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Travesti Memory and Politics: Toward a Peruvian Transgender Imaginary

By

Giancarlo Fernando Cornejo Salinas

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

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and the Designated Emphasis

in

Women, Gender, and Sexuality

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Trinh T. Minh-ha, Chair

Professor Judith Butler

Professor Shannon Jackson

Professor Juana María Rodríguez

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Abstract

Travesti Memory and Politics: Toward a Peruvian Transgender Imaginary

by

Giancarlo Fernando Cornejo Salinas

Doctor of Philosophy in Rhetoric

with a Designated Emphasis in Women, Gender, and Sexuality

University of California, Berkeley

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My dissertation, *Travesti Memory and Politics: Toward a Peruvian Transgender Imaginary*, argues that travestismo is a critical tool by which to read the unstable and contested production of gender, sexuality, and race in contemporary Latin America. My project's point of departure is the definition of travestismo itself. Travestismo is usually depicted as a sort of unidirectional gender migration from male to female embodiments. This is why I argue that "travesti" as a name cannot be easily translated as "transgender." Travestismo does not share the transgender indifference to the direction of gender migrations. The fact that travestismo presupposes a particular gendered destination has been read by some scholars as a sign of its reactionary tendencies. The femininity that travestismo constructs as a "final destination" feels dated. The desire for (a sort of anachronistic) femininity at the heart of travestismo seems troubling for some queer, trans, and feminist scholars. However, this tension reveals more about a desire of U.S.-based queer studies to sanitize their objects of study than of travestismo per se.

My dissertation contributes to several interdisciplinary fields. My project makes the case for a displacement of the category "transgender" within transgender studies. Travestismo, that vernacular trans identity, is not a name "that sits easily with transgender." Moreover, yet, my dissertation elaborates on the productive tensions of thinking and imagining travestismo and transgender as proximate to each other, and not in antagonistic ways. In contemporary transgender studies, transfeminism is a framework that offers possibilities for thinking and linking the many forms of oppression and violence that cisgender women and transgender subjects share. In this sense, my dissertation is a transfeminist take on the name travestismo and its imaginary. Thanks to this transfeminist perspective, in my project travestismo is not a break with feminism, but an expansion of feminism to its limits. My dissertation also proposes that queer studies and theories have a lot to gain from an engagement with travestismo, but only if these fields allow themselves to be transformed by such an encounter. My project can be read as an invitation for the cultivation of a hemispheric dialogue around the name "queer." Such a dialogue in order to be fruitful needs to surrender the name "queer" to the possibilities and limits of translation. I argue that "queer" and "travesti" can be thought together because both names share a refusal to signify only one thing and in only one way. My project contributes to the

much-needed effort of displacing the U.S.-based mark of birth of queer theory, cultivating trans-disciplinary and trans-national dialogues around the vernacular name travestismo.

*Travesti Memory and Politics: Toward a Peruvian Transgender Imaginary* opens up the term travestismo with a method I call “travesti memory.” Travesti memory meshes the praxis of remembering and imagining, allowing for unpredicted becomings. In the first chapter I question the romance of ethnography and travestismo, a fixation on travestismo as exclusively an object of ethnographic research, and discuss some of its implications. I offer, through an engagement with postcolonial and queer psychoanalytic theories, an account of the losses that ethnography implies in the effort of imagining a different travesti trajectory. In the second chapter, I move to a close reading of Claudia Llosa’s film *Loxoro*, a film about transgender kinship and starred by transfeminist activist Belissa Andía. This chapter reads the film next to the political trajectory of its leading actress. Here I argue for the possibility of a language for travestismo that brings justice to travesti’s tears. The third chapter examines the work of the philosopher and curator Giuseppe Campuzano, with a particular emphasis on the work that the name hysteria performs in his essay “Reclaiming Travesti Histories.” The resonances between hysteria and history mobilize gender as an analytical tool with the promise without guarantees of unpacking transgender oppression. In my final chapter, I turn to the LGBTQ theater play *Desde afuera*, to think on the racialized connotations of travestismo. Here I focus on the collective pronoun *nosotrxs* and its power to repair some of the scars and wounds produced by racist and homo-transphobic national projects. In the concluding part of my dissertation, reading the photographic record of Campuzano’s performance *TransformaT*, I propose an imaginary in which travesti death is not-so-final.

My dissertation takes Peru as a case study, because this nation offers a radical instance of the aliveness of colonial, racist, and sexist normative violence in the southern cone of Latin America. Precisely for that reason, I trace assemblies of movements, memories, energies, bodies, trajectories, and images, which under the name travestismo are doing a lot of much needed critical political work in contemporary Peru. Throughout my dissertation, travestismo works as name that cannot be easily digested nor accepted by neoliberal logics or dynamics. Travestis, unlike many gay men and lesbians, are not sanitized subjects that aspire to be docile consumers. In my dissertation, I argue that travestismo is both a gendered and racialized category. My conclusion makes a case for thinking travestismo as a name that cultivates a bond with racialized indigenous subjectivities. That queer bond offers a promise for destabilizing the dangerous conjunction of racist, sexist and homo-transphobic normativities. I mobilize travestismo as memory work that refuses to forget queer racialized bonds.

# **Travesti Memory and Politics: Toward a Peruvian Transgender Imaginary**

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This dissertation wouldn't exist without the key contributions of communities of Peruvian travesti, trans, and transgender activists. In particular, my dissertation establishes conversations with four travesti activists and thinkers. Sandra offered me friendship as a gift. I did my best to reciprocate her generosity, and to try to do justice to her ambiguities and the ambiguities of the worlds she inhabits. Belissa Andía has been for more than a decade a brilliant and kind interlocutor for me and many queers in Peru and the Americas. I try to envision with her (next to her) worlds in which misogyny, racism, homophobia and transphobia are not the unquestioned norm. Belissa's commitment to a left political project of radical social justice continues to inspire me. Giuseppe Campuzano is a person I missed deeply. I am thankful that this dissertation allowed me to engage with some of Giuseppe's brilliant writings and performances. It gives me comfort to know that several scholars across the hemisphere are engaging with the vast range of Giuseppe's works. Yefri Peña showed me (and I will argue to the whole Peruvian nation) that scars can be also sites of love, but only when mobilized in imaginative ways. Yefri's effort of intertwining art and politics is a constant invitation to dwell in new modalities of travestismo and peruvianness.

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## Introduction

It is time to listen to the wide range of critical inter-sex and transgender narratives and learn from their problematisation of conventional gender thinking, and from their experiences.

Giuseppe Campuzano “Reclaiming *Travesti* Histories.”

Indeed it is time! The Peruvian philosopher, artist, performer and essayist Giuseppe Campuzano is one of the most original thinkers of travestismo. For Campuzano, travestismo makes reference to a gendered, sexualized and racialized space that is always moving. Campuzano’s project is marked by an enabling paradox. Campuzano’s oeuvre offers different, and sometimes openly contradictory, definitions of travestismo, which render the effort of defining travestismo a senseless or even humorous task. In the above quote taken from his essay “Reclaiming *Travesti* Histories,” Campuzano doesn’t use the terms “trans” or “transgender” as transnational umbrella terms in which a vernacular category like “travestismo” should fit. In a way, Campuzano here is mobilizing travestismo as an umbrella term itself that can make room for “inter-sex and transgender,” and not only for people, but for “narratives.” Travestismo, in this short quote, is used to designate a time and space in which a “wide range of critical inter-sex and transgender narratives” can flourish. They can flourish for two reasons: Firstly, because travestismo troubles “conventional gender thinking.” And secondly, because travestismo disrupts normative hierarchies of knowledge. Campuzano doesn’t say it’s time to read, but to listen. And to listen not only to voices, but narratives already providing the critical tools by which to trouble “conventional gender thinking.” My dissertation, *Travesti Memory and Politics: Toward a Peruvian Transgender Imaginary*, is a response to Campuzano’s call.

Travesti communities in Peru endure multiple forms of violence, most often at the hands of the nation state. These communities face economic discrimination, extreme forms of physical violence, quotidian yet nonetheless spectacular psychic violence and seemingly endless forms of exclusion. Nevertheless many travesti subjects and communities survive and flourish—making livable lives for both themselves and others. *Travesti Memory and Politics: Toward a Peruvian Transgender Imaginary* tells, engages with, and rehearses narratives of travesti Peruvian subjects. Travesti politics in Peru is struggling to create and maintain spaces for political demands within LGBTQ communities, but also in the national public discourse. In my dissertation, what politics is or stands for isn’t taken for granted and the same applies to travesti politics. “Politics” will serve as the site by which I expand the question of narrative, which is central to both Campuzano’s and my own project. In many accounts, politics (and activism) are placed in opposition to forms of passivity that are supposed to stand in for a sort of acceptance of subjection or domination. But I wish to challenge such easy uses of “politics.” Moreover, I contend that “politics” can also be a means by which to challenge rigid definitions of “travestis” and “travestismo.”

The travesti subjects with whom I engage in my research, most of them activists, in varied and different forms have produced narratives of themselves and their struggles that in many cases radically depart from the stories one often hears in the public media, quotidian jokes, public spaces, and even progressive left politics. Their activism has been of great importance in relation to creating narratives for themselves—selves that are usually not recognized as such. These travesti narratives, as Campuzano asserts, trouble “conventional gender thinking,” and



they should be listened to. My dissertation understands these narratives as forms of becoming, that is to say, of travesti becomings. Politics, then, resonates with the “struggle-like” quality that many of these travesti narratives have. To imagine these narratives, to find and (co)produce spaces in which these narratives can circulate and be sustained, to listen to other travesti narratives, to love these travesti narratives will only be possible, I argue, through a certain contact or encounter with activism and through an expanded notion of activism. Here I concur one again with Campuzano’s call.

*Travesti Memory and Politics: Toward a Peruvian Transgender Imaginary* recognizes the importance and necessity of a “travesti memory.” This, I argue, is a way of acknowledging the survival of travesti communities and subjects and of recognizing the many losses embedded in travesti survival. As with my invitation for an expanded consideration of “travesti politics,” I also want my notion of “travesti memory” to defend certain forms of attachment to the past. However, I do not mean to imply a totalizing notion of the past, but rather one in which the past can be lived in many different ways. I hope that “travesti memory” can constitute itself not only as a praxis of remembering, but also of imagining, as Toni Morrison (2008) beautifully asserts. Morrison stresses the excessive dimension of the imagination in its relation to memory: “a rush of imagination is our ‘flooding’” (77). My dissertation echoes Morrison’s provocations and mobilizes her take on the past as not something that one simply remembers, but something that one must constantly imagine. I will appeal to “travesti memory” as a form of engaging with the many virtualities of time, and of the times-in-between.

So far I have avoided defining “travestis.” Any easy categorical definition of “travestis” (like with any identity) is destined to fail. Nevertheless, one of the most widespread definitions of “travestis” in Peru can be summarized as: persons designated biologically “male” who identify and fashion themselves as “feminine.” Indeed, this is a definition that has been deployed in academic contributions. For instance, Latin Americanist scholar Vek Lewis defines travestismo as “male to female gender crossing” (2010: 1). In some instances, my dissertation will challenge this definition, and will explore its complexities. Nevertheless, most of the time my dissertation will accept this definition because even this stereotypical characterization of “travesti” shows that whatever it is or stands for differs from other signifiers like “transgender,” “transsexual,” and “transvestite.”

Travestis, unlike many transsexuals, don’t (usually) follow procedures of genital reassignment surgery. Most travestis do modify their bodies to a greater or sometimes lesser degree, appealing to a wide array of (precarious) technologies, often at the margins of the medical establishment. Some scholars like anthropologist Alvaro Jarrín argue that “the travesti identity, in fact, is systematically excluded precisely by not being medicalized at all, rendering it invisible within the health-care system” (2016, 359). Jarrín makes the case for the untranslatability of travestismo. In his words “what does not translate—what is rendered, in fact, untranslatable through the deployment of transsexuality—is travesti identity as a ‘viable life’ and as a valid way of being in the world” (2016, 360). My dissertation joins Jarrín’s call for respecting the opacity and untranslatable dimension of travestismo. To this end, I opt for mobilizing this term rather than the other more vernacular or seemingly global names.

Likewise, “travesti” is not coterminous with “transvestite” because the latter has been associated with heterosexuality and pathologized forms of male heterosexual eroticism. Trans studies scholar Susan Stryker offers a compelling account of the term “transvestite”.

*Transvestite*: This is an old word, coined in 1910 by the German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld. He used it to describe “the erotic urge for disguise,” which is how he understood the motivation that led some people to wear clothing generally associated with a social gender other than the one assigned to them at birth... Initially, this term was used in much the way that “transgender” is used now, to convey the sense of a wide range of gender-variant identities and behaviors. During the course of the last century, however, to the extent that it has not fallen entirely out of favor, it refers primarily to people who wear gender-atypical clothing but do not engage in other kinds of body modification. It usually refers to men rather than women and usually carries with it the association of cross-dressing for erotic pleasure. (2008, 16-17)

The most important difference between “travesti” and Stryker’s definition of “transvestite” concerns body modification. Travestis do modify their bodies, and in very creative and resourceful ways. That being said, travestismo also troubles the stiff barriers between bodies and clothes/clothing. In addition, Stryker’s reminder of the erotic pleasure associated to the name “transvestite” doesn’t have to be disavowed. Indeed, “cross-dressing for erotic pleasure” is not an accurate description of travestismo, and yet it is important to acknowledge that there is pleasure in and around travestismo. To argue that travesti shouldn’t be translated as transsexual or transvestite isn’t mean to foreclose the possibility of mobilizing these other monikers. There are many dissonances, but there are also resonances among these terms.

My dissertation resists taking “travesti” and “transgender” as synonyms, and yet it reclaims the possibility of thinking both signifiers together without conflating them. That’s why the title includes the word “Transgender.” To be more accurate, the subtitle of my dissertation is “Toward a Peruvian Transgender Imaginary.” The subtitle links “transgender” to a national signifier, “Peru,” as a limit to efforts of universalizing any sexual or gendered category, including “transgender” and “travesti.” The title of my dissertation acknowledges that there are mismatches and tensions between “travesti” and “transgender.” Indeed, they literally appear in different sentences. Importantly, a period separates the context in which both words appear. And yet, my dissertation elaborates on the productive tensions of thinking and imagining travestismo and transgender as proximate to each other, and not in antagonistic ways.<sup>1</sup> My project is intimately bound to the field of Transgender Studies and gains intelligibility within this very field. According to Susan Stryker, transgender studies is a field that does not take for granted what “transgender” as a category is. Stryker, perhaps unknowingly echoing Campuzano’s call, also puts narrative at the center of transgender studies: “Transgender studies renarrates this considerable intellectual heritage. It calls attention to ‘transgender effects’... In doing so, the field begins to tell new stories about things many of us thought we already knew” (2006: 13).

In their introduction to the special issue of *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, titled *Decolonizing the Transgender Imaginary*, Aren Z. Aizura, Trystan Cotten, Carsten Balzer/Carla LaGata, Marcia Ochoa and Salvador Vidal-Ortiz make a compelling call to trace, but also to

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<sup>1</sup> In the inaugural volume of the academic journal *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, editors Paisley Currah and Susan Stryker recognize explicitly the challenge and limits of the attempts of thinking transgender in transnational terms. In their words, “transgender has been correlated, too, often through acts of epistemological violence, with past and present terms drawn from nonanglophone cultural traditions around the world (mahu, sworn virgin, female husband, bakla, eunuch, hijra, travesti, berdache, and so on). The perils and potentials of the “transgender” rubric are most evident in such transnational contexts, particularly those that traverse global North/South and East/West divides” (2014, 7).

listen, to the alternative histories of the field of Transgender Studies. In their words, “if transgender studies is now a field, it is time to highlight the necessary work of tracing histories of colonialism, gender, and sexuality that accompany the formation of that field and to undo them” (2014, 308). For the editors, to undo a normative and universalizing history of transgender studies is as the core of the effort of “decolonizing” transgender studies. The editors elaborate more on their decolonizing enterprise: “What does it mean to decolonize transgender studies? It means, first, to interrogate what transgender studies is and to understand it as having multiple nodes of emergence... The insight we draw precisely from decolonial feminisms, Indigenous studies, and trans of color theory is to understand ‘theory’ differently” (312). Like Campuzano’s “critical inter-sex and transgender narratives,” “decolonial feminisms, indigenous studies and trans of color theory” trouble gender thinking, but the editors are even more explicit. These critical fields and studies trouble “thinking” itself. My dissertation joins the editors of *Decolonizing the Transgender Imaginary*, and their departure from frameworks that conceptualize the “Imaginary” as essentially normative. In fact, the imaginary also “opens up the path to other kind of subjectivities as well” (Sabsay 2016, 9). This is precisely why my dissertation subtitle frames the idea of “Transgender Imaginary” as a desirable horizon for “thinking otherwise,” preceded by a “Toward.”

Aizura, Cotten, Balzer/ LaGata, Ochoa and Vidal-Ortiz argue that transgender studies cannot presuppose that its only subjects of study are transgender. They make the case for a displacement of the category “transgender” within transgender studies. “Decolonizing transgender is not a project that sits easily with transgender (or any category) as a stable or self-evident identity or with transgender theory as something based on the study of transgender subjects only” (313). My dissertation joins in these efforts of displacement. Travesti is not a name “that sits easily with transgender,” and sometimes even appears eccentric in relation to transgender. Likewise, the studies of travestismo do not always fit easily within the field of transgender studies. In what follows I engage with one theoretical tradition in Latin America and Latin American studies that offer compelling accounts of travestismo, ethnography.

