Salvador in comparison to the United States: "They were always touching each other and stuff. I was like, this is great!" However, it was something new for her and which made her feel embarrassed and uncomfortable because, "Sometimes I would get aroused […] they didn't know and when they knew they would turn weird." Her mother sent her back to El Salvador to "fix" her, so to speak, to turn her straight. For some time Charlie convinced herself that she was in love with a man while at the same time trying to "pray it away." A year later, before her residence permit expired, which allowed her to be out of the U.S. for a maximum of one year, Charlie returned to the United States.[64]

Societal heteropatriarchal norms impacted Charlie's mother, a working class woman who migrated from a predominately Catholic country like El Salvador to the United States searching for financial resources. She received overwhelming messages that being straight is the only right way to be. Having migrated to the United States for economic reasons she then used migration in the opposite direction to try to morally "fix" her daughter. The United States represented the land of economic opportunity but also the land of immorality, which could only be remedied by sending Charlie back home. In *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures,* Gayatri Gopinath defines "home" within nationalist diasporic discourses as, "a sacrosanct space of purity, tradition, and authenticity, embodied by the figure of the 'woman' who is enshrined at its center, and marked by patriarchal gender and sexual arrangements."[65] Similarly, Yen Le Espiritu makes a

[64] If Charlie had stayed out of the country longer than a year, she would have lost her U.S. residency.

[65] Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 14.

connection between home and morality among Filipino immigrants in the United States. She, however, conceptualizes morality—female morality, specifically—as a site where Filipinos see themselves as superior to the dominant group. Espiritu defines female morality within Filipino communities as, "women's dedication to their families and sexual restraint." She argues that it is within morality that "economically and politically dominated groups can construct the dominant group as the other and themselves as superior."[66] It is possible that Charlie's mother embraced the nationalist conceptions of home that Gopinath discusses as a tool to fight what Espiritu describes as a constant othering in the United States, due to her economic, racialized, and migrant position. Both impacted Charlie's mother, who then also reproduced such constructs of home to her daughter, Charlie. She accepted the idea of a perfectly heterosexual "home" that would take away any unacceptable behavior she believed her daughter might have acquired from living in the United States.

Charlie's mother's economic situation along with heteropatriarchal norms influenced her decision to send her back to El Salvador as a teenager, while she stayed in the U.S. to work. They all could not migrate back due to economic necessity, as they would have found it more difficult to financially support themselves in El Salvador. She sent Charlie back by herself to regain the heterosexual morals she believed she had lost in the U.S. This of course ignores the reality that, as Charlie narrates, there were "gay girls" at her school in El Salvador and in the country.

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[66] Yen Le Espiritu, *Home Bound: Filipino American Lives Across Cultures, Communities, and Countries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 160.

Camilx

Camilx's story is quite different from Charlie's. Since the interview, Camilx has transitioned to male-identified, therefore, for the remaining of this chapter (and dissertation) I will use male pronouns to refer to him. He was twenty-six years old when the interview took place. Camilx is from Chiapas, Mexico and identifies as Indigenous, Mayan specifically. He migrated to the United States in 1999 with his mother and siblings, looking for economic opportunities that they were not finding in Mexico. He was thirteen years old and has not been back since. He grew up in Chiapas, in a living environment that was friendly toward LGBTQ communities. He and his family lived in a bar, where his mother worked, and were often surrounded by LGBT people. He pointed out it is hard to say whether he always knew he was queer because, given how accepted non-normative genders and sexualities were in his immediate environment, he never paid much attention to it. Everyone, especially his mother, embraced and welcomed Camilx's non-normativity.

> I didn't come out. My mom sat me down and told me, "You're gay" (laughs). I tell this story all the time because I was so angry, I was like, "Mom you can't tell me this, this is my privacy, what are you doing." She was like, "Don't worry, we already told everybody, everybody's cool." She was like, "We're going to go have dinner, you can bring your girlfriend, who's your girlfriend? You can bring her." I just remember being like, "This is my privacy! My brother has a girlfriend and you don't do this!" you know. But of course now I think, "Wow that's very different… […]" My brother is also very queer friendly. His best friend is this very feminine guy who is married

> to another man. My brother's wife… her dad is gay, and very openly gay. My sister's bi and very openly bi… […] The only thing she [my mother] told me when she sat me down was, "Be careful 'cause it's going to be really tough. This house is always going to be a place of safety, but outside of this house, there are dangers." And that is very true.

Camilx's experiences contradict ideas that it is within the home that anti-LGBT violence always takes place. While that is certainly the case for many people, Camilx's story offers another narrative. His home has been his family, who have loved and supported him all along. Richard Rodríguez, in *Next of Kin*, discusses the concept and discourse of queer familia, which often implies that in order to live queerness comfortably and away from oppression, queer people need to get away from their immediate families and create their own chosen families—their "queer" families. Rodríguez, however, points out the importance of creating a queer familia within kin networks. It does not always have to be a different family, isolated from the place of growing up.[67] That is what Camilx has done. His family includes the people in his life, the communities he creates with friends and comrades, but also his mother and siblings, who have never rejected him or his queerness.

Camilx shares,

> I grew up being surrounded by queer people, mostly trans women and this particularly very masculine woman. So I remember seeing them talk and laugh, and my mother was always very loving, so when the massacre

[67] Richard T. Rodriguez, *Next of Kin: The Family in Chicano/a Cultural Politics* (Duke University Press Books, 2009), 176.

> happened she lost a lot of her friends, and my mother herself grew up surrounded by queer people. So it was sort of generations of very queer friendly people. I don't think it came as a surprise to my mother that I was very gay, like seeing me grow up. I used to wear my brother's clothing and that was totally fine. It wasn't like, "Oh no, you can't because you're a girl." It wasn't anything like that.

Although Camilx grew up living in a safe home environment that welcomed his full self, he knew that outside of his home there were extreme forms of violence taking place. In the quote above he makes reference to the violence that LGBT people experience in Chiapas. According to the report "Informe especial sobre ejecuciones en Chiapas" (Special Report on the Murders of Chiapas), by the *Center of Human Rights Fray Bartolomé de las Casas*, published in 1999, eleven gay people were reported killed from 1991 to 1993. However, it may be safe to assume there were additional attacks that might have gone unreported. The victims of such anti-LGBT violence had similar backgrounds and were murdered in similar ways, leading the Center to believe it was a wave of anti-gay violence that involved the state.[68] For example, on June 8, 1991, three people that the report calls "gay men" were found dead on the highway that connects San Cristóbal de las Casas with Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas. They were shot multiple times with automatic weapons, and they all had similar characteristics: they were young, ranging from nineteen to twenty-two years old, they were

[68] "Informe Especial Sobre Ejecuciones en Chiapas," *Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de las Casas,* (1998), 4.

all sex workers, and finally, they were described as "transvestites."[69] The language the report uses, describing the victims as gay men wearing women's clothing, suggests that they might have been trans women who labored in the sex industry. In a different case where "gay men" were shot, witnesses identified the shooter as a former employee of the *policía judicial* (the judicial police). The report states investigations on these cases were completely suspended.

Such was the context of the city where Camilx lived during his childhood. A wave of compounded violence toward his communities was present, from being queer, poor, and Indigenous. That was the reality "out there," while within Camilx's immediate living environment showed a drastic contrast. He further reflected that while he felt safe in his home, this violence was tangible, along with the oppression he always directly faced from his experiences with being Indigenous in Mexico, being an immigrant person of color in the U.S., and living in poverty in both countries.

Bamby

Bamby is a trans woman from Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico. She was forty-four years old at the time of our interview in 2013, and was the president of the Coalición Trans Latina, or the Trans Latina Coalition. She has been living in the United States for over twenty years, since the age of seventeen when she first migrated in the mid 1980s. She was deported several times, and each time she made the trip back to California.

> [I crossed] through the beach, other times por el cerro, jumping el borde, the big ol' wall, but I jumped it, and I ran and all that. So yeah, there were

[69] "Informe Especial Sobre Ejecuciones en Chiapas," 5.

> multiple ways. Being that I'm a trans person, it was a scary situation because the way you would be able to come across with help of some coyotes, was promising sexual favors, or actually being subjected to being violated physically. If you don't, you don't know what could happen. Like, I didn't know my way, it's kind of scary. You just have to do it.[70]

Once in the United States, Bamby lived with her father in central California. Later, she moved to a small town in northern California, where she experienced constant labor exploitation. She would work overtime but would not get paid the extra hours. Because she came with the "American Dream" in mind, to better the situation of her family, her mother specifically, she would "put up with it."[71] A couple of years later, she moved to Los Angeles, California, where she has lived since.

In Bamby's case, as a trans woman, her gender identity has particularly been a journey. She used to identify as gay, and it was later in her life that she began to identify as trans, not because she was confused about her gender, but because of the lack of information available to her that would give her the tools to name her gender the way she felt it.

> I started identifying as trans, I would say later in my life. First I didn't really understand the concept of being trans or queer. There was a point in my life where I identified as gay. But that was because, [it was] kind of what I knew in some ways, but also kind of what people knew—how other people

[70] *Por el cerro*: by the mountains

[71] Bamby Salcedo, in interview with the author, July 29, 2014.

> identified me. I sort of went with that, it was easier for people to understand in some ways. I wouldn't question that. Obviously, I didn't feel I was a gay person. I think in some ways I felt I was more queer. Even back then, that term wasn't even coined. So it was easier for people to understand and for me also…

The process of identifying as a woman came later.

> Ever since I was little I felt different, but obviously I didn't know what it was. Since I didn't really have the support of my family, I just never even tried to figure it out. Because of that I got involved in drugs very little, at a very young age. I was like eight years old when I started sniffing glue. I know it's related to that. As I've been growing older, I've been able to understand the root cause of things, so now I understand that was one of the reasons why I sought support in drugs. I needed to get away from my reality.

In this day and age, there is still not enough available and accessible information about trans experiences, especially working class trans women of color. The misogyny, transphobia, and cissexism that trans women face daily continues to invisibilize their struggles. Julia Serano, trans woman who wrote the manifesto *Whipping Girl: A Transexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*, sees the marginalization of femininity as crucial in the invisibility of trans women. She suggests, "The idea that femininity is subordinate to masculinity dismisses women as a whole and shapes virtually all popular myths and

stereotypes about trans women."[72] In other words, feminine women, including many trans women, tend to be perceived as weak and vulnerable, in comparison to the perceived strong masculinity, perpetuating trans misogyny at large.[73] Moreover, Kortney Ryan Ziegler and Naim Rasul, in *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves*, point out that trans people of color are some of the most vulnerable members of the trans community, trans women of color being at the top of the list of individuals who are murdered every year.[74]

Bamby Salcedo was the co-investigator of the report *TransVisible: Transgender Latina Immigrants in U.S. Society*, published in 2013, a contribution to the recent volume of work on trans experiences. This report documented the experiences of trans Latina immigrants, presenting survey responses from 101 trans Latina women across the United States. It found great disadvantages in terms of identification, employment, housing, health care, and immigration status.[75] Bamby was at the forefront of the report, presenting it in different U.S. cities. Additionally, a documentary film on Bamby's life appeared in 2014.

It is no wonder that Bamby had little point of reference when she was exploring her gender identity as a young trans woman in her late teens and early twenties. The works discussed above have only appeared in the last several years—and she herself was central in creating such visibility, along with other trans people who are bringing attention to their own

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[72] Julia Serano, *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity* (Emeryville: Seal Press, 2007), 5-60.

[73] Julia Serano, *Whipping Girl*, 4.

[74] Ryan Ziegler Kortney and Naim Rasul, "Race, Ethnicity, and Culture," in *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves: A Resource for the Transgender Community*. Ed. Erickson-Schroth, Laura (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). Kindle.

[75] Karla M. Padrón and Bamby Salcedo, *TransVisible: Transgender Latina Immigrants in U.S. Society* (2013): 4.

struggles and life experiences. As a poor and working class migrant, she had no access to this kind of information.

Queer Migrant Bodies within the Prison and Asylum Systems

Lack of information and resources, and a set of structures and systems that directly affect LGBTQ migrants impacted all three narrators as they searched for a home (or something that resembled a home) in the United States. Two such systems are the asylum and the prison systems. Prison and immigration are strongly linked; Angela Davis indicates the prison industrial complex includes jails, prisons, Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention centers, as well as military detention centers.[76] She documents that in 2002 alone, "There were 157,979 people incarcerated in these institutions [incarceration facilities], including approximately twenty thousand people whom the state holds for immigration violations."[77] Moreover, asylum seekers who are awaiting their cases to be resolved, as well as those whose applications have been denied, are often placed in detention centers.[78] These systems also impact people who are not in detention, but who live under its surveillance while undocumented in the United States. In "LGBTQ Immigrants and Refugees in Southern Arizona," Karma Chávez discusses the difficulties that LGBTQ migrants specifically face in seeking services in the state of Arizona. The harassment at the hands of different

[76] Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003), Kindle location 1180.

[77] Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, Kindle location 86.

[78] Vance Guerra, Crystal and Gabriel M. Schivone, "From Suffering to Detention: Why does the U.S. put Asylum Seekers Behind Bars?" *The Guardian*, 13 October 2015, accessed April 15, 2016, http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/oct/13/why-us-put-asylum-seekers-behind-bars.

enforcement agents, including raids from ICE, Border Patrol checkpoints in their neighborhoods, and constant racial profiling, is a constant fear.[79] "Due to a history of law enforcement profiling of LGBTQs, immigrants, and people of color, LGBTQ migrants find themselves at the unfortunate crossroads in relation to the law," she notes.[80] Queer migrants are often targeted for being "undesirable" people in the United States, with their bodies and movements consistently policed.

Bamby was one of many migrants who experienced surveillance, as her gender identity, racialized body, and labor made her an easy target of criminalization. Bamby narrates finding other trans women in Los Angeles, California, finally feeling at home in their presence, and finding a community where she had previously felt isolated. Her new community was trans women who did sex work for a living, and who were mostly undocumented.

> [Before moving to LA] My life was work, getting high and going to sleep, that was really all I did. There wasn't really a sense of community. There were people I would get high with, but I couldn't be me. It wasn't until I came to LA… I came here practically by myself. I was 19. I started my transition, I started hanging out with the girls—the girls that I knew were all on the streets—this is where I found actually my sense of community […].

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[79] Karma Chávez, "LGBTQ Immigrants and Refugees in Southern Arizona," *Journal of Homosexuality* 58 (2011): 194.

[80] Karma Chávez, "LGBTQ Immigrants," 207.

> This is where I could be myself. This is when I started transitioning little by little.

Bamby continues:

> That's where I belonged […]. The people that I associated myself with was people from the streets. So I was involved in the street economy. I was doing crime […]. I was doing sex work. I was involved in drug addiction, in the drug trade. That was the community I was associated with. Because of that I went to prison four different times. I went to the county jail multiple times.

Now that Bamby had a community with whom she felt comfortable being herself, she was also in a highly vulnerable position—she was being subjected to the violence from the criminal justice system. Bamby was in and out of prison between the ages of nineteen and her thirties, doing a total of four prison terms. She was deported each of these times, but was able to cross the border back in to the United States every one of those times. The last time she was in Mexico was 2001. While in prison, she experienced physical and sexual assault, humiliation by inmates and guards, and was put in solitary confinement multiple times, sometimes for up to six months. She narrates an incident of harassment with a fellow inmate:

> [The] first time I was in prison… it's very racialized… so the thing is that I'm Mexicana, so, like I was supposed to be hanging out with los paisas, which I did. But in this particular group there was someone who was from

> the same town that I was from, and so he felt very disrespected and se sentía avergonzado de que I was where I was from, and that I was also trans, and that I was also part of the group… that I was supposed to and forced to be with. It wasn't really by choice. He kept telling me for me to change. He would say things like, "Paisa no está bien lo que está haciendo, paisa ya déjese de mamadas," you know? Me decía, "Está bajando bandera." It's like, you're putting the town down. At first I thought he was playing, because that's how I wanted to take it, saying like, "Oh don't trip, it's all good." Le decía, "ay no se agüite, paisa, todo está bien" y no sé qué. This happened in a period of a month. Every time he would see me he was like that, [telling me] for me to change who I was.[81]

With tears in her eyes and a shaky voice, Bamby remembers and reflects on her experience in prison, sharing what it meant for her to survive in there as a trans woman:

> I think the biggest challenge for me was to be who I was, being that up until I was 19 I couldn't be who I was. So then I got to LA and was able to be myself. And then I went to prison. For this person to tell me for me to go back to where I came from in some ways, I obviously wasn't going to do that. So my reaction after I saw it was starting to get serious, I started standing up

[81] *Paisa* is a term often used when people are from the same town, city, or country.
Se sentía avergonzada de que: Felt embarrassed about.
'Paisa no está bien lo que está haciendo: Paisa, what you're doing is wrong.
Paisa ya déjese de mamadas: Paisa, stop with the bullshit.
Le decía, "Ay no se agüite, paisa, todo está bien" y no sé qué: I would say, "Don't trip, *paisa*, everything is going to be okay," or whatever.

> for myself—saying things like, “What are you talking about? Don’t trip, just take care of your business, take care of yourself,” you know. One time we were out in the yard… he had planned this, right […]. He had a gardening tool hidden, like, behind a wall. He had access to that because he was a gardener at the yard. I was playing and he grabbed it, and came after me and started hitting me with it. I obviously defended myself to the best of my ability. That was one incident that happened. I was beaten up pretty hard, but I fought, and then after that we had to fight with home knives, you know, because it got to that point. It got to the point to where it was either him or I who would stay. We got down and… I mean… I’ve been pretty fortunate in my life that I’m still here…

Structural factors forced Bamby to live on the streets, and to engage in survival jobs. For Bamby, sex work and the drug trade were survival forms of labor, not only because they were sources of income, but also because that was where she found a sense of community and belonging. The criminalization of survival labor, including sex work and drug trade, on top of the lack of resources available to trans women, create the conditions for arrest, being taken to prison, face violence while incarcerated, and in the case of Bamby and many other undocumented migrants, being deported. What she experienced in and outside prison exemplifies how trans women are structurally the targets of violence. Trans people of color face continuous processes of dehumanization, which are both the cause *and* the effect of the violence they encounter on a daily basis.

The diagram, "Trans Immigrants Disproportionately Subject to Deportation and Detention Suffer Special Gender-Related Harms in These Processes," from the Sylvia Rivera Law Project (SRLP) website, illustrates how systematic violence targets trans immigrants through detention and deportation.[82]

[82] "About SRLP," *Sylvia Rivera Law Project*, accessed Novembr 9, 2014, http://srlp.org/about/.

Trans Immigrants Disproportionately Subject to Deportation and Detention, Suffer Special Gender-Related Harms in these Processes

Barriers to Getting any Legal Immigration Status:

Employment-based immigration not available because of job discrimination

Family-based immigration not available because trans people's family members often reject them, trans marriages not seen as valid, chosen and extended family not recognized

Asylum and other claims often not available because of lack of access to trans-friendly legal help, less connections with immigrant communities to get information combined with strict timelines, bias and harassment from immigration officers

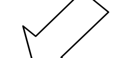
Criminalization of Trans People:

Most convictions and some arrests can make people deportable, even if they have status

Trans people falsely arrested for lack of proper identity documents or for using bathroom

Police profiling of trans people as violent, prostitutes

Committing survival crimes because lack access to legal employment or education (sex work, drugs, theft, etc.)



Trans immigrants likely to be detained and/or deported:

Trans people disproportionately HIV positive, if from country where no access to HIV meds, deportation is death sentence. Also, deportation can lead to serious transphobic violence, persecution, and imprisonment once in home country.

In detention trans people often isolated and/or targeted for rape, harassment, abusive searches and other violence by staff and other detainees. Gender misclassified based on genitals in sex segregated system.

Can't access hormones and other medical treatments while detained.
Forced to change gendered characteristics of appearance (cut hair, give up prosthetics, etc.)
Results in mental anguish and increased violence because appearance may conform even less to gender identity.

The Sylvia Rivera Law Project is an organization in New York City that works to improve access of low-income people and people of color who are transgender, intersex, or gender non-conforming to health, social, and legal services. SRLP seeks to "increase the political voice and visibility" of these communities.[83] The diagram demonstrates that trans immigrants are seldom able to regularize their immigration status through the options that are available, which are employment-based, family-based, and asylum claims. Employment-based claims do not always work for trans immigrants due to job discrimination. Family-based claims are not always an option either, as trans immigrants are often ostracized by their families, resulting in not having strong familial ties and also due to trans marriages not being perceived as valid. Finally, filing for asylum can be difficult as well because legal advice and resources are not always trans-friendly.

The diagram shows that trans immigrants are vulnerable to criminalization. For example, a conviction can result in deportation, "even if they have status." It is common for trans people to be harassed and detained merely for using what is often perceived as the "wrong" bathroom and for lacking legal documentation that can identify them. Moreover, the diagram informs that trans people can and are criminalized for survival crimes. That is, they face criminalization for engaging in sex work, theft, and drugs, which are some of the few options available to economically survive, precisely due to lack of legal documentation, job discrimination, and having little-to-no family support.

The lack of access to resources that can help regulating their immigration status combined with the too common criminalization of trans people results in the detention and/or deportation of trans immigrants. The detention and deportation of trans immigrants literally

[83] "About SRLP," *Sylvia Rivera Law Project*, accessed November 9, 2014, http://srlp.org/about/.

put their lives in danger. As the diagram shows, once they are detained, trans immigrants can undergo physical, emotional, and sexual violence from guards and other detainees. They also experience being misgendered. That is, if they were assigned male at birth, they are sent to male detention centers, regardless of their current gender identity. Once in detention, they do not have access to medical or hormonal treatments, resulting in high levels of anxiety and being mentally unbalanced. If they are deported, trans people run the risk of facing "transphobic violence, persecution, and imprisonment," while those who are HIV positive might not have access to HIV medication.

Bamby's experience confirms the information from the diagram, voicing with her own words and accounts the ways in which systemic violence targeted her as a trans woman, undocumented immigrant, person of color, and laborer in the sex industry. She was criminalized for trying to survive, economically and emotionally. She endured inhumane conditions in prison, facing violence from inmates, and spending long periods of time in solitary confinement. The prison system did not offer any protections against violence from her surroundings. The prison system itself was the source that produced and re-produced such violence.