### **Thinking Travestismo in Latin America**

Travestismo and Latin America seems to share a bond—one could even call it a queer bond. To characterize such a bond is not the purpose of my research. Yet, every student of travestismo needs to engage with the Latin American and Latin Americanist theorists of travestismo. This is an interdisciplinary, transnational and diasporic field that doesn’t share many things, but does undeniably share its deep investment in ethnography. Indeed, travestismo has seduced many ethnographers around the world.

One of the first English monographs on travestismo is Don Kulick’s *Travesti: Sex, Gender and Culture among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes* (1998). Kulick’s project is ethnographic, as most of the scholarly approximations to travestismo in the social sciences and humanities have been. Kulick offers a definition of travestis that should be unpacked.

The word *travesti* derives from the verb *transvestir*, or cross-dress. Travestis, however, do not only cross-dress. What is most characteristic about travestis in Salvador, and throughout Brazil, is that they adopt female names, clothing styles, hairstyles, cosmetic practices, and linguistic pronouns, and they ingest large amounts of female hormones and pay other travestis to inject up to twenty liters silicone directly into their bodies in order to acquire feminine bodily features such

as breasts, wide hips, large thighs, and, most expansively buttocks. Despite all these changes, however, many of which are irreversible, travestis do not self-identify as women. That is, despite the fact that they live their lives in female clothing, call one another by female names, and endure tremendous pain in order to acquire female bodily forms, travestis do not wish to remove their penis, and they do not consider themselves to *be* women. They are not transsexuals. They are instead, they say, homosexuals – males who ardently desire men, and who fashion and perfect themselves as an object of desire for those men. (6)

Kulick takes as a point of departure a semantic reference to “transvestir,” to cross-dress, in order to clarify that travestismo is not only or even primarily about cross-dressing. Kulick lists distinctive characteristics of the travestis of Salvador. The first travesti trait that Kulick mentions is the adoption of female names, or production of travesti names. He includes also the use of female “linguistic pronouns” as a distinctive travesti marker. Kulick’s travestismo is not only about cross-dressing, because travestis modify their bodily features, and produce their travesti bodies. Kulick acknowledges the travesti labor, sociality, and pain in order to make and remake their bodies. In Kulick’s account there is a certain incongruence that has to do with the fact that even though travestis use female names and pronouns, and modify their bodies in order to make themselves look like idealized exuberant female bodies, travestis don’t identify as women, but as homosexual men. The actual paraphrasing of Kulick is interesting. In Kulick’s words, travestis “do not consider themselves to *be* women.” His italicizing of the verb “be” may suggest a certain cautiousness on his part about adhering to the very gender system he is theorizing. And yet, the next sentence is an assertion that leaves little room for ambivalence and ambiguity. Travestis “are not transsexuals.” The assertive character of this sentence is important, since part of Kulick’s intervention is to dispute the easy habit of reading gender variance using as a frame of reference contemporary western gender systems, particularly U. S.-based ones. Then, Kulick proceeds to assert that travestis “are instead, they say, homosexuals.” Kulick’s definition of travestismo goes back and forth between attributing his definition of travestismo to the communities of travestis he engaged with in Salvador, Bahia (“they are, they say.”) It’s also telling that in order for Kulick to offer a definition of travestis he feels the need to define “homosexuals.” For Kulick, travestis and homosexuals are basically “males who ardently desire men, and who fashion and perfect themselves as an object of desire for those men.”<sup>2</sup> In summation, Kulick’s travestismo has more to do with sexuality than with gender.

In Kulick’s ethnographic account, gender seems to be displaced in importance by sexuality, or at least Kulick’s analysis of (travesti) gender seems to be dependent upon his own

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<sup>2</sup> Similarly to Kulick’s argument, the name “travesti” in Peru is associated intimately with “male homosexuality,” and indeed some travestis self-identify as homosexuals. Perhaps for that same reason travesti activism in Peru, and in many parts of Latin America, puts so much effort in demarcating a specific space for travesti politics, and to denounce the specific forms of violence that travesti people, unlike male homosexuals, have to endure on a daily basis. That effort of demarcation of borders between male homosexuality and travestismo is even more radical in the case of many homosexual men who are afraid that their attributed proximity to travestis may jeopardize their attempts of sanitizing homosexuality as a social category. According to feminist anthropologist Angélica Motta many homosexual men guided by a desire for western modernity define themselves “por oposición a las ‘locas rematadas’ y travestis, a quienes...critican por haber aceptado pasivamente el mandato social y también...culpan de crear ‘mala fama’ y rechazo contra los homosexuales por parte de la sociedad en general” [in opposition to ‘extremely crazy’ and travestis, whom... they criticize for having passively accepted the social mandate and also...blame for creating and rejection against homosexuals by society in general] (1999: 462).

understandings of sexuality. In his words, travestis “do not want boyfriends for sexual pleasure. They don’t get sex from their men—what they get, instead, is gender. Sexual pleasure is something that travestis obtain elsewhere, from their boyzinhos, their vícios, and the clients they meet on the street at night” (133). Kulick’s bold statement mirrors how his own account of travestismo gets gender only through sex and sexuality. Kulick offers a geopolitical and theoretical reason for his preference for sexuality: “whereas the northern Euro-American gender system is based on anatomical sex, the gender system that structures travestis’ perceptions and actions is based on *sexuality*” (227). Kulick seems to be implying that his own preference of sexuality over gender is based solely on his loyalty to the demands of his object of study, or of his archive. Nevertheless, every scholar is also a producer of objects of study and archives. Kulick’s skepticism of gender echoes the influential work of U. S. based queer theorists Gayle Rubin and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, both of whom argue for the analytical independence of sexuality (in relation to gender). It is not my intention to contest the accuracy of Kulick’s assertions, nor to deny their originality. My aim is to make the case for the importance of engaging with the messiness of both gender and sexuality, while also being careful not to diminish what gender and feminist theory can offer. Kulick’s favoring of sexuality over gender has a correlation with his modest engagement with feminist theories, in favor of other theoretical accounts. In my view, this is one of the pitfalls of Kulick’s beautiful ethnography.

Kulick’s definition of travestis and travestismo is original, but is also prescriptive at times. In his words “being homosexual is at the heart of the travesti project. Before anyone is a travesti, that person is first a viado” (221). Kulick offers a chronology (or even a history) of travestismo that takes as its point of departure male homosexuality. The travesti subject was first a “viado,” a homosexual man. Nevertheless, the travesti subject is (in the present) also a “homosexual man.” In Kulick’s account, male homosexuality gives coherency and legibility to the travesti project. One may do well in wonder about the risks and losses that the travesti theoretical dependence on male homosexuality implies.

At moments, Kulick’s project presumes that majoritarian tendencies in the social group he studies, travestis in Salvador, leave no room for resistance and dissonances. Kulick again seems to be simply describing the travesti communities he engages with, but he is also reinforcing some of the majoritarian tendencies of these communities. At one point Kulick goes as far as to claim that a desire for maternity cannot exist within travestis. “In all of this, there is one gendered, absolutely central, culturally incited feminine desire that is absent from travesti presentations or understandings of themselves – namely, the desire for motherhood. I have had nothing to say about maternal feelings or desires among travestis in this book largely because they hardly exist” (234). The arrogant certainty with which Kulick pens those lines must be troubled.

Another presumption of Kulick’s book that he states but that he does not elaborate on has to do with his national framing of travestismo. According to Kulick “travestis appear to exist throughout Latin America, but in no other country are they as numerous and well known as in Brazil, where they occupy a strikingly visible place in both social space and the cultural imaginary” (6). This statement is no way self-evident, nor self-explanatory. Yet, its power lies less in its accuracy than in its productive and dynamic effects. While Kulick’s assertion is difficult to prove, there is ample evidence that Brazil is the Latin American country with the most books and academic articles being published about travestismo. There are Brazilian academic accounts of travestismo that predate Kulick’s book, and yet the influence of the latter in most of the Brazilian academic production on travestismo of the past twenty years is

unquestionable. Most of these Brazilian theoretical accounts configure what queer sociologist Salvador Vidal Ortiz calls an emergent “sociología de lo trans” [sociology of the trans] (2014, 112).

Queer sociologist Tiago Duque reinforces the sense of national exceptionality of Brazilian travestis of Kulick’s account: “no Brasil, em especial, as travestis constituem uma das expressões da nossa cultura sexual própria, tendo, portanto, uma história particular” [in Brazil, in particular, travestis are one of the expressions of our own sexual culture, and therefore have a particular history] (2011, 35). In Duque’s account, we can also find a focus on sexuality, but, unlike Kulick, without presuming the male homosexuality of travestis: “a construção da ‘feminidade travesti’ é marcadamente sexual, ou seja, o ‘feminino travesti’ é sexualizado, tem a marca do feminino como interpretado pela cultura sexista hegemônica. A construção do ‘feminino travesti’ segue modelos glamorosos, sobretudo imagens de mulheres brancas, poderosas e sensuais disseminadas pela mídia” [the construction of ‘travesti femininity’ is markedly sexual, that is, ‘travesti feminine’ is sexualized, and has the mark of the feminine as interpreted by the hegemonic sexist culture. The construction of the ‘travesti feminine’ follow glamorous models, especially images of powerful and sensual white women, disseminated by the media] (41). In order to stress the sexualizing dimension of travesti lives, Duque doesn’t have to read them as male. In a similar account queer sociologist Larissa Pelúcio states that “as travestilidades, portanto, podem ser vistas como processos (nem sempre continuados ou lineares) de construção de um certo feminino, muitas vezes glamorizado, ligado historicamente à noite e às artes cênicas” [travestilities, therefore, can be seen as processes (not always continuous or linear) of construction of a feminine, often glamorized, historically connected to the night and the performing arts] (2009, 43). Pelúcio’s and Duque’s sociological accounts read travestismo as linked with an idealized, racialized and sexualized femininity. Unlike Kulick, whom seems to be fond of making categorical statements about travestis, Duque modestly and poetically asserts that multiplicity is at the heart of travestismo: “sugiro que a experiência travesti trata-se de uma multiplicidade de possibilidades na qual nenhuma deve ser tomada como modelo absoluto. Penso-as como sujeitos contemporâneos que escapam da vida planejada” [I suggest that travesti experience is about a multiplicity of possibilities in which none should be taken as an absolute model. I see them as contemporary subjects who escape from the planned life] (86).<sup>3</sup> Likewise, many theoretical accounts question Kulick’s clear demarcations between travestis and transsexuals. According to sociologist Jorge Leite, “identificar-se como travesti ou transexual era muitas vezes uma questão situacional. Dependendo do lugar e da situação, tal pessoa se apresentava como uma ou outra das identidades” [Identifying as travesti or transsexual was often a situational issue. Depending on the place and the situation, such a person presented herself as one or another identity] (2001, 24). And very far from any prescriptive tendency, queer sociologist Berenice Bento provocatively asserts that “essa linha rígida, como se fosse um muro que separasse transexualidade e travestilidade, para muitas pessoas transexuais é uma ficção” [this rigid line, as if it were a wall separating transsexuality and travestility, for many transsexual people is a fiction] (2008, 71).

Annick Prieur’s *Mema’s House, Mexico City: On Transvestites, Queens, and Machos* was published in the same year (1998) as Kulick’s famous monograph. Prieur is particularly

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<sup>3</sup> Duque’s poetic take on travestismo echoes one of the main insights of the first ethnographic book on travestismo published in Brazil. According to anthropologist Hélio Silva, “o principal trabalho do travesti é a correção de sua própria natureza” [the travesti’s main job is the correction of his own nature] (1993, 37).

interested in the *vestidas* of Mexico City. “Some *homosexuales* are transvestites in the sense that they wear women’s clothes; they are called *vestidas*. The word means ‘dressed,’ in feminine gender.” (1998, 25) Prieur translates “vestida” to the English word “transvestite;” and while not exactly synonyms, it does echo similarities with the name “travesti.” In addition, Prieur’s book shares some key arguments with Kulick’s. For Prieur, *vestidas* are a radicalization of the male homosexual project. Like Kulick, Prieur is interested in the ambiguity at the heart of *vestidas*’ world making projects. “*Vestidas* dress like the opposite sex, but by doing so, they also show respect for the traditional sexual divisions” (1998, 62). *Vestidas* are not only ambiguous in this account, but they are actually quite conservative, if not openly reactionary. At one point Prieur claims that *vestidas* “pay homage to their own shameful femininity, and are proud of it” (129), almost implying that they are proud of the conservative tendencies of their complex femininities. Prieur also doesn’t hesitate to state that “the *jotas* are not feminists” (63), and this statement includes all *vestidas*.

For Prieur, *vestidas*’ gender presentation is not only ambiguous, but also deeply paradoxical. “The *vestidas* are paradoxical. The overtly sexual signs and the exaggerated femininity draw attention to the fact that the transvestites are not really women – thereby creating an ambiguity that is in contrast with their efforts to present themselves as unambiguous” (161). Here, Prieur is arguing that *vestidas*’ gender liminality is not covered, but is actually exposed. Perhaps mimicking her “objects of study,” Prieur also offers a very paradoxical account of the gender of *vestidas*. In their shameless exhibition of artifice, *vestidas* in some moments of her monograph are depicted as avant-garde subjects of resistance.<sup>4</sup> Almost echoing Judith Butler’s famous take on drag, for Prieur’s *vestidas*’ gender can expose something about gender itself. “That which is acquired is no less valuable than that which is natural. Whether something is genuine or false has little relevance... The acquired may in fact reflect the self better than the natural, precisely because it demonstrates will and skills. In that sense the artificial can be more genuine than the natural” (158). In these brief passages in her book Prieur seems to see in *vestidas*’ gender the demystification of the reality of sex. Actually, the difference between sex and gender is blurred because everything seems to be gender. Gender can become “more natural” than sex where *vestidas* seem to offer a glimpse of a world in which gender has superseded sex.

Unlike Kulick, Prieur puts more emphasis on a class-based analysis of the social relations of *jotas* and *vestidas*. “The *jotas* are true proletarians: they possess nothing but their bodies. With other resources one may express oneself through work, through art, through a creating home, through children and so on. Without those resources, all that is left is the body” (159). This is why, even while facing many forms of dispossession, *vestidas*, according to Prieur, make creative exercises of possessing and repossessing the body. Prieur is less optimistic about the resistance in pleasure than Kulick. For Prieur, “it is the domination that gives a license to pleasure” (233). So, even if *jotas* and particularly *vestidas* can remake their bodies in inventive forms, there are social scripts that limit most subversive potentials. According to Prieur the *vestidas*’ emancipatory tendencies occupy a few pages in her monograph because ultimately: “power and domination imply mastering the categorizations and evaluations, the possibility of

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<sup>4</sup> Judith Butler tends to differentiate Prieur’s and Kulick’s project in these terms: “In both Prieur’s and Kulick’s pieces, it is clear that for some travestis, femininity can be assumed without being or becoming female. In this context, femininity must be separable from ‘females’ but I gather that, for the travestis who Kulick interviewed, that separability of femininity from femaleness ought not to therefore become artificial. This contrasts with Prieur’s report of travestis who embrace and applaud the artificial, indeed, for whom artificiality is a precondition of beauty. So what is this femininity?” (1998, 356).

enforcing one's judgments as valid. It is the masculine men who define what homosexuality is and who the homosexual is, as they may also define accepted and unaccepted sexual behavior for women" (232). It goes almost without saying that the *vestidas* don't master the categorizations and evaluations of the gender system that Prieur analyzes. Nevertheless, for Prieur the situation of working class cisgender women seems to be more precarious than the *jotas* and *vestidas*. "Femininity is used in the seduction game, masculinity in the power game" (162). In Prieur's account, sometimes the *vestidas* are depicted as subjects who can switch from female to male social codes at will and with ease. This is something that, for Prieur, cisgender women cannot do.

Prieur's book offers a sympathetic depiction of *vestidas* and of their gendered labor. In the words of Prieur, "the *vestidas* do not dress as the opposite sex as some kind of amusement, to play with the sexes. On the contrary, they dress as they do because they take the sexes extremely seriously. Without sex difference, their world falls apart" (167). So, even if Prieur is hesitant in some sections of her monograph, she tends to depict *vestidas* as essentially conservative subjects who work hard to keep in place the institutions that produce and enforce dyadic sexual difference. Prieur is explicit and repetitive about this point. "Without sex difference, their world falls apart." *Vestidas*' own survival seems to depend on the maintenance and cultivation of a sexist, misogynist and transphobic gender system. In the concluding pages of her monograph, Prieur reiterates a convention of many ethnographies, the framing of their objects of study as threatened by an unimpeachable extinction. "I do believe that the existing form of homosexuality in Neza, as described in this book, is threatened, and probably will be less frequent in the years to come... And the fascination for the *vestida*, for the man enwrapped as a woman, is perhaps losing out now" (269-270). The gender system of Mexico is changing, and that's why for Prieur *vestidas* survival seems to be perishing.

Marcia Ochoa's *Queen for a Day: Transformistas, Beauty Queens, and the Performance of Femininity in Venezuela* (2014) is another important ethnographic contribution to thinking trans subject formations in Latin America. Ochoa is interested in the national dimension of *transformistas* and *transformismo*. Ochoa's focus is on *transformistas*, subjects that are akin to what in Brazil and in Peru would be *travestis* (and in Mexico *vestidas*). *Transformistas* like *travestis* are subjected to quotidian exclusion from the nation state. Ochoa makes an assertion that could be said of *travestis* as well: "Exclusion from mainstream educational and economic opportunities leads *transformistas* to carve out the economic niches they can find, which is often either on sex work or beauty, but can also include food preparation, nursing, and spiritual work" (4). Ochoa's take on ethnography is a critical one, and certainly more critical than Kulick and Prieur. She frames her project as a "*queer diasporic ethnography*" (3). For Ochoa, this kind of ethnography "questions the boundedness of the 'native informant' as a point of entry for ethnographic projects" (13). This is why Ochoa reads *transformistas*' performances next to beauty queens as being part of a making and remaking of the Venezuelan nation. Ochoa's book is more indebted to queer theory than Kulick's and Prieur's. For Ochoa "queer" is a theoretical and methodological lens that can offer a responsive reading of *transformismo*. Ochoa stresses the paradox that her queer diasporic ethnography engages with "subjects for whom the notion of queer is irrelevant" (14). This is an avowal of the limits of any scholarly work. There is no pretense here of offering a transparent description of *transformistas*. This humility at the heart of Ochoa's project is unquestionably related to the queer feminist theories informing it. Ochoa frames her project as a feminist ethnography because "ethnographic approaches to the body rooted in feminism establish an empirical approach to the question of gender while attending to the fate of flesh" (166). Ochoa doesn't consider that empirical approaches should foreclose the



engagement with rich traditions of feminist theories around the world. According to Ochoa, feminist ethnography like queer theory understands “materiality *itself* as a cultural construction” (166).

Like Ochoa’s, feminist theorist Pedro Di Pietro’s project is deeply invested in decolonial feminist theories. Whereas Kulick is not particularly interested in reading travestis as engaging in collective forms of resistance, Di Pietro’s focus is precisely in travesti resistances to a conjunction of disciplinary regimes and norms. In “Decolonizing Travesti Space in Buenos Aires: Race, Sexuality, and Sideways Relationality” (2016a) Di Pietro offers an account of travestismo as resistant to pervasive and privatizing forms of neoliberalism. Unlike Kulick’s and Prieur’s accounts that read travestis as male homosexuals, Di Pietro stresses the dissonances among contemporary travesti and gay subjectivities. “Not fitting into patterns of gay commodification turns travestis into a troubling element for neoliberal integration. They denounce that privatization of state policy has pushed them to the underground labor market” (684). For Di Pietro travestis are cognizant of their unfitness to share the normalized gay desires and public demands. Di Pietro also offers an account of travestismo sensitive to race and critical of racial hierarchies: “travestis inhabit their scandalous embodiment and yet embrace its depth to criticize the sanctity of *criollo* femininity” (686). Di Pietro accentuates in his reading the possibilities for disruption and social change. According to this philosopher, travestis’ “marginal sideways subjectivities pollute mainstream and counterpublics by inciting dissident and decolonizing rhythms” (687). Di Pietro concludes his article with a plea for analyses that grant equal weight to race and sexuality. In his words “at the intersection of racialization and sexuality, lies a corrective to the normalization of both queer motivations and theorizing” (687-688). Ochoa and Di Pietro’s projects share a feminist commitment to look for possibilities of disobedience and resistance in the names transformista and travesti respectively. My project joins them in the cultivation of those feminist bonds and commitments.

### **The Liminalities of Travestismo and Queer (Theory)**

Campuzano’s “Reclaiming *Travesti* Histories” makes an intervention in many fields, as well as the Peruvian academy, opening up a space for the emergence of Peruvian queer and transgender studies. As we will see in chapter three, in the work of Campuzano, the names queer and travestismo coincide in non-antagonistic ways. Campuzano seems interested in the liminalities of travestismo and queer, especially in the radicalized versions of “queer” that some venues of Queer theory offer. Campuzano treasures some of the work that “queer” can do; and he isn’t alone in suggesting the still existent possibilities of thinking critically around queerness. Ochoa is another author who embraces the multidimensionality around “queer:” “La multidimensionalidad de lo *queer* es lo que se pierde al considerarlo como otro concepto colonizador más—se imagina una coherencia de la categoría que en realidad no existe” [The multidimensionality of *queer* is what is lost when considering it as one more colonizing concept—one imagines a category’s coherency that does not really exist] (2011, 253). For Ochoa, queer is a lens that must be always disputed. Likewise, feminist theorist Leticia Sabsay argues that “the difficulties or even the impossibility of dialogue with queer views emerge when we deny the instability of the term queer and assume that it necessarily describes a fixed set of meanings... It is often due to freezing the meaning of what queer might mean that the fear of its colonizing potential arises” (2016: 151). My project joins Campuzano’s, Ochoa’s and Sabsay’s call for a critical embracement of the polyphony of “queer.”

Ochoa argues for the necessity of a hemispheric dialogue around “queer.” “Si vamos a hablar de los estudios *queer* en América Latina, tenemos que utilizar *queer* como se debe: perversa y críticamente. En vez de ocultar y homogenizar, *queer* debe darnos la oportunidad de destacar las categorías locales de la alteridad sexual... Ojalá no cedamos *queer* a las fuerzas homogenizantes del imperialismo cultural norteamericano” [If we are going to talk about *queer* studies in Latin America, we have to use *queer* as it should be: perversely and critically. Instead of hiding and homogenizing, *queer* must give us the opportunity to highlight local categories of sexual alterity... Hopefully we will not yield *queer* to the homogenizing forces of North American cultural imperialism] (255). My project attempts to join Ochoa in her invitation for a hemispheric dialogue around “queer.” Such a dialogue in order to be fruitful cannot presuppose a fixed and pejorative idea of what “queer” stands for. As Sabsay asserts in such a hemispheric and transnational dialogue *queer* theorists need to reject any mastery over the name “queer.” *Queer* needs to surrender itself to the possibilities and limits of translation.

In my view, a *queer* approach points to a permanent questioning of the limits of the paradigms with which we operate, inviting us to an incessant process of cultural translation. And in this sense, I think the untranslatability of the term at the level of its literal meaning as a *term* – *queer* is not the same as *raro* or *torcido*, as it has been literally translated into Spanish, now transliterated as *cuir* – is an advantage, because it marks the origin of the term, and in this sense does not deny its history, does not forget its legacy. I would say that in this regard it is a signifier whose traces compel decolonizing translations. (Sabsay 2016, 152)

According to Sabsay, *queer* can become a decolonizing tool, but only when engaging with translating practices. Sabsay explicitly address something that in my view is at the theoretical “origins” of “queer.”<sup>5</sup> In what follows I make explicit that even in the work of *queer* theory’s two most canonical authors, Eve Sedgwick and Judith Butler, *queer* is a term that is opaque to itself, and that remains open to contestation, endless translations and resignification. In the words of Sedgwick:

It is only here, I think, that a politics can begin that is both nonseparatist and nonassimilationist. That’s one of the things that the American usage “queer” can refer to: the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically. (2011, 188)

Sedgwick has recycled some parts of this same passage in other contexts (most famously in her essay “Queer and Now”). The passage I quoted comes from her posthumous collection *The Weather in Proust*. In this passage, what differs from previous iterations is that Sedgwick here stresses that she is talking about the “American usage” of “queer,” or of “queer” as “American usage.” Sedgwick is cognizant of the potential colonizing implications of the universal assertion of a “vernacular” as *queer*. And yet, one might wonder what we lose when we renounce to the

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<sup>5</sup> The questioning of limits is at the heart of *queer* theory’s first theoretical iteration. In the words of feminist theorist Teresa de Lauretis, “the term ‘queer,’ juxtaposed to the ‘lesbian and gay’ of the subtitle, is intended to mark a certain critical distance from the latter, by now established and often convenient, formula” (1991, iv).

promise of a non-separatist and non-assimilationist politics that Sedgwick sees in “queer.” At the same time, why the effort of thinking about “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances, lapses and excesses” of gendered and sexual meanings would be limited to the United States? In Sedgwick’s approach, queer stands for the utopian impossibility that “the constituent elements of anyone’s gender” and “anyone’s sexuality” signify monolithically.<sup>6</sup> It is in this light that “queer” and “travestismo” resonate in my project. Travestismo, I argue throughout my dissertation, isn’t “made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically.”

Sedgwick is also cognizant of the possible (perhaps inevitable) cooptation of queer as a name: “In the quick-change American marketplace of images, maybe the queer moment, if it is here today, will for that very reason be gone tomorrow. But many of us feel the need to make, cumulatively, stubbornly, a counterclaim against the obsolescence: a claim that something about queer is inextinguishable” (188). Queer, like an old-fashioned object of consumption, can be condemned to disappear into oblivion. It is that undesirable possibility that in Sedgwick’s account produces the collective “need to make, cumulatively, stubbornly, a counterclaim against the obsolescence.” According to Sedgwick, the stubborn counter-claim to the threat of obsolescence states “that something about queer is inextinguishable.” Sedgwick doesn’t define what is “that something about queer” that makes it inextinguishable. Indeed, this can even be taken as the ultimate Sedgwick’s definition of “queer.” This is a definition that doesn’t define anything, but just affirms its inextinguishable character in the face of constant threats of erasure and obliteration,<sup>7</sup> which also resonates with travestismo’s radical potential.

Perhaps disavowing her own limiting to the “American usage queer,” Sedgwick explicitly states her understanding of the history of the name “queer” as essentially a diasporic one, based on several forms of translation and migration. “The word ‘queer’ itself means across—it comes from the Indo-European root *-twerkw*, which also yields the German *quer* (transverse), Latin *torquere* (to twist), and English *athwart*” (188). Sedgwick’s limiting of queer to its “American usage” is a gesture of humility, opening a history of transnational movements and travels. Perhaps this humility should be attributed not only to Sedgwick, but also to the name “queer” itself. In Sedgwick’s account, in order for queer to remain a radical possibility it needs to be allowed space for its constant undoing. Sedgwick’s “queer” inhabits an “across-space,” very akin to the idea of “trans.” “Queer is a continuing moment, movement, motive – recurrent, eddying, *troublant*... A lot of queer writing tends toward ‘across’ formulations: across genders, across sexualities, across genres, across ‘perversions.’ The concept of queer in this sense is transitive – multiply transitive” (188). Sedgwick explicitly states that queer makes reference to movements across genders, sexualities, genres, and perversions. In my project, queer works to signal this across or trans movement that Sedgwick appreciates. Yet, in my project queer can also refer to the movements across languages and nations (movements that remain implicit and under-theorized in Sedgwick’s account.)

Judith Butler’s take on “queer” resonates with Sedgwick’s. Both queer theorists share an investment in the trans-and across-movement attached to the name queer. Yet, unlike Sedgwick, Butler doesn’t feel the “need to make, cumulatively, stubbornly, a counterclaim against the

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<sup>6</sup> In a resonant tone, de Lauretis queer raises the question of imagining different ways of inhabiting the body and world. “Can our queerness act as an agency of social change, and our theory construct another discursive horizon, another way of living the racial and the sexual?” (1991, x-xi).

<sup>7</sup> Recently, Dana Luciano and Mel Chen offer an account of “queer” that echoes Sedgwick’s. “We are marking a specific kind of situation – a desire to persist in the face of precarity – as the primary catalyst for queer thought in general” (2015, 193).

obsolescence” (188) of queer. Butler finds value in the possibility of a future disappearance of “queer.”

If the term “queer” is to be a site of collective contestation, the point of departure for a set of historical reflections and futural imaginings, it will have to remain that which is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes. This also means that it will doubtless have to be yielded in favor of terms that do that political work more effectively. Such a yielding may well become necessary in order to accommodate – without domesticating – democratizing contestations that have and will redraw the contours of the movement in ways that can never be fully anticipated in advance. (1993, 228)

Butler doesn’t share the utopian belief of Sedgwick in the inextinguishable character of queer. In fact, Butler through the conditional “if,” doesn’t presume that queer is inalienably a “site of collective contestation.” In Butler’s account in order for queer to be a site of “collective contestation,” and “historical reflections and futural imaginings” need to open itself to its endless undoing. Queer is “never fully owned” by no one, not even by itself. Butler risks tautology in order to assert that queer needs to be queered through its disloyal deployment. For Butler, queer may work in the present as a radical possibility of contestation, but “doubtless” in the future queer will have to lose its temporary preeminence to other terms and names, that can do radical political (and theoretical) work better. According to Butler the future “yielding” of queer will open radical democratic possibilities that cannot yet be foreseen.

In my project I will sustain an attachment to queer, an attachment that perhaps is an anachronism today. To risk that anachronism may be utopian, and yet utopias don’t need to be disavowed while thinking critically. In Butler’s account of queer, utopia appears in a different guise than in Sedgwick’s account. In Butler’s words, “it will be necessary to affirm the contingency of the term: to let it be vanquished by those who are excluded by the term but who justifiably expect representation by it, to let it take on meanings that cannot now be anticipated” (230). Like Butler’s my deployment of queer affirms its own contingency, and always asserts itself with doubts, questions, and fears. In Butler’s account the defining element of queer seems to be its own contingency. “That it [queer] can become such a discursive site whose uses are not fully constrained in advance ought to be safeguarded not only for the purposes of continuing to democratize queer politics, but also to expose, affirm, and rework the specific historicity of the term” (230). My project is queer in this Butlerian sense that demands “queer” to remain endlessly open to its own opacity.

### **Thinking Gender**

Travestismo, as Campuzano’s argues, troubles “conventional gender thinking.” Indeed, travestismo troubles gender. Nevertheless, Campuzano never states that travestismo destroys gender, neither is his intention to eradicate the tools that gender as an analytical framework can provide. To be fair, there is something about gender itself that is troubling and that defies “conventional thinking.” A more detailed exploration on gender seems appropriate at this point, since the word “gender” in Latin American political landscape and particularly in Peru, has been the object of endless controversies, and in recent years the war against gender has only intensified.

Jean Franco's "The Gender Wars" (1999) sets some of the stakes of this conservative and anti-intellectual war against gender. Franco is not hesitant in affirming that the war against gender is fundamentally misogynist and homophobic (and I would add transphobic). "The fact that the debate over gender has surfaced simultaneously in recent months in many different Latin American countries suggests that this concern for semantic masks a surreptitious campaign against women's and gay rights" (123). In Franco's account it seems easier to target women and queer people when the explicit object of derision is "gender." Franco offers a tentative "definition" of gender, and elaborates on why it is considered so dangerous by some:

For post-1960s feminism, gender refers to socially constituted differences between masculine and feminine. This definition of gender is considered a dangerously destabilizing concept in Latin American circles close to the Catholic Church, one that undermines the natural relations of marriage and reproduction. According to critics of "gender," once people accept that differences between men and women are socially constructed and hence modifiable, then the road is open for legalized abortion, the acceptance of homosexuality, the recognition of "irregular" families, and the collapse of family values (124).

Franco's precise depiction of gender as "socially constituted differences between masculine and feminine" contrasts with the all-mighty powers and capacities that the "critics of 'gender'" attribute to "gender." The Church's war against gender is, as Franco states, a war against feminism, and more specifically against feminist theory itself. "By challenging the word gender and alternative definitions of family, the Church hopes to strike a blow at the very foundations of feminism" (124). The Catholic Church isn't alone in this enterprise. Protestant churches [Iglesias Evangélicas] and communities have gained an unprecedented public recognition through its brutal targeting of gender. These catholic and protestant right wing political actors coined the dangerously catchy term "ideología de género" [gender ideology]. "Ideología de género" may very likely be the only form of imperialism that these catholic and protestant right wing alliances have ever protested against. As Franco reminds us "the Vatican is trying to discredit feminism. In order to do this, the Church uses trendy-sounding rhetoric which equates feminist platforms with imperialism" (125). The rhetoric of the reactionary enemies of gender unashamedly reinforces and capitalizes on the homo-transphobia of several dispossessed communities. The enemies of gender's rhetoric is one that fits with Anna Tsing's claim that "when most everything has been lost, it is easy to demand more and more control over less and less" (2005, 47).

Franco's definition of gender as "socially constituted differences between masculine and feminine" recalls Gayle Rubin's (2011) take on gender, especially her influential "The Traffic in Women." Rubin's "The Traffic in Women" is one of the few feminist theoretical works that is directly and explicitly addressed by many of the conservative "critics of gender." In this article, Rubin proposes "as a preliminary definition, a 'sex/gender system'" (34) as "the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied" (34). For Rubin, the slash that separates sex from gender needs to be preserved, and also critically explored. And yet the slash that separates "sex" and "gender" also makes them to be part of the same "system." Sex and gender aren't the same, and yet they are intimately (and sometimes dangerously) related.

In this landmark article, Rubin affirms that "sex is sex, but what counts as sex is equally culturally determined and obtained" (39). Nevertheless, the conservative enemies of gender seem

to believe that the fact that “sex is equally culturally determined and obtained” threatens to contaminate and radically alter “sex.” Even if in “The Traffic in Women,” sex and gender are opaque to each other, some conservative readers seem to project onto gender an ability to destroy sex. That’s why the war against “gender” comes accompanied with the reactionary championing of sex (of course of a very dyadic notion of sex). If one should concede anything to the reactionary enemies of “gender” is that Rubin’s article is indeed a radical political intervention. In the words of Rubin, “the sex/gender system must be reorganized through political action” (61). And yet, unlike what her conservative readers argue, Rubin actually makes the case for the eventual and desirable demise not of sex, but of gender. “Ultimately, a thoroughgoing feminist revolution would liberate more than women...it would liberate human personality from the straightjacket of gender” (58). Rubin is even more explicit in her call for a revolution of gender that will end with the annihilation of gender in the concluding lines of her article. “The dream I find most compelling is one of an androgynous and genderless (though not sexless) society, in which one’s sexual anatomy is irrelevant to who one is, what one does, and with whom one makes love” (61). Perhaps even in their worst nightmares the “critics” of gender would like to coincide with Rubin, but in a paradoxical way they do. In “The Traffic in Women” Rubin never argues for a sexless society. If anything, there is something about sex that “The Traffic in Women” preserves.