The criminalization of survival labor that trans women of color are driven to perform creates the conditions for them to be incarcerated. Contradictorily, another system claims to do just the opposite. The asylum system portrays itself as one that "protects" LGBTQ people from the Global South. This, then, establishes how both, the prison and asylum, systems are intertwined. People who are waiting to hear from their asylum cases often have to do so in immigration detention centers. Those whose asylum cases are unsuccessful are often also kept in detention centers before they are deported. According to the official website of the

Department of Homeland Security, "Every year people come to the United States seeking protection because they have suffered persecution or fear that they will suffer persecution due to race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion."[84] Juana María Rodríguez, in *Queer Latinidad*, analyzes the court case of Marcelo Tenório, a Brazilian gay man who was granted political asylum in the United States on the basis of sexual violence in Brazil. Before seeking asylum, however, he had been denied a U.S visa, and therefore entered the United States through Mexico without proper documentation.[85] Rodríguez argues there were discourses of freedom and persecution present in the court transcripts.[86] While Tenório was not only gay, but also Black and poor, his sexuality is highlighted as *the* reason of the violence he encountered in Brazil, and *the* reason he was granted asylum in the United States.[87] Imperialism within the U.S. court system was evident as it portrayed the United States as the savior of a man in a country believed to be backwards.

Camilx filed for asylum after his second year in college at the University of California Berkeley, when it became impossible to receive financial as well as emotional support as an undocumented student, forcing him to leave school for one semester. He did not feel comfortable sharing details of how and on what grounds he was granted asylum to

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[84] "Asylum," *Official Website of the Department of Homeland Security*, accessed April 20, 2016, https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-asylum/asylum.

[85] Juana María Rodríguez, *Queer Latinidad: Identity Practices, Discursive Spaces* (New York: NYU Press, 2003), 84.

[86] Juana María Rodríguez, *Queer Latinidad*, 86.

[87] Juana María Rodríguez, Queer *Latinidad*, 89.

stay in the United States. However, he said that he was granted asylum after one year of filing. Camilx shares,

> It was very difficult, it was a four-hour interview, and triggered so many things… of being caught by the border patrol, being questioned at immigration when I was in detention when I was thirteen-years old, and then again when I was twenty-three, being in front of the immigration officer again, telling them why I needed this.

Similar to Tenório, Camilx was, "taken back in time," "forcing him to performatively relive the violence."[88] In both cases, the U.S. court re-traumatized the asylum seekers in an attempt to demonstrate the so-called freedom that the United States claims to offer as a western liberated country. Camilx goes on to say,

> All their questions being so stupid… I thought they were so offensive, or just sort of putting me in a bad light, or putting Mexico in a bad light. Sort of, "Why do you need us to save you?" kind of attitude. I was like, that is not my argument! I'm just talking about law, and legal rights, and the rights I have here, because of course I knew the legal case was not pretty and flowery and nice.

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[88] Juana María Rodríguez, *Queer Latinidad*, 92.

The asylum application process places the applicant in a highly vulnerable position. The Department of Homeland Security provides instructions on filing asylum status, stating, "If you are not granted asylum, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) may use the information you provide in this application to establish that you are removable from the United States."[89] Applicants seeking asylum entirely put themselves at the hands of the DHS, provide all the personal and identifiable information requested by the DHS and undergoing a process of dehumanization and humiliation, which Camilx references. Asylum seekers are forced to speak the state's language, begging to be saved from their countries. If an asylum officer or immigration judge determines the asylum seeker is not eligible, they are to be deported, thus being sent to face the very violence they were fleeing.

The United States government and corporations have been responsible for worsening living, economic, and democratic conditions in the Global South, forcing many individuals to leave their homes. On the other hand, when people from the global South happen to seek asylum in the United States due to violence in their homeland, the U.S. paints itself as a democratic hero that saves the lives of *some* asylum seekers from their governments and societies. The selection of "good" and "bad" immigrants is not new, however. Eithne Luibhéid documents that the United States border patrol has historically policed immigrants' genders and sexualities, allowing in only those who meet standards of respectability.[90] Yet the U.S. currently utilizes discourses of modernity and a so-called open mindedness to appear

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[89] "Instructions, I-589, Application for Asylum and for Withholding of Removal," Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, accessed April 20, 2016, https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/files/form/i-589instr.pdf.

[90] Eithne Luibhéid, *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

to embrace *some* immigrants on the grounds of violence faced in their countries of origin. In some cases, ironically enough, this is now based on "membership in a particular social group," which includes LGBT.[91] During Camilx's interview, many of these structural contradictions surfaced, making him overwhelmed by the process.

> I stood up and I was yelling at the immigration officer, really angry, and all of a sudden I felt this fear. I am yelling at the person who has complete control over my life. This person will decide if I stay or if I leave. If I leave, I know I'll be very miserable. So that's when I was like, oh ok, I'll sit down and answer the questions, while I dehumanize the moments of my life.

Juana María Rodríguez argues about Tenório" "The undocumented refugee seeking asylum, trapped between legal constructions of citizenship, rights, and nations, speaking publicly against a 'home' that has excluded him, embodies the excesses of nationalism."[92] In Camilx's case, he made the decision to accept and go along with the asylum seeking process in that moment, despite how dehumanizing it was. He performed, so to speak, U.S. nationalism to his advantage so he could stay in the country, already having gone through a continuous process of humiliation and in his own words, dehumanization. He asserted his resistance by strategically using the institutionalized asylum process to his advantage.

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[91] Asylum," *Official Website of the Department of Homeland Security*, accessed April 20, 2016, https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-asylum/asylum.

[92] Juana María Rodríguez, *Queer Latinidad*, 97.

Conclusion

Camilx, Bamby, and Charlie have engaged in a constant search for home as migrants who embrace and embody non-normative genders and sexualities. By merely living their lives, they are constantly going against norms, structures, and systems that attempt to erase them and their experiences. Much of what they shared speaks to not having had much choice of when, where, or how they would move from one physical space to another, while embodying their LGBTQ positions. They and their families migrated in order to survive, for economic and safety reasons. However, the survival they were searching in the United States was met with more violence. Structural factors, like exploitation, heteropatriarchy, transphobia, and (un)documented status, all impacted their search for home, as LGBTQ, racialized, working poor, and migrants.

The oral histories of the narrators in this chapter bring attention to the violence that is embedded within institutions, policies, and discourses, and which target LGBTQ migrant Latinx womxn living in Los Angeles, California. The stories demonstrate that it is impossible to look at their lives from a single-issue lens. That is, they constantly face intersectional violence, experiencing the injustices built within the migration, prison, and asylum systems. These are all systems of anti-home that hover in the so-called land of "opportunity." Their constant movement, their constant leaving and search of home, put them in situations where they were, time and time again, faced with different forms of systemic violence. From leaving their physical homes in the first place and looking for economic and safety opportunities elsewhere, to figuring out what home meant as LGBTQ migrant womxn in the United States, their search for home has never stopped.

CHAPTER 2

Not Coming Out, but Building Home: An Oral History in Re-Conceptualizing a Queer Migrant Home[93]

Introduction

The growing field of queer migration has theorized the intersections of sexuality, gender, ethnicity, and citizenship in queer migrants' lives, whether in cultural production, the impact that policy has in their lives, or in their quotidian practices.[94] It has largely challenged dominant gay and lesbian discourses for uncritically reproducing western, racist,

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[93] An early version of this chapter was published in the journal *Diálogo: An Interdisciplinary Journal*. Sandibel Borges, "Not Coming Out, but Building Home: An Oral History in Re-Conceptualizing a Queer Migrant Home," *Díalogo: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 18.2 (2015): 119-130.

[94] Lionel Cantú, *The Sexuality of Migration: Border Crossings and Mexican Immigrant Men,* eds. Nancy A. Naples and Salvador Vidal-Ortiz (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

Eithne Luibhéid, *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

Martin F. Manalansan VI, *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

Karma Chávez, *Queer Migration Politics: Activist Rhetoric and Coalitional Possibilities* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2013).

Karma Chávez, "Identifying the Needs of LGBTQ Immigrants and Refugees in southern Arizona," *Journal of Homosexuality* 58.2 (2011): 189-218.

and settler colonial ideologies that invisibilize and further marginalize queer migrants.[95] This chapter contributes to the growing scholarship on queer migration by presenting the story of a queer Mexicana migrant who, by embodying her intersectional experiences, disrupts the practice of equating "coming out" with the idea of "coming home" or "arriving home."[96] Instead, she demonstrates how she builds a sense of home through the conditions under which she lives, challenging the erasure of queer migrant narratives within dominant discourses. Systems of power within academia have demonstrated little interest in centering the voices of marginalized groups or using community-based methods to do so. This chapter uses oral history to disrupt the lack of visibility of queer migrants' narratives within scholarship. It generates a critique from the narrator's own daily experiences of living a queer migrant life, to show how we can build theory and interpretation from grounded ethnographic research.[97]

This chapter is based on the oral history of Kitzia Esteva, a self-identified queer Mexicana, Zapoteca, Oaxaqueña, Third World, and working-class woman, who, when interviewed in December 2012, was living and engaging in political activism in Los Angeles.

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[95] Martin, Manalansan, "In the Shadows of Stonewall: Examining Gay Transnational Politics and the Diasporic Dilemma," In *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*. Eds. Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997): 485-505.

Gloria Wekker, *The Politics of Passion: Women's Sexual Culture in the Afro Surinamese Diaspora* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

[96] I mostly utilize the word "migrant" to highlight that Kitzia, like most migrants, has migrated multiple times within and beyond borders, instead of moving once and staying put. However, I also use the term "immigrant" as a reminder that as such, Kitzia cannot escape the structural systems in place that keep her marginalized.

[97] In this chapter and dissertation I use oral history as a method. That is, I speak about queer migration and re-conceptualize a queer home by bringing forward Kitzia's story. As Paul Thompson argues, oral history "thrusts life into history itself and it widens its scope" (23). Kitzia's voice, thus, shapes the argument and widens the scope of queer migration.

She was twenty-five years old. Her experiences disclose that queer sexualities is a continuous negotiation of survival, and that creating a sense of home involves building intersectional communities of trust, survival, and resistance. Borrowing from queer Latino oral historian Horacio Roque-Ramirez, this chapter is "part of a historiographic activism" that privileges "the reconstruction of community narratives."[98] As an activist who is socially and politically conscious of the layers of marginalization she faces, Kitzia Esteva has much to offer about homebuilding. She challenges "coming out" as the normative and over-simplified construct of a queer home. Meanwhile, she demonstrates that constructing home is building communities of trust and compassion with those around her.

By bringing Esteva's story to the forefront, I interrogate the common assumption that "coming out" is an "arriving home" for all queer individuals.[99] That is, I question the idea that coming out is always *the* queer liberation, and argue that it is instead a colonialist conception. I suggest that the closet is a constant negotiation as Esteva continues to survive in a system that was never built to serve her needs. Esteva's story illustrates the difficulties of creating a sense of home as a queer migrant woman in the U.S. She offers alternative ways of conceptualizing home that are intersectional, encompassing her positions as a queer immigrant woman of color and a political activist. She builds family and community ties within and outside her immediate family. Building homes that are intersectional creates

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[98] Horacio Roque-Ramírez, "Memory and Mourning: Living Oral History with Queer Latinos and Latinas in San Francisco," in *Oral History and Public Memories*, eds. Hamilton, Paula and Linda Shopes (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008).

[99] Kitzia wants her real name to be used in the dissertation. As an activist and community organizer, she has shared her migrant experiences publically. She has also given other interviews with her real name.

political spaces that allow for survival as a queer, working class, Indigenous, undocumented, migrant woman.

Oral History as Method

Oral history as method offers its own alternative understanding and construction of knowledge. In contrast to quantitative research it does not intend to prove something about an entire population, in this case, about all queer migrant Latinas living in the U.S. An in-depth analysis of Esteva's story demonstrates that individual queer migrant stories matter, not only because the lives of queer migrant individuals are important, but also because they can offer additional ways of understanding systemic violence. Marginalized communities are not only numbers. They have individual and complex stories that illuminate from new perspectives, systems of power, historical events, time and space, and day-to-day resistance. Given the few available written and oral archives about queer migrants, in writing this chapter I follow the footsteps of oral historians Roque Ramírez and Alamilla Boyd when they indicate that those who study marginalized groups, "where no documents or acid-free folders existed, researchers set out to create them."[100] This chapter therefore serves as a place where Esteva's words are archived in a particular time and space as I record her speaking back to heteronormative ideologies, dominant gay and lesbian discourses, and anti-immigration policies in the U.S.

Utilizing oral history in this manner is part of the project of decolonizing academic research. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, a professor of Education and Maori Development in New

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[100] Roque Ramirez, Horacio and Nan Alamilla Boyd. "Introduction: The Body and Knowledge in Queer Oral History." In *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History,* eds. Alamilla Boyd and Roque Ramírez (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 5.

Zealand, argues that research has historically been a Western and colonizing practice that "desire[s], extract[s] and claim[s] ownership of our [Indigenous] ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce, and then simultaneously rejects the people who create and develop those ideas."[101] However, "Indigenous peoples across the world have other stories to tell," which, on the one hand, challenge the narratives that Western research generates, and on the other, retell Western colonial history through their own eyes.[102] Similarly, oral history, as Paul Thompson defines it, "is a history built around people."[103] It has the potential to serve the purpose that Smith suggests as a method that can "recover neglected or silenced accounts of past experience, as a way of challenging dominant histories which underpin repressive attitudes and policy."[104] Consequently, this chapter is both, one that documents Esteva's experiences as they challenge dominant accounts of sexuality, and one that decolonizes methodology.

Note on Terminology

I utilize the term "queer" to refer to Esteva's social and political position as non-heterosexual, but also to speak of non-normative genders and sexualities. Additionally, I turn to Eithne Luibhéid and Karma Chávez in their approach to queerness. Luibhéid's use of "queer" is "a call to transform, rather than to seek accommodation within existing social

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[101] Tuhiwai Smith, Linda, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 2nd Ed. (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2012), 1.

[102] Tuhiwai Smith, Linda, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 2.

[103] Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, Third Ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 28.

[104] Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, 183.

structures."[105] Chávez, borrowing from José Esteban Muñoz, sees it as something that "implies what is possible for making lives livable."[106] My use of the term "queer," therefore, also reflects Esteva's commitment to challenging systems of power in order to make her life—and the lives of those around her—more livable, by creating a sense of home.

When Esteva first realized she was in love with another woman she saw herself as a lesbian. The moment she disclosed her sexuality to her mother she used the term bisexual, and for years she has identified as queer. She came to understand "queer" as a term that is open, encompassing different genders, sexualities, and radical politics (while recognizing that not all self-identified queer people embrace radical politics). Esteva is in continuous conversations about the meaning of queerness for herself and the communities with whom she organizes. At the time of our interview, she saw "queer" as a political term that goes beyond orientation, countering binaries of gender and sexuality, and speaking to politics of resistance. Further, she has been part of the UndocuQueer movement, which employs "queer" in organizing non-normative undocumented communities. "Queer" in UndocuQueer, as Chávez suggests, often emphasizes self-empowerment, acceptance, and identity of undocumented migrants whose genders and sexualities are non-normative, and where the goal is to achieve their legalization and liberation.[107] The movement and Esteva's involvement in it reflect their use of the term as a non-rigid and non-normative identity as well as a struggle against hegemonic power. Thus, in this chapter I utilize "queer" as a

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[105] Eithne Luibhéid, "Introduction: Queering Migration and Citizenship," in *Queer Migrations: Sexuality, U.S. Citizenship, and Border Crossings*, eds. Eithne Luibhéid and Lionel Cantú Jr. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), x.

[106] Karma Chávez, *Queer Migration Politics*, 6.

[107] Karma Chávez, *Queer Migration Politics*, 102, 104.

political term that speaks to identity, but also as one that challenges normative genders and sexualities, and interrogates larger systems of power.

Kitzia's Migration Story

Born and partly raised in Mexico City, Esteva spent the first fifteen years of her life moving between Mexico City, and the states of Oaxaca and Veracruz with her family. At the age of thirteen, her mother, sister, and two nephews (one of them had been diagnosed with leukemia) migrated to the U.S., while she moved in with an aunt in Mexico City. In 2003 her father, who had been separated from her mother for several years, migrated with Esteva to the U.S., and the city of Oakland, where he stayed for about a year before returning to Mexico. Here she tells her experience crossing the border:

> The first time we [her and her father] were in the desert we were walking and walking, and walking, and then there was a point when we ran out of water. I was like, 'damn, we're not going to make it,' you know? It just felt like an infinite amount of hours. I remember we left before the sunrise and then it was the sunset and we were still walking. It got really dark. At some point the coyote that was directing us around decided to go see if he could find the person who was supposed to pick us up on the highway. Eventually we made it there [to the highway] but the border patrol intercepted us. And I remember being like 'damn! All this walking!' And you know… in my mind it felt like it was days, but obviously it wasn't… maybe it was twenty hours of walking before we were intercepted. […]. The moments when I couldn't be with my dad were scary. But overall, I just felt, I don't know, I was on a mission to be

here with my family, so it was worth the risk for me. I had a lot of fear that my nephew was going to die and I wasn't going to see him again. I think that was in my mind the whole time. I was like, 'you know what, I'm almost there, I'm going to see him, he might still be alive and it's going to be okay.' […] The few times that we were separated for different reasons, I was, not freaking out, but I definitely felt fear. But yeah, I mean, other people were doing it [migrating]. And I think what was difficult was that I was usually the young girl of the group that was trying to cross, and everybody else was a guy. The way I remember it was mostly as something I accomplished. Like beating death and beating the migra,[108] beating the U.S. in some ways. Definitely there were times that I was like, 'oh man, why can't my family just go back? I don't want to be doing this and […] also feeling like I was leaving something really important behind. I remember the last time we crossed. I remember looking back and kind of being like, 'this is it, I'm not going to see México for a long time.' I remember looking out in the distance and kind of just saying my goodbyes in my heart. And I remember that being really fucking difficult. I remember thinking, 'something was just taken away from me' and seeing it go away and walking away. I guess that's when I realized that this time we were going to make it to the other side. It was a realization that I was finally saying bye because I was going to make it. It felt good that I had that certainty but at the same time I was like, damn, goodbye.

[108] Migra: colloquial way of referring to the border patrol.

After September 11, 2001, the U.S.-Mexico border became increasingly secured and since then has been undergoing a process of further militarization in order to "fight terrorism." In the words of Patricia Zavella, "those racialized as nonwhite became increasingly scrutinized and seen as security threats."[109] As Esteva reflects, she felt scared being the only young woman in a group of men, especially when she was not with her father. When the border patrol arrested them, her father was taken to a jail cell while she was asked to wait in what she remembers being a lobby-area. She was afraid the officers would tell her to go home on her own. Not knowing where she was, she wondered how she would find her way back to Mexico, or her way forward to Oakland. Feminist scholars Sylvanna Falcón and María de la Luz Ibarra have documented that part of the systematic militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border involves sexual violence, often by border patrol agents and coyotes against female border crossers.[110] Despite the violence she knew occurred while migrating, Esteva was "on a mission" to be in the U.S. with her family and willing to take the risks that crossing the border implied. After her father was released, they crossed again, that time reaching Oakland. Her feelings of accomplishment, and of beating the U.S. *migra*, surfaced from knowing that despite the imperialist power of the U.S, they managed to evade its immigration control and join her family.

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[109] Patricia Zavella, *I'm Neither Here Nor There: Mexicans' Quotidian Struggles With Migration and Poverty* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 39.

[110] Falcon, Sylvanna, "'National Security' and the Violation of Women: Militarized Border at the U.S.-Mexico Border," in *Color of Violence: The Incite! Anthology*. Ed. Incite! Women of Color Against Violence (South End Press, 2006), 119.

Ibarra, María de la Luz, "Buscando la Vida: Mexican Immigrant Women's Memories of Home, Yearning, and Border Crossings," in *Gender on the Borderlands: The Frontiers Reader*. Eds. Antonia Castañeda with Patricia Hart, Karen Weathermon, and Susan H. Armitage (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 276.

For economic reasons and due to her nephew's illness, Esteva left her home in Mexico to move to another country. Saying goodbye to Mexico, where she hasn't been back since 2003, marked the beginning of a new chapter in her life as an immigrant, a woman of color, a non-English speaker, and a non-citizen in the U.S. It would also be in the U.S. where she would get in touch with, and explore, her queerness.

"The Closet" Through A Queer Migrant Lens

Esteva narrates:

> Being an immigrant and being in this country did give me a few tools, I don't know, I feel like being an immigrant, this conversation of being undocumented, shaped a little bit of the queerness stuff, at least to a degree where I was like, well this is another dimension of oppression that I have to experience. Some of it felt painful and difficult, and definitely there wasn't always this space where I am now, where I feel comfortable with it, I feel happy about it, and it brings me a lot of pride [...] There was a point where both of them [being undocumented and queer] felt really oppressive. They felt like categories that were imposed. But I think that there are a lot of things that connect with each other. One of them is my consciousness because I understand everything in political terms, the more I grow older the more that is the case. That's not to take the emotional aspect [for granted] because politics, for me at least, are very emotional. I feel like the understanding of exclusion from the perspective of being undocumented or being an immigrant, and also being a woman, and being queer, makes more sense—all of it. The framework of all the different -isms, like capitalism, patriarchy, sexism,

> homophobia, heterosexism, all of those things, it makes sense to me because I experience the exclusion in so many ways that I'm like, 'oh, they're all connected, and they're all bad, and we must get rid of them.' In some ways, even though I believe a lot in self-determination […] I feel happy that I had the fate that I had. It was meant for me to be who I am because, from experience, from the emotional aspect of what it is, I've learned a lot more than reading a book. There's a lot of wisdom from experiencing it on an emotional level. Makes you more compassionate for other people. When somebody else would say, 'somebody needs to come out of the closet,' that doesn't come from a place of compassion. So in many ways, what has shaped my identity is learning to have compassion for different people, for myself, learning to do away with shame, and continue the process—it's always a process and sometimes it's a regressive process.

Esteva's political consciousness emerges from her intersectional experiences, as well as from her mother, who has been a political activist since they lived in Mexico, and continues her political work in the Bay area of northern California. Esteva became politicized early on. She also attended college, and was a student activist in queer and student of color spaces.

Unlike much of the existing research on queer migration, which is mostly on gay men, Esteva did not migrate 'while being queer.' She came to identify as queer once she lived in the U.S., about a year later. While she *is* a queer immigrant, her experience shows the complexity of queer migration, and allows for a fluid understanding of the interconnectedness of queerness and migration. Her experiences as an undocumented,

racialized immigrant in the U.S. have impacted how she understands her own queerness today. Being an undocumented immigrant showed her what it was like to be an outsider and to be put into categories she had never used for herself before. It gave her the tools to understand her queerness, which at the beginning felt oppressive. Had she not had the immigrant experience, she might have had a very different process coming to terms with her sexuality. Currently, in her political activism, she uses both social positions—immigrant and queer—as political tools to gain visibility for the queer migrant movement. While she faces oppression from both social positions, she now also sees them as experiences that make her stronger and more compassionate.

Compassion for fellow queers comes from knowing first that "coming out" is not a "coming home" per se. For queer people of color, revealing their non-normative genders and sexualities is not always an option. In Esteva's case, not always disclosing her sexuality has been a method of physical, economic, and emotional survival. For instance, the first time she fell in love with another woman was at the age of sixteen, when she was in high school (while living with her mother in Oakland). As noted here, the circumstances of her relationship demonstrate the particular negotiations some queer migrant women need to make.

> I fell in love with somebody in high school. With this girl who fucking broke my heart. It's funny because my mom doesn't know about it, [but] she was actually doing an internship at the organization where my mom used to work. She just had a lot of shit going on in her life and with her family too, so you know, I've forgiven her or whatever (laughs). That was the first time [in my

> life] that I was like, 'oh I definitely like her.' I always just kind of experienced looking at people and feeling attracted to different people, and I never made much of it. I wasn't like, that's scary or, I don't know. I kind of just accepted it. But I guess falling in love is different. And that's when I was like, 'oh I'm definitely a lesbian!' and for a while I was like, 'I'm a lesbian!' I remember coming to this conclusion with my girlfriend at the time, and she was like, 'don't tell your family, you're crazy.' I was just so excited, I was like, 'damn, I'm a lesbian! Yeah! Let's make this happen!' But she was like, 'no, don't tell them, you need to chill, first of all cuz, you know, I work with your mom, so my job is on the line.' You know, she just had […] a lot of shit she was dealing with.

Esteva did not share with her mother about her sexuality until she was twenty years old (although when she was seventeen her mother asked if she was a lesbian, to which she responded no). This was the first time Esteva and her ex-partner were in a same-sex relationship. Their decision to not disclose it was a difficult one, not only because it was a same-sex relationship but it was also influenced by their positions as working-class and undocumented immigrant women. In the case of her ex-partner, who was afraid of her family's reaction, not knowing what she would do if she was kicked out of the house, she also knew her job would be on the line. Being undocumented, it would not have been easy to find a new job and a new home at the same time.

Their mutual decisions to not reveal their relationship influenced how Esteva came to see queerness. Later, after other experiences and conversations, she shifted her

understanding of what it means to be "out" as a lesbian, which is often perceived in binary terms: you are either "out" (out and proud) *or* you are "in the closet" (and internally oppressed). Queer of color scholar Martin Manalansan problematizes this binary, arguing that the coming out narrative is based on western definitions of same-sex practices.[111] In *Global Divas*, his book on gay Filipino men in New York City, Manalansan found that "'coming out,' or becoming publicly visible, is not a uniform process that can be generalized across different national cultures." It also cannot be universalized to encompass different and complex experiences of brown working class undocumented immigrant women. That is, "coming out" does not translate to a sense of "arriving home" for everyone. It is not always an act of liberation for *all* queers at *all* times. Similarly, remaining "in the closet" is not the same for everyone, given the power structures that queer migrants and queer people of color must navigate. As noted above, Esteva originally wanted to disclose her first same-sex relationship and was excited to see herself as a lesbian, but that was not the case for her ex-partner. They each needed to navigate the visibility of their relationship based on the constraints of their daily lives. Economic survival—keeping a job and housing—were key factors for each. Disclosing their relationship would not have meant being a liberated modern lesbian couple, due to the systems that marginalize them for being immigrant, women, queer, brown, working-class, and undocumented. The intersectionality of their social positions created the conditions for them to keep their relationship private. Queer visibility, thus, is a continuous negotiation of circumstances.

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[111] Martin Manalansan, "In the Shadows of Stonewall: Examining Gay Transnational Politics and the Diasporic Dilemma," In *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*. Eds. Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997): 486.

Martin Manalansan, "In the Shodows of Stonewall," 501.

On the other hand, queer of color critiques have noted that "coming out" is not a one-time process.[112] Coming out also does not speak only to sexuality. For Esteva, coming out is—in her work as a political activist—a constant process depending on the spaces where she moves at different times. Thus, she *now* has come out multiple times. In her political organizing, it has been important to speak about her undocumented status, her political sexual life as polyamorous and queer, and her political ideology as leftist. However, she also strongly believes that not everyone wants to publicly speak about their queerness, as was the case with her first same-sex love, *or* to publically declare their undocumented status. She reflected on how those who have citizenship, class, and white privilege, are able to announce their queerness all times and in most spaces where they move. For her, however, always revealing it—or expecting others to do so—does not reflect a home-like place.

Queer Indigenous Approach to "Coming Out"

Esteva explains how she sees the closet:

> I see the closet as a colonialist invention, because, in other cultures—like the Zapotec culture for example, there's no real secret in the community. You know, if you live in Oaxaca, in Tehuantepec or Juchitán, people just know each other's business. No joke, you would just go and ask anybody about somebody else, and they just know. There's a little bit of judgment value but most of it it's just, "How can I support? How can I be of help? How can I be

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[112] Anne-Marie Fortier, "'Coming Home'," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 4.4 (2001): 404-424.

David Eng, "Out Here and Over There: Queerness and Diaspora in Asian American Studies," *Social Text* 52/53 (1997): 31–52.

> with you?" and I feel like that's not unique to Zapoteco culture. There's so many Indigenous cultures, or cultures that might not be quote-on-quote Indigenous, that understand queerness on different levels and appreciate it, or respect it, or hold it sacred. So this idea of 'you're closeted,' or 'you have to be in silence,' or 'you have to be hidden about who you are,' is a colonialist imposition. It's just like being undocumented, because you have to protect yourself in order to survive and you have to fight it. So I think that maybe for people that are white and rich, they can see it [the closet] in a different way, but for me, my POC [people of color] reading is that this is a colonialist imposition, and I'll be careful about it.

Esteva offers a sharp and necessary critique of the closet from her Indigenous and migrant positionalities, through centering colonization. She has been in dialogue with fellow political organizers and activists who often create spaces to speak about their experiences as a way to organize their communities against anti-immigrant, heteronormative, and patriarchal policies and norms. Her political consciousness is constantly in motion as a tool for organizing but also as a personal one to understand the oppression she faces. Being undocumented has taught her that navigating power structures is necessary in order to survive. She utilizes this framework to analyze "coming out," reviewing the impact colonization has had on genders and sexualities, as well as the role that community plays in what is—and is not— known about queer sexualities in different spaces.

The anthropologist Lynn Stephen has observed that within Zapotec culture in Oaxaca, *muxe* has come to be understood as a third gender, pushing against binary colonial constructions of gender and sexuality. It is attributed to those who are assigned male at birth,

taking on a more feminine role as they grow older. *Muxes* do not give up their masculinity and engage in romantic relationships with *cis* males and females (43). Spanish colonization in the Americas violently imposed the binary of gender, as solely male and female. Yet Oaxaca is an example where there always were "a variety of gender, sexual, and social roles that did not conform to the ideals of a dual male/female gender system."[113] Today, *muxes* continue disrupting the rigid colonialist binary gender system. As Stephen documents, the Zapotec community in Juchitán, Esteva's hometown, maintains a tradition of welcoming and respecting *muxes*.[114]

The process of categorizing sexuality as a taboo, and dominant heteronormative systems, are legacies of colonialism for Esteva. Interviewed by ethnographer Megan MacDonald in the Twin Cities area, Beth Brandt, a self-identified Mohawk lesbian, explained, "our sexuality has been colonized, sterilized, whitewashed… what the dominant culture has never been able to comprehend is that spirit/sex/prayer/flesh/religion/ natural is who I am as a Two-Spirit.'"[115] Both Esteva and Brandt articulate contemporary constructions of sexuality as deeply colonized. Political theorist María Lugones strengthens this link by arguing that colonialism's stake in creating and reinforcing the gender binary and heterosexualism is to make up the conditions for racialized patriarchal control over labor and

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[113] Lynn Stephen, "Sexualities and Genders in Zapotec Oaxaca," *Latin American Perspectives* Issue 123.29, No 2 (2002): 49.

[114] Lynn Stephen, "Sexualities and Genders in Zapotec Oaxaca," 44.

[115] Megan L. MacDonald, "Two-Spirit Organizing: Indigenous Two-Spirit Identity in the Twin Cities Region," in *Queer Twin Cities: Twin Cities GLBT Oral History Project*, eds. Editorial Board of the Twin Cities GLBT Oral History Project (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 151.

knowledge production.[116] In other words, exploitation within a colonialist and capitalist context is made possible by, among other factors, the normative gender and sexuality system.

In Esteva's view, the colonization of gender and sexuality has been key in creating the construct of the closet, implying secrecy. Disclosing queerness is not always necessary in the Indigenous communities she refers to in Oaxaca, as there is indeed a sense of community where "people just know." However, when Esteva migrated within Mexico, and then to the U.S., she not only experienced separation from her communities, but also faced additional oppressive colonialist structures. Because colonization plays a significant role in separating communities and creating structural conditions of violence that queer people of color face today, not always disclosing queerness cannot merely be perceived as an act of internalized oppression. Doing so puts all the weight and sometimes shame on the person, and away from the structures. While Esteva describes the construct of "the closet" as a result of colonization, she is also clear that not revealing it is often necessary in certain circumstances, *precisely* because one continues to live under colonialist systems and ideologies. Navigating these becomes a necessity. There are multiple negative consequences that marginalized queer people of color cannot afford to experience on top of the structural violence they already confront for being people of color, immigrant, and often working-class or poor. She reflects:

> I know that it [the closet] is real and that people experience it on a psychological level and at the same time I don't like it, and I don't like when

[116] Megan L MacDonald, "Two-Spirit Organizing," 206.

> people tell me that I'm closeted or when they say, 'oh so and so is closeted.' It's like, 'ok, obviously you know, so why don't you try supporting them?'

Despite the colonialist construct of "the closet"—or perhaps because of it—the relationship that marginalized queer people of color have with coming out narratives is not simple. It is not as clear-cut to state that coming out equals arriving home and that not doing so is merely an act of internalized oppression, without first looking at the systemic violence that the colonization of gender and sexuality has created over the past centuries. Reinforcing heterosexuality and gender binaries, both built into structures and societal norms, is part of this colonization. Always disclosing queerness, thus, cannot be reduced to an act of decolonization for queer people of color. Based on the socio-economic, anti-immigrant, and patriarchal structures in place, it can often be safer not to reveal queerness in contexts where different forms of violence are likely to occur. Navigating such violence is an act of survival and thus of resistance to the many colonialist structures that have been built to marginalize queer people of color. Building communities of trust and compassion, however, has been consistent in Esteva's life as she engages in creating a sense of home.

Where Is Home? The Challenges of Creating Home

Esteva explains her transition to the United States:

> It was a different transition because I've lived in DF [Mexico City] and Veracruz and in Oaxaca, so I was kind of used to migrating per se, but I definitely wasn't used to the culture here. And I came to Oakland, to a really fucked up area of Oakland where there was a lot of police brutality, there was

a lot of really poor people selling drugs on the streets, a lot of gang violence that I heard about but never actually saw. Sometimes I heard shootings and stuff but I never, like, looked out my window or anything like that. But I do remember a couple of times coming back from school and seeing the police strip search the people that were selling drugs right outside my house. And it was people that I said hi to, that I was familiar with, so it was painful to see that. I never actually saw that in Mexico. Maybe I was a little sheltered from it, I don't know, but it was different. It was in-your-face racism. And so that was painful and difficult […]. My mom was pretty open about, you know, this is an imperialist power and people here who are Latino or Black have a really tough life. And I came [to the U.S.] with that in mind. But it didn't make any sense because of the pictures and the stuff that you see on TV—it looks completely different. And then when I came [to Oakland] and saw what she meant by that I was like, oh, this is not your standard, 'some people are criminals but it just happens every once in a while.' It was an everyday thing, like people were beaten up by the police in the street, or they were fighting each other, or they would be selling drugs. I actually never saw anybody sell drugs in México, and I lived in a neighborhood that wasn't, you know, rich. I lived in a lower-middle class neighborhood, where I guess those kinds of things could happen, I just didn't see them. I don't know. I just kind of felt like, in your face, the poverty and the racism [in Oakland.].

When Esteva arrived in the U.S., she became aware of the blatant racism. She quickly had to learn to manage the systemic violence that she faced and witnessed as a young working-class transnational immigrant, such as the institutional racism, poverty, and police brutality in communities of color. Despite experiencing internal migration within Mexico, migrating to the U.S. was a different transition. Knowing how to navigate the oppression within the U.S. —to interpret how others read and perceived her and when she could and could not make herself visible—was a tool she needed to develop for her survival.

Esteva recognized that in her new physical home poor people of color were targets of structural violence. For many, this could be a rude awakening to the falsity of media images that circulate, portraying the United States as the "American dream." Esteva's life-long activist mother, as she notes above, taught her early on that the U.S. is an imperialist country. If Esteva was indeed exposed to positive images of the U.S. from Mexican media, she articulated understanding she would not feel liberated while living in the U.S., which she confirmed after witnessing what she calls "in your face racism" in Oakland.

Sociologist Yen Le Espiritu, when speaking of Filipino immigrant families in the U.S., argues, "immigrant subjectivity is a production that is always in process."[117] In other words, migrants constantly create meaning for themselves.[118] Similarly, Martin Manalansan, referring to Filipino gay immigrant men, points out that "together with experiences of alienation and displacement come the experiences of rebirth or a second chance."[119] Despite, or perhaps in some ways due to the difficulties, alienation, and marginalization they

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[117] Yen Le Espiritu, *Home Bound: Filipino American Lives Across Cultures, Communities, and Countries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 215.

[118] Yen Le Espiritu, *Home Bound*, 208.

[119] Martin Manalansan, *Global Divas*, 17.

experience, many immigrants do not always despair, but "refigure their lives and selves within existing constraints."[120] The process of refiguring lives and selves is what Lionel Cantú calls the "journey of the self" that gay immigrant men in his study experience within such limits.[121] Esteva's situation is different from those of gay men in Manalansan's and Cantú's studies; she did not migrate while identifying as queer and her queerness was not a factor in her decision to migrate. However, her "journey of the self," as an immigrant who is also queer, has meant navigating social spaces, learning where she can and where she cannot, where it is safe and where it is not, to disclose her queer identity. The systemic violence she has endured and witnessed has had an impact on how she understands her sexuality and her search for "home."

Building A Political Home

Esteva's personal journey has been explored through her political organizing. In 2012 Esteva joined the UndocuBus campaign, also called the "No Papers, No Fear Ride for Justice" campaign, organized by undocumented people throughout the U.S.[122]

> There's this idea of a political home, right? Like a place where you belong, where your ideas are respected, and where you can have a sense of leadership, empowerment and all those awesome things. But also where you can be challenged. Sometimes challenging can also be home, you know? […] There

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[120] Martin Manalansan, *Global Divas*, 149.

[121] Lionel Cantú, *The Sexuality of Migration*, 135.

[122] Karma Chávez, *Queer Migration Politics*, 100.

are other organizations that I'm a part of, that I see as family, that I see as a school, that I see as a place to belong, and also a place where I feel a lot of trust, and if I have trust then it doesn't feel so difficult when you're challenged, or when you make a mistake and somebody tells you that it wasn't right, you know? You learn to take it as a lesson. And that's also a lesson, to have those spaces 'cause you should ask for something you can have in a family, if the family has good ties with each other, if they're people that tell the truth to each other. The truth might be painful, but I feel like a lot of times in political spaces when people are organizing they do a lot of fucked up shit. And we don't have trust with each other, and we'll just kind of go behind each other's backs and talk shit, or get really angry at somebody and then write a piece about it, but [do] not confront the person. There's power dynamics, of course. But a lot of it comes from not having trust in each other. I feel like something that I really value about the UndocuBus is all of us being able to come out of the shadows with all of our different experiences, and talk about being queer and things that don't usually get talked about in that same intersectional context. It was just really open and really honest. Yeah, that's not always the case in organizing spaces and in political activist spaces where people sometimes get kicks out of being in the movement. It's a hard dilemma [but] to me, finding an organization where people both understand me and support me—that is a political home. Where I work now […] is a political home to me. I'm going to be with my family and that's another political home. When it is a political home, it takes a lot of commitment; and

> you learn to deal with all the dynamics, […] committing to work on the difficult dynamics even though they might be painful and challenging. But in order for you to make that commitment, you have to feel safe, and feel a level of trust for other people. That cannot be built from out of nowhere.

A home, for Esteva, is always in the making, and a never-ending process. Political organizing has been a way for her to find different homes, where she can work with others who are also interested in fighting oppressive systems. The political homes she has found in the U.S. through activism, with fellow undocumented people, including her mother, and importantly, with other queer migrants, has led her to understand that being an immigrant *and* queer come together in her activist work. With fellow organizers, she works to create spaces that put forward the needs of queer migrants—including access to health care and stopping the detention and deportations of non-normative migrants—through political homes of trust and commitment.

The UndocuBus began its five-week journey in Phoenix, Arizona, visiting fifteen cities and ending at the Democratic National Convention in Charlotte, North Carolina.[123] Its purpose was to challenge the Obama administration for its inaction in stopping the criminalization of immigrants.[124] During the campaign, Esteva and her peers (many also queer) formed a political home of support, through honest interactions with one another while fighting for immigrant rights.

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[123] "The Rumpus Interview with Kitzia Esteva," The Rumpus, accessed September 13, 2014, http://therumpus.net/2012/11/the-rumpus-interview-with-kitzia-esteva/

[124] Karma Chávez, *Queer Migration Politics*, 100.

Yen Le Espiritu discusses homemaking among Filipino immigrants in the U.S. as part of building political coalitions across differences.[125] Those communities of resistance reflect one way in which immigrant women rebuild a sense of political home.[126] Sociologist Hondagneu-Sotelo, in her research on Mexican communities in northern California, found that many immigrant women are politically involved in their communities, "mobiliz[ing] their kin, friends, and neighbors to push for school reform for their children."[127] Many were undocumented, and poor or working class. With the well being of loved ones in mind, their political involvement became an important part of their home and community.

Esteva emphasizes that the interconnectedness of queer and undocumented communities in a political context is not always recognized. Mainstream gay and lesbian activism seldom takes migrant communities into account, and mainstream immigrant rights work often overlooks queerness. Esteva, however, unites the two in her political organizing, as they are important in her daily struggle. Thus she participated in the UndocuQueer national movement that bridges both communities, contributing to the visibility of many queer undocumented people.[128] Esteva demonstrates that her migration and queer experiences come together in the process of constructing a home for herself.

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[125] Yen Le Espiritu, Home Bound, 2-3.

[126] Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Gendered Transitions: Mexican Experiences of Migration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

Lynn Stephen, *Transborder Lives: Indigenous Oaxacans in Mexico, California, and Oregon* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

[127] Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Gendered Transitions*, 197.

[128] The term UndocuQueer is attributed to Julio Salgado, an artist based in San Francisco and a self-identified queer and undocumented activist. See Karma Chavez, *Queer Migration*

Conclusion

Coming out is a constant negotiation in Esteva's personal life, as well as a tool in her political work. Making her queerness visible in her everyday life is not always safe, just like it is not always safe to reveal she is undocumented, as either or both can be received by different forms of violence (verbal and physical as well as structural). But within her political work she has explicitly made her queerness and her immigration status visible, calling attention to the intersectionality of both positions. Coming out to everyone and everywhere cannot be assumed to always constitute a coming home. Instead, as Esteva's story demonstrates, "home" is a continuous process of building communities of trust and compassion.

Esteva's narrative is what I would call history in the making.[129] Her experiences and her political activism have developed through and in the face of historical anti-immigrant actions, such as SB1070 in Arizona, and through resistance struggles like the UndocuQueer movement and the UndocuBus campaign. Esteva's story offers new considerations about homebuilding and a sense of home. As a queer immigrant, she challenges dominant constructions of home through the very act of living and navigating systems of violence, including anti-immigrant, racist, capitalist, and colonialist structures, which reinforce gender and sexuality normativity. Always disclosing her queerness is not always an act of building home for Esteva. Instead, she negotiates visibility and determines when and where to build

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Politics: Queer Activist Rhetoric and Coalitional Possibilities (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 81.

[129] Borrowing from Roque Ramirez and Alamilla Boyd as they explain the importance of archiving marginalized people's stories/histories. See Horacio Roque Ramírez and Nan Alamilla Boyd, eds. *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

homes, when key elements of trust, commitment, and survival are present. As Audre Lorde, lesbian Black feminist, once stated, “we were never meant to survive;” however, Esteva survives and resists a set of structures that were never built to serve her needs. Her voice stands against normative, dominant, and exclusionary constructions of homebuilding.

CHAPTER 3

LGBTQ Migrant Women Returnees: Survival Strategies and Home Building in Mexico

Introduction

Prior to 1990, all LGBT persons were barred from legally entering the United States, or the so-called land of the free.[130] As Luibhéid points out, "they came anyway, but most kept their lives and experiences hidden lest they face deportation."[131] It was also in the 1990s when dominant LGBT discourses started to receive more attention and visibility. They began to utilize language of "gay rights," and "inclusion," trying to normalize the idea that gays are just like everyone else—they are just like the heterosexual person who is successful, a hard worker, and a contributing society member. In other words, gays can also be respectable good U.S. citizens. This conception of respectable good citizens, however, represents only a very particular part of the LGBT community—usually white, middle-class, nationals, cis-gender, and able-bodied. Migrants, who can often be working class people of color, transgender, disabled, and undocumented, are not part of this discourse of "gay rights." Instead, they continue to be on the margins and, when convenient, disposable.