Rubin’s “Thinking Sex” was written as a response to “The Traffic in Women” and its defining influence. “Thinking Sex” like “The Traffic in Women” became foundational in its field. In “Thinking Sex” Rubin iterates some of the radical arguments of her previous essay “we never encounter the body unmediated by the meanings that culture give to it” (147). Nevertheless, here is not only “gender” that mediates the body, but also sex itself. Rubin proposes that “modern Western societies appraise sex acts according to a hierarchical system of sexual value. Marital, reproductive heterosexuals are alone at the top of the erotic pyramid” (149). In “Thinking Sex” a gender revolution doesn’t seem to be enough. Actually, “Thinking Sex” offers a picture of gender as a sort of coopted analytical framework. “I want to challenge the assumption that feminism is or should be the privileged site of a theory of sexuality. Feminism is the theory of gender oppression. To automatically assume that this makes it the theory of sexual oppression is to fail to distinguish between gender, on the one hand, and erotic desire, on the other” (177-178). In “Thinking Sex” Rubin makes the case for a non-feminist theory of sex, sexuality and erotic desire. Here, in Rubin’s account it is not gender, but sex that is dangerous. It goes without saying that for Rubin the danger of sex, sexuality and erotic desire should be embraced and cultivated. Paradoxically, the conservative enemies of gender seem to believe, unlike the Rubin of “Thinking Sex,” that sex is stable, fixed, and easily domesticated. Rubin may make the call for a non-feminist theory of sex, but that doesn’t mean that she is proposing an anti-feminist theory of sex. Actually, the enemies of gender are the ones that, in a paranoid manner, cultivate an extremely anti-feminist theory of sex that renders sex immutable.

In the concluding remarks of “Thinking Sex” Rubin makes the case for the necessity of feminist critiques of gender oppression, and for an autonomous theory of sex and sexuality. Rubin dreams of a future in which both set of theories and of analytical tools can enrich and illuminate each other. “In the long run, feminism’s critique of gender hierarchy must be incorporated into a radical theory of sex, and the critique of sexual oppression should enrich feminism. But an autonomous theory and politics specific to sexuality must be developed” (180). The time(s) and space(s) in which Rubin’s “Thinking Sex” made an intervention are very different from the current renewal of fascisms and reactionary politics that in Latin America

virulently target “gender.” And yet, as Rubin herself argues “we should use all the intellectual tools we possess to think about the present” (29). Do Rubin’s “The Traffic in Women” and “Thinking Sex” offer any intellectual tools to think the present? Probably now more than ever is the time to reclaim the necessity and radicality of thinking gender. What the enemies of gender seems to abhor is the radical possibility of thinking gender. Thinking gender is dangerous due to its transformational potential. It is not only that thinking transforms gender, but that an engagement with gender transforms thinking itself.

Judith Butler’s work is a living proof of the transformational potential that “gender” has to offer. She is probably the author who is most openly decried and savagely criticized by the reactionary enemies of gender. These conservative critics tend to obsess over the radicality of Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (2006[1990]). Gender is constituted, and its temporality seems tricky because it postulates as an origin something that actually is a result or consequence. For Butler “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (34) The “expressions of gender” don’t express an origin, a gendered origin, or the origin of (one’s) gender. The “expressions of gender,” actually, don’t express nothing, they “constitute” something. They constitute gender. For Butler, there is nothing about gender that is a natural origin. In her view, gender is troubling, and its essential troubling traits need to be radicalized. Butler makes a call “to make gender trouble, not through the strategies that figure a utopian beyond, but through the mobilization, subversive confusion, and proliferation of precisely those constitutive categories that seek to keep gender in its place by posturing as the foundational illusions of identity” (46). *Gender Trouble* is a call to mobilize, confuse and proliferate gender and those “constitutive categories” that police gender. These “constitutive categories” attempt to “keep gender in its place,” but they fail. These “constitutive categories” of gender fail, according to Butler, because they try to pass as the foundations of identity. They pose as the “foundational illusions of identity.” Perhaps what the reactionary critics of gender cannot forgive of Butler’s account is that it thinks of them as gender dupes.

Butler’s project is deeply committed with “the political project to enlarge the scope of possible gender configurations” (51). If gender is an illusion of an origin, there is no reason why its dichotomic configuration cannot be rejected. Troubling gender implies enlarging the scope of what gender is, and of how many genders there can be. Interestingly, Butler mobilizes here the notion of “gender configurations,” and not “gender identities.” Perhaps this is due to the fact that “configurations” makes reference to the endless shapes that gender can take. This Butlerian theoretic-political project of enlarging “the scope of possible gender configurations” doesn’t leave the usual configurations of gender untouched. Butler thinks of gender as essentially an imitative structure. “*In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency*” (187). Drag in *Gender Trouble* has the power to expose the “imitative structure of gender itself” and the contingent character of gender itself. Drag performance exposes the fact that a particular gender configuration could have taken other forms, or followed other paths. These alternative configurations could have taken place if the social matrix wouldn’t be one so invested in reinforcing heterosexuality and male privilege. For Butler, drag performance parodies gender, and illuminates on the constitutive dimension of parody for gender. “Indeed, the parody is *of* the very notion of an original... so gender parody reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin” (188) The object or the target of the parody is another parody, not an origin.

Butler, certainly, troubles the temporal certainties that many have, especially the reactionary critics of gender:

Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (191)

Gender is not something that should be construed as a “stable identity,” neither as a “locus of agency” of acts. Gender is “an identity tenuously constituted,” or perhaps precariously constituted, “through a stylized repetition of acts.” The stylish character of these acts seems to attribute to those acts a certainty and prestige that they shouldn’t have. For Butler, gender is an effect that produces other effects. In Butler’s account there is something about gender itself that is the opposite of abiding, which is actually quite subversive. “Gender is also a norm that can never be fully internalized; the ‘internal’ is a surface signification, and gender norms are finally phantasmatic, impossible to embody” (192). Gender as a norm, or set of norms, is impossible to fully embody. That failure at the heart of gender for those of us who are always read as failures feels liberating. Nevertheless, the essential failure at the heart of gender for many others feels disheartening. This seems to be case of the reactionary critics of gender who cannot tolerate the possibility of being represented as failing at what they consider to be a natural trait of.

For the reactionary critics of gender, the only way that they could accept the validity of gender as analytical framework is if gender and sex are thought as synonyms. In this somber scenario, gender is of a natural sexual origin. This is to say that the only way in which these conservative critics can tolerate gender is if it is renounced to its analytical capacities. This is a different account than Butler’s, for whom gender is indomitable. “If gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction (192). In Butler’s account the conservative enemies of gender are those militants of the “fiction” of a “true gender identity.” Of course, the conservative critics cannot handle being labeled writers of fiction, and on top of that as bad ones.

The reactionary critics of gender see in gender an omniscient and omnipresent threat. In fact, using Butler’s language one could say that these reactionary collectives and institutions performatively produce gender as an abject(ed) name. For these critics, the subtitle of *Gender Trouble* “Feminism and the Subversion of Identity” summarizes their worst nightmares. For these reactionary critics, the potential subversive dimensions of gender as an analytical framework seem to take shape in the figure of the travesti. Travesti, for them, materializes the “horrificing” subversive possibilities of gender. For instance, in Peru, fundamentalist catholic and protestant collectives oppose any mention of gender in public policy and law, and in particular any notion of “gender identity.” These collectives mobilize people, especially working class communities, with the fear that the so-called “gender ideology” will homosexualize their offspring, and more particularly will turn their beloved sons into travestis. Elsewhere, Butler’s take on gender theorizes what may be at the stake of the radical opposition to gender, and in the use of “homosexuality” and transgender subjectivities as the abject offspring of “gender.”



According to Butler, “the abjection of homosexuality can take place only through an identification with that abjection, an identification that must be disavowed, an identification that one fears to make only because one has already made it, an identification that institutes that abjection and sustains it’ (112). What Butler says of this disavowed identification with homosexuality can be extended to travestismo. A horrifying identification with travestismo is part of what fuels the critics of gender’s hate toward “gender.” The fear and hatred of these critics specifically with regard to the theoretical work of Judith Butler should be taken seriously, even if these critics are not particularly good readers of her work. Perhaps that hatred and fear signifies the enormous potential for thinking travestismo and Butler’s elaboration on gender. According to Butler, gender is not a finished business; there is something incomplete about gender formation. “Further, the impossibility of a full recognition, that is, of ever fully inhabiting the name by which one’s social identity is inaugurated and mobilized, implies the instability and incompleteness of subject-formation” (226) The incompleteness of gender subject-formation speaks to a more broader defining “subject-formation,” and offers a picture of the “subject” as always in the making. At this point, it goes without saying that travestismo is always in the making, and never finished business.

### **Transfeminism Meets Travestismo**

Travestismo can be posited as a desire for femininity, for embodying femininity. Travestismo, as a desire for a sort of unidirectional gender migration from male to female embodiments, is not always a synonym of the signifier “transgender.” And yet both names are related, and sometimes coincide in their uses and forms of mobilization. At the same time, since “femininity” is so important in accounts of travestismo, a dialogue with feminist theories is more than necessary. Thanks to several feminist theories we know that “femininity” is not a simple “particular destination,” but a very complex and sometimes unachievable one. In what follows I am interested in exploring the resonances amongst three names: travesti, transgender and feminist.

Many of the most widespread uses of “transgender” in transgender studies have explicit bonds with feminist theories. For instance, for Stryker and trans studies scholar Paisley Currah “practically speaking, transgender bodies are always somewhere. They are never ‘the body,’ always particular bodies. Knowledges of them are likewise partial, situated, and concrete” (2015, 540). In their view, transgender is mobilized in particular forms, against a universal implicitly deemed cisgender. Here feminist theorist Donna Haraway’s essay “Situated Knowledges” (1988) is useful when she writes: “Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object” (1988, 583). Haraway does not only champions situated knowledges, but also partiality as a way of knowing: “only partial perspective promises objective vision” (583). Haraway challenges her (future) readers reminding us that “the ‘body’ is an agent, not a resource” (594). The body is not a resource, even for transgender people or transgender studies.

According to David Gramling and Aniruddha Dutta translation is at the core of the formation of transgender studies as a field. In their words, “allowing transgender studies to be as multilingual, as multidirectional and linguistically centrifugal, and as untranslatable and methodologically possible seemed an important aspect of the development of the field” (2016: 341). Haraway’s essay echoes here: “Feminism loves another science: the science and politics of interpretation, translation, stuttering, and the partly understood. Feminism is about the sciences of the multiple subject with (at least) double vision” (589). Feminist theories and transgender studies seem to share a love for translation and interpretation. These echoes between recent

transgender studies articles and feminist pieces do not only talk about the inexhaustible influence of Donna Haraway's essay, but also perhaps they are more symptomatic. Perhaps this is why the enabling bonds that gather under the name "transfeminism(s)" weren't so unforeseeable after all.

In a similar tone as Gramling and Dutta, trans studies scholars Susan Stryker and Talia M. Bettcher argue that transfeminism engages explicitly with the powers of translation. "In English, *transfeminism*, written all as one word, usually connotes a 'third wave' feminist sensibility that focuses on the personal empowerment of women and girls, embraced in an expansive way that includes trans women and girls... In Spanish and Latin American contexts, *trasmfeminismo*... become[s] closely associated with the 'postporn' performance art scene, squatter subcultures, antiausterity politics, post-*Indignado* and post-Occupy 'leaderless revolt' movements, and support for immigrants, refugees, and the undocumented" (2016, 11-12). For Stryker and Bettcher some of the uses of *trasmfeminismo* (in Spanish) can supplement some of the workings of transfeminism in English. Both theorists seem to hint to the fact the prefix trans of transgender is very proximate to the prefix trans of translation. In their account, transfeminism is meant to be expansive. Likewise, transfeminism is not a break with feminism, but an expansion of feminism to its limits. In Bettcher's words, "a politics that focuses on the intersections of sexist and transphobic oppression" (2014, 387) is at the heart of transfeminism. In that sense, transfeminism offers possibilities of thinking and linking the many forms of oppression and violence that cisgender women and transgender subjects share. Queer theorist Sara Ahmed puts it more bluntly: "No feminism worthy of its name would use the sexist idea 'women born women' to create the edges of feminist community, to render trans women into 'not women,' or 'not born women,' or into men" (2017, 15).

Although collisions do exist between the prefix "trans" and "feminism," an engagement with transfeminism shouldn't disavow those disencounters and misrecognitions. Trans studies scholar Cameron Awkward-Rich argues that "trans and feminism, it seems are caught in a continually reiterated conflict, driven by the search for an integrated theory of gender that is undermined by the political desires of each field" (2017, 819). So, the encounter of "trans" and "feminism" shouldn't be a reenactment of the cisgender and heteronormative couple, in which each partner fulfills the lack of each other. It is curious, then, that Awkward-Rich provocatively asks "what if we think of the relation between *trans* and *feminism* as *love*?" (837). If the answer to that question is affirmative, it is only a very queer and non-monogamous kind of love.

Transfeminism puts to use gender as an analytical tool in order to unpack transgender oppression. This is how Berenice Bento and Larisa Pelúcio mobilize the notion of gender in order to offer a framework to depathologize gender (any gender). "Em última instância, são as normas de gênero que contribuirão para a formação de um parecer médico sobre os níveis de feminilidade e masculinidade presentes nos demandantes... o que assusta é perceber que tão pouco conhecimento, credenciado como científico, tenha gerado tanto poder" [Ultimately, it is the gender norms that will contribute to the formation of a medical opinion on the levels of femininity and masculinity present in the applicants... scary to realize is that so little knowledge, credentialed as scientific, has generated so much power] (2012, 573). Bento and Pelúcio are interested in troubling the borders that gender as a social analytic create between those deemed normal and abnormal. "Quais e como estabelecer os limites discerníveis entre 'os transtornados de gênero' e 'os normais do gênero'?" [What and how to establish the discernible boundaries between the 'gendered disordered' and 'gendered normal'?] (2012, 579).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Echoing similar concerns for transgender studies scholar Eric Stanley, "gender self-determination is a collective praxis against the brutal pragmatism of the present, the liquidation of the past, and the austerity of the future. That is

Transfeminist perspectives like Bento and Pelúcio are more than welcome and necessary, but in some other cases some transfeminist positions cannot do justice to travestismo. For instance, feminist anthropologist Ximena Salazar contends:

Así, la identidad colectiva de mujeres trans constituye un proceso complejo y contradictorio que pretende confrontar la identidad negativa adscrita por la sociedad: el “travesti” impuro, promiscuo y habitante de la noche, que no ha sido un “otro” para nadie, porque simplemente no ha existido. Es a través del “derecho a la identidad de género” que se procesa la transición de “travesti” (en masculino) a mujer trans, manteniendo unas e introduciendo otras prácticas y dispositivos culturales a los cuales adherirse; que construye referentes identitarios comunes; que elabora una historia, una memoria y una representación colectiva. Estas serán las fronteras que definirán la identidad colectiva de las mujeres trans en relación a la sociedad heteronormativa.

[Thus the collective identity of trans women constitutes a complex and contradictory process that seeks to confront the negative identity ascribed by society: the impure, promiscuous “travesti” that inhabits the night, who has not been an “other” for anyone, because it simply has not existed. It is through the “right to gender identity” that the transition from “travesti” (in masculine terms) to trans woman is processed, maintaining some and introducing other cultural practices and devices to which to adhere; that constructs common identity referents; that elaborates a history, a memory and a collective representation. These will be the frontiers that will define the collective identity of trans women in relation to heteronormative society] (2017, 209-210)

Clearly, Salazar shares a concern with the naturalization of the oppression against trans people, and particularly trans women. Salazar is also making an intervention in Peruvian academic and activist spaces making the case for the importance of recognizing the “right to a gender identity.” Nevertheless, she seems to iterate the violence committed against a name already socially disapproved, and that name is “travesti.” In Salazar’s account, “travesti” is a name that is socially attributed by others, and usually in forceful and transphobic ways. Salazar states that “travesti” hasn’t been an “other,” but it has occupied a more radical subaltern position. For Salazar, “travesti” is simply unreal and unimaginable within heteronormative frameworks. Salazar chooses to mobilize the name “mujeres trans” [trans women] to reclaim a collective and political subject position for transgender people, or at least she seems to endorse such a movement. To be fair, Salazar uses “travesti” with the masculine article “el,” “el travesti” as the target of her critique. This is not a minor detail, since even some contemporary academic work about Peruvian travesti communities uses and endorses without any problematization of masculine pronouns to refer to these communities.<sup>9</sup> At no point in her paper, does Salazar make clear what she thinks of “la travesti” with the feminine article. It is very likely that Salazar subsumes many

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to say, it indexes a horizon of possibility already here, which struggles to make freedom flourish through a radical trans politics” (p. 89)

<sup>9</sup> For instance, in a detailed ethnographic paper on communities of Peruvian travesti sex workers, Robin Cavagnoud (2014) talks about these communities in undoubtedly masculine terms: “hombres travestidos” [*travestidos* men] (151) and “jóvenes prostitutas” [young male prostitutes] (154),

travestis (in the feminine) within the umbrella term “mujeres trans.” In any case, Salazar’s framework potentially performs the same kind of erasure that she attributes to the polluting name “travesti.” Unlike this approach, my dissertation attempts to preserve and cultivate the names “travesti” and “travestismo.”