Fast forward almost two decades later, large numbers of undocumented immigrants were deported during the Obama administration, while many left the country "voluntarily,"

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[130] Eithne Luibhéid, *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

Lionel Cantú, *The Sexuality of Migration: Border Crossings and Mexican Immigrant Men,* eds. Nancy A. Naples and Salvador Vidal-Ortiz (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

[131] Eithne Luibhéid, "Introduction: Queering Migration and Citizenship," in *Queer Migrations: Sexuality, U.S. Citizenship, and Border Crossings*, eds. Eithne Luibhéid and Lionel Cantú Jr. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), x.

witnessing how surveillance against their communities was increasing by the minute. State laws, such as SB 1070 in Arizona and copycat bills in other states, gave power to local police to facilitate the removal of undocumented migrants. In this chapter I present four oral histories of queer Mexican women who were migrants in the United States and are now living in Mexico City. I do so to demonstrate that the neoliberal globalization that is currently in place has impacted U.S. immigration control; in other words, it has led to the increasing criminalization and deportation of LGBTQ migrants. I bring forward the voices of LGBTQ Mexican migrant returnees as they show resistance to the systemic violence they face, engaging in processes of homebuilding and belonging in their quotidian lives.

Neoliberal Globalization and the State's Definition of Home

In the book *Normal Life*, Dean Spade explains neoliberalism as "a significant shift in the relationship of workers to owners, producing a decrease in real wages, an increase in contingent labor, and the decline of labor unions; the dismantling of welfare programs; trade liberalization (sometimes called 'globalization'); and increasing criminalization and immigration enforcement."[132] Neoliberalism on a global scale involves international financial institutions based in the Global North, like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, lending money to impoverished countries in the Global South, under structural adjustment policies as preconditions for [new] loans, as Grace Chang shows. Some of these adjustment policies include: "slashing wages, liberalizing imports, opening markets for foreign investment, expanding exports, devaluing local currency, and privatizing

[132] Dean Spade, *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law* (Brooklyn: South End Press, 2011), 50.

state enterprises."[133] Transnational trade agreements are part of this neoliberal globalization, leaving workers and the environment unprotected and increasing the conditions for their exploitation. In an attempt to survive, migrating to countries with more material wealth such as the United States becomes a possibility, where anti-immigration policies and rhetoric, labor exploitation, white supremacy, and a colonialist and imperialist heteropatriarchy await them. The "land of the free" is thus not a welcoming new home for LGBTQ individuals who are often not only migrants, but also poor or working class.

The United States has historically constructed specific ideas of what home should look like, wrapped in discourses of nationalism. Jyoti Puri defines contemporary U.S. nationalism as "relatively recent beliefs and practices aimed at creating unified but unique communities within a sovereign territory." She indicates that within this definition, "such forms of community are thought of as nations" while sovereign territory is the state.[134] A community is thus understood as a kind of home and as a place of belonging that, for example, the American nation could represent. Puri further argues that nationalism is "an expression of power" as well. Social institutions and human relations are founded upon it, with "the ability to shape beliefs and practices."[135] While everybody might be assumed to be equal within a community—or within the nation—inequalities are in actuality "built into the social and legal infrastructures."[136] Such is the case of the American nation, or the American

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[133] Grace Chang, *Disposable Domestics: Immigrant Women Workers in the Global Economy* 2nd Ed. (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016), 115-116.

[134] Jyoti Puri, *Encountering Nationalism* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 2.

[135] Jyoti Puri, *Encountering Nationalism*, 5.

[136] Jyoti Puri, *Encountering Nationalism*, 6.

home. While it is discursively constructed as a place of belonging, it is founded on the systemic oppression of many. Mariana Ortega and Linda Martín Alcoff, in *Constructing the Nation: A Race and Nationalism Reader*, interrogate, "what does it mean today to be an 'American' when one does not represent or embody the norm of 'Americanness' because of one's race, ethnicity, culture of origin, religion, or some combination of these?"[137] The notion of the home and who belongs in it becomes obscured, only letting in those who uphold the idea of home as the nation.

Scholars like Eithne Luibhéid and Martin Manalansan have pointed out that queer migrant people of color have historically been policed for not fitting into the image that the United States constructed for itself as a heterosexual nation.[138] Immigration officials have kept "undesirable" people outside the United States borders so that the nation remains white and heterosexual. On the other hand, U.S. borders have also historically let people in from the Third World to do cheap disposable labor under guest worker programs, sending them back after their labor has been utilized.[139] Only in recent years has the United States started to paint itself as a nation that celebrates sexual diversity. However, the picture of sexual

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[137] Mariana Ortega and Linda Martín Alcoff, eds., *Constructing the Nation: A Race and Nationalism Reader* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009), 3-4.

[138] Eithne Luibhéid, *Entry Denied*.

Martin F. Manalansan VI, *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

[139] Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Gendered Transitions: Mexican Experiences of Migration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

Grace Chang, *Disposable Domestics.*

Patricia Zavella, *I'm Neither Here Nor There: Mexicans' Quotidian Struggles With Migration and Poverty* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

diversity is that of gays and lesbians who are white, middle class, cis-gender, and U.S. citizens, or welcoming to wealthy gay and lesbian tourists.

Jasbir Puar coins the term homonationalism, or U.S. sexual exceptionalism, to describe this, the "national recognition and inclusion" of the homosexual.[140] Gays and lesbians are now part of the nationalist discourses of home and belonging—they can be nationalists too, and be proud to be American. As Puar argues, narratives that claim to successfully embrace a group of people are key in building exceptionalism. It utilizes narratives of excellence through a process in which "a national population comes to believe it its own superiority and its own singularity."[141] The United States claims superiority for being "tolerant" and inclusive as a very specific group of gays and lesbians can now proudly feel part of—embrace and uphold—the American empire. Meanwhile, the same discourse ignores the many ways the nation perpetuates violence on non-normative genders, racialized bodies, the poor, and non-citizens or undocumented.[142]

Respectability Politics, Gay Rights and Inclusion

U.S. sexual exceptionalism goes hand in hand with discourses of respectability. While homonationalism upholds the U.S. empire, respectability politics are utilized to keep communities "in check." As E. Frances White, author of *Dark Continent of Our Bodies: Black Feminism and the Politics of Respectability*, points out, "European and Euro-American

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[140] Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 2.

[141] Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 2, 5.

[142] Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 5, 8.

nationalists turned to the ideology of respectability to control sexual behavior and gender relations."[143] She adds, "Respectability set standards of proper behavior at the same time that it constructed the very notion of private life." This standard was precisely heterosexuality, binary gender norms, and a nuclear family. Anything that deviated from this was not deemed respectable, and therefore not acceptable within the U.S. nation. In her argument, white nationalism "repeatedly portrayed African Americans as a threat to respectability."[144] Frances White specifically writes about respectability politics being imposed on Black communities in the United States, which can also apply to different groups of people of color living in the country, including migrants and queer migrants, many who are also Afro-descendent.

Respectability politics reached the mainstream gay community decades ago. Lisa Duggan, in *The Twilight of Equality*, points out how the mid-1990s saw the beginning of a "greater acceptance of the most assimilated, gender-appropriate, politically mainstream portions of the gay population […] in politics, media representations, and the workplace."[145] From the 1990s on, there was a stronger push from mainstream gay and lesbian organizations for gay marriage and inclusion in the military.[146] Both are institutions that reproduce notions of respectability. Duggan goes on to explain the new homonormativity as "a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a

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[143] E. Frances White, *Dark Continent of Our Bodies: Black Feminism and the Politics of Respectability* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), Location 1169.

[145] Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), 44.

[146] Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?,* 45.

privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption."[147] It is precisely this homonormativity that fits all too well with the state's idea of respectable, which can uphold its system of violence and greed.

An event at the White House in June 2014, which has been widely critiqued, exemplifies the homonormativity that is currently present in mainstream gay and lesbian circles. The White House held an LGBT reception to celebrate Pride Month, having former President Obama give a speech to an LGBT audience. Several youtube videos circulated in social media, showing Jennicet Gutiérrez, a trans immigrant woman activist, shouting, "Not one more deportation! Ni una más deportación!", interrupting Obama's speech.[148] In one of those videos it is apparent that the audience is elite, most likely gay and lesbian, and mostly white, who begin to shush Jennicet Gutiérrez. Obama tells her she is being disrespectful of *his* house and asks her to be quiet or leave. He then tells her, "shame on you" and has her removed from the event. Meanwhile, the elite lesbian and gay audience cheers former President Obama and boos Jennicet Gutiérrez. An audience member mimics Obama's words, and yells, "shame on you!" Viewers can see audience members laughing and cheering as Gutiérrez is being escorted out. There was no sign of solidarity from the elite gay and lesbian audience with Gutiérrez. There was no sense of unity with her, as she not only demanded being humanized as a trans person, but as an undocumented immigrant trans woman of color living in the United States. She challenged deportations and the sexual abuse trans women experience in detention centers. The audience at the LGBT event opted

[147] Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?*, 50.

[148] Youtube, accessed Jan. 20, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z3Q5Wq1kOBg.

for assimilating, demonstrating being the “good” gay and lesbian people, rather than supporting and uniting with Gutiérrez and the queer and trans undocumented community.

This is merely a well-known example of how much of the dominant gay and lesbian population is actively showing their respectability and co-optation to the state. They are actively portraying themselves as deserving of rights and privileges that respectable middle-upper class citizens have. In a time of neoliberalism, within the United States and globally, the state is indeed including privileged gays and lesbians into corporate America to portray itself as diverse and accepting. In the meantime, LGBTQ immigrant people who are not “respectable” are racially profiled, exploited, dehumanized, disposable, and when convenient, removed.

Forced Removal of Queer Muxeres

Waves of mass deportations from the United States significantly increased during the Obama administration. Laws like SB1070 in Arizona and copycat laws in other states, including SB 20 in South Carolina, HB 87 in Georgia, and HB 56 in Alabama, gave institutional power to local police to facilitated the already-implemented removal of many undocumented people. Undocumented migrants were often sent to countries where they did not grow up and thus did not embrace as their homes. Immigration advocates and activists named former President Obama the “deporter in chief,” as a response to his administration deporting over two million undocumented people since he took office in 2008. Susana and Yanelia are two immigrant lesbian cis muxeres who were deported back to Mexico after living most of their lives in the United States. They were both raised working class, racialized, undocumented women who did not fit the state’s idea of respectability. They

were therefore easy targets of neoliberal and anti immigration policies that deemed them disposable after having exploited their labor, and continuing to profit from their families' labor as well.

Yanelia's Story

Yanelia was born in Tamaulipas, México, but crossed the border to Texas three times, first when she was six, then at the age of eight, and finally at ten. She lived with her mother in Harlingen, Texas, to then move to Houston to live with her father and his family. At the age of seventeen, she moved once again, this time to Austin to start college at the University of Texas, Austin. Yanelia narrates growing up poor but always seeing her parents working as hard as they could to provide for them. She describes how difficult it was to go to college without financial aid, constantly having to submit extra documents. She studied education; however, upon graduating was not able to get a job as a teacher due to her immigration status. She instead got a job at a Wendy's.

> I was a manager at Wendy's, a chef manager, and I was making okay money. I lived fine. Obviously, if I could've worked as what I studied for, as a teacher, I would've made a lot more money and my life would've been better. My parents would've been better, because that's what I wanted to do at the end of the day, which was help my parents.

While working at Wendy's, Yanelia fell in love with one of her co-workers, who was also an undocumented woman from Mexico and married to a man. She narrates,

> When I found out she was married, I was like, in shock, because she is a butch lesbian. I'm here thinking, "she's gay!" you know? To my surprise she was married and… I didn't say anything obviously for respect for her husband. I never wanted to cause any kind of trouble. But there was a time where I couldn't hold it anymore... I couldn't hold it anymore, and I was like, I need to tell her, so I can let go of it, and move on. And she responded back, she wanted to talk, you know? And then we found ourselves cheating on the guy. She didn't love him and she was going to break up with him and I don't feel proud of this part of my life, but that's how it happened. At the end of it all, we ended up together. I graduated from college, because that was my last year of college, and we moved in to one apartment.

After working at Wendy's for about a year and a half, and living with her partner, Yanelia received a letter from immigration. She was asked to appear at a U.S. consulate in Mexico, so she went to Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua. Her father had petitioned for her when she was sixteen years old, and now, about eight years later, she was finally receiving news from immigration. Looking at Yanelia's story, it is clear she had done everything she could to be considered a "good" and respectable immigrant in the eyes of the United States. As she shares, "The only thing I've done is work illegally, but I did that so I could survive. Who wouldn't?" Since she had a clean criminal record and had attended college, Yanelia thought she would be getting her papers to be in the United States legally. At this point, she had not seen her mother for seventeen years, as there was a checkpoint between Harlingen, TX, and

Houston. She was hopeful she would see her mother once she returned from her interview in Juárez. At the time of our interview in 2014, it had been four years since her deportation.

> Because I entered the U.S. three times [while undocumented]—when I was six, then when I was eight, and then when I was ten—they punished me for ten years. I can't go back [to the U.S.] I got six years to go […]. We were honest about it, you know. We never lied. We were real honest. When did you come in? When did you go? And things like that. I was really honest. I like to speak with the truth, so I mean, if that's the punishment I deserve for doing absolutely nothing, then so be it. I think I already made peace with that… […] I left that office like, crushed, you can only imagine. I went to live in a rancho called Villa Cuahutémoc in Tamaulipas. That's where I lived, and I was in depression for about a month.

Yanelia felt immigration officials interrogated her about her sexuality. She had heard that they look up people's Facebook profiles to know more about them. She was also questioned about the tattoo she has, asking her if she belonged to a gang. Yanelia not only was denied re-entry to the United States for another ten years, but she was also harassed and interrogated about her respectability, labeling her unfit to be in the United States. As she mentions above, she went back to the town where she spent the first few years of her life, in Tamaulipas, México. Yanelia then re-connected with a friend who had also been living as undocumented in the United States, but who decided to return to Mexico, seeing no future for herself in the

U.S. Together, they moved to the state of Querétaro, and finally to Mexico City, where Yanelia resided at the time of our interview.

Susana's Story

Susana was four years old when she migrated to the United States in 1994, along with her mother, father, and siblings. They went from Mexico to California, then to Colorado, to Kansas, and finally made Oklahoma their new home. She received her GED and due to her undocumented status, she was not able to attend college without financial aid. In 2011, Susana left her home, driving without a driver's license as, she points out, "la policía se empezaba a poner más estricta con las licencias," "the police was starting to get more strict with driver's licenses." She was twenty-one years old at the time. Susana narrates,

> I couldn't believe it at the beginning. What happened was that they detained me because I didn't have my license, and when they put me in jail I thought I would just need to pay a fine, go to court and that's it. But that day… that night, they told me ICE wanted to speak with me. I didn't know what was happening… […] I was in Oklahoma City for about a week and a half, and from there they took me to Tucson, that's where they keep all the immigrants. I was there six months… […] I was scared, sad, I didn't know what was going to happen, [and kept] thinking, "why is this happening to me? Such injustice." But I tried looking at it in the most positive way possible. […] I was there six months waiting for my court day, but there were so many immigrants, that they decided to let some of them go… I was one of them. They chose me

> because my case was a minor offense, and they told me I could go until my court date arrived. Instead of waiting in jail, they told me I could wait outside until my court date. My court date arrived and they assigned me voluntary exit…

When Susana was in detention, her sister was the only person in her family who could visit her without fear that she could be deported as well. She was born in California and was therefore a U.S. citizen. Her sister visited Susana once during the six months that she was in detention. Susana's family was not only unable to visit her in person, but it was also impossible for them to talk on the phone on a regular basis.

> I could talk to them on the phone, but I would only call them once a week for about five minutes. It was too expensive… my family had to pay… they were collect calls. It was about three dollars a minute. Besides, I preferred saving that money for food… because I did talk to my family but it was… I mean, we had no news, it was just waiting until my court date. I could talk to them, but what for? It was pointless talking to them. It would just make my mom cry… it was better that way… […] We were fed there, but the food was not very good. If you wanted better food, you had to buy it in there… on top of having us all there… it's all a business.

Existing research supports Susana's astute critique of prison as a business. Scholar and activist Angela Davis and writer, activist, and educator James Clingman argue that phone

companies are some of the many who benefit from the exploitation of prisoners, or in her case, from immigrants in detention.[149] Angela Davis, one of the pioneers critiquing the prison industrial complex, explains in an interview to *The Nation* that the vast numbers of prisoners behind bars in the world—and the profit they generate—is an example of global capitalism. She points out that the prison industrial complex "does not only include public and private prisons, but also juvenile prisons, military prisons, and centers of interrogation."[150] In *Are Prisons Obsolete?* Davis indicates that in 2001, as reported by the U.S. Department of Justice, "There were 1,324,465 people in 'federal and state prisons,' 15,852 in 'territorial prisons,' 631,240 in 'local jails,' 8,761 in 'Immigration and Naturalization Service detention facilities,' 2,436 in 'military facilities,' 1,912 in 'jails in Indian country,' and 108,965 in 'juvenile facilities.'"[151] Then in 2007, according to a statistics table that is made public from the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 27,368 people were held in Immigration Customs Enforcement (formerly Immigration and Naturalization Service) facilities. The number includes 13,427 people who were held for immigration violations, 11,687 for criminal office, and 2,254 who were pending charge.[152] Three years later, Susana was added to these statistics, and after being in detention six months she was released. Susana explains how she experienced that moment.

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[149] James Clingman, "Why are Phone Calls from Jails so Expensive?" *Chicago Defender*, Oct. 17, 2007, accessed Nov. 27, 2014, ProQuest.

[150] "Q&A Angela Davis." *Nation*, 299.11 (2014): 5, accessed Nov 27, 2014, *Academic Search Complete.*

[151] Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003), Location: 1189. Kindle.

[152] "Number of Detainees in Custody By U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Authorities, By Office Type, December 31, 2007," *Bureau of Justice Statistics*, accessed May 16, 2017, https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=1589.

> It was like one in the morning when they told me I could leave. I was awake because I was doing my laundry, and I was playing cards with other women. All of a sudden they called me and said I was getting out. I thought I was going to be in there another four months, until my court date. They didn't tell me why they were calling me… they only said, "you're getting out, out of this place, so grab your things." It was all very fast. It was all within two hours. They let me go to Oklahoma. From there it was still another year, because they extended my court date. After my court date, they gave me another year to leave voluntarily.

According to the website of the U.S. General Consulate in Mexico, the Department of Homeland Security gives the option to "foreigners" who have lived in the United States without authorization to leave the country within a specific time.[153] Those who choose this option must go to a consulate or embassy outside the United States in person and sign their "exit verification" form.[154] Their records will say they exited voluntarily without being deported. However, in June 2013, the ACLU sued the U.S. border patrol and ICE for coercion and providing incorrect information to immigrants, forcing them to sign their own

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[153] "Voluntary Departures," U.S. Embassy & Consulates in Mexico, accessed Nov. 15, 2015, https://mx.usembassy.gov/embassy-consulates/merida/voluntary-departures/.

"Voluntary Departure," Department of Homeland Security, accessed May 16, 2017, https://www.uscis.gov/ilink/docView/FR/HTML/FR/0-0-0-1/0-0-0-102229/0-0-0-106136/0-0-0-106514/0-0-0-106604.html.

[154] "Voluntary Departure and Verification of Departure," Department of Homeland Security, accessed May 16, 2017, http://photos.state.gov/libraries/jamaica/231771/PDFs/ice_form_i_210.pdf.

voluntary exits.[155] During Susana's hearing, although she was assigned a lawyer, she did not help her case. Instead, Susana says, "she stayed quiet," and it was Susana herself who spoke up to defend her case. It is questionable whether signing voluntary exit or being deported were the only two options, and it is worth wondering what would have happened if she had received the proper legal advice she needed.

Since her return to Mexico, Susana lives in Ecatepec, State of Mexico, where her father, her grandmother, and more relatives live. It has been difficult to adjust to life in Mexico, where, "everything is different… I don't know the family, it's starting from scratch, my whole life from scratch." When she arrived in Mexico, she moved in with her father, at her grandmother's house in Ecatepec. Shortly after, she moved to a different apartment where she rented when we met, because her grandmother kicked her out. She told Susana she did not want "people like that" in her house, so she left.

As Jill Anderson and Nin Solís demonstrate in their book *Los Otros Dreamers*, the resources for migrants who have been deported are practically non-existent in Mexico.[156] When they are there, they tend to be quite heteronormative. In other words, they focus on families with opposite sex parent households. It is true that entire families have been returning to México in the last several years—families whose gendered labor was exploited in the United States. However, there are no resources for those who are LGBTQ. Neither,

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[155] "Victory! Immigration Authorities Must Stop Coercing Immigrants Into Signing Away Their Rights," ACLU, accessed Nov 15, 2005, https://www.aclu.org/blog/victory-immigration-authorities-must-stop-coercing-immigrants-signing-away-their-rights.

[156] Jill Anderson and Nin Solis, *Los Otros Dreamers* (Ciudad de México: Offset Santiago, 2014).

Susana nor Yanelia met the United States' standards for citizenship in the country. As Amy L. Brandzel argues, in the United States, "differentiation between citizens and noncitizens is racially loaded, noncitizens become 'aliens' and 'illegal aliens.'"[157] Both, Yanelia and Susana were literally punished for "misbehaving," so to speak, that is, for living in the country "illegally." Although Yanelia tried to follow the rules and expectations of what is considered a good citizen, it was not good enough. They were both shamed, removed, and sent back to a "home" they did not know.

Voluntarily Leaving the United States

Although there have been massive numbers of undocumented people who have been deported from the United States, many have chosen to leave the country, given the limited opportunities they see for themselves in the United States. They are faced with few opportunities to economically survive in a country that only welcomes their exploitable labor but dehumanizes their existence. In this section I focus on the oral histories of Marifer and Sandra, two queer immigrant muxeres whose families chose to return to Mexico after living as undocumented in the United States for years.