### **Rethinking the Nation through Travestismo’s Lenses**

My dissertation explicitly engages with the power of the names travesti and travestismo, especially in its Peruvian resonances. Thus, it is important to offer an account of why and how the national marker “Peru” plays a role in this theoretical discussion. According to one of the founders of Peruvian cultural studies, Gonzalo Portocarrero, “en el Perú, el racismo está en los huesos de la gente” [in Peru, racism is in the bones of the people] (2004, 39). For this sociologist, racism is not only at the core of the name “Peru,” but perhaps more importantly, persists in the embodiment and psychic lives of the people who reclaim an attachment to the name “Peru.” Elsewhere, Portocarrero elaborates more detailed accounts of the particularities of the workings of racism in Peru. “En el Perú, la dificultad para elaborar una memoria colectiva es un hecho recurrente, sintomático y de consecuencias muy profundas. Esta dificultad nos revela como una sociedad que es aún prisionera de su pasado. En ella se expresa el poder del autoritarismo, el escaso vigor de la crítica y, sobre todo, lo precario de la identidad nacional” [In Peru, the difficulty to elaborate a collective memory is a recurrent, symptomatic event with very profound consequences. This difficulty reveals us to be a society that is still a prisoner of its past. It expresses the power of authoritarianism, the scant vigor of criticism and, above all, the precariousness of national identity] (2012b, 13). In Portocarrero’s account, the Peruvian nation is marked by a racist form of authoritarianism that attempts to erase any bond with its indigenous character. In this account the Spanish colonization of Peru is very much alive, especially in its endless and cruel racist efforts. The indigenous character of the Peruvian nation is constructed as part of its past, sometimes celebrated, but in most cases obliterated. Not only that, but according to Portocarrero that “indigenous past” is also postulated as a set of memories that need to be forgotten. Actually, Portocarrero cleverly postulates a formula in which the Peruvian nation interpellates its subjects through enforced amnesia. “La propuesta original del mundo criollo hacia los indígenas era ‘un olvido a cambio de una promesa’. Tendrían que romper con su tradición para acceder al reconocimiento y la ciudadanía” [The original proposal of the creole towards the indigenous was ‘a forgetfulness in exchange for a promise’. They would have to break with their tradition to gain recognition and citizenship] (2004, 211). According to Portocarrero’s theories, indigenous subjects could only reclaim an attachment with the name Peru, and a sense of belonging and rights of citizenship, if they agree to forget.

For Portocarrero this racist desire for amnesia of the (indigenous) past constantly fails, and it is within the failure of colonizing processes that critical work might be done. “La colonización del Perú, como la de otros países, empezando por la invasión y continuando con la rapiña y el genocidio es, sin embargo, una empresa que nunca terminó, en la medida en que lo ‘colonizado’, desde entonces relegado al espacio de la ‘sombra’, perduró. En un sentido profundo, la colonización como ‘extirpación’ radical del pasado fue una tarea fallida” [The colonization of Peru, like that of other countries, beginning with the invasion and continuing with the robbery and genocide, is nevertheless a business that never ended, insofar as the ‘colonized,’ since then relegated to the space of the shadow, endured. In a profound sense, colonization as a radical ‘extirpation’ of the past was a failed task] (2013, 13). Indeed, the colonized indigenous persists as a shadowy figure undoing the success of any colonial enterprise.

Portocarrero goes on in his critique of the senseless racist efforts of the Peruvian nation of obliterating any disruptive memory. “El pasado aparece tercamente porque ignorarlo no significa dejar de vivirlo sino solo renunciar a conocerlo” [The past appears stubbornly because ignoring it does not mean to stop living it but only to give up knowing it] (2013, 12). For Portocarrero, a will to not know the past is characteristic of the construction of “Peru” as a name. In my dissertation, especially in the second half, travestismo marks an intimate bond with indigenous subjectivities. That queer bond offers a promise for destabilizing the racist consensus that unfortunately is widespread in Peru today. Travestismo can and needs to be mobilized as a refusal to forget.

Portocarrero is one of the very few established professors in Peru that explicitly attempts to think on the links among racism, misogyny and homophobia. In his words, “en la base del autoritarismo está el pánico a la homosexualidad. En cualquier forma, la inferiorización de la mujer y el asco por el homoerotismo configuran una manera de ser que implica cerrarse al diálogo y a la imaginación, y que supone, por tanto, la violencia como forma de acallar esas presencias incómodas, internas y externas” [At the base of authoritarianism is the panic of homosexuality. In any way, the inferiorization of women and the disgust for homoeroticism configure a way of being that involves closing oneself to dialogue and imagination, and that supposes, therefore, violence as a way to silence those, internal and external, uncomfortable presences] (2010a, 27). In this quote, Portocarrero makes the bold statement that homophobia, the construction of homosexuality as abject, is at the core of the production of the Peruvian nation. In Portocarrero’s compelling account in order to interrupt those normative iterations of the name “Peru,” what is needed are political, theoretical, and cultural critiques of the enmeshing of racism, misogyny and homophobia. This is why Portocarrero roots for a culture in which a different kind of dialogue is possible, one in which these topics are not foreclosed. “El diálogo y la transacción son el camino para dejar de ser esa sociedad jerarquizada y fragmentada que solo produce caudillos y oligarquías, que es aún una república sin ciudadanos. Una cultura del diálogo permite desarmar los miedos que alimentan la confrontación” [Dialogue and transaction are the ways in which to stop being that hierarchical and fragmented society that only produces caudillos and oligarchies, which is still a republic without citizens. A culture of dialogue disarms the fears that fuel confrontation] (2010b, 331). In the culture of dialogue that Portocarrero envisions, indigenous, female, and queer voices take the main stage of the nation. Inspired by such a plea, my dissertation puts travestismo at the center of the discussion, and attempts to offer a reframing of the question of national belonging.

Portocarrero seems optimistic in his depiction of some events, that for him open new unexplored possibilities in Peru:

En las últimas décadas, al calor de la democratización, la demanda de reconocimiento ha crecido exponencialmente. En Lima hace poco gente *gay* que manifestaba su derecho de existir sin ser criminalizada fue duramente reprimida por la policía. Y lo que convirtió a la hostilidad de las fuerzas del orden en un ataque furioso, la gota que derramó el vaso, fue que tal gente empezó a besarse. La homofobia ganó. Y, como se ha dicho tantas veces, la homofobia proviene del miedo que nos despiertan nuestras propias latencias homosexuales. No obstante, a los pocos días se convocó a un evento similar pero esta vez los participantes ya no pudieron ser reprimidos. Primaron los derechos sobre el abuso. Una victoria en la lucha por el reconocimiento.

[In recent decades, in the heat of democratization, the demand for recognition has grown exponentially. Recently, in Lima, *gay* people who manifested their right to exist without being criminalized were harshly repressed by the police. And what turned the hostility of the forces of order into a furious attack, the drop that spilled the glass, was that such people started kissing. Homophobia won. And, as has been said so many times, homophobia arises out of a fear that our own homosexual latencies will also awake. However, a few days later a similar event was called but this time the participants could no longer be repressed. Rights over abuse prevailed. A victory in the fight for recognition. (2012a, 249).

Portocarrero reads an LGBT activist protest in a public main square in front of a cathedral that ended in police violence as an instance of the culture of abuse that is so pervasive in Peru. Interestingly, this kind of police violence is not exceptional against travesti subjects and bodies. Portocarrero finds hope in the fact that a massive collective assembly in protest against homophobic police violence took place a few days later. For him, this is a sign that a longtime struggle for recognition has been fruitful. There are reasons for being slightly optimistic, but there are also other reasons to being more skeptical. Feminist literary critic and lawyer Violeta Barrientos (2017) shares similar concerns to Portocarrero, but she is more aware of the dynamics of Peruvian LGBTI activism. Barrientos acknowledges that in recent years the protests and collective demonstrations around LGBTI issues have turned massive, but in her account this is related to neoliberal dynamics that turned the acronym LGBTI into a perfect target consumer. “Digamos que en estos últimos años el espacio político de la militancia LGBTI ha sido sobrepasado por el de las fuerzas provenientes de los consumidores del mercado *gay friendly* y que lo *gay friendly* es en la actualidad un signo de modernidad. Lo que no ha podido la militancia lo podrá el mercado para el que ser LGBTI es solo ser un tipo de consumidor” [Let’s say that in recent years the political space of the LGBTI militancy has been surpassed by that of forces coming from the consumers of the *gay friendly* market and that being *gay friendly* is currently a sign of modernity. What the militancy has not been able to do the market will where being LGBTI is only another type of consumer] (2017, 186). In Barrientos’ account, the “*gay friendly*” mantra of neoliberal consumption demands the erasure of the racialized character of the Peruvian LGBTI movement. Barrientos poignantly argues that “el Mhol ha existido desde 1982, fundado por intelectuales de izquierda y amadrinado por el feminismo peruano como parte de la ‘liberación sexual’. Desde su creación, tuvo en claro una identidad ‘chola’ que rechazaba el clasismo y el racismo” [Mhol has existed since 1982, founded by left-wing intellectuals and patronized by Peruvian feminism as part of the ‘sexual liberation’. Since its inception, it has a clear ‘chola’ identity that rejected classism and racism] (2017, 185). Barrientos implicitly argues that a racialized bond with “chola” subjectivities is being forgotten as the price of neoliberal tolerance. In my dissertation, travestismo works as a name that cannot be easily digested nor accepted by neoliberal logics or dynamics. Travestis, unlike many *gay* men and lesbians, are not sanitized subjects that aspire to be docile consumers.

In “Inequality, Normative Violence, and Livable Life: Judith Butler and Peruvian Reality” (2014), Jelke Boesten, like Portocarrero and Barrientos, attempts to think through the dimensions of violence in Peru. Boesten puts more emphasis on the gendered violence in Peru, in light of Judith Butler’s work. Boesten takes as a point of departure the idea that “normative violence is the violence of the norm” (2). Her essay speculates upon the particularities that

normative violence takes in Peru. Coinciding with Portocarrero's idea that "el sentimiento de igualdad entre los peruanos es todavía demasiado precario" [the feeling of equality among Peruvians is still too precarious] (1993, 9), Boesten writes that "Peruvians know what they can be and do in a given context. They also know, and to a certain extent expect, normative and physical violence when boundaries are crossed" (230). In Boesten's account, the boundaries that allow or deny certain forms of being and inhabiting the nation are severely patrolled in Peru. Boesten is particularly interested in the production and reproduction of these race-, gender-, and class-based borders. "Peruvians are trapped in a hierarchy grounded in race, class, and gender that normalizes violence, naturalizes exclusion, and denies grief" (234). Boesten labels this Peruvian form of normative violence a racialized heteronormative sexual structure. "A racialized heteronormative sexual structure draws boundaries around people's bodies and desires, and makes abuse possible" (236). One sentence in particular aptly summarizes Boesten's take on the violence of these gendered and racialized norms. "In light of the prevalence of postcolonial patriarchal gender relations grounded in a closely policed form of racialized heteronormativity, subverting the gender norms in Peru is difficult if not impossible" (226). Boesten's point shouldn't be easily discredited for its categorical depiction. Boesten is making the case for the need to acknowledge the pervasiveness and aliveness of "postcolonial patriarchal gender norms" and "racialized heteronormativity" in Peru. If one agrees with Boesten's depiction, it wouldn't be a stretch to argue that Peru offers a radical case of colonial, racist, and sexist normative violence in the Andean region of Latin America. But precisely for this same reason an utterance such as "subverting the gender norms in Peru is difficult if not impossible" becomes particularly troubling. In certain instances of my dissertations, travestismo is a name that, in its uses and forms of mobilization, perform some possibilities for subverting gender norms in Peru. And that is something that should never be taken for granted or easily discarded. In contemporary Peru there are assemblies of movements, memories, energies, bodies, trajectories, images, that under the name travestismo are doing much needed political work.

The first chapter engages with the Latin American ethnographic tradition of studying travestismo, but it does it so critically and disloyally. In chapter one I question the romance of ethnography and travestismo, a fixation on travestismo as exclusively an object of ethnographic research, and discuss some of its implications. How can the name travestismo disturb this ethnographic overinvestment? I offer, through an engagement with postcolonial and queer theories, an account of the losses that ethnography implies in the effort of imagining a different travesti trajectory. In the second chapter, I close read Claudia Llosa's film *Loxoro* about transgender kinship and starring transfeminist activist Belissa Andía. This chapter reads the film next to the political trajectory of its leading actress. Here I argue for the possibility of a language for travestismo that brings justice to travesti's tears. Travestismo, in this instance, stands for inhabiting the world through a different kind of gendered embodiment. The third chapter examines the work of the philosopher and curator Giuseppe Campuzano, with a particular emphasis on the work that hysteria performs in his essay "Reclaiming Travesti Histories." The resonances between hysteria and history mobilize gender as an analytical tool that helps unpack transgender oppression. In this chapter, travestismo works as a lens to imagine alternative gendered pasts, presents and futures. In my final chapter, I turn to the LGBTQ theater play *Desde afuera*, to think about the racialized connotations of travestismo. Here I focus on the collective pronoun *nosotrxs* and its power to repair some of the scars and wounds produced by racist and homo-transphobic national projects. My dissertation makes the case, more explicitly in its last chapter, that travestismo is a name that cultivates a bond with racialized subjectivities

marked in Peru as indigenous. Responding to Campuzano's call, every chapter of this dissertation offers a different form of reading travestismo. What all these chapters share in common is that each in its own manner problematize, and at some moments attempt to obliterate, "conventional gender thinking."



## Chapter One

### Travesti Dreams Outside in the Ethnographic Machine

Travestismo, that vernacular Latin American trans subject positionality, poses some challenges to queer studies. The most important theoretical accounts of travestismo (Berkins 2009, Campuzano 2006, Di Pietro 2016a, Duque 2011, Jarrín 2016, Kulick 1998, Kulick and Klein 2009, Lewis 2010, Pelúcio 2009, Richard 2004, Sabsay 2009 and 2011) depict travestismo as a sort of unidirectional gender migration from male to female embodiments, at least in contemporary Latin America. This is why “travesti” as a name cannot be easily translated as “transgender.” Travestismo doesn’t share the transgender indifference to the direction of gender migrations. Nevertheless, travesti and transgender are not mutually exclusive terms. In fact, travestismo resonates with Susan Stryker’s definition of transgender as “the movement across a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting place” (2008, 1). But unlike Stryker’s characterization of transgender, which doesn’t presuppose a “particular destination” (1), travestismo in most cases takes femininity, in its broadest sense, as its “particular destination.”

The fact that travestismo presupposes a particular gendered destination has been read by some scholars as a sign of its reactionary tendencies. For instance, according to Cymene Howe “rather than challenging gender norms, if exaggerated for the stage, the transvestic performers in glamorous women’s regalia and the macho affectations of their boyfriends mirrored commonly held assumptions about femininity and masculinity in Nicaragua... There was, rather, very little gender trouble here” (2013, 115). Howe adds the assertion that travestismo is not in essence subversive, and yet her account tends to render travestismo as inevitably inflexible. Jack Halberstam gives an account of the signifier “transgender” that is relevant to this discussion. According to Halberstam, “even as the transgender body becomes a symbol par excellence for flexibility, transgenderism also represents a form of rigidity” (76-77). In the case of travestismo this seems to be even more accurate, since many travestis treasure idealized forms of femininity and stereotypical notions of (cisgender) feminine beauty. Indeed, the femininity that travestismo constructs as a “final destination” feels dated. The desire for (a sort of anachronistic) femininity at the heart of travestismo seems troubling for some queer, trans, and feminist scholars. However, this tension reveals more about a desire of U.S.-based queer studies to sanitize their objects of study than of travestismo per se.

Instead of assuming a paranoid position “averse above all to surprise” (Sedgwick 2003, 146), this chapter positions travestismo as a way of making an encounter with the unexpected possible. Travestismo doesn’t have to only signify complete subversion or reification of gender. This chapter proposes that queer studies and theories have a lot to gain from an engagement with travestismo, but only if these fields allow themselves to be transformed by such an encounter. In this sense, this chapter asks queer studies to keep alive the promise that the name “queer” held in some of its early theoretical iterations. And that promise has never been better articulated than by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. For Sedgwick “queer” can refer to “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or *can’t be* made) to signify monolithically” (1993, 7). In this chapter if “queer” and “travesti” can be thought together it is because both names share a refusal to signify only one thing and in only one way.

The most important monographs on travestismo are ethnographies (Benedetti 2005, Camacho 2007, Duque 2011, Fernández 2004, Kulick 1998, Páez Vacas 2010, Pelúcio 2009, Prieur 1998, Silva 1993 and 1996). This is one of the main reasons why a scholarly study of travestismo cannot afford the luxury of not engaging with ethnography. This seems to add to the opacity that travestismo represents for U.S.-based queer studies. According to Heather Love, queer studies as a field formation in the United States is too invested in a “critique of empiricism” (2015, 76) that discards any theoretical engagement with ethnography. The queer “critique of empiricism” doesn’t acknowledge (enough) the important tradition of queer ethnographies that has contributed and contributes to deprovincialize queer thinking (see for instance Allen 2011, Dave 2012, Decena 2011, Howe 2013, Najmabadi 2014, Ochoa 2014, Stout 2014, Wekker 2006). Even more poignantly, if U.S. based queer studies want to engage in a transnational dialogue with Latin American queer studies, it needs to acknowledge that for the latter ethnography is an enabling tool of analysis.

It is telling that in their introduction to a journal dossier on the topic of queer thinking in Latin America, María Amelia Viteri, José Fernando Serrano and Salvador Vidal-Ortiz (2011), trace and reinvigorate a specific tradition of queer studies in Latin America based on empirical social studies methods, particularly ethnography (55). According to the editors of *¿Cómo se piensa lo “queer” en América Latina?* this Latin American queer trajectory differs from U.S. based queer theory debates, which in most cases take place in humanity departments and forums. Symptomatically, four of the five articles included in Viteri, Serrano and Vidal-Ortiz’s edited volume are ethnographic. The fifth article in that volume (Arboleda Ríos 2011), while a piece of literary criticism, makes the case for the inclusion of Néstor Perlongher in the transnational canon of queer theory. Interestingly, Perlongher’s most important contribution to such a canon is a groundbreaking ethnography (originally published in 1987) on communities of young male sex workers in Sao Paulo, Brazil (Perlongher 1999). So, in order to displace the U.S.-based mark of birth of queer theory, a cultivation of trans-disciplinary and trans-national dialogues that includes an appreciation of ethnography is necessary.

This chapter makes a call for a queer transnational engagement with ethnography, and yet its most important contribution is its critical invitation to imagine ways of disrupting the ethnographic encounter. I elaborate a critique of ethnography by building on the contributions of feminist ethnographers to the project of radically transforming the ethnographic encounter. For Lila Abu-Lughod, “to be feminist entails being sensitive to domination: for the ethnographer that means being aware of domination in the society being described and in the relationship between the writer (and readers) and the people being written about” (2008, 5).<sup>10</sup> Ruth Behar goes a bit further and makes a call for an “anthropology that breaks your heart.” Behar’s anthropology attempts “to map an intermediate space we can’t quite define yet, a borderland between passion and intellect, analysis and subjectivity, ethnography and autobiography, art and life” (1996, 174). Similar questions and concerns have been raised by other ethnographers. One of the most lucid and bravest of these perspectives comes from Veena Das, who tries “to defend a picture of anthropological knowledge in relation to suffering as that which is wakeful to violence wherever it occurs in the weave of life, and the body of the anthropological text as that which refuses

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<sup>10</sup> Autoethnography has been one of the favored routes by many feminist theorists to explore and critique the power relationships embedded in the ethnographic encounter. For Mary Louise Pratt, “autoethnography... involves partly collaborating with and appropriating the idioms of the conqueror” (2008: 9). Autoethnography performs a sort of situated critique that acknowledges its limits and the opacity of social relations.

complicity with violence by opening itself to the pain of the other” (2007, 211). Only a heart that is open to the pain of the other can be broken.

A heart can be broken in many ways and for many different reasons. Sometimes it is an encounter with “the otherwise” that breaks a heart. But because in many instances it’s not easy to say what the otherwise looks like this heartbreaking encounter is uneventful. For Elizabeth Povinelli “this otherwise may lie in shattering the life-world in which a person finds herself situated, but it also might mean maintaining a life-world under constant threat of being saturated by the rhythms and meanings of another” (2011, 130). Povinelli raises the possibility of an “ethnography of the otherwise.” Such a project wouldn’t foreclose what an ethnography is or can be.

Sometimes “the otherwise” takes paradoxically familiar faces. Sometimes it can even take the face of “home.” According to Angela Garcia “one of the issues of researching ‘home’ is that you never really leave, and the research never really ends. Such work is... *sin término*, without end” (2010, 205). What Garcia is gesturing towards is the sense of affective closeness in which ethnographers and informants are invested, and this affective intimacy may take disturbingly unfamiliar faces. Perhaps this is one the reasons why this is indeed a work without end, an endless engagement. Thinking of the ethnographic encounter as an endless engagement perhaps can counter a long tradition in which the ethnographer assumes, in the terms of Adriana Cavarero (2000, 64), the position of the *story-taker*. This chapter echoes Abu-Lughod, Behar, Das, Povinelli, and Garcia’s invitation to imagine a different kind of ethnography.

This chapter considers a series of ethnographic encounters between myself and Sandra, a Peruvian travesti who is a former sex worker and activist. Sandra is a close friend of mine, and was for several years “my best informant.” I thus linger on moments in which “the line between research and friendship had collapsed” (Stout 2014, 148). Here, I continue with a critical exploration of the queer possibilities of friendship in the ethnographic encounter (see Cornejo 2014). I dwell on the messiness of queer friendship and its limits, and takes heed of Sara Ahmed’s assertion about the possibility that “the discussion of friendship conceals the ethnographic relation” (2000: 66). In the case of my friendship with Sandra, our bond is characterized not only by love and support, but also by betrayal and lies. Echoing that, my engagement with ethnography is, at moments, disloyal, disobedient and treacherous. My theoretical engagement with ethnography is far from any attempt to redeem it for radical queer uses. Indeed, my point of departure is that not everything about ethnography is redeemable, and that there is nothing less queer than trying to redeem everything.

This chapter is an assemblage. It is formed from three different, but interconnected sections. The first is a life story of Sandra. My reading of this particular travesti narrative is an attempt to mark a queer existence or presence in and against worlds, institutions, and collectives that historically have attempted to erase such an existence. The second is an exploration of the encounter of an ethnographer and an informant. This second section attempts to undo and displace, through dialogue with dreams and nightmares, some of the certainties that the ethnographic encounter has come to imply. The third section introduces the queer art of lying, another form of aesthetic and political reflexivity, and rethinks all I have presented thus far by exploring its limits. Toward this end, the third section takes seriously one commonality that the names “queer” and “travesti” share, namely, that both terms, even if in unevenly, “bear the weight of the deceiver-pretender representation” (Bettcher 2014, 401). Finally, the chapter concludes with a critical plea for engaging with the queer art of lying, in order to imagine new forms of travesti survival, and less cruel ways of travesti death.

### **The Becoming Travesti of Sandra**

Santiago de Surco, better known as simply “Surco,” is one of the largest districts of Lima, the capital city of Peru. This district is symptomatic of uneven distributions of economic resources in Peru, and in Lima more specifically. In some parts of Surco you can live a very glamorous and comfortable life if you are considered a viable subject, and if you have inherited racial and class privilege, both of which are usually attached to certain last names. But if you are not one of those subjects you will probably live in “Surco Viejo” (Old Surco). A contingent of working-class communities and families still persists in Surco Viejo, thriving in the face of an aggressive process of gentrification that threatens to displace them.

If you live in Surco Viejo you probably know Sandra. If you have visited the main square of Surco Viejo, you have probably caught at least a glimpse of her. This is (or at least was) one of her favorite spots. And depending on the way you look at her and what your body looks like you might have also received a sexy, defiant, tender, indifferent or hateful gaze from Sandra in return. And if you have never been to Surco Viejo, who knows, you might have still met Sandra.

You may be a bit impatient, but becomings take time. This is a story of the travesti becoming of Sandra, who is in her late thirties. She sometimes describes herself as humble and sometimes as arrogant, but she always describes herself as attractive. She lives with her parents as well as some of her brothers and sisters and their children in a modest rented apartment in Surco. Her neighborhood is a space of crossings due to its close proximity to luxurious houses and apartments with new and ostentatious cars in their driveways. Sandra is not a shy person, yet she likes to remind me that “secrets function to exclude those who do not share them and to closely bind those who do” (Abu-Lughod 1986, 235). From the very beginning she let me know that most of her secrets were hers and hers alone.

Sandra’s travesti becoming is intimately related to one of her queer passions, dancing. In her mid teens, Ángel, her first gay friend, encouraged her to go to a local party dressed as a “she.” Her female friends lent her clothes: a sexy mini-skirt, colorful high heels, and Ángel lent her for the night his favorite wig. Sandra is sure that she looked fabulous that night when she walked defiantly (or maybe she was dancing?) through the streets of her neighborhood. She was so happy and she enjoyed her looks so much that she went to the main public square of her district just to be observed by curious and desiring gazes. She attracted a lot of attention at the party. One young man who Sandra knew asked her to dance. During it he recognized Sandra underneath her makeup. The gossip circulated quickly from mouth to mouth. It caused such a commotion that even her mother heard the news. When Sandra returned home, she was severely reprimanded by her mother for being a *loca*, an insult that combines the injuring resonances of faggot and madwoman.

Sandra cross-dressed in her house when everyone was asleep, but that was difficult because her house is very small. She also started to party and dance at a gay disco in Lima’s center. Cinderella may have enjoyed her night only until midnight, but that was the hour in which Sandra would leave her house to enjoy the pleasures of the night. One of her nightly pleasures is to be the center of male gazes. Most of them made their desire for her explicit, but some of them also insulted her. She did her best to ignore the hateful words, and to return hostile gazes when necessary. Another pleasure of the night was that she started to explore erotically on her own terms with men. She kissed a handsome young man for the first time in that disco. But her heart was also broken for the first time there. When she arrived at her house, she immediately scrubbed all the makeup from her face. But some mornings she was too tired or too drunk to do it

by herself. On those occasions her mother woke up earlier than everyone else to clean the face of her son. Was this how her mother protected Sandra from the most hostile members of her family? Or, paradoxically, was this her way of allowing Sandra to become travesti?

Once Sandra finished high school, she left for another Peruvian city, Cuzco, to work. There she started to take female hormones to modify her body. In Cuzco she met a travesti who would inject her with liquid silicone. As painful as that process was, she could not have been happier. Actually, there was one long-time dream of hers that she achieved and that made her even happier: after so many years of wearing her hair short she let it grow and she dyed it blonde. Her becoming travesti is intimately related to her becoming a blonde. And according to Sandra's family, at least at first, her blonde hair was scandalous and above all a betrayal to her race. For Sandra and her family, an escape from the body as a gendered prison is connected to a desire for racial metamorphosis. These desires for escape have specific "final destinations": cisgender femininity and glamorous blonde whiteness. The initial rejection of Sandra's family may have to do with their fear of the public display of Sandra's failure at performing cisgender blonde femininity. Perhaps they read Sandra's travesti becoming as a shameless embrace of "*huachafaría*," which Pedro Di Pietro characterizes as a "failed attempt at crossing class boundaries" (2016b, 67). Her family was concerned for the consequences that Sandra would have to pay for her daring cross-gender and racial desires. For Frantz Fanon "the first thing the colonial subject learns is to remain in his place and not overstep its limits" (2004, 15), but Sandra was unlearning that lesson. Her becoming travesti was all about a refusal to remain fixed in a single place and a need to overstep several socially and culturally enforced limits.

Sandra's becoming *travesti* also gave her more opportunities for love. She has had many boyfriends; most, if not all, self-identify as straight men. There is one relationship that she considers particularly relevant. She did not like him at first, but his sweet words and fine looks made her fall in love with him in the end. He was not perfect and was sometimes violent. More often that not he was very jealous and cheated on her with other *travestis*. He was not perfect, but she loved him and after all, he was a very good lover. Their relationship ended when he was arrested and convicted (for a crime she prefers not to discuss).

As much as Sandra enjoyed her sexual and sentimental relationships with men, she did not renounce her queer pleasures. All her boyfriends asked her to dye her hair a dark color, and to stop using ultra-short miniskirts, but she never accepted their requests. She loved her boyfriends, but she loved her blond hair and femininity more. Maybe she thought that was a fair price to pay for dating such a gorgeous whore. Perhaps Sandra was actually in search of "a fragrance suitable for a *puta* (whore)" (Rodríguez 2014, 171).

And as much as Sandra loves her family, she does not renounce sexual pleasures in their name. Her mother, who disliked Sandra's aforementioned ex-boyfriend, allowed him and Sandra to meet at the family's house without anyone else knowing about it. On one occasion, Sandra invited him to the house at midnight. They were having sex in Sandra's bedroom while everyone else was asleep, that is, everybody except one of her neighbors. This neighbor was a conservative straight woman, and she could not stand the moans of queer pleasure she heard through her thin wall. Perhaps the musical sounds of queer sex were too loud for her. This neighbor started to scream, "you have no morals!" She was incensed enough to call the police and accompanied an officer to Sandra's house. Everyone in the house was now awake, and all were alarmed. The police officer entered Sandra's house and searched unsuccessfully room-by-room for her boyfriend. Her boyfriend evaded him by moving from room to room with the help of the family, especially Sandra's mom. After the unsuccessful search, Sandra threw the officer and the woman

from the house. The female neighbor was still mortified and insulted Sandra again. In response, Sandra gave her a slap in the face. Sandra also told her neighbor (and the police officer) that any man she desired could enter her house, and her body.

Sandra's becoming travesti also gave her the opportunity to discover another pleasure of the night, sex work. Agrado, an older travesti sex worker and friend, recommended she offer sexual services on the streets in order to afford the bodily transformations she desired and to buy things she liked. Sandra took her advice. She was with Agrado her first night working the streets of Surco. It was on the streets that Agrado introduced Sandra to other travestis and even to some clients. In a short period Sandra met many travesti sex workers. She developed a close bond with Tina, the most powerful (because she was beautiful and had the lightest skin) of the group. But with close bonds also come strong rivalries with other travestis.

Another nightly pleasure was the expansion of sexual possibilities. Her sense of being desired was reassured. She was so desired by men that many paid to fuck her. Indeed, "prostitution makes individual travestis feel sexy and attractive" (Kulick 1998, 136). The sexual practices in which she engaged while working were more complex than the ones she had been used to. She learned that some men enjoyed the more voyeuristic pleasures of seeing her naked and in different positions. Other men preferred being submissive and asked her to be physically aggressive and to verbally humiliate them. Other men liked to smell her body and clothes. There were also men who liked to be treated "like women" by her. Some men were into group sex, including several travesti sex workers. There were also men who preferred to include their female partners in sexual trios of different sexes and genders.

The night offered Sandra many pleasures, but also dangers. Violence was the main threat. This was a radical violence and an unavoidable menace to all travesti sex workers. Indeed, part of becoming travesti was to learn the "power to dance with death" (Ochoa 2014, 201), and it goes without saying that this is a dance that no one can master. The police were (and still are) travestis sex workers' main enemy. On many occasions, the police hit Sandra on the head or in sensitive areas, where silicone had been injected. They insulted her verbally and attacked her with their dogs. They (illegally) imprisoned her temporarily and kidnapped her in order to sexually abuse her, dumping her in abandoned places far from where she worked. These were institutional practices. Sandra was no exception. If anything she was luckier than other travesti sex workers, some of whom experienced worse police violence. Sandra learned from the others to sometimes act passively in her reaction to violence, as challenging the police would only make her more vulnerable. But Sandra also learned from them to fight back, to return their blows and the kicks. She also used a widespread technique of self defense among many travesti sex workers, to cut her wrists or arms and to threaten the police with "infecting" them with AIDS. According to Sandra that is one of the better ways to turn police officers into crying babies. On at least one occasion, after being beaten badly by a policeman, she paid some of her male friends to beat the officer up, which she enjoyed watching from a safe distance.

The story you have just read is much too linear. You should rebel against this totalizing chronology because the last thing becoming *travesti* is, is linear.

### **The Dreams of a Dumb Kid**

I want to continue writing this piece, but my fingers hesitate. I am once again exploiting my relationship with Sandra. Wait! This is so frustrating! I am still *talking about* her. What I want to write is inspired by Trinh T. Minh-ha's, when she states the importance of "acknowledging without occupying the center, one's location(s) in the process of engendering meaning" (2010,

54). But this is no easy task, especially if one doesn't want to place "the non-trans subject at the centre of the conversation, paradoxically at the precise instance it seemingly offers sensitivity towards trans people" (Namaste 2015, 137).

You may feel trapped and restricted, but feel free to follow a different path. Allow yourself the possibility to become a "dreamer inside a dream" (Genet 2003, 173), maybe even inside two dreams. The dreamers in question are the dumb kid and Sandra. The dumb kid as an undergraduate studied sociology in a private university in Lima and in that context he engaged deeply (under disciplinary pressures) with ethnography. It was within this trajectory that he produced a "native informant." Her name is Sandra. His native informant lived in Surco, but unlike some of the people he met in his university, Sandra didn't live in the luxurious parts of that district. She was not just an informant. She was his *best informant*. The one, which he could most rely on to engage his many ethnographic enterprises: interviews, focus groups, participant observations, and to serve as a source for more and more contacts. He met her in 2004, while he was a volunteer in a workshop with travesti activists. He was eighteen and she a little older than him. Perhaps because they were the youngest participants in the workshop they became friends. Their relationship was defined and constructed through uneven power mechanisms, and no matter how uneven power may be, then, it is never (even if a master believes it to be) determined solely by individuals. Sandra also had reasons to engage in this relation. The dumb kid was dumb, but not so stupid as not to realize that she found him "interesting." He is pretty sure that she found him cute. While stupidity and cuteness are not necessarily related, he may have thought twice about taking advantage of such a cliché. There are complex erotic dynamics in the ethnographer-informant dyad, and as Esther Newton argues "the significance of the erotic equation in fieldwork" (1993, 4) needs to be openly thought. The "erotic equation" of the dumb kid's fieldwork wasn't unidirectional. Without confessing it, and probably without knowing it, the dumb kid was also attracted to Sandra. For both of them, it was risky to acknowledge that their bond was "ranging from passionate (although unconsummated) erotic attachment to profound affection to lively interest" (Newton 1993, 11). And it was risky because the "erotic equation" of their bond puts into question some of their most beloved identitarian certainties: how can a travesti be attracted to an effeminate gay guy, and a gay man to a feminine travesti? That being said the dumb kid cannot know with certainty why Sandra accepted his invitation, an invitation to a place and journey that he did not fully understand at the time (neither did she).

In the first semester of 2004, the dumb kid instead of sleeping at night started doing participant observations in an area of Lima populated by travesti sex work. In a way some of his usual patterns of sleeping and dreaming were disrupted. Maybe without knowing it he was becoming a dreamer inside a dream, but whose dream was it? He and Sandra started to walk together over many nights and dawns crossing from the most humble to the most luxurious spaces of Surco and vice versa. "El Ovalo Higuiereta," a place that in the morning was a center of commercial exchanges of many kinds, at night became a place centered almost exclusively around commercial sex.