Marifer's Story

Marifer was twenty-two years old at the time of our interview. She identifies as a trans woman, and was raised in poverty in both Mexico and the United States. Marifer chooses not to define her sexuality, as gender is not an important factor when she is attracted to different people. However, she does have a preference for not being romantically and/or

[157] Amy L. Brandzel, *Against Citizenship: The Violence of the Normative* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016), 10.

sexually involved with cis women and cis men. When she was about eighteen years old, around the time that she moved out of her parents' place, she began to define herself as a trans woman to people close to her.

Marifer has really migrated three times, from Guanajuato to Texas, from Texas to Guanajuato, and from Guanajuato to Mexico City. The first time she experienced a migration journey was in 2002 at the age of ten. Prior to that, however, she already lived within a migrant environment, as her father was a migrant worker for years in the United States and would go back and forth between both countries every few months. Back in Mexico, her mother became friends with a highly religious neighbor, who convinced her that a woman's place was with her husband. Her mother, then, decided to join Marifer's father in Texas. Two years later, they had enough money to pay a coyote and have the children—Marifer, her sister, and two brothers—cross too. Marifer recounts,

> It was cheaper back then. What you pay now to be taken in a trailer, which is the cheapest option you can find, back then they charged us the same amount, but [the conditions were better]. It was only grown men who had to cross by foot, and it was a short walk. The rest of us [crossed] by the bridge, by car… it was all really well organized.

As an immigrant in the United States, Marifer experienced poverty, racism, and was made to feel she was a threat to those around her. For example, she shared a story about a fieldtrip her school organized when she was in seventh grade. While some seventh graders were taken to the local community college, she and other working class students of color were

taken to the local correctional facility. There, they saw former racialized classmates, who were being criminalized by the system at an age no older than fifteen. In our conversation, Marifer stated how clearly the school was differentiating between students who were expected to be "successful" and would go on to college, and "problem" students who would most likely end up in jail.

Years later, Marifer began to identify as a trans muxer. However, she explains she does not like to see that process as any sort of coming out.

> I didn't come out of any closet before coming to Mexico… I wouldn't say I was trans… a couple of very close people knew… I feel like it's a little more complicated because, as an undocumented immigrant, there's already very little support outside of that community [immigrant community], which might or might not have prejudices… So, I was really scared to say something about my gender and sexuality, in the sense of getting support from that community…

Marifer had to negotiate her social positions as a way to survive in a society that does not value non-normative genders and sexualities. She wanted to keep her immigrant community, and the support she received from it. But due to centuries of colonized ways of thinking about gender and sexuality, she did not always know if they would still accept her for identifying as a woman. While she was still going through this process, about eight years after migrating to the United States, Marifer returned to San Miguel, Guanajuato. Six months later, her brother was deported, a year later her other brother returned to Mexico, and

months prior to our interview her father returned as well. When I asked Marifer why she returned, she said,

> I came back for economic reasons… socioeconomic reasons. I knew what my future was going to be as a migrant… [I knew] I was going to be able to do more than what I would always be there [in the U.S.], [such as] work in restaurants…[…]. While I was there, it was easy to be there, but if I wanted to do something else with my life, if I ever wanted to retire or something like that… the idea I had was that it was better for me, even if it was from poverty, to make a life for myself here in Mexico, where I had access to resources. At least it wasn't a legal risk here [to seek resources].

Marifer returned to Guanajuato when she was eighteen years old, in 2010. Wanting to look for spaces where she could find LGBTQ community and more job opportunities, she moved to Mexico City, where she resides now. Marifer and part of her family were forced to return to Mexico, as the United States had nothing to offer them. It was also around the time that mass deportations were taking place, perhaps influencing her decision to return. The United States did not represent a home of the "land of the free" or the "land of opportunity" to her. She also did not feel she could turn to the gay community in town, as she did not think they would embrace her or her experiences as an undocumented racialized trans woman. The act of returning itself became a form of resistance for Marifer. Consciously or subconsciously, she rejected the idea of the American dream that is sold to immigrants, unwilling to

unconditionally live under exploitative conditions. She instead opted for finding a home back in Mexico.

Sandra's Story

Sandra, who identifies as a woman and as lesbian, was twelve years old when she migrated with her family to the United States, lived in Georgia, Atlanta, and settled in Charleston, North Carolina, where they lived for ten years. Similar to Marifer, her father was a temporary migrant worker in the United States, going back to Mexico for a few months and repeating the migration cycle year after year. At one point, Sandra and her family in Mexico did not see her father for two years, which was the incentive for them to decide to migrate too.

> I crossed by the border. My mom had a visa, so she went in a different vehicle. My brother and I went with this lady who had birth certificates from other kids. We got to customs, and since they saw I was a little older or taller, they got suspicious of us. He asked me in Spanish where I was from, but I couldn't hear very well, so I said, "sorry, can you say that again?" So he probably thought I didn't speak Spanish and said, "Where are you from?" in English. I said California. He said, "Okay, you can come thru."

Sandra recounts feeling frustrated the first couple of years in the United States, describing it as a "nightmare." She felt everyone stared at her, wondered where she was from and why she did not speak English. Sandra remembers these first few years

being very hard, being in a different country and having to learn another language. She shared with me that shortly after they moved to the United States her parents expected her to order food at fast food restaurants for them, when she would barely speak any English. Several years later, at the age of sixteen, she began to identify as a lesbian, although, she feels she always knew. When she was twenty-two years old, Sandra returned to Mexico.

> It's funny because you do get used to it, and you feel like you have a home there, but I'm the kind of person who is like, wherever your roots are, that's where you feel most comfortable, you don't have to worry about documentation, about the papers, about work. So I started thinking about what was best for me, for my future, for my family, and I decided to come back. Many judged me for the decision I took… "But why are you leaving? The situation is really bad there, blah, blah." There are always things you won't like, and I thought, things are getting hard here… we had done nothing to fix our papers… everything happens for a reason. Some time later I found out Obama was doing the whole Dream Act thing… I was already here. I was like, well that's nice.

Sandra was not the only one who returned to Mexico. Her parents and siblings returned as well. The first ones to make the trip back were her mother and sister.

> I had a car accident, so my dad stayed another half a year with me. While I was recuperating, he went back to Mexico, so it was just me and my brother who stayed in the U.S. I stayed with my partner at the time, who I lived with. My brother finished school and left for Mexico. Half a year later… eight months later, I come back [to Mexico]. I didn't want to be there alone anymore. Well, I wasn't alone, but I felt alone…[…]. When my mom came back [to Mexico], I went through a period of depression. So I started going out a lot to parties, I would smoke, that's when I had the accident. From that accident, I lost my job, my transportation, and everything became really difficult, so I decided to come back.

Sandra explains how she experienced her return to Mexico,

> It was mind-blowing, we crossed through Texas and literally, as soon as you cross the border, everything changes, like the trees, the sky, the people, the air that you're breathing… everything changes. It's so drastic. It's weird to think that it's just a line that's dividing two places and that's it. And how the change can be so drastic. We got to Nuevo León, got out of the bus to get the luggage and I'm like, "oh god, please help me go back." My mom was like, "no, it's too late now." Getting to Mexico City too, I see my dad, my sister… my sister was so grown now. I almost didn't recognize her. We went to have food, we went to have barbacoa tacos. And then I was like, I like the food here, it's awesome!

Both Marifer and Sandra—and their families—were structurally forced to return to Mexico, as the United States had nothing to offer them other than the exploitation of their labor. The United States did not embrace them as part of the nation. They were also not part of a gay community, as undocumented racialized LGBTQs. Marifer and Sandra were not respectable enough in the eyes of the nation-state, becoming vulnerable to the global neoliberal policies and discourses that target minoritized populations in the United States. It is likely that their survival options would have been very limited if they had stayed in the country, including engaging in survival crimes like sex work, therefore, increasing the likelihood of entering the prison industrial complex, work for low and exploitable wages, and fear deportation at any moment. They instead made the decision to return to a home they had not seen for years. Despite receiving criticism for going back and leaving the "American Dream," they both now live in Mexico City, creating a different path for themselves and their families.

Home-Building as Survival

Yanelia, Susana, Marifer, and Sandra are all survivors of state violence. They have been displaced from their homes multiple times—directly and indirectly. They have been trying to find economic and emotional stability. These four muxeres are survivors of systems of power, structures, and dominant discourses that position them as having no home and being unworthy of belonging anywhere.

Three of the narrators in this chapter, Susana, Yanelia, and Sandra know each other and are friends. They met while working in call centers in Mexico City, given that that was one of the few jobs they were able to find, as people who did not grow up in Mexico and who did not have an institutionalized Mexican education. Their bilingual skills and knowledge

about the United States and its culture make them the ideal call center workers. Ironically enough, while it has been rightly argued that call centers are highly exploitative, that is where they met other returnees, some of them LGBTQ. Their stories show the contradictions of exploitation and survival. Facing marginalization and isolation, Susana, Yanelia, and Sandra began creating a type of home with each other, realizing that they were not alone in Mexico. Susana, Sandra, and Yanelia shared with me, separately, that they get together, go to gay clubs, go to pride events every June, and share their intersectional experiences with one another. These are all ways of challenging the isolation that the migration, deportation, and returning experiences put on them.

Marifer, on the other hand, specifically wanted to look for spaces where she would find queer and trans community, as well as more job opportunities in Mexico City. She took the entry exam to start school at UNAM, the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, nationally and internationally known for its leftist scholarship and politics, and she was accepted. In the end, however, Marifer decided not to attend UNAM, as she began shaping her views on institutionalized education, not wanting to become a part of it. She decided not to go to college and seek different forms of education elsewhere.

Since she moved to Mexico City, she has built a solid community of queer and trans people with whom she organizes. She and her friends started a small group that they envision as one that prioritizes healing and self-care, which involve writing, drawing, cooking, sharing experiences, and watching TV series and films. They also started talking about a project that Marifer thought would be called *El Otro Cuarto (the other room)*, which would be a space where queer, trans, and gender non-conforming people, would gather to disrupt normative ways of understanding beauty, consent, gender, sexuality, and race.

Marifer has been creating tactics of survival, and she indeed is surviving, creating, and re-creating a home for herself.

While the four narrators I introduced here are surviving, it is also important to not lose sight that they continue to experience difficulties in their everyday lives. Marifer, for example, suffers from anxiety and sometimes has to take medication for it. Exploitation, classism, racism, anti queer and anti trans rhetoric, sentiments, and policies, and heteromatriarchy are all very real in their lives. But despite all these forms of violence, Marifer, Yanelia, Susana, and Sandra left the "American Dream" to create homes, dreams, and a sense of belonging back in Mexico.

Conclusion

The narrators that I presented here all struggle daily to survive economically, leading to also struggle to survive emotionally. They are not the kind of queers that will make the nation-state proud to have in its home or that it could use to portray the nation-state as accepting and liberating. Instead, all four narrators have felt the effects of a neoliberal globalization that has shaped citizenship, inclusion, and belonging. Neoliberal policies, on a global scale, have increasingly forced people to migrate, and on an internal level they have strengthened U.S. immigration control, militarization of the border and the deportation of high numbers of undocumented people. At the same time, this very neoliberalism has also portrayed the United States as exceptional, claiming progress by including white and middle class LGBTQ people into its institutions. Undocumented LGBTQ migrants, however, do not see the progress the United States claims to have made. They continue to be vulnerable and are still easily removed—directly or indirectly—literally from their homes in the United

States. They can be, and have been, forced to “go back home” to a place that does not feel like one.

In the midst of the systemic violence that all four narrators, Yanelia, Susana, Marifer, and Sandra have faced, they engage in creating a sense of home basically from scratch, out of necessity. They are building homes of belonging and survival, challenging the isolation and displacement imposed on them by immigration, economic, patriarchal, and hetero/homonormative systems.

CHAPTER 4

Queer, Cuir, Joto, Marica?
Creating Discursive Queer Homes in Mexico

Introduction

In April 2015, the Gender Studies Program at the National Autonomous University of Mexico hosted their *1er Congreso Internacional Sobre Género y Espacio* (First International Conference on Gender and Space). Two panels that were part of the same series had the term "queer" in it: "Sexualidades y espacio: Heteronormatividad, diversidad sexual, disidencia sexual, sexualidades queer," (Sexualities and Space: Heteronormativity, Sexual Diversity, Sexual Dissidence, *Queer* Sexualities). Two out of six presentations from the first panel had the term "queer" in the title, while one of five presentations in the second panel used the term as well. The discussions ranged from observations about *queer* as an identity in feminist spaces within Mexico City to a type of feminism that is self-proclaimed *queer*, and to the relationship between queer theory and a movement that generated in Spain called, posporno, or pos-porno. None of the panels discussed *queer* in relation to U.S. LGBTQ migrant returnees, as people moving across physical, political, and social borders, or for whom *teoría queer* could serve as a theoretical tool.

The impact of what developed mostly in the United States as "queer theory," which challenged the construction of gender often borrowed from postmodern theory, has gone beyond its borders. *Queer* is used in French and Spanish—to name only two—languages.[158] Along with queer theory or *teoría queer,* the term is making its way into the Mexican

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[158] Beatriz Preciado, *Testo yonqui: sexo drogas y biopolítica*. (Madrid: Espesa, 2014).

Paul B. Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era* Bruce Benderson, (New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2013).

academy, as well as into art and performance that is meant to be critical of hetero—and homo—normativitiy. Within Gender Studies programs, texts on *estudios queer* and *teoría queer* are being assigned and read.[159] Meanwhile, within some feminist performance and art circles, *queer,* along with its phonetically translated term *cuir,* is beginning to be adopted.

The entrance of *queer* into a Mexican context already signals having imperialist and colonialist implications due to its origins in the already-dominant U.S. academy. Although it provides opportunities for challenging normativity, queer is also based on often inaccessible, and arguably elitist Eurocentric theories. Such a basis suggests queer may not be a theoretical home for communities positioned within intersectional marginalities, such as the poor and working class, migrants, and those who lack access to academic environments. This is not to say marginalized communities are not capable of understanding theoretical analyses, but that most queer theory texts are inaccessible to non-academic audiences. Similarly, while *cuir* is still theoretically developing, most texts describe it as the Spanish phonetic translation of *queer*, often using both interchangeably. This chapter is based on the participant ethnographic work I conducted in Mexico City, as well as my analysis of online primary sources, such as Facebook pages, radio shows, recorded talks, and artists' web sites from Mexico. I look at these as sources and part of today's age of social media and technology, where the flow of information is constant and accessible (as long as there is access to internet connection). Analyzing a Día de los Muertos party at Casa Gomorra, Judith Butler's talking in Mexico, and the translation of English texts into Spanish, I argue that the *estudios queer* and *teoría queer* that is growing in Mexico is showing to be developing into an elitist, western, and imperialist lens from which to observe culture-specific dynamics in the country.

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[159] Field notes.

Día de los Muertos at Casa Gomorra

Casa Gomorra is a space in Mexico City that its founders envision as a feminist and queer house. The name alludes to the biblical City of Gomorrah and the punishment of its inhabitants, along with those of the city of Sodom, "because of the loathsome sin of its denizens," or what is often interpreted as same-sex behavior.[160] Founded in 2013, Casa Gomorra is a house where people interested in feminist and queer critiques live and organize events, parties, and various activities.[161] Casa Gomorra's Facebook page describes it as, "A self-managed space, which intends to be a subterfuge of varied monsters with feminist and queer perspectives."[162] *Timeout*, a guide about restaurants, museums, bars, clubs, and festivals in Mexico City, had a column about Casa Gomorra in February 2015, where the author, Alejandra Villegas, names Bruno Cuervo, Ana Agredo, Mirushka, and Letto Belquia as the creators of Gomorra, and friends whose interest in, "Feminism, *transfeminismo*, *pornoterrorismo*, and queer philosophy" brought them together to make it a space for parties for the LGBTTTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Transgender, Travesti, Intersex) community. Ana, one of the founders, was quoted as saying, "We realized that parties were a great option for fundraising, but they also open up a space that the community needs: a safe place to live their sexuality without prejudices. Here, you can dance with your boobs out

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[160] Heather R. White, *Reforming Sodom: Protestants and the Rise of Gay Rights*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015) 19-20.

[161] Field notes.

[162] "Casa Gomorra," Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/pg/casa.gomorra/about/?ref=page_ internal.

"Casa Gomorra es un espacio auto gestionado que pretende ser subterfugio de monstruxs variadxs con perspectivas feministas y queer."

without bothering anyone. Everybody respects each other's identities."[163] The article then refers to Diana J. Torres, an activist and *pornoterrorista* from Spain, who joined Casa Gomorra in 2014. Bruno Cuervo, Ana Agredo, Mirushka, and Letto Belquia, and Diana J. Torres live in the house, although it may be possible that some have left and others joined since Villegas's column was published in 2015. Those who live in Casa Gomorra are the main organizers of the parties that take place there, where practices like orgies are common in the rooms. Furthermore, some members of Gomorra make feminist and queer fanzines as well as jewelry for sale. The people who attend parties and events at Gomorra either identify as LGBTTTI or are interested in LGBTTTI spaces that are not normative. While class status is difficult to define, it is possible that many attendees range from working to middle class. Some are university students, while some are connected to various performance spaces.[164]

Vignette, November 1, 2014:[165]

> *Yesterday, October 31, 2014, I attended a Halloween/Día de los Muertos party at Casa Gomorra. It was meant to celebrate Día de los Muertos. Most attendees were part of the LGBTI community, and many painted their faces like calavera (skull). There were mariachis for part of the night, and a lot of dancing. At some point during the party, the music shut down and the lights lit up. A performance was about to begin.*

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[163] Alejandra Villegas, "Casa Gomorra," Timeout: Ciudad de México, https://www.timeoutmexico.mx/ ciudad-de-mexico/gay-y-lesbico/casa-gomorra.

[164] Field notes. Some of this information came from conversations with friends who are familiar with Casa Gomorra.

[165] Field notes.

It was a political performance calling attention to the disappearance of forty-three students from Ayotzinapa, Guerrero over a month earlier. On the night of September 24, 2014, forty-three young men in their late teens and early twenties, all student teachers at the Escuela Normal Rural Superior Raúl Isidro Burgos in Ayotzinapa, Guerrero, Mexico, were disappeared, and three more were killed.[166] It has been documented that that night the government and organized crime came together to silence, kill, and disappear rural student teachers who, historically, had been fighting for resources for rural schools.[167] Rural teaching schools, also called normales rurales, were founded on revolutionary ideas during the late 1930s, having *tierra y educación* (land and education) as their motto.[168] The goal was to make education accessible to the poorest communities, who were often Indigenous peoples and peasants. The creation and maintenance of normales rurales has therefore been a social struggle since then. The current Mexican administration of Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-present) passed an education reform that impacts teachers who can now be easily fired, forcing them to re-model their curriculum to, among other changes, remove Indigenous languages from it and incorporate English instead.[169] Rural teachers are some of the many who are fighting the education reform under vulnerable conditions, since the state has been

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[166] Luis Fernando Méndez-Franco, "La vida en el imaginario de la Resistencia popular por Ayotzinapa: la comunidad en contextos de terrorismo de Estado," *El Cotidiano 189* enero-febrery (2015): 95.

[167] Luis Fernando Méndez-Franco, "La vida en el imaginario, 67.

César Navarro Gallegos, "Ayotzinapa y la estirpe insumisa de normalismo rural, *El Cotidiano 189* (enero-febrero 2015).

[168] César Navarro Gallegos, "Ayotzinapa y la estirpe insumisa," 95.

[169] César Navarro Gallegos, "Ayotzinapa y la estirpe insumisa," 100.

looking for ways to remove them from the education system, given their historical resistance to it.

In September 2014, over one hundred students from Guerrero had been getting ready to travel to Mexico City to be a part of an annual march on October 2. Ironically, the annual October 2nd marches commemorate the student massacre that took place in 1968 in Mexico City, which left many dead and disappeared students. *La Jornada*, a well-recognized leftist newspaper, was one of the many that reported about the disappearance of the forty-three students from Ayotzinapa, remaining as archives that have marked history. According to *La Jornada,* it had become a tradition for student teachers to take buses and use them as transportation to Mexico City for the mass marches of October 2.[170] Historian César Navarro Gallegos, points out that, in reality, their taking of busses comes from the lack of transportation for conducting school activities, such as student fieldtrips.[171] With that, in September 2014, different groups of students took several buses, agreeing to meet in Chilpancingo, the capital of Guerrero. Based on photos and videos taken by the student teachers themselves, audio testimonies of survivors, and interviews with witnesses and family members, *La Jornada*'s documentation of the night's events reports that the federal preventive police followed the busses and started shooting. The last bus in line stayed behind, receiving most of the gunshots and wounding two students who were inside. The police called an ambulance for one of the wounded young men, taking the rest in six or seven municipal police trucks, while the rest of the student teachers hid and watched, thinking they would need to get their comrades out of jail the next day. Those who were hiding later found

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[170] "La Tragedia de Iguala: 2014-2015," La Jornada, http://www.jornada.unam.mx/ultimas/la-tragedia-de-iguala-2014-2015.

[171] César Navarro Gallegos, "Ayotzinapa y la estirpe insumisa," 98.

another bus with signs of gunshots and flat tires, then learning that the young men had run out of the bus and toward the mountains. The following day, one of the students who ran was found dead, with signs of torture and part of his face torn off. The students who were taken by the police are all still missing today. Numerous marches and protests have been organized since then in different parts of Mexico, and some cities in the United States. Some of the protests have taken the form of art and performance.

Two examples of such performances took place at the Día de los Muertos party, on October 31, 2014, at Casa Gomorra in Mexico City. The first one consisted of two white non-binary people from Spain, appearing naked at the center of the dance floor. Both of their feet were chained, and both bodies were chained to each other. Parts of their bodies were bleeding, while one used a whip to spank the other. It was short, no more than ten minutes long. There was no dialogue. It was only until the end of the performance that they yelled, “Vivos se los llevaron, vivos los queremos!” (Alive, they took them. Alive, we want them back!), which is a chant that has been extensively used in Mexico to demand answers from the state about the forty-three disappeared students from Ayotzinapa. A different performance followed, this time it was a widely known queer and posporno performer named Diana J. Torres, *la Pornoterrorista*, also from Spain. The crowd showed excitement to see her. Torres’s performance was longer, twenty to thirty minutes, approximately. She stood in front of the crowd and next to the altar for Día de Muertos as she started to speak on the microphone. She appeared fully naked. The topics she spoke about went from naming different people who had been important in her life and who had passed away in the last several years, showing photos on the projector as she went on, to speaking about the importance of doing decolonial performance—presumably like hers—linking decolonial

work, the Catholic church, and heteronormativiy with Día de los Muertos celebration. Meanwhile, Torres masturbated to the audience. At one point she pinched her finger until it bled, using the blood to write the names of her *muertitos* (death ones) on the white wall.