Maybe out of curiosity, maybe out of generosity, maybe even out of love, Sandra risked a lot in order to join the dumb kid in these observations. Then and for at least six months before, she did not offer sexual services. This decision was partly due to a terrible fight that she had with another travesti who was also a sex worker. So, in order to walk those streets she didn't want to be recognizable to the other travestis. They decided that she would have to pass as a man, moreover, as a straight man. Here, Sandra was performing a double travestismo. She who loved (and loves) effeminate femininity would have to perform rough masculinity. Indeed, they both

laughed at the scene. But was it only funny? If so, for whom? And at whose expense? When the dumb kid was at work on it his stupidity could reach the sky. In his attempt to grasp the “native’s point of view” he didn’t think much about the safety nor the comfort of his informant. As Trinh provocatively asserts, “the ultimate goal of every ethnographer, The Great Master wrote, is ‘to grasp the native’s point of view’” (1989, 73).<sup>11</sup>

If mastery was his unacknowledged objective, Sandra let him know very soon that he was indeed a dumb kid. She and other travestis insisted that in order to understand the realities that travestis face the dumb kid should travestirse himself. At first, he didn’t consider the idea seriously, but Sandra was very emphatic about the importance of it. Was he seeking to transgress the ultimate “taboo for anthropologists” (Pratt 1986, 38) and become a “native”? Sandra perhaps thought that the answer was affirmative, and if that were the case that she would give him a lesson. Of course, this could have been a kind of revenge for the previous violence he had enacted against her.

Every now and then the dumb kid has smart ideas. Indeed, there are intelligent ways of being dumb. One of these “smart ideas” was his intuition that gender was a sort of language. The “native informant”, he may have thought, possesses a high level of proficiency in a “native language.” What kind of language is travestismo? How does a native speaker of travestismo sounds like? If travestismo is a sort of “native language” it is a very curious one, since certainly it implies to unlearn the previously enforced native language of a gender deemed natural. To become travesti was to become a speaker of travestismo.

Can the dumb kid learn the language of travestimo? Sandra’s invitation to engage with travestismo was one that didn’t presupposed ownership. According to Judith Butler, “always already implicated in each other, always already exceeding one another, language and materiality are never fully identical nor fully different” (1993, 69). This is why travestismo as a language and as materiality are intertwined. To engage with the language of travestismo is to encounter it on the skin... but apparently also in dreams. Was this the dream of the ethnographer, or of the native? Are both dreaming the same dream?

“The speech of the native speaker... is deemed so natural that is said to be without – or shall we say outside? – an accent” (Chow 2014, 58). But all languages have accents, including all native languages. If Sandra offered herself to introduce the dumb kid to the language of travestismo, wasn’t she also sharing with him her particular accent of travestismo? Maybe she also found boring the usual accent of the dumb kind’s gender. How does his unbecoming sound? Maybe she wanted to hear the accent of his travesti language, of his travestismo. Maybe she wanted to hear the resonances and dissonances of their travestismos.

When the day in which the dumb kid debuted himself as travesti finally arrived, he was very anxious and nervous. Many female friends lent him their best clothes and accessories, and he also secretly took some of his mother's. He and Sandra went to a market to buy or rent all the other needed items. They were many, and his budget was quite limited. So, she did a type of magic with the budget, and with him. They rented a room in a well-known hotel among travesti sex workers and their clients. He entered performing an effeminate masculinity, but that was not the way in which he was going to leave. Protected by the walls of a private room in which

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<sup>11</sup> Part of the power of Trinh’s take on ethnography relies on some of her practices of naming (i.e. “every ethnographer,” and “The Great Master”) that critiques and expose a colonizing will to know and to domesticate differences. My engagement with Trinh’s critique acknowledges that there are many traditions and ethnography, including feminist and queer ones.



Sandra was doing her best to make him look his best, the process of performing a travesti bodily materiality was amusing, indeed amazing. But it was the kind of pleasure that a man feels when goes to a carnival to break the rules for one day (or night) only to return and resume his usual position the next day. But could this be the only reason?

Perhaps Sandra perceived the dumb kid's deep discomfort with masculinity. Perhaps she heard the pain in the accent of his (gendered) language. Perhaps she was trying to be generous and give him an opportunity that a heteronormative culture has always denied him. Speaking the language of travestismo, the language that is travestismo, is not unrelated to dreaming. Was the dumb kid becoming a dreamer inside her dream? This encounter with the language of travestismo awoke him to acknowledge his "queer desire for gender transitivity" (Wiegman 2012, 312). If this was a dream it was certainly a wet dream.

At first the dumb kid thought that the most painful experience that night would be to shave his legs or to sew a red wig to his hair but he was mistaken. When they left the hotel "as" travestis his sense of safety crumbled. Gazes directed at him (actually at both of them), oh that disturbing feeling of so many gazes directed at you and your body! Some gazes were accompanied by words, and some of those words were indeed very offensive. He was shaking not only because it was a cold winter's night, but also out of fear. Sandra was not particularly fearful, perhaps because this was part of her quotidian life. She made fun of his complaints and his fears. Not because there were no risks, but perhaps because she knew that gazing from a safe distance and from a masculine position (no matter how effeminate or queer) is indeed one of the privileges of the ethnographer.

While Sandra flirted with any car that stopped next to them or with any man who would approach them, the dumb kid just wanted the male observers to leave them alone. But she did experience deep fear with another kind of car that belonged to the police. When she saw it she immediately became very careful, but he didn't experience the same sensation of fear he had had with their prospective clients. He naively thought that of course the police would not hurt them. Of course? The police started approaching them with insults. Sandra was careful but acted with indifference towards their utterances. But the police started to chase them. She told him to run as fast as he could. They took off their high heels and ran. It was his first time running from the police, running without shoes and on a rough pavement with waste and glass shards. He ended up with painful and bleeding feet. The police didn't catch them, but they certainly tried to.

Dreams can easily turn into nightmares. This may happen because nightmares are not necessarily the binary opposite of sweet dreams. Maybe nightmares can create unexpected movements and rhythms. Maybe nightmares can also awake new gendered accents. This nightmare made the dumb kid indignant. But at whom? His indignation was a proof of his privilege. As if such a proof was necessary...

The dumb kid engaged this "participant observation" trying to grasp the native's point of view or, worse, trying to become the native. But he ended only in failure. At the time he considered this a failure because they remained in the streets not much more than an hour. He was disappointed in himself. But maybe his disappointment is related to his acknowledging that he wasn't the only dreamer. Sandra was also a dreamer, and she was a dreamer inside a nightmare, his nightmare. In this play of projections, maybe he was terrified by the thought that now she could see that his stakes on his masculine name and pronouns were very precarious. Maybe after having her as a guest dreamer in his nightmares he got a glimpse of the worlds between "he" and "she". "Cisgender" and "transgender" are not mutually exclusive, but one can dwell, dream, desire and die in their in-between(s).

To acknowledge these un/becomings can be both sexy and terrifying. This ethnographic experience, far from giving the dumb kid mastery, forced him to acknowledge the structural differentials of power that go along with the positions of ethnographer and informant. He realized how arrogant and sexist it was to presume that the ethnographer's gaze was invisible, and capable of capturing the totality of his surroundings like a camera. Indeed, this sense of invisibility and omniscience is a product of a colonizing privilege that demands the hyper-visibility of the native, no matter at what cost, and that constructs her knowledges waiting to be deciphered and translated by the omniscient ethnographer. In this way he realized there to be an incommensurable distance between Sandra and him. But was it really incommensurable?

Weren't the dumb kid (and Sandra?) made to acknowledge that "we live in many worlds at the same time, but also that these worlds are, in fact, all in the same place – the place each one of us is here and now"? (Trinh 2010, 56). The two shifted positions. She was not only the object of his gaze, but she was also gazing at him "as" a travesti. Indeed, "positionings are radically transitional and mobile" (Trinh 2010, 51). However, he couldn't stand that travesti position, or rather, he couldn't stand having her look at him occupying that position, even for a little more than one hour. The dumb kid learned in a painful way a tough lesson: the "serious danger of romanticizing and/or appropriating the vision of the less powerful while claiming to see from their positions" (Haraway 1988, 584).

Becoming travesti was her dream and his nightmare. This nightmarish sweet dream begs certain questions: how can the places, dynamics and power mechanisms involved in the ethnographic encounter be troubled? Shouldn't the ethnographic encounter be rejected altogether? Shouldn't they, and we, you and me, look for other languages? But what about her? Shouldn't any troubling of the ethnographic encounter necessarily account for the uneven distribution of benefits and risks among both ethnographer and informant?

It was the dumb kid's turn to become a dreamer inside Sandra's nightmares. But if her dreams made him uncomfortable, than her nightmares were intolerable. It was a year after his ethnographic *anecdote*<sup>12</sup>, in 2005, that she was again working the streets, even though the situation of travestis in that zone of Surco had worsened mainly because of police violence and a lack of clients. One terrible night Sandra joined a man in his car and provided sexual services for him. Up until this point nothing unusual has occurred. She had always been relatively lucky and had most of the times been able to escape the brutal violence of some men. Unfortunately, that was not going to be the case this particular night. The man beat her so badly that it was a miracle that she had survived at all. Her face was disfigured and when the dumb kid saw her he thought that the first thing that they should do was to go to the police and file a complaint about the man. The dumb kid attended the meetings of several activist groups to convey the importance of this case, an unwelcome labor even in gay and lesbian communities. But in doing so he ignored her desires. She didn't want to go to the police. At the time he thought that the only reason for this was that she had internalized her subaltern position. And there he was attempting to save her, and to turn her nightmare into his dream of self-realization. He very easily forgot the fear that the police had caused Sandra (and on that night him), a fear based on an intimate knowledge of the fact that "the criminal punishment system is the most significant perpetrator of violence against trans people" (Spade 2015, 47).

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<sup>12</sup> Here I am making a reference to a methodology that Jane Gallop (2002) calls "anecdotal theory," which stresses the importance of the quotidian, the present, the personal and intimate dialogues for theorizing. See also: Cornejo (2011), Cvetkovich (2011), Gallop (1997); Quesada, Gomez and Vidal-Ortiz (2015), and Stewart (2007).

The bloody encounter with the man wasn't victimless. During that nightmare the sex worker in her was killed. Afterwards Sandra decided not to engage in sex work, and at the very least not on the street. This wasn't a trivial loss. Sex work allowed her to not only move between different worlds, but also sustained her. The sex worker in her was used to running away, but now what Sandra needed was to slow down. To borrow a phrase of Trinh T. Minh-ha, "in times of coercive politics and transnational terror, slowing down so as to learn to listen anew is a necessity" (2005, 13). Her attacker wanted to destroy her, to eradicate from this world the dreamer that she is. But she didn't submit to his will. The nightmare didn't kill her, just limited the speed of her movements. Some time later she had plastic surgery to reduce the visible effects of violence on her face. And with the help of family and friends she opened a small and humble store in which she sold party favors for children's parties. She was so excited with this project, and with much effort she sustained it for about two years, after which she closed it, having amassed a lot of debt.

You shouldn't leave this text with fixed pictures for Sandra and the dumb kid. Every now and then the dumb kid and she discussed politics. In the 2011 Peruvian presidential election she was going to vote for a rightwing candidate and he (of course?) for the left. In their conversations other distances between both of them had become visible. By this point he had already moved to Berkeley, CA to start a PhD program, something that had been a long-time dream of his, unlike Sandra, who for a long time has dreamed about moving to Argentina or Italy but was unable to do so. Of course, dreams are deceiving, and we've seen can easily become nightmares. Nevertheless, (some of) his dreams were materializing, while hers were not. Any effort to trouble the ethnographic encounter must attempt to do something about this asymmetry.

One more thing: It might have been that during a nightmare the sex worker in her was killed. But this doesn't mean that *la puta* in her also died, neither *la puta* in him.

### **The Queer Art of Lying**

The queer art of lying echoes the deep discomfort with universal notions of truth that are at the core of the founding texts of queer studies as a field. For instance, in the words of Monique Wittig, "the discourses which particularly oppress all of us, lesbians, women, and homosexual men, are those which take for granted that what founds society, any society, is heterosexuality" (1992, 24). The beloved "truths" of the "straight mind" are exposed as lies by many queer theorists. For Judith Butler, in a similar way, "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (2006, 34). The "notion of a true gender identity" (186) is exposed as a lie that has forgotten its shaky genealogy in Butler's famous account. It is almost as if "truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions" (Nietzsche 1993, 84).

The queer art of lying is not only reactive to a universal notion of "Truth"; it also explicitly treasures the worldmaking capacities of lies. In that sense, the queer art of lying is akin to Sedgwick's nonce taxonomies, the resources that allow for "the making and unmaking and remaking and redissolution of hundreds of old and new categorical imaginings concerning all the kinds it may take to make up a world" (2008, 23). The queer art of lying promotes an intimate exercise of imagination. The queer art of lying doesn't propose itself as the only path for queer thinking and politics, nor forecloses the importance of mobilizing in particular contexts some notion of "truth" in the struggles against homophobia and transphobia. This queer art is neither prescriptive nor proscriptive.

Queers have been accused of failing to perform “true” genders and sexualities. The queer art of lying attempts to embrace such a failure. According to Halberstam, “all losers are the heirs of those who lost before them. Failure loves company” (2011, 121). Indeed, lying, like failing, create unexpected queer forms of sociality. This seems to be even more poignant in the case of travestis. In her groundbreaking essay “Gender Contortions and Sexual Doubling: Transvestite Parody” (2004), Nelly Richard offers a reading of travestismo as essentially metaphoric. Richard’s essay focuses on “the transvestite fantasy of posing as what one is not” (47). Richard’s essay was originally published in 1993, and it is interesting to note that it shares some resonances with Butler’s take on drag: “Transvestites make all this unravel when they explode the correspondence of sex and gender through their own anatomical incongruence” (50). For Richard, travestismo is an anti-dogmatic and anti-hierarchical political and aesthetic project. Notwithstanding all its contributions, Richard’s essay doesn’t take into consideration the psychic and material consequences that travestis have to pay for carrying the burden of being labeled as “fake women” (Campuzano 2008, 8). Unlike Richard’s, my theoretical engagement with the queer art of lying attends to the uneven distribution of risks and losses that travestis as “fake and deceitful women” face in quotidian basis. At the same time, I attempt to radicalize a powerful suggestion already made in Richard’s essay: travestis are perhaps the best practitioners of the queer art of lying.

Sandra is and has been for many years a talented practitioner of the queer art of lying. Sandra was a shy boy and never had many friends. She did not like to play like other boys, but she loved to play jacks with the girls. From a very young age, and probably out of boredom, she engaged in the *queer art of lying*. In order to avoid the heavy burden of masculinity through the disciplining of the body via soccer games, military-like exercises, and other gendered technologies, Sandra asked her mother to lie for her and inform her teachers that she had a physical disability that prevented her from working out. The queer art of lying implies not only that lies be artful, but that they also create a bond capable of sustaining the world that your lie has imagined. Her lies were successful: during her years of school she was never once forced to kick a soccer ball.

Sandra remembers that during her childhood she did not think of herself as a “she,” but this changed around her thirteenth birthday. That year she started to dream of herself as feminine. More and more she started to resent heteronormative constrictions over her body. Her dreams needed to be protected from a social environment that could not tolerate her feminine attachments and belongings. In order to protect her secrets, she started to self-consciously copy what the boys and male teenagers of her school did. According to Sandra, boys were easy to mimic. Perhaps Sandra intuited that “mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate... and poses an immanent threat to both ‘normalized’ knowledges and disciplinary powers” (Bhabha 1994, 86). Sandra was very successful at mimicking these boys because not even one attempted to fight her for fear of losing. Again, the queer art of lying is an art form born of an attempt to survive in a world that for the most part is uninhabitable for queer people. Her masculine performances also allowed her to be close to the young men she liked, even to touch them, but without anyone knowing the non-normative desires that lay behind her passionate attachments. Ultimately, the queer art of lying is born out from the need to queerly love in a world that does not appreciate queer bonds.

In discussing the Black Panthers, Jean Genet stresses their endless becoming: “the metamorphosis was by far the most important, and that is why the Panthers can be said to have overcome through poetry” (2003, 100). Perhaps becoming travesti is not unrelated to the

Panther's overcoming through poetry. Perhaps becoming travesti offers Sandra the possibility to imagine a time and space where her dreams do not end when she awakes. In Sandra's case, then, poetry takes many forms. Drawing and painting were her passions. Drawing from yet existent forms and painting her worlds with brighter colors than the monotonous shades of heterosexual normalcy are instances of Sandra's poetry.

Sandra draws and paints names. Her politics of naming, and the politics surrounding her name deserve some attention. Even after ten years of knowing each other Sandra has never told me her male birth name given to her by her family. I've heard it a couple of times used by some of her family members, but I've since forgotten it. When she needs it Sandra can use shadowy shades to paint a name with which she doesn't want to be associated. Her family calls her by her legal name. That is the name by which they have always known her. It stresses the continuity of their love for Sandra in their process of mourning her masculinity.

According to Nelly Richard, travesti politics of naming or what she calls travesti "poetics of nicknaming," renders "a name forever dysfunctional to the patrimonial regimes that legalize the Subject as the only owner of a Singular identity" (2004, 46). This is indeed the case of Sandra, who not only changed her masculine first name to a feminine name, but to vast array of feminine "first" names. The fact that "naming is an act of dispossession" (Pandolfo 1997, 129) seems to be radicalized in the case of Sandra. Sandra's "poetics of nicknaming" shows that there is something essentially improper about travesti practices of naming. This "improperness" has to do with the shameless shattering of the will to master (of) any proper name. At the same time, "any first name appears to possess a seasonal and mysteriously collective life of its own" (Riley 2005, 118). This includes Sandra's long list of discarded first names (and some last names) that indeed have a life of their own. Actually, she doesn't use "Sandra" anymore. She chose the name "Sandra" for the publication of this essay. She told me that this was the first feminine name that she used for herself in her teens. So even if she does not use "Sandra" anymore she is still emotionally attached to that name. She wanted to share that discarded name and (some of) its life with you.