Diana J. Torres *Pornoterrorista* is a well-known member of the posporno/pos-porno movement in Spain. She lives in Casa Gomorra, doing some of her performances there. As a performance artist that collaborates with queer artists in Spain and increasingly in Mexico and Latin America, Torres defines herself as an artist, poet, and terrorist.[172] In the introduction of this chapter, I referred to "posporno" as a movement that generated in Spain, and which has a relationship with *teoría queer*. Gender Studies scholar Nancy Prada quotes Silvia Marimon's definition of postporno as something that is, "Primarily plural, and it wants to be everything that traditional pornography ignores."[173] Prada references the work of a posporno group from Barcelona called Girls Who Like Porno, who, "Believe in queer feminist post pornography theory."[174] It is a kind of porn that disrupts non-binary genders and sexualities, is about pleasure, and distances itself from the victimization of those in the sex industry.

Torres's work is well known. She started a project in 2007, called *pornoterrorismo*, and published a first edition book on it in 2011 in Spain. Her project looks to re-appropriate

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[172] Nancy Prada, "Todas las caperucitas rojas se vuelven lobos en la práctica pospornográfica" *Cadernos Pagu* 38 (2012): 156.

Diana J. Torres, Pornoterrorismo, https://pornoterrorismo.com/about/.

[173] Nancy Prada, "Todas las caperucitas rojas," 152.

Translation: "El postporno es sobre todo plura, y quiere ser todo aquello que la industria tradicional pornográfica ignora."

[174] Nancy Prada, "Todas las caperucitas rojas," 153-154.

bodies and pleasure, explicitly stating that she is not speaking from a theorist's perspective, but rather from her own personal experience. In the book, Torres tells about her childhood, her observation of prejudices and codes to keep people—women—constrained. As she grows up, Torres realizes, "My sex is not auto-censored—that always comes from the outside."[175] She defines herself as "butch, lesbian, crooked, perverted, criminal, blasphemous, ugly, sick," to point that she is purposely creating a life outside the heteronormative system, embracing it and transforming it into something that is powerful for herself.[176] Torres then defines terrorist as, "Any person in society that is labeled as monstrous, dangerous, or angry," and argues that the state has used terrorism, under the facade of democracy, to control societies.[177] Therefore, Torres suggests her *pornoterrorismo* is a "counterattack terrorism."[178] Diana Torres has given numerous performances, where she is usually semi or fully naked, like the one at Casa Gomorra. She sometimes masturbates to the crowd and ejaculates at them as she speaks of the violence that the state perpetuates on different bodies. She views these performances as a way to produce fear and "terrorize a heteropatriarchal system." She then dedicates her performances to everyone who has "lost their lives because their sexualities or genders transgressed borders of norm(ality)."[179] Diana Torres *Pornoterrorista* has taken her performances to different cities in Spain and to Latin America,

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[175] Diana J. Torres, *Pornoterrorismo*, (San Isidro: Txalaparta, 2011), 22.
Original: "Mi sexo no es autocensura, eso siempre viene desde fuera."

[176] Diana J. Torres, *Pornoterrorismo*, 23.
Original: "Marimacho, bollera, desviada, pervertida, delincuente, blasfema, fea, enferma."

[177] Diana J. Torres, *Pornoterrorismo,* 69.

[178] Original: "Terrorismo de contraataque."

[179] Diana J. Torres, *Pornoterrorismo*, 72.

including Mexico. Her work has become popular among queer/cuir crowds in Mexico City, where the latest edition of her book, *Pornoterrorismo,* was published and, as mentioned above, where she joined the project of Casa Gomorra almost since its beginnings.

While the first two performers and their work are not known widely like Torres's, here I aim to highlight their performance as one that centered around them while they were in a particular position of power. They were in Mexico, at a Dia de los Muertos celebratory party intending to call attention to the murders of the Ayotzinapa students. Both performers were white bodies on the dance floor surrounded by Brown and Mestizx Mexicans. Both were from Spain and most likely had a Spanish (European) passport, perhaps facing little to no trouble with immigration to enter the country. These were two bodies that embody privilege in many ways, as they literally caused each other's bleeding and pain. Meanwhile the forty-three Mexican, racialized, impoverished students from Ayotzinapa had no choice but to be the direct target of extreme violence from the state and organized crime.

The first performance set the stage for Torres's, whose call for decolonial work seems contradictory in this situation. It is dangerous to name something decolonial, or to call for decolonial work, without ever mentioning the historical and current struggles of Indigenous peoples in Mexico and the Americas, or without critically looking at her own position as white, Spanish, and able to afford traveling across different borders. Many of the student teachers from Guerrero, and their communities, are Indigenous. However, that was never mentioned. Indigenous scholars Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Corntassel, in their piece, "Unsettling Settler Colonialism: The Discourse and Politics of Settlers, and Solidarity with Indigenous People," which provides critical insights of the institutionalization of settler colonialism studies, argue that the de-conceptualization of, "'Settler' and solidarity risk

further eschewing Indigenous peoples […] through de-centering Indigenous people's own articulations of Indigenous-settler relations."[180] None of the performers questioned their own historical and current social positions. At no point during either performance was there any reflection about the legacy of colonialism between Mexico and Spain. There was no reflection about ways in which colonization might be carried on generation after generation, and how all three performers might be complicit in that process. There was no dialogue about ways in which they might carry colonizing patterns in their own bodies, which they likely reproduce onto Brown Indigenous and Mestizo bodies. Finally, there was no reflection or dialogue about how they could be effective allies, without centering themselves in a social and political climate that should be centered on Indigenous struggles that, unlike the performers who chained themselves to each other, have been chained to centuries of colonization.[181]

While Torres's queer performances in Mexico can offer critiques of the heteronormative state, she is also introducing a vision of *queer* that is specific to Spain's historical and social context, perhaps not accounting for Spain's colonizing history in the Americas. It is questionable whether her queer *pornoterrorismo* is translatable to a country with a long history of colonization and imperialism, like Mexico and the rest of Latin America. Moreover, a racialized audience watched Torres, a person positioned within privilege as Spanish, white, and someone who can afford (monetarily and otherwise) to travel

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[180] Corey Snelgrove, Rita Kaur Dhamoon, and Jeff Corntassel. "Unsettling Settler Colonialism: The Discourse and Politics of Settlers, and Solidarity with Indigenous Nations." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3.2 (2014): 26.

[181] Ricky Sherover-Marcuse, "Working Assumptions and Guidelines for Alliance Building," in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice: An Anthology on Racism, Heterosexism, Ableism, and Classism*, Eds. Maurianne Adams et. al. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 486.

with a passport, utilize the sacred celebration of death for herself and to supposedly decolonize sexuality.

The Oakland Museum of California, who conducted and published research on the Day of the Dead and its role in Chicana/o communities in the U.S., states, "To simply see the tradition of the Mexican Días de los Muertos as a quaint folk custom does it little justice. It has always been a religious practice alive with its own cosmology, vibrant with spiritual and emotional meaning for the people who participate it in." The Day of the Dead, the authors continue, is "full of reverence, sorrow, and prayer."[182] While the performances might provide a critical look at heteronormativity's censorship of genders and sexualities that fall outside the norm, as westerners, they are in positions of power within the centuries-long colonized land of Mexico. I therefore question the idea that these performances needed be central in a sacred and ancient Indigenous celebration. Día de los Muertos is one of the Indigenous celebrations that survived colonization from Spain, and is therefore one that must be centered on survivors of colonialist violence. In this particular case, Mexican workers, peasants, and Indigenous people have a closer connection to the disappearances of Ayotzinapa, as most Mexicans are directly impacted by the ongoing state violence in the country, from kidnappings to disappearances, and to constant killings that take place on an everyday basis. Either performance "cannot be decolonized because of good intentions" only.[183] Spanish white bodies taking space as they are surrounded by brown Mexican bodies, in a context that

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[182] Rafael Jesús González, Chiori Santiago, Meoy Gee, Oakland Museum of California, *El corazón de la muerte: Altars and Offerings for Days of the Death* (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2015), 28.

[183] Corey Snelgrove, Rita Kaur Dhamoon, and Jeff Corntassel. "Unsettling Settler Colonialism," 9.

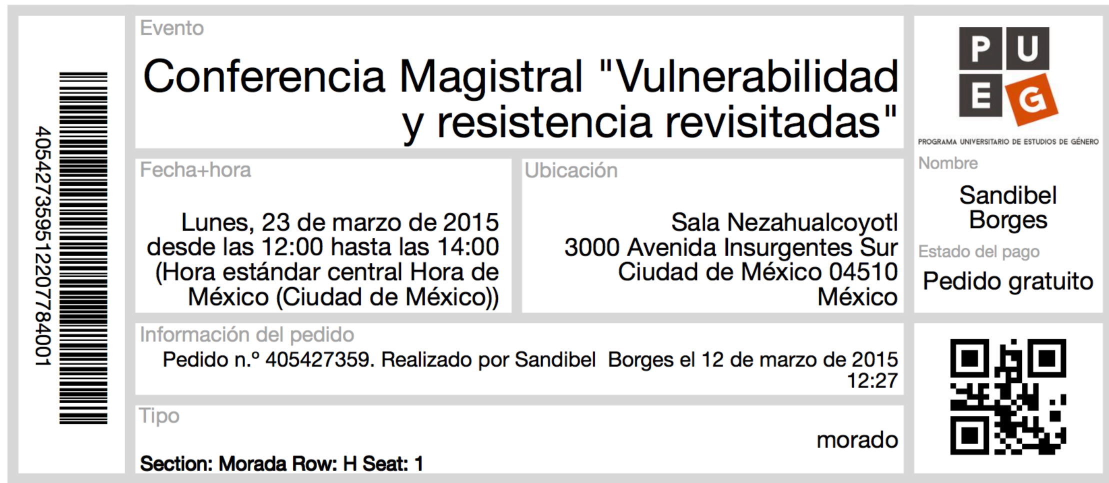
celebrates a sacred tradition, while supposedly honoring and remembering the students from Ayotzinapa, is not decolonizing, but colonizing in a twenty-first century kind of way, by using a discourse of decolonization, while the actions are those of appropriation.

Judith Butler's Talking in Mexico

Vignette, March 23, 2015:

> *Monday March 23, 2015—Judith Butler was invited to give a keynote presentation at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, or UNAM. The Gender Studies Program and the Department of Letters and Philosophy organized the event, circulating information on the event on academic listserves, Facebook pages associated with UNAM, and on the UNAM site. There was an entrance fee, although as a visiting scholar in UNAM's Gender Studies Program, I received a free entrance. It was unclear to me whether all Gender Studies faculty received a free entrance as well, and whether students had to pay to attend. It took place in one of the biggest auditoriums of the university, Sala Nezahualcoyotl. As I looked at the title of the talk, "Vulnerability and Resistance, Revisited," I think about the many Women and Queer of Color spaces that I have been a part of, and where members tend to talk about our own vulnerability as a form of resistance. I wonder how Butler will speak about the topic.*

Imprime y lleva esta entrada contigo.



Evento
Conferencia Magistral "Vulnerabilidad y resistencia revisitadas"

Fecha+hora
Lunes, 23 de marzo de 2015 desde las 12:00 hasta las 14:00 (Hora estándar central Hora de México (Ciudad de México))

Ubicación
Sala Nezahualcoyotl
3000 Avenida Insurgentes Sur
Ciudad de México 04510
México

Información del pedido
Pedido n.º 405427359. Realizado por Sandibel Borges el 12 de marzo de 2015 12:27

Tipo
morado
Section: Morada Row: H Seat: 1

PUEG
PROGRAMA UNIVERSITARIO DE ESTUDIOS DE GÉNERO

Nombre
Sandibel Borges

Estado del pago
Pedido gratuito

4054273595122077784001

Es indispensable imprimir el boleto y presentarse con una identificación vigente con fotografía. El nombre registrado en el boleto y en la credencial deben coincidir.

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Image: Ticket for free entrance to Judith Butler's keynote.

Judith Butler's talk was titled, "Vulnerability and Resistance, Revisited," and discussed, as the title says, vulnerability as a form of resistance and a political act, using the massacre of the students from Ayotzinapa, Guerrero to argue that people's vulnerability in the face of state violence is also a form of resistance to it.[184] Butler pointed out that in the case of Ayotzinapa there is a collective act of grieving taking place around the country, and asked, "How can there be justice?" Nowhere during the talk, however, did Judith Butler credit Women of Color Feminisms for discussing vulnerability as a form of resistance many years ago. In 1978, Audre Lorde wrote, "And it is never without fear—of visibility, of the

[184] Field notes.

"Judith Butler: Vulnerabilidad y resistencia (audio original)," YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=UE52SC1R-vU.

harsh light of scrutiny and perhaps judgment, of pain, of death. But we have lived through all of those already, in silence, except death. And I remind myself all the time now that if I were to have been born mute, or had maintained an oath of silence my whole life long for safety, I would still have suffered, and I would still die."[185] Lorde spoke of fear as a vulnerability that she has already survived. Surviving that fear became a resistance. Her piece, "Litany for Survival" is an example as well. Lorde proclaimed, "… When we speak we are afraid our words will not be heard nor welcomed, but when we are silent we are still afraid. So it is better to speak, remembering, we were never meant to survive."[186] Audre Lorde refers to the violence Women of Color, specifically Black women, have historically experienced, and which was never built to serve their needs. Despite such violence, Black women and Women of Color, have survived, and have therefore resisted the violence to which they have been subjected. Referencing Audre Lorde's work would have been pertinent, especially in the context of a Global South space with a history of colonization and continuous imperialist violence, and also because Audre Lorde had a strong connection in Mexico, having spent some time living in Cuernavaca and Mexico City, where she did work at UNAM.[187] It would have been appropriate to discuss the struggles happening in Mexico while referencing those of racialized communities in the United States. This is not to say Butler should have spoken for U.S. Women of Color feminists, but crediting their work while making connections

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[185] Audre Lorde, "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action," *Sister Outsider*, (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007), 43.

[186] Audre Lorde, "A Litany for Survival," *The Black Unicorn: Poems*, (New York: Norton and Co., 1995), 31.

[187] Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1982).

between racialized and classed violence in Mexico and the United States not only would have been relevant but it would have challenged the too common erasure and/or appropriation of Women of Color scholarship.[188] Judith Butler went on to talk about queer, performance, performativity, vulnerability, and resistance.[189]

Vignette:

The talk was in English. Attendees who did not understand English received headsets where they could hear the translation. During the talk I sat close to a crowd that I had seen before at different events that were related to gender, sexuality, and anything queer. They seemed to be familiar with Butler's work, as they discussed it before the talk began. I realized that the talks I attended within different university campuses, and which had interests in gender, sexuality, and queer studies, referenced her work.

Much of the work that is developing in Mexico references Judith Butler as the pioneer of queer theory.[190] Other western authors that are usually credited as the pioneers of feminist and queer theory are Donna Haraway, Adrienne Rich, and Simone de Beauvoir, going along

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[188] Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs, Yolanda Flores Niemann, Carmen G. González, and Angela P. Harris, *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia*, (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2012).

[189] Field notes.

[190] Carlos Fonseca Hernández, María Luisa Quintero Soto, "La Teoría Queer: la de-construcción de las sexualidades periféricas," *Sociológica,* 24.69 (enero-abril 2009): 43-60.

with a dominant and western narrative of feminist and queer struggles.[191] Another theorist that has become popular within gender, sexuality, and queer theory is Beatriz/Paul Preciado, from Spain. Preciado writes about queer theory, references Butler's work, and has collaborated with her on different projects. Preciado teaches in Barcelona and Paris, and has been invited to Mexico City multiple times to give talks.[192] His latest book, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmapornographic Era,* where he talks about, among other subjects, his experimentation with testosterone and his own gender transition, was translated from French into English and published in 2013. Paul Preciado too, goes along with the dominant narrative of feminist and queer studies, not accounting for women and queer of color feminist scholarship. His work and Butler's are some of the most cited within feminist and queer work developing in Mexico.[193] Judith Butler's speaking at UNAM in March 2015 is representative of her and other western theorists speaking in the Global South. Often considered *the* feminist and queer theorist within and beyond U.S. borders, from which other western theorists tend to draw, Butler is credited for work that she has borrowed from different scholars, including Women of Color feminists, without citing or acknowledging their ideas and influence.

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[191] Maylei Blackwell, "*¡Chicana Power!: Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement*," (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011).

[192] Field notes.

[193] Field notes.

Politics of Translation

The increasing visibility of Judith Butler's voice, writings, and speaking in Mexico is telling of who has freedom to cross theoretical and academic borders. Much of her work has been translated into Spanish. It was precisely the Gender Studies program at UNAM that began the initiative to translate *Gender Trouble,* or *El género en disputa*.[194] However, what are the politics of translation? Who, and what, is often cited? Who, and what, gets to be translated into Spanish, a language that is both colonizing and impacted by colonization and imperialism? What, then, does it mean to use queer theory in Mexico? Butler's theorization of performance and performativity of gender has had an impact in how gender and sexuality are understood, in and outside the United States.[195] Around 2011, while taking a class with Dr. Chela Sandoval, who was involved in the Chicana feminist movement during the nineties, she pointed out that U.S. Women of Color feminists were critical of Butler and her theory of performance. Black women, she suggested, had already been talking about performing gender, specifically when looking at Sojourner Truth's speech, "Ain't I A Woman?" Sojourner Truth questioned that womanhood was associated with whiteness, giving specific examples of the ways in which she was not treated like one. She would have had to be white in order to perform as a woman.[196] When *Gender Trouble* was first published, there was no mentioning of Sojourner Truth's critique. Just like dominant feminism has been invested in the narrative of the feminist waves without accounting for

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[194] Judith Butler, "Vulnerabilidad y Resistencia visitada," (Keynote at UNAM, March 23, 2015).

[195] Carlos Fonseca Hernández, María Luisa Quintero Soto, "La Teoría Queer."

[196] Patricia C. McKissack and Fredrick McKissack, *Sojourner Truth: Ain't I a Woman?* (New York: Scholastic Paperbacks, 1992).

women of color or labor feminist struggles outside of such narrative, queer theory was now doing the same.[197]

In the mid 1990s, Martin Manalansan warned about the use of a western/Eurocentric gay and lesbian rhetoric. He discusses the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) as an example of how measuring "gay liberation" on a global scale is imperialist and erases the different ways in which gender and sexuality are practiced in non-Western countries.[198] The ILGA was doing what Chandra Mohanty views as a common colonialist practice among Western feminism, which often offers, "Universal images of 'the third word woman'," simultaneously portraying western women as liberated and "third world women" as oppressed.[199] Her analysis is helpful in seeing that, when talking about queer theory in non-western contexts and translating key western texts into different languages, we might be falling into the same trap of universalizing what queer means. *Queer* is a word that had been used in English as an insult toward LGBT people, and which was then reclaimed as a term of

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[197] Maylei Blackwell, "*¡Chicana Power!: Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement*.

The Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement," in *This Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, ed. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (New York City: Kitchen Table Press, 1981), 210.

Kathleen A. Laughlin, Julie Gallagher, Dorothy Sue Cobble, and Eileen Boris, "Is it Time to Jump Ship? Historians Rethink the Waves Metaphor," *Feminist Formations* 22.1 (Spring 2010): 76-135.

[198] Martin Manalansan, "In the Shadows of Stonewall: Examining Gay Transnational Politics and the diasporic Dilemma," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 2 (1995): 428.

[199] Chandra Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes," in *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 74.

empowerment.[200] It was used to create spaces that were very specific to the context in which *queer* was developed. Nevertheless, the term is not translatable to a Mexican context, where *queer* does not mean anything. In Mexico, *queer* only signifies an academic term that speaks to those who have access to academic spaces and texts, and who might use it in theoretical contexts, not in everyday life situations. Therefore, using the term to talk/write about "queer theory" within Global South contexts can be dangerously imperialist.

Scholars engaging in what is growing as the field of Queer of Color Critique have provided critiques of queer theory, as one that does not account for intersectional violence.[201] The contributors of the anthology *Black Queer Studies* are some who are bringing forward such critical analyses. Cathy J. Cohen, for example, argues that queer theory became one with postmodern theory in the 1990s. She suggests that queer theory was now, "In direct contrast to the normalizing tendencies of hegemonic sexuality rooted in ideas of static, stable

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[200] Michael Warner, *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

[201] Martin Manalansan, *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson, Eds. *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

Horacio Roque-Ramírez, "Claiming Queer Cultural Citizenship: Gay Latino (Im)Migrant Acts in San Francisco," in *Queer Migrations: Sexuality, U.S. Citizenship and Border Crossings*, ed. Eithne Luibhéid and Lionel Cantú Jr. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

David Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

Michael Hames-García and Ernesto Javier Martinez, Eds. *Gay Latino Studies: A Critical Reader*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

sexual identities and behaviors."[202] In the foreword, "'Home' is a four-letter word," Sharon P. Holland speaks about her coming of age while a student at Princeton in the nineties, as queer theory was becoming more popular. She discusses the conversations that were developing about identity politics, pointing out how, "The academic market, at least its emerging 'queer' constituency, seemed to be interpreting 'identity politics' as the root of all evil—simply get rid of 'race' (always a fiction?) and the category of 'women' (already a misnomer?) and we would have our rebirth on the other side of our problem(s)." Nevertheless, she directs us to Black feminist scholars, such as Barbara Smith, who had already, "Questioned the myopic identity politics of civil rights and women's activist networks," arguing that critiques of identity politics were barely new. Queer theory—a predominately white field that is rapidly becoming dominant—was now receiving more attention than the Black feminist scholars Holland references. In Holland's words, dominant queer theory was, "Remaking discourse in the image of its rightful owners—whitewashing the product so that it could and would be more palpable to a growing constituency."[203] It is the whitewashing of Black feminist thought, and of Women of Color feminism in general, that became so popular in and outside U.S. borders. It has been translated into Spanish (and other languages), and read in Mexico within intellectual and academic contexts, becoming *the* queer theory. The translation of queer theory texts is then certainly political. First, dominant theory is often the body of scholarship that quickly becomes popular, widespread,

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[202] Cathy Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" in *Black Queer Studies*, 23.

[203] Sharon P. Holland, "Foreword: 'Home' Is a Four Letter Word," in *Black Queer Studies*, ix.

and well known, reaching considerable numbers of audiences. Second, within academic spaces in Mexico and Latin America, Western scholars and scholarship tend to be given priority and are seen with higher respect than those who were trained in Latin America.[204] For example, the Mexican academy has a strong field of migration, which is increasingly growing. Many of the texts with which I came across cited U.S. migration scholarship (in English and Spanish); however, U.S. scholarship about migration rarely cites works that come out of Mexico or Latin America. It is no surprise, then, that the presence of dominant western feminist and queer theory along with how highly regarded the Western academy is in Mexico and Latin America, result in translating feminist and queer theoretical works into Spanish. Once they are translated, they are more widely read in Spanish speaking countries, such as Mexico.

It should be understood, however, that some works by U.S. Third World feminists have also been translated into Spanish. In 1988, *Esta puente, mi espalda: Voces de mujeres tercermundistas en los Estados Unidos*—the Spanish translation of *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*—edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, was published.[205] Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La frontera: La nueva mestiza* was then published in 2016. Historically, there have been strong political, economic, social, and cultural connections between Mexico and U.S. Third World communities. *This Bridge* includes pieces from women who have solid ties to Mexico and/or Latin America, whose

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[204] Field notes.

[205] Cherríe Moraga and Ana Castillo, Eds., *Esta puente, mi espalda: Voces de mujeres tercermundistas en los Estados Unidos* (San Francisco: Ism Press, Inc, 1988).

Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, Eds, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (New York City: Kitchen Table Press, 1981).

ancestors were Indigenous, migrants and/or refugees. Certainly, in *Borderlands* Anzaldúa speaks of U.S colonization in Mexico, where the U.S. took almost half of the country. She speaks of white Americans taking Mexican peasants' land, and of shaming Mexican people who were now American for speaking Spanish. Anzaldúa refers to how U.S. colonialism has forced Mexico to heavily rely on the U.S. market, continuing the exploitation of resources and people in the country.[206] This scholarship, while still coming from the global belly of the beast, the United States, emerges from the intersectional position of U.S. Third World women and feminists, who have lived, directly or through their ancestors, the colonialist and imperialist relationship between the United States and Mexico. Moreover, not only is U.S. Third World feminist scholarship traveling to Mexico, but as Chicana feminist scholar Cristina Serna has found, Chicana art is also crossing borders back to Mexico.[207] In Borderlands, Anzaldúa spoke of a journey that is cyclically traveled between what is now Mexico City and Aztlán, or what is currently the American Southwest. Mexican and Chicanx people, art, and writings continue to travel this journey back and fourth, as historical, economic, political, and social ties are maintained alive.

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[206] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 2nd Ed. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999), 28-32.

[207] Cristina Serna, "Decolonizing Aesthetics in the Art of Consuelo Jimenez Underwood and Georgina Santos Hernández," *National Women's Studies Association Conference,* 2016.

In fall 2016, Dr. Marisa Belausteguigoitia Ruis and Dr. María del Socorro Gutiérrez Magallanes collaborated to teach a class on borders and citizenship, called *Frontera y Ciudadanía: Estrategias corporales, visuales y discursivas de construcción del sujeto ciudadano fronterizo,* at UNAM.[208] Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* and *Esta Puente mi espalda* were both assigned, along with scholarship from Latin American writers. During one of the seminar meetings, a discussion developed around the term *queer*, and the way in which Anzaldúa was using it in the text when *Borderlands/La Frontera* was first published in 1987, before *queer* became theoretically commodified in the nineties.[209] The foreword of the translated text speaks of a hope for connection between the Chicana/o experiences that Anzaldúa considers, and the livelihoods of UNAM students who come from poor and working class homes, who come from rural towns, and who have to work to finance their education. A different kind of feminist theory—one that is intersectional and that is committed to its connection with Mexico and the Global South—is also finding its place in Mexico. In this case, Women of Color feminists have been involved in the translations. Chicana feminists Ana Castillo and Norma Alarcón were the translators of *This Bridge Called My Back*.

Translating intersectional work into Spanish—work that can speak to the experiences of its readers in Latin America and where readers can draw direct connections from their own contexts—has different politics from white western theory. Indeed, E. Patrick Johnson and

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[208] Field notes.

Original title: Border and Citizenship: Corporal, Visual, and Discursive Strategies for Constructing the Border Citizen Subject.

[209] Field notes.

Mae G. Henderson, in *Black Queer Studies*, point readers' attention to intersectionality in the context of queer studies. They argue that LGBTs of color, "Who are committed to the demise of oppression in its various forms, cannot afford to theorize their lives based on 'single-variable' politics."[210] Much of *This Bridge* and *Borderlands* is queer of color writing, not only speaking about sexuality, but also about race, class, citizenship, effects of colonization, and imperialism. However, because the dominant Western academy is highly respected in Mexico, as mentioned above, there is little room within the Mexican academic institution for intersectional feminist scholarship to be translated and circulated. But some of it is already there and, just like in the U.S., it is making room for itself where there was little to none. Marginalized people in Mexico who constantly live intersectional violence—imperialism, capitalism, colonialist heteronormativity, state violence, but also imperialist academic theory—might benefit more from Women of Color Feminism and Queer of Color Critique than western and dominant queer theory. This is all while remaining cautious that this theory still comes from the United Stated, and might center U.S. perspectives. For example, in Anzaldúa's theorizing of Mestiza consciousness, she borrows from Mexican philosopher José Vasconcelos's theory of mestizaje, from the 1920s, crediting him with creating a theory of, in her own words, "inclusivity," "opposite to the theory of the pure Aryan."[211] For many Mexicans, however, "mestizo" is a word loaded with racism, not of racial inclusivity. Vasconcelos was invested in "bettering" the Mexican race; that is, whitening the country. He advocated for a "mestizo race," proposing that people of different races mix, so that "inferior" races could benefit from "superior" ones. He specifically named Black as the

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[210] E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson, *Black Queer Studies*, 5.

[211] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 99.

"inferior" race that would benefit from racial mixing.[212] Further, his theory of mestizaje erased Indigenous people and Afro-Mexicans from the imaginary. While Anzaldúa turned mestizaje on its head and developed her own theory in a commitment to the empowerment and identity journey/ies of Chicanas, her theory of mestizaje credits Vasconcelos in ways that can make Mexicans skeptical. Her text, then, might have a difficult first encounter with Mexican readers. Remaining aware that problematic framings can also take place within U.S. Third World texts is thus important too.

Joto, Puto, Marica: Theorizing From Home

Given what I have laid out so far, it is questionable whether queer/cuir theory in Mexico is a home to LGBTQ, poor and working class people in Mexico, some who have either been migrants in the United States or who have migrant family members there. It is worth wondering, who this theory is created *for*, specifically speaking of a Mexican context? On September 30, 2015, the blog entry "El Queer/Cuir en la Ciudad de México," by Fabiola Rocha, was published in the blog *Regeneración*.[213] Rocha presents information she gathered from talking to different people involved in LGBTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex) activist and artist—or artivist—community in Mexico City. One of the responses Rocha received was, "it has been very hard for it [queer] to mean something to me. When you go out to the streets as artivist, or as someone who wants to have an impact around you, 'queer'

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[212] Mauricio Pilatowsky, "El Acercamiento de José Vasconcelos al Nazismo y su dirección de la revista *El Timón*," *Estudios 110.XII (otoño 2014*): 171.

[213] Fabiola Rocha, "The Queer/Cuir of Mexico City," Regeneración, http://regeneracion.mx/el-queercuir-en-la-ciudad-de-mexico/.

does not say anything over here." She goes on to discuss that the term is becoming better known and popular.

Some alternatives to how people organize and do art in Mexico is by borrowing the Spanish words joto, marica, and puto—terms that have been used as insults in the country for years. They are being reclaimed to refer to non-normative genders and sexualities specific to Mexico.[214] On January 20, 2017, a radio show that focuses on LGBTI lives invited two persons who are particularly involved in activism and art that challenges the normative gender and sexuality system. During the show they shared their thoughts on queer theory. Their names are Emmanuel Álvarez, also known as Diva Puta, and Tadeo Cervantes, also known as Unicornia Fúrica, Princesa Cabbage Patch Tercera, 21 Veces Primavera, and Briza de Invierno.[215] During their conversation Tadeo suggests that he uses *queer* as a critical lens, more than as an identity. It is evident that the anti-identity theorizing of *queer* has translated to Tadeo's ways of understanding and using the concept. However, he continues, "If I were to use a strategic identity I would call myself 'marica,' or 'puto'." Emmanuel, on the other hand, sees a translation problem when speaking about "queer," as *queer* is not understood as an insult in Spanish. He suggests it is important to think about "our own context to position ourselves." In terms of identity labels, he believes that when they are erased, specific oppressions can be erased as well, and so when claiming "soy joto" (I'm joto), Emmanuel

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[214] "Sonidos incluyentes: Qué significa ser queer?" Asilegal, https://archive.org/details/SonidosIncluyentes56QueSignificaSerQueer200117.

[215] Translation:
Diva Puta: Bitch Diva
Unicornia Fúrica: Fury Female Unicorn
Princesa Cabbage Patch Tercera: Cabbage Patch Princess the Third
21 Veces Primavera: Spring, 21 Times
Brisa de Invierno: Winter Breeze

sees it as a way to also denounce a history of violence. As a joto, he points out, he can connect with other jotos, build community, struggle against violence, and create his own spaces, from his own perspective of how he is constructing his own life outside gender and sexuality norms. In this sense, he sees *queer* as a tool to point to those oppressions, not to use it as an identity that says nothing to Spanish speakers in Mexico. Furthermore, Tadeo understands a queer struggle as one that challenges ideas of partnerships, monogamy, state, and family, but also heterosexuality, whiteness, and capitalism, while acknowledging the specificities of each struggle. Emmanuel then proposes that the term not be completely embraced. Although it has been useful as a tool to be critical of the normative gender and sexuality system, he questions, "How can we think about our own Mexican, Latin American, Mexico City context? What other ways of life can we think, for example, from joto?" Emmanuel and Tadeo are taking what is useful from *queer*, and throwing away the rest to build theory from the ground, from their language and culture specific context, their history, and from their experiences and those of their communities.

Emmanuel and Tadeo seem to be creating what Cherríe Moraga called "theory in the flesh." In *This Bridge Called My Back,* Moraga defined a theory in the flesh as one, "Where the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity."[216] This is what both Emmanuel and Tadeo claim to be doing. Reclaiming "puto," "marica," and "joto," is out of necessity to resist heteropatriarchy and western critiques of gender and sexuality. Referencing the work of Indigenous writer Chrystos, Moraga explains about Women of Color feminists, "We are interested in pursuing a society that uses flesh and blood

[216] Cherríe Moraga, *This Bridge*, 23.

experiences to concretize a vision that can begin to heal our 'wounded knee' (Chrystos)."[217] Although not as visible to the mainstream, people and communities in Mexico are creating activism, theory, art, and are thinking about a gender and sexuality system from their own homes. In the case of Emmanuel, while he sometimes uses the term queer, his strategic use of the term leaves room for primarily thinking about a local context of struggle and resistance.

Conclusion

Vignette April, 20, 2015:

> *Every event and talk that I have attended and which focuses on gender and sexuality leaves migration out of the equation. I notice there is no conversation whatsoever about LGBTI migrants from Central America and the Caribbean, but also not about LGBTI migrant returnees from the United States. The topic of migration is completely invisible. I wonder if U.S. migrant returnees would feel welcomed in these spaces. I wonder if they would feel alienated. I remember an interview with a migrant returnee, self-identified lesbian who was deported in 2011, where she said Mexicans made fun of her accent and her way of speaking. I think about whether she would feel comfortable in a mostly academic setting, where people talk about queer, but are not talking about her.*

[217] Cherríe Moraga, *This Bridge*, 23.

One collective in Mexico City that has been active for several years now is Migrantes LGBT.[218] They are a mostly migrants from Central American who migrated to Mexico, are on their way to the United States, or were on a journey to the United States but were not able to cross the U.S.-Mexico border, so they stayed in Mexico. Neither, their Facebook page nor the events they organized to which I attended ever used the term *queer*.[219] It is not an academic or artistic collective. It is primarily focused on providing legal, migration, and housing resources to each other. I never saw the members in any of the queer/cuir events or talks I attended. It is telling of the exclusionary politics of queer/cuir.

The development of *estudios queer/cuir* and *teoría queer/cuir* in Mexico—a lot of it imported from, and influenced by, the United States and Spain—has serious imperialist and colonialist implications that are important to question. *Queer* is becoming an elitist and western concept that is not showing to be very useful in a Mexican context. It does not offer a home for marginalized communities, certainly not the working class, migrants, or anyone that has no access to academic jargon, spaces, and texts. Work that develops from the ground, using culture-specific and language-specific tools demonstrates being a more helpful home of departure than *queer*. That is the work that has the potential to open up spaces of resistance and inclusive struggle.

[218] "Migrantes LGBT," Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/MigrantesLGBT/

[219] Field notes.

CONCLUSION

On Home and Homing

> Re-membering home is lived in motions: the motions of journeying between homes, the motions of hailing ghosts from the past, the motions of leaving or staying put, of 'moving on' or 'going back,' the motions of cutting or adding, the motions of continual reprocessing of what home is/was/may be. But the motions are also 'stilled' within the discrete 'moments' of memory.
> --Anne-Marie Fortier[220]

> For a woman to be a lesbian in a male-supremacist, capitalist, misogynist, racist, homophobic, imperialist culture, such as that of North America, is an act of resistance
> --Cheryl Clark[221]

Thus far I have discussed the meaning of home in the lives of the LGBTQ migrant muxeres that I interviewed, centering a group of people who are repeatedly excluded, marginalized, and made invisible by structures of power on the basis of their gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity, citizenship, and often class. This last chapter expands the discussion, bringing in some of my narrators' own conceptualizations of home, as I lay out ways that we can further think about what it means to build homes of survival. The featured LGBTQ migrant muxeres have different lived experiences from one other, all influenced by the systems of power that seem to perpetuate a never-ending cycle of violence. At the same time, they engage in re-building a sense of home in their everyday lives, whether through old memories or through their ongoing and new lived experiences. In the introduction I discussed neoliberalism as a social and political force that has largely caused the displacement of many LGBTQ migrant Latinx women, in the recent past and today. The

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[220] Anne-Marie Fortier, "'Coming Home'," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 4.4 (2001): 420.

[221] Cheryl Clark, "Lesbianism: An Act of Resistance," in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color,* eds. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (Watertown: Persephone Press, 1981), 128.

impact that neoliberalism has had on local and global economies and in racialized, classed, sexualized relations is palpable.

For this concluding chapter I focus on the processes of homebuilding—of homing*,* if you will—among LGBTQ migrant Latinx women I interviewed, whose oral histories are part of chapter one and three. That is, I look at the practices of creating homes, and the ways in which these are forms of resistance to the violence they experience and the isolation it produces in their lives. I lay out three themes that were prevalent in their interviews: their experiences with building home(s) out of necessity, maintaining close ties to immediate family, and taking memories from the past to build homes in the present and future.

When analyzing migration, one must think of the histories of colonization and imperialism that have impacted movements of people around the world, and which continue to do today. Sara Ahmed, Claudia Castañeda, Anne-Marie Fortier, and Mimi Sheller point out in the introduction to their anthology, *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*, "The differentiated histories of movement that were central to the imperial process are still lived and negotiated in the forming of spaces of inhabitance understood in terms of 'home' (e.g. nation or homeland)."[222] Questions of power are and have been imperative in the different movement of people across borders. The colonization of homelands and the use of imperial power have caused the displacement of entire communities. Consequently, as Grace Chang demonstrates in *Disposable Domestics,* migration, as we know it today, is not merely a matter of an apolitical push and pull of people, where "sending countries act as a 'push' and perceived opportunities in receiving

[222] Sara Ahmed et al., *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration* (Oxford: Bloomsbury, 2003), 1.

countries serve to 'pull' migrants from the Third World to the First World."[223] The pull of migration, Chang argues, is both orchestrated and legislated by governments and capital in both sending and receiving countries. Saskia Sassen indeed reveals that "U.S. business, military, or diplomatic activities were a strong presence in countries that have significant migration to the U.S."[224] Movement across borders is thus political and economic, deriving from histories of colonialist and imperialist violence. In the context of entire communities having been displaced due to such violence, in an attempt to survive many have left their physical homes to create new ones somewhere else. With that, migrant and displaced communities often engage in homebuilding or "homing," a process that is associated with, "Reclaiming and reprocessing of habits, objects, names and histories that have been uprooted."[225] Such is the process in which I am interested. Below I discuss different ways in which some of the narrators I interviewed conceptualize and contextualize home and homebuilding in their lives.

Before continuing, a cautionary note about home is necessary, as scholars have addressed problems with romanticizing the ideal of home. In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza,* Gloria Anzaldúa illustrates that for lesbians, there is often a "fear of going home. And not being taken in."[226] She goes on to indicate that in the context where she was, "Raised Catholic, [and] indoctrinated straight," home was not always welcoming, but instead

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[223] Grace Chang, *Disposable Domestics: Immigrant Women Workers in the Global Economy,* 2nd Ed. (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016), 3.

[224] Saskia Sassen, *The Mobility of Labor and Capital: A Study in International Investment and Labor Flow*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 9.

[225] Sara Ahmed et al., *Uprootings/Regroundings*, 9.

[226] Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 2nd Ed. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1991), 42.

it was a place where, "We're afraid of being abandoned by the mother, the culture, *la Raza*, for being unacceptable, faulty, damaged."[227] She points to the internalized violence that can often be perpetuated amongst family and community members. Although "home" "permeates every sinew and cartilage" for Anzaldúa, she proclaims, "I too am afraid of going home."[228] Home can certainly be a space that upholds oppressive systems, like heterosexuality, heteropatriarchy, and gender binarism, all largely imposed and enforced by colonialism and Catholicism, reproducing the oppressive beliefs and actions to which Anzaldúa refers. Similarly, Gayatri Gopinath and Yen Le Espiritu contend that when immigrants re-create home, they can fall into repeating inequalities from "back home," such as "patriarchal control in the name of culture and nationalism."[229] While writing about the diasporic home among South Asian populations, Gopinath suggests it has been constructed primarily as a nationalist discourse. In other words, she argues that diasporic "home" is constructed as "a sacrosanct space of purity, tradition, and authenticity, embodied by the figure of the 'woman' who is enshrined at its center, and marked by patriarchal gender and sexual arrangements."[230] Constructing this kind of nationalist home has been, in some ways, a strategy to resist the oppression that immigrants face, including racism and xenophobia. Such constructs of home, however, can be and are, oppressive toward those within the community that do not uphold the same beliefs, including those who are LGBT and/or queer

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[227] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera,* 42.

[228] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 43-44.

[229] Yen Le Espiritu, *Home Bound: Filipino American Lives Across Cultures, Communities, and Countries*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003) 15.

[230] Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 14.

and women. Challenging nationalist and heteropatriarchal ideas of home through reading of cultural productions, Gopinath argues that queer racialized migrants can make, "The space of home from within."[231] That is, queer migrants are able to use the tools that are available to them and make their physical homes a space of belonging for themselves.

I wish to maintain that home is not to be romanticized, and so I do not present the homes of LGBTQ migrant Latinxs as any sort of nationalist spaces—not as their creating a "little Mexico," "little El Salvador, or "little Latin America." I have discussed home as place of resistance, a place that contradicts isolation, separation, and displacement. I thus conceptualize home as a site where processes of belonging take place, regardless of ties, or lack thereof, to nationalism and/or heteropatriarchy. At the same time, creating communities around the social position of Latinxs is certainly one of many factors in their building of spaces of belonging. Social scientist Vijay Agnew refers to the British context to point out, "Where 'hybridity is not allowed,' racism has provided the impetus for some diasporic individuals to maintain ties with their homelands, and has encouraged them to 'express their quintessential selves that are rooted in their ethnicities.'"[232] Creating and maintaining communities with other Latinxs has certainly been one way of maintaining a sense of home, particularly when it comes to food, music, and cultural practices. Their borrowing whatever works for them within oppressive systems for their daily survival does not lead me to equate home with the nation or with heteropatriarchal ways of homebuilding.

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[231] Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires*, 14.

[232] Vijay Agnew, "Introduction," in *Diaspora, Memory, and Identity: A Search for Home*, ed. Vijay Agnew (Toronto: University of Toronto Press Inc., 2005), 14.

Agnew is quoting: Feroza Jessawalla, "South Asian Diaspora Writers in Britain: 'Home' versus Hybridity.' In *Ideas of Home: Literature of Asian Migration*, ed. Geoffrey Kain, 17-38 (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1997), 30.

Instead, their borrowing of certain practices from "home" transforms these in ways that are functional for themselves. I borrow from Ahmed, Castañeda, Fortier, and Sheller to present home as something that is "always made and remade as grounds and conditions (of work, of family, of political climate, etc.) change."[233] That is, I envision home as that which is remade constantly among and within the LGBTQ migrant narrators in this dissertation. I am thus in agreement with Ahmed et. al. that, "the greatest movements often occur within the self, while the phantasm of limitless mobility often rests on the power of border controls and policing of who does and does not belong."[234] It is this movement within the self in which I am most interested for this dissertation, and for this last chapter in particular. It is also this movement within the self that drives me to ask the following: What does it mean for LGBTQ migrant Latinx women to create homes of survival? When I asked my narrators about the meaning of "home" in their personal lives, they all, in some way, had to do with creating it out of necessity. Institutions that derive from global capitalism and neoliberalism, and which reinforce oppressions such as patriarchy, heteropatriarchy, anti-LGBTQ violence, and racism were never built to serve the needs of communities that are poor, women, LGBTQ, people of color, and who have experienced colonization generation after generation. They are in fact communities that are directly targeted by these systems of power. LGBTQ migrant Latinx women, in Audre Lorde's words, "were never meant to survive" these conditions.[235] In the context of Black America, Audre Lorde writes, "One of the most basic

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[233] Sara Ahmed et al. *Uprootings/Regroundings*, 9.

[234] Sara Ahmed et al., *Uprootings/Regroundings*, 5.

[235] Audre Lorde, "Litany For Survival," in *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde*, 1st Ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 256.

Black survival skills is the ability to change, to metabolize experience, good or ill, into something that is useful, lasting, effective." She goes on to say, "Four hundred years of survival as an endangered species has taught most of us that if we intend to live, we had better become fast learners."[236] I borrow from Lorde's understanding of survival to present homebuilding precisely as survival among LGBTQ migrant Latinx women in this dissertation.

Camilx, for example, confirms this understanding of home:[237]

> What home means to me has definitely been shaped by my immigrant experience […] Living in a bathroom with my other three family members, growing up in a bar, feeling like I was homeless when I was in college, I felt like my home was where I took it. It was what I made of it, you know. It could be under the bridge, it could be just like next to the toilet, it could be in bed with my lover. Like, it really is what I made of it. And by that I mean… of course I like the protection of four walls, a ceiling, and I like a comfy bed, but there are some things I can let go, like, I don't like mattresses, for example, 'cause I never had it and it feels uncomfortable to sleep on a mattress. And so forth…

Camilx's take on home is elastic. For him, "homing" is something that can be practiced in various ways and which can be shifted and molded to fit the circumstances at hand, as

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[236] Audre Lorde, "Learning from the 60s," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde,* 2nd Ed. (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007), 135.

[237] Camilx's oral history is part of chapter 2 of this dissertation.

difficult and/or violent as these might be. Such were the tools he had to develop growing up in order to survive, and which allowed for him and his family to endure constant policing and denigration. Similarly, Susana, after thinking for a moment about my question regarding home, expressed how difficult it was to define it. She then articulated, "Home is everywhere, *está en todos lados*." For her, being back in Mexico after her deportation has had to become her new home given the circumstances.

> It has to be that way, otherwise I would be very sad and it would be very hard for me to be here [in Mexico]. If it were different, I would have gone back [to the US], legally or illegally… I would have left already if I didn't feel happy here.

Susana explained that because her situation was forced upon her, rather than being of her own choosing, she wants to make the most out of her experience in Mexico, reconnecting with her life there. She is transforming an experience of pain into something "useful, lasting, effective," as Lorde indicated. Furthermore, Susana shared that to some extent she came to feel at home at certain moments while in detention as well, because she had the support of other women detainees. The system of detention is in no way a place of belonging or one that is welcoming to racialized, gendered, classed, and sexualized bodies within it. It is a system that is used to displace and separate entire communities. However, during our interview, Susana referenced the people in detention who made her feel accompanied and supported. Creating a sense of belonging in the midst of violence was a survival strategy in that space, while she was away from her family and the people and places she knew. She

took the few resources to which she had access in that moment and used them to not feel completely isolated, contradicting the separation that the structures of migration and detention constantly impose.

In contrast to Susana's first response to home as being everywhere, Yanelia's immediate response was to state that she has no home because she is not able to return to Texas to be with her family. However, she started the interview by saying, "Soy como de todas partes" (I'm sort of like from everywhere)." After giving my question more thought she shared her own process of creating home in her everyday life:

> I guess I try to make every place I'm in my home because I won't be going back home in a long time, so I try to make the best of it, you know? Because that's… I don't know, I try not to let it get to me but especially around this time of the year [weeks before Christmas], I get home sick. I kinda want to be home… I try to make the place that I'm in home. Like, right now this is my home. I like cooking and after cooking just taking a moment to breathe and say, 'this is home, this is how it smells, this is how it feels, and this is mine… this is my place.'

Referencing a previous year around Christmas time, when Yanelia had broken up with a partner, she narrates the difficulty in creating a home in that situation, while also suggesting she had no other choice but to make one.

> I think when you have no other option, then you have to do that [create a home] […] During the Christmas season I bought furniture, I bought myself a little Christmas tree, like literally, it's little like this (makes hand gesture), and that was my home, you know? This is my Christmas tree and this is my little apartment and I'm going to make it mine. That's how it is.

Yanelia's definition of home above clearly demonstrates that she *makes* home. She creates a sense of home out of necessity because she knows she cannot be with her family in Texas since her deportation in 2010. Yanelia has found homes in the places where she has lived, while speaking from a place where she has experienced systemic oppression in a number of ways. It is a place that is born out of survival but which also *creates* possibilities of survival. As explained in chapter three, Yanelia had already experienced migration from Mexico to the United States when she was a small child. She had already lived, from a small child's perspective, what it was like to cross a border and to then be separated from her mother by a checkpoint while they were both living in the state of Texas. Yanelia had practiced a kind of "fragile agency," which migration scholar Lilia Soto borrows from Alicia Schmidt Camacho, defining it as "an agency in motion of 'mobile people,'" specifically in relation to children.[238] In other words, Soto suggests that although young girl migrants in her study have "limited access" "to the decision-making process of migration" and "have no say if or when they will migrate," they also "provide keen insights of how decisions are made and the role family

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[238] Lilia Soto, "The Telling Moment: Pre-Crossings of Mexican Teenage Girls and their Journeys to the Border," *Geopolitics* 21.2 (2016): 326.

members play."[239] Similarly, from a very young age Yanelia had insights of her and her family's status as undocumented as well as her inability to see her mother, despite living in the same state. She had thus developed, perhaps subconsciously, strategies to survive displacement and separation. Being deported back to Mexico as a young adult, Yanelia was now practicing some of the survival strategies she learned as a child migrant years ago, but she was now also developing new ones for her experience as a deportee back in Mexico. Survival in this case is then associated with time. It is linked with overcoming the past, surviving what is happening in the present, and looking forward to the future to continue to survive but to also thrive.

For some of the LGBTQ migrant Latinx women I interviewed, part of surviving involves having their immediate families close, regardless of physical space. It is within their immediate families that they find a space that is dear and familiar to them and which is also a source of support. Anne-Marie Fortier asserts that the familial home has been often theorized as a place of heterosexuality; meanwhile, home has often been associated with comfort and familiarity.[240] She challenges said assumption, arguing, "This model of 'home as familiarity' attributes inherent qualities to home which, in turn, becomes the cause of its refusal when one no longer feels 'familiar' in the childhood home." In other words, equating familiarity with home is the perfect set up to *not* feel at home when it no longer feels

[239] Lilia Soto, "The Telling Moment," 342.

Lilia Soto conducted interviews with teenage Mexican girls who had migrated to Napa, California, and who had grown up within transnational families. Soto found that the teenage girls exercised agency in the insights they offered about decision-making processes and family members' roles.

[240] Anne-Marie Fortier, "Making Home: Queer Migrations and Motions of Attachment," in *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*, ed. Sarah Ahmed et al. (Oxford: Bloomsbury, 2003), 116.

familiar, like it might have felt during childhood. It is assumed, Fortier argues, that for queer migrants, leaving the home is a kind of 'homecoming,' one of leaving an unfamiliar and unwelcoming home to one that is welcoming of gays and lesbians. However, some of the narrators who took part in this dissertation do not reject their familial homes, but embrace them as part of their homebuilding processes. They remake "the space of home from within," as Gopinath states, rather than rejecting their familial home altogether. Susana, from chapter three, expressed that her main source of support and her major basis for home is, and has been, her immediate family; that is, her mother and siblings. She affirmed that her home was,

> Being with them [her family], maybe not physically, maybe not having them here with me or me being over there [in the US], but to be in touch and doing something positive for me and for them.

Susana's closeness with her family has been a source of strength particularly in her experience of deportation back to Mexico. As she states above, it does not matter to her if they are not able to be in the same physical space. For her, closeness transcends space. Susana feels at home with them despite the distance, and despite physical and socio-political borders. They remain in touch via phone, and use a cellphone app called WhatsApp to be in constant communication.[241] Susana said home is an emotional space, more than a physical

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[241] WhatsApp can be downloaded to any smartphone free of charge. It requires wifi or data to send messages within and beyond national borders, charging much less than a text message.

"About WhatsApp," https://www.whatsapp.com/about/.

one. Yanelia shared a similar take on what home means for her in one of her responses, where she equated "home" with the space where her family is located, expressing,

> The only reason I would want to get my papers back is to go back home and see my dad, see my grandma, see my sisters and my brothers, and my tías... have the parties that we used to have, you know?

It is perhaps their diasporic experiences as Mexican LGBTQ migrants, both in the United States and in Mexico, that strengthens the connection with their families. Espiritu suggests that, "In an inhospitable world, home stands for a safe place, for community."[242] The way in which Susana and Yanelia spoke about their families conveyed the message that their families were indeed part of their communities, part of their survival, and where they felt safe and welcomed in an environment that constantly excludes, marginalizes, and invisiblizes them.

María establishes that her family is an important part of her home as well, but in her case she sees it especially in financial terms: "In some way, my family and I support each other… financially more than anything." She shared that when someone in the family, whether someone who is still living in the United States or who is now back in Mexico, is not able to pay medical bills, and/or everyday necessities, they all see different possibilities to help and be there for one another. Leaving each other to survive on their own is not an option. In *Next of Kin: The Family in Chicano/a Cultural Politics*, Richard T. Rodríguez discusses queer *familia* in the lives of U.S. Chicana/os. He questions the common

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[242] Yen Le Espiritu, *Home Bound,* 15.

assumption that is made within mainstream LGBTQ communities that building home should be done away from their immediate families. Rodríguez does so by referencing the work of Cherríe Moraga on "Queer Aztlán," where she "adopts la familia to foreground its potential for collective empowerment and social change."[243] He thus brings forward Moraga's use of family as a form of belonging, contradicting the idea that the family always has to be male and always nationalist.[244] The immediate family has much more potential and power than that, which both, Rodríguez and Moraga importantly present. Rodríguez argues that choosing community beyond family, but also maintaining immediate family ties, are not mutually exclusive. Whenever it is assumed that they are, as Fortier argues, "The familial home remains unproblematically heterosexualized and defined exclusively in terms of normative 'family values.'"[245] Some of the narrators in this dissertation view family from a similar lens to Moraga and Rodríguez. In previous chapters, I discussed different ways in which LGBTQ migrant Latinx women in Los Angeles and Mexico City find different homes of belonging with other LGBTQ migrants, activist comrades, and fellow organizers, finding one another as they struggle with the multiple axis of oppression they face. However, here it is also evident that immediate families have been an important component of creating homes for some of them, being a significant part of building and maintaining homes of survival.

The act of creating and re-creating homes is part of what Fortier calls "re-membering home." For her, re-membering is "the physical and emotional work of creating 'home'," and

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[243] Richard T. Rodríguez, *Next of Kin: The Family in Chicano/a Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 168.

[244] Richard T. Rodríguez *Next of Kin*, 168.

[245] Anne-Marie Fortier, "Making Home," in *Uprootings/Regroundings*, 120.

"the encounter with homing desires already *within* the home, and not only outside of it."[246] The five narrators presented in this concluding chapter engaged in such re-membering as both, LGBTQ migrants and LGBTQ members of migrant communities. To separate themselves from their migrant communities in their search for home is often not an option. They instead search for a home that is inclusive of their families and communities, avoiding experiencing further separation or displacement.

Furthermore, it has been documented that migrants often associate memories with their search for home.[247] Ahmed, Castañeda, Fortier, and Sheller, however, write, "Making home is about *creating* both pasts and futures."[248] Bamby's story, from chapter one, is an example of how memories and experiences from the past move her to creating the future she wants for herself. Bamby looks at Los Angeles, California as her physical home, where her activism mostly takes place and is increasingly growing. It is also where much of her trans Latina community currently is located. As stated in chapter one, it was in Los Angeles that Bamby began to explore her trans identity and where she found a sense of community. She has now become well known for her activism around trans experiences in the United States.

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[246] Anne-Marie Fortier, "Making Home," in *Uprootings/Regroundings*, 131.

Anne-Marie Fortier discusses Avtar Brah's idea of "homing desires," or "the desires to feel at home in the context of migration," referring to "a longing to belong," which "suggests that 'home' is constituted by the desire for a 'home', rather than surfacing from an already constituted home, 'there' or 'here'." In "Making Home," *Uprootings/Regroundings*, 129.

[247] Yen Le Espiritu, *Home Bound: Filipino American Lives Across Cultures, Communities, and Countries*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

Pauline Park, "Homeward Bound: The Journey of a Transgendered Korean Adoptee," in *Homelands: Women's Journeys Across Race, Place, and Time* (Emeryville: Seal Press, 2006): 125-134.

[248] Sara Ahmed et al. *Uprootings/Regroundings*, 9

Her work with the TransLatin@ Coalition, her role as Co-Investigator in the report *TransVisible: Transgender Latina Immigrants in U.S. Society*, and the film about her life story, *TransVisible: The Bamby Salcedo Story*, directed by Dante Alencastre, have all put her in the forefront of trans Latina struggles.[249] Her actions demonstrate that she is deploying her experiences from the past, and looking to the future to thrive and advocate for the trans Latina community. She specifically referred to her work with trans youth as one of her homes and which is very dear to her:

> Young people make me feel good, when I see them blossom, when I meet young people who are trans, who I have known since they were thirteen or fourteen, and now they are twenty-one. I've seen sort of their development. I've seen the beautiful persons they have become, because they have chosen to live their lives that way.

Bamby is choosing to look at her past experiences as knowledge as she creates trans spaces in her present and future. Her activism today is very much part of what makes her feel at home, and is directing where she is going. Bamby is putting into practice what Anh Hua proposes: "Memories do not simply document the past but move us to new ways of articulation, thus articulating us from the past as it has been known to the present and the

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[249] Karla M. Padrón and Bamby Salcedo, *TransVisible: Transgender Latina Immigrants in U.S. Society* (2013).

TransVisible: The Bamby Salcedo Story, directed by Dante Alencastre, Fullerton, CA, 2013.

future."[250] Bamby is indeed articulating herself from the past as she constructs her present and paves the way to her future.

In a similar manner, Yanelia, when picturing her past self from her current perspective, expresses to herself, "You are some tough ass bitch." She continues,

> If I did it once I could do it again, you know? It's not been easy. I mean, everybody has their problems, everybody has their struggles. Everybody has their own experiences. For me, it has not been easy. I don't think I would change anything… like, I wouldn't change anything of my life, because the person that I was back then has made me who I am now. And I owe that to all of the experiences. As a child, as a teenager, as a straight person, as a gay person, because you know, when I was a teenager I was straight, I wasn't gay. It was a different experience. Everything has molded me into who I am now, and I would just say, "Keep going." It's not an easy road, but nothing that is worth is easy.

Like Bamby, Yanelia takes her experiences from the past to drive her to shape her present and construct her future. Community building has been part of what makes Yanelia feel at home in her present, particularly articulating her involvement in lesbian spaces in Mexico:

> Right now, I'm on 'Lesbianas de México', the [Facebook] page… like, I'm always commenting, I'm always like, putting up stuff. It's not my page, pero

[250] Anh Hua, "Diaspora and Cultural Memory," in *Diaspora, Memory and Identity: A Search for Home*, ed. Vijay Agnew (Toronto: University of Toronto Press Inc., 2005), 205.

> you know, I asked to be added and they added me. Ohhh, my friend… she is a butch, she is real butch, she's super cute, like, she's hot I just have to say (laughs). Pero yeah, for example, for the gay parade, I went last year, I went and I walked from the Angel [Angel de la Independencia] to el Zócalo, and it was hot.[251] I have a friend who came with us, he's older, he's like forty-five now…[…]. So I went to the parade with both of them, and then this year I went with my other friend… we didn't walk this year, we just went to watch the parade. It's a long walk. After that we went to a club. I really like to associate myself with a lot of lesbian girls, especially like, if I don't know them first… I have to know the person. If it's a straight person I have to know the person to be able to trust them.

Remaining close to family, but also creating and maintaining a sense of community with other lesbians has been important in Yanelia's life. The use of memories and re-membering, maintaining and creating ties with families and communities, are thus integral to the processes of homebuilding among the five narrators in this chapter. Given the systemic violence they have experienced in their lives, the fact that they are not only surviving but are also thriving must be noted. Women of Color feminists have long proclaimed that survival and vulnerability are both forms of resistance. Chicana feminists Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, wrote about visibility as one form of vulnerability: "We must perform visible and public acts that may make us more vulnerable to the very oppressions we are fighting against. But our

[251] There is a distance of about 2.5 miles between Ángel de la Independencia and Zócalo.

vulnerability *can* be the source of our power—**if we use it**."[252] The concept and the act of vulnerability as a source of power has been part of Women of Color feminist theorizing for a long time. In "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action," Black feminist Audre Lorde also maintained, "For to survive in the mouth of this dragon we call america, we have had to learn this first and most vital lesson—that we were never meant to survive. Not as human beings. And neither were most of you here today, Black or not. And that visibility which makes us most vulnerable is that which is also the source of our greatest strength."[253] Both writings agree that visibility, which might often be the cause of vulnerability, is the very source of power and strength for those who are constantly made invisible and silenced. Since the early 1980s, feminists of color were already utilizing the vulnerability they experience as women of color, and the intersectional marginalization that comes with being women of color, as a tool to theorize and to practice resistance.

I borrow particularly from Audre Lorde, whose speeches and writings about vulnerability are pertinent to this discussion of LGBTQ migrant Latinxs surviving structural and systemic violence. Lorde referred to fear as one form of vulnerability that Black women have already survived.[254] In "Poetry is not a Luxury," she affirms that women have already survived violence, and so, "there are no new pains. We have felt them all already. We have hidden that fact in the same place where we have hidden our power."[255] Although it should

[252] Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, eds, "The Vision: El Mundo Zurdo," in *This Bridge Called My Back*, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 2002), 195.

[253] Audre Lorde, "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action*," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde,* 2nd Ed. (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007), 42.

[254] Audre Lorde, "The Transformation of Silence," 43.

be noted that I am writing about a different context, I borrow her words to convey that the tactics narrators in this dissertation have used so far are coming from that very source of power. They have indeed already survived various forms of violence and pain. And it is the power they hold that is driving them to thrive, resisting, through their daily survival, the structures that have never served them. Camilx's take on home speaks to this survival of structural forces, and his connection with community and a sense of safety in doing so.

> My idea of being uncomfortable or feeling warm, changes a lot, and it has to do with where I feel safe… because, for example, feeling homeless—there are some spots where you feel more safe than in others. There are people that you feel more safe than with others, because you build your community. People really help each other out, you know. Being a woman, being homeless, having your period… I felt like there are people who struggle and they make things work, so I feel like those are the connections I will never forget, sort of when like people give you food, I feel like this is where they come to give me food because they know I live here. I feel like my home is that space where I feel safe, and when I build those connections with other people, whoever they are, sharing that one blanket, that one person giving me food, or coming home to somebody really helps me feel this warmth.

In the case of Camilx, he has already survived various forms of violence, from policing, to being uncertain of where he will sleep or what he will eat, to experiencing harassment due to

[255] Audre Lorde, "Poetry is Not a Luxury," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde*, 2nd Ed. (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007), 39.

his gender identity and presentation. At the time of our interview, Camilx was at a point where he was focused on creating connections with people who show compassion. He was in a place where creating and maintaining community was a form of resistance to what he had survived until then. He mirrored Lorde's words above in terms of having already survived the "unsurvivable," so to speak, while his power was gaining space in how he thought of himself and his experiences.

Having said that, narrators' strength and ability to build homes and places of belonging must not be mistaken as an argument about resilience. That is, my emphasis here on the survival of narrators should not be taken to mean they will forever be able to take any and all sorts of violence. The point is precisely that not everyone has survived the violence they experience in their daily lives. They are survivors of systemic violence. The narrators' stories highlight the ways in which various structures impact LGBTQ migrant Latinx women, the ways in which they survive them, and by surviving them, the ways in which they are already resisting them. This is different from assuming that despite being hit by oppression at any time and place, they will be able to resist it anyway. Pointing to their power and the strategies they have *had* to develop under their circumstances does not in any way entail that the very systems of power that put them in those positions should be let off the hook. The systemic oppression that they have experienced is nothing but a gross manifestation of the dehumanization of people and entire communities whose gender, sexuality, class, race, and citizenship are mediated by powers that are invested in exploitation (economic and otherwise), whiteness, and heteropatriarchy. The systemic violence is undeniable. To reference Audre Lorde once more, in speaking of Black children being raised in the U.S., she observes: "For survival, Black children in america must be raised to be

warriors, they must also be raised to recognize the enemy's many faces."[256] I propose that the LGBTQ migrant Latinxs in and beyond my interviews were, out of necessity, raised to be warriors. Out of necessity, they learned to recognize immigration enforcement, policing, and labor exploitation as the enemy. They learned to recognize that heteropatriarchy, anti-LGBTQ violence, racism, and classism were in one way or another part of their realities as migrants, as LGBTQ, and as women.

These narratives demonstrate the power that marginalized communities can exercise in the face of intersecting forms of violence. The resistance that LGBTQ migrant Latinxs practice, and which has been documented herein, is evident. As LGBTQ migrant Latinx women, the narrators herein have experienced anti-LGBTQ violence, heteropatriarchy, racism and classism, exploitation, policing of their bodies and their communities, detention, deportation, and exclusion. While being in the United States, institutions repeatedly tell them they do not belong in the country. They are too "Brown" or "Black," too Latinx, too "non-American." For narrators who are now back in Mexico, they are made to feel they do not belong there, either. They are made to internalize the idea that, as Patricia Zavella has titled her book on Mexican migrants in the U.S., they are "neither here nor there." [257] They are too *gringo*, too American, too *pocho*. But the fact that they are creating spaces for themselves and that they are finding community and maintaining familial ties tells a great deal about the resistance they are practicing in the midst of great violence. Such survival is perhaps a never-ending process for them as migrants, as members of the LGBTQ community, and as

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[256] Audre Lorde, "Man Child: A Black Lesbian Feminist's Response," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde,* 2nd Ed. (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007), 75.

[257] Patricia Zavella, *I'm Neither Here Nor There: Mexicans Quotidian Struggles with Migration and Poverty* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

women. Engaging in creating, re-creating, and maintaining multiple and multidimensional homes is representative of their survival, their resistance, and their power.

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