In her professional life as a sex worker, Sandra had to display and put to some use her penis. Sandra proclaims that she has never anally penetrated men with her penis, not even when working. This may be a lie but Sandra's lies are so well crafted that one can never be sure. In any case, her love relationships were a different business. Sandra and (most of) her boyfriends engaged in sexual encounters in which they all tacitly agreed to ignore her penis. For Sandra this was extremely gratifying and reparative. Perhaps this is why the queer art of lying can be so sexy.

The queer art of lying may be sexy, but it can easily turn into a risky or even deadly business. Sandra's almost fatal encounter with that hateful male client was, among many things, an instantiation of the panic that many men experience in male economies of desire when they find themselves experiencing lust while interacting with travesti subjects. Apparently, these men have difficulty acknowledging that their pleasures are not contained by cisgender heterosexual dictums. That man could have thought of himself as a victim of Sandra's lies, and her murder as a deserved punishment for such lying. This episode of extreme violence remains very opaque, thanks mostly to Sandra's silence and tangential responses. In any case, Sandra's departure from sex work (the murder of the sex worker in her) has different valences for each of us, and as such we both lost different things from it. I dare not say what Sandra lost after her deadly encounter with violence while selling sexual services, but after that she did not want to engage in sex work. For her, the dangers outweighed the pleasures. But I also have lost something here I cannot quite

grasp. Perhaps I lost part of my idealization of sex work as a space of freedom. It seems to me still important to problematize the borders between ethnographers of sex and sex workers. To begin with, ethnographers of sex are also sex workers, perhaps of a different kind, but sex workers nevertheless. At the same time, it is vital to consider the uneven economic and political landscapes that ethnographers of sex and sex workers, especially travesti ones, tend to occupy.

I echo Viviane Namaste's concern about the unjust position that transgender sex workers face in supposedly progressive academic and activist contexts. "I think that academics and activists set a very dangerous precedent if we maintain that people's identities are acceptable only if and when they can prove that they are politically useful. Who gets to decide what constitutes 'politically useful' anyway?" (Namaste 2005, 10). Namaste explicitly incites her readers to "question the activist will to name and know a definitive trans reality" (2015, 146). Following Namaste, I acknowledge that ethnographers shouldn't try to annihilate the opacity or even messiness of travestismo.<sup>13</sup> This is one of the reasons why it seems to me that the queer art of lying, with its proliferation of "*partial* – committed and incomplete" truths (Clifford 1986a, 7), can be of some help. The queer art of lying may make ethnographers more humble about the limits of any theoretical enterprise. The queer art of lying takes as a point of departure that "one does not always know *what* one opposes and that a political vision at times has to admit its own finitude in order to even comprehend what it has sought to oppose" (Mahmood 2012, 199).

"The 'edge' is not a comfortable place to live." (Weston 1996, 279) In Sandra's case, she was forced by her circumstances to live at the edge. There is no need to romanticize such messiness. Part of the challenge that Sandra experiences on a quotidian basis is that acute pain can knock at her door at any moment and in unexpected ways. In July 2013, a time of national holidays in Peru, Sandra attempted to kill herself at home. She was stopped by one of her sisters whose intuition that something was wrong fortunately awoke her from sleep. As Elizabeth Povinelli says "we are all vulnerable, but not equally so" (2006, 73). Sandra was becoming a prisoner of love. She was very disappointed and hurt by the lies of her boyfriend. Being a practitioner of the queer art of lying doesn't make anyone immune to being wounded by lies. Sandra's psychic life in many instances was sustained by the desire and love that many men professed to her. The desiring recognition that she is used to getting from men counters (in some measure) the wounds that she gets from the systematic precarization of travesti lives. But sometimes, like everyone else, Sandra isn't loved back. This is when an amorous wound works in tandem with a broader political context that deems travesti subjects as improper, or even impossible, objects of love. In this case, love wasn't going to enable Sandra's survival. In fact, the realization that one cannot inhabit the cisgender ideal of love can have murderous effects.

Sandra's failed suicide reorganized at least temporarily her social landscape. Her family and friends supported her, not only reassuring her that she was loved, but also gave her money to reopen her store, a project she was extremely excited and passionate about. I went to the official reopening of the store, where she put together a gathering for friends and family. She knew very well that her store was the prettiest in "el Mercado de Surco Viejo," even if it was to remain open

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<sup>13</sup> In all fairness, Namaste would disagree with my attempt to agglutinate her arguments within a queer theoretical perspective. As Namaste asserts, "queer theory and much transgender theory do not respect transsexuals because they do not understand transsexuality on its own terms" (2005, 25). Namaste is not alone in being skeptical toward the broadness of the signifier "queer," especially when attached to theory. According to Jay Prosser, "above all transgendered subjects, the transsexual is more of the limit case for queer studies: the object that exceeds its purview" (1998, 58).

for only a few months. She also renegotiated her love relationships. There is a paradox in the fact that an attempt to extinguish the self can have as a consequence a certain amount of agency, perhaps not a self-centered agency, but an agency nevertheless. But this is not the whole story, because acute pain and sadness can come (or return) to stay. Sandra's suicidal attempts didn't stop. Of course, these attempts of exterminating herself (and her self) reorganized her social landscape, but there is no way of predicting in which directions or with which outcomes.

There is something that has never stopped surprising me: the strength of Sandra's engagement with the queer art of lying. Her psychic and physical health was decaying, her world was collapsing, but her face didn't show any sign of it. Sandra may have pronounced these words: "One of the most serious objections to me was that having nothing, I still did not know how to be humble" (Hurston 1995, 635). Her queer and defiant beauty didn't know how to be humble. And it wasn't just the beauty of her face, or her body, but of the environments and objects that surrounded her. And this demanded a lot of her labor and creativity. Perhaps Sandra is cognizant of a long travesti tradition of leaving behind a beautiful corpse. Is this a form of lying to death? Is it a form of lying to the living?

Many of my conversations with Sandra were guided by an unpronounced plea: "Tell me a story, even if it's a lie" (Behar 2003, xviii). My different (and sometimes competing) accounts of Sandra attempt to do justice to such a plea and to the enabling role that lying played in our relationship. Like Sandra's, my engagement with the queer art of lying is risky. In the final part of this essay, Sandra is portrayed as an instantiation of the anthropological trope of the "ethnography's disappearing object" (Clifford 1986b, 112). It is almost as if Sandra "is lost, in disintegrating time and space, but saved in the text" (Clifford 1986b, 112). In my engagement with the queer art of lying, the fact that in recent years Sandra seems to have overcome that particular love depression is barely mentioned; even though, this is a triumph that demanded a lot of labor from Sandra and her loved ones. It is almost as if in closing the chapter, I am dangerously toying with the political and theoretical "uses of the travesti corpse" (McCullough 2016, 137), uses in which a travesti subject becomes more legible while dead. It should be clear that there are no safe choices around the messiness of travestismo. To offer a final account of Sandra as a survivor who chooses life over death risks a static and sanitized image of travestismo. Paraphrasing Marcia Ochoa, the radical potentiality of a travesti subject "comes not from her liminality in terms of gender but from how she is able to exist within a space of violence and death, to negotiate its excesses, and to make her body out of these excesses" (2014, 164). Sandra dreams, lies, dwells, desires, resists, complies, suffers, and cries in a broader political and economical context that makes travesti lives always very precarious. And yet Sandra persists in making her beautiful body out of these deadly excesses and messes.

**Chapter Two**  
**Thinking Travesti Tears**

*Interval:*

*This exploration remains experimental in its nature.  
How to write on tears?  
Perhaps not as a sustained movement of reason/reasoning,  
but as an interval between chapters.  
This is an interval that remains vulnerable as its subject requires.*



In Peru there is a symptomatic absence of published academic studies on travestismo.<sup>14</sup> This silence is telling, since non-academic accounts of travestismo proliferate in many different forms of media in Peru (including the crime section of newspapers, movies and soap operas, and TV comedy programs) making travestismo part of everyday life for many Peruvians. Rachel McCullough's "¿Puede ser travesti el pueblo?: Testimonio subalterno y agencia marica en la memoria del conflicto armado" [Can the People Be Travesti? Subaltern Testimony and Queer Agency in the Memory of the Armed Conflict] (2016) contributes to break the silence in theoretical debates about travestismo in Peru's academic communities. McCullough's essay explores the association of travestismo with the liminal space between life and death. McCullough is particularly interested in "los usos del cadáver travesti" [the uses of the travesti corpse] (137). Indeed, what is the function of the travesti corpse? McCullough's essay explores both the travesti subaltern voice and *testimonio* [testimony]. The travesti voice and body that McCullough is interested in has been disappeared by political violence. McCullough offers a critical reading of the *Informe Final de la Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación* [Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission]. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (henceforth CVR) main purpose is to elaborate a truthful account of the political violence that took place in Peru during the 1980's and early 1990's. CVR's biggest contribution is to challenge the widespread amnesia that has made many people in Peruvian society indifferent to political violence and racism. McCullough takes to task a text that is considered socially progressive in Peru, and exposes how it is complicit with efforts to proscribe subjugated memories. In McCullough's words:

Queda muy claro que para el órgano estatal responsable de elaborar la narrativa integral, objetiva, y precisa—es decir, la supuesta verdad histórica—de los años del conflicto interno y sus secuelas, las políticas heteronormativas del MRTA [Movimiento Revolucionario Tupac Amaru] constituyen una consideración secundaria más que central para el conocimiento nacional y la construcción de la memoria colectiva.

[It is very clear that for the state body responsible for elaborating the comprehensive, objective, and precise narrative—that is, the supposed historical truth—of the years of the internal conflict and its aftermath, MRTA's [Revolutionary Tupac Amaru Movement] heteronormative policies constitute a secondary rather than a central consideration for national knowledge and the construction of collective memory] (122).

According to McCullough, travesti communities and subjects that were the target of political violence and extermination are not included in CVR's progressive efforts. Travestis, though, do appear marginally in the official *Informe final*. CVR's *Informe final* reports at least one collective assassination and torture case to have taken place at the bar "Gardenias" where the people primarily targeted have been travestis. For McCullough, CVR's *Informe final* forecloses the possibility of imagining any form of travesti's resistance. In her words "un gran silencio en el

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<sup>14</sup> The academic works that explore travestismo, or related trans positionalities, in Peru are mainly comprised of theses and dissertations, mostly at the undergraduate level. See for instance: Cornejo (2008), Grados (2014), and Villanueva (2014). More recently, several articles about travestismo haven been published in edited collections in Peru (Cornejo 2013, Salazar 2017).

*Informe final sobre la agencia de las travestis*” [there is a great silence in the final report on travesti agency] (123). McCullough draws attention to the politics of (mis)naming with regards to the travesti corpses, a practice that has recently been referred to as dead naming:

En el caso de Las Gardenias, el *Informe final* identifica a las “personas” asesinadas con sus nombres masculinos, sin referencia a sus identidades de género performativas; el MRTA las nombra como “otros dos delincuentes no identificados”... En el caso de Mónica y Pamela, las dos travestis asesinadas en Las Gardenias, quitar sus nombres no es solamente heterosexualizarlas; también las borra, junto a sus valores y afectos. Borra la única marca suya de una subjetividad. El texto de la CVR constituye, entonces, la ratificación del borrón inicial desempeñado por el MRTA.

[In the case of Las Gardenias, the *Final Report* identifies “people” murdered with their male names, without reference to their performative gender identities; MRTA names them as “two other unidentified criminals”... In the case of Mónica and Pamela, the two travestis murdered in Las Gardenias, removing their names is not only to heterosexualize them; also erases them, along with their values and affects. This erases the only mark of their subjectivity. The CVR’s text constitutes, therefore, the ratification of the initial erasure carried out by MRTA] (143).

Mónica and Pamela, the two travestis murdered at the Bar Gardenias, are labeled as masculine in CVR’s *Informe final*. In this way, the *Informe final* doubly reinforces Mónica’s and Pamela’s erasure after their death. CVR also echoes MRTA’s criminalization of both travesti subjects. However, McCullough’s most important claim remains that CVR’s *Informe final* instead of offering (the promise of) reparation to travesti communities affected by political violence, is instead complicit with MRTA political party that committed those transphobic crimes. McCullough concludes her provocative essay by asking why travestis need to be constructed even by progressive accounts as abject scapegoats that reproduce the myth of national coherency. McCullough asks “¿Puede ser travesti el pueblo?” [Can the people be travesti?] (145). McCullough invites her Peruvian academic readers to dispute the name travesti, and to not reify “travesti” as antithetical to the construction of a Peruvian “we.” That challenge still has yet to be met by scholars in Peru, or more, by Peruvianists elsewhere. Nevertheless, there are activist and cultural producers in Peru that are asking many of the same questions that McCullough raises, in particular a film that predates McCullough’s essay by five years.

Claudia Llosa’s short film *Loxoro* (2011), like McCullough’s essay, explores the political uses of the “travesti’s corpse” and also the possibility of imagining and inhabiting a collective notion of travestismo.<sup>15</sup> *Loxoro* goes even further since it offers a notion of travestismo that is world-making, in which language is at its core. Additionally, Claudia Llosa’s *Loxoro* addresses more explicitly than McCullough’s essay the cruel intersection between transphobic violence, misogyny, and racism, continuing an exploration of gendered and racialized violence that Llosa’s

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<sup>15</sup> *Loxoro* debuted through the cable channel TNT on the night of December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011. In 2013 the movie also screened in the Tenth Annual “Outfest” LGTB Film Festival in Lima. The relative fame of the film in Peru is due to the fact that it won a Teddy Award for best short film at the Berlin Film International Festival.

filmography undertook, especially in her film *La teta asustada* [The Milk of Sorrow] (2009).<sup>16</sup> *Loxoro* and *La teta asustada* share a number of similarities. In particular, both focus on mother-daughter bonds in the context of political violence that can be read as subtly incestuous. Both films also stress the inability of Spanish as a language to take into account colonial violence as a cultural-linguistic enterprise. To this end, *Loxoro* continues several of the questions that are raised in *La teta asustada*, but without endorsing a biological determinism predicated upon the mother/daughter bond between two cisgender women. Instead, *Loxoro* tells the story of a travesti mother, Makuti (performed by Belissa Andía), committed to the search of her travesti daughter, Mia (performed by Ariana Wésember), who was killed at the beginning of the movie. The short film builds its narrative toward the moment where the travesti mother discovers that her daughter has disappeared from this world.

### **The Walk of Travesti Tears**

The beginning of *Loxoro* portrays the extinction of a travesti body. This is why a close reading of those initial first minutes of *Loxoro* is necessary. The first scene of *Loxoro* performs certain resistance to clear and total visibility. We can see the reflection of Mia's queer face and body in and through a mirror, a mirror that itself is slightly blurry or distorted. Mia's queer body not only offers itself to the camera, to the filmmaker, and to the audience, but also and importantly offers the reflection of her queer body to herself. Mia is dancing to the rhythm of electronic music and checking herself out in a mirror. The camera focuses on Mia's queer brown skin, and this skin seems to become extended through and in her clothes, and vice versa, recalling Cixous's comment that "clothing is skin. It is adopted skin, adoptive skin" (Cixous and Calle-Gruber 1997, 106). Indeed, travestismo seems to question the clear borders between clothes and skin. The camera now allows us to see Mia walking down through the stairs. The scene is dimly light with a yellow tonality. One can also hear the loud steps of her high heel shoes, of a feminine presence that is not afraid of making itself heard. The first scene of *Loxoro* superimposes blurred images, electronic music, and the sound of steps. On the liminality between those images and sounds, that the first scene of *Loxoro* offers us, one can see how travestismo slowly comes into being and into focus.

One of the merits of *Loxoro* is that even as it allows travestismo to slowly come into focus, through Mias's movement and steps, it also marks the omnipresence of the threat of violence against the defiant travesti walking. In relation to scenes above, there is a disturbing moment in which the gaze of the spectator is aligned with the gaze of a group of male aggressors. The camera is in a car, while Mia is walking. She is moving trying to evade the car and its gaze (and our gaze). Total visibility is promised under the premise of persecution. There are sounds, but these are mainly the car motor sounds and words and phrases uttered by men, or to be more precise by male voices, voices that don't sound particularly queer. Then one can hear again the sounds of Mia's high heel shoes but this time running. Instead of the glamorous sounds that these shoes possessed in the first scene, now the high heel shoes' sounds echo desperation.

Three men get out of the car. One of them catches Mia. There is a discrepancy between some of their phrases, their actions and gestures. Some of their words and phrases, in a very different context, could sound like expressing a certain form of care and even desire ("mi amor" [my love], "mi vida" [my life], "preciosa" [precious], "mi conejita" [mi little bunny]). But their

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<sup>16</sup> Llosa's 2009 feature film *La teta asustada* won a number of accolades, including an Academy Award nomination for best foreign language film.

actions and gestures are clearly threatening. Perhaps we are just seeing another iteration of certain male prerogatives of expressing care through violence against bodies read or marked as feminine.

Mia is scared and her voice sounds vulnerable. Her mobility has been severely restrained, as the three men surround her. She can no longer move freely, in contrast to the first scene in which she was seductively dancing. She feels fear immediately: “¿Qué les pasa?” [What’s wrong with you?], “Por favor no me hagan daño” [Please don’t hurt me]. The men touch her, and ask Mia for a kiss. The sounds of their voices sound delicate at moments. One of the men touches her breast, and quickly takes out a “false breast” of a pushy texture. This action emerges out of a misogynistic rendering of Mia’s body perfectly visible, and of not allowing her any word on the terms of her own visibility. Once the “false breasts” are exposed, and the dissonance (or failure) of Mia’s femininity made visible, these men laugh loudly. But, their mood quickly changes and they start to scream. Once the femininity of Mia is exposed as a “masquerade,” as a sort of artifice, there is no place for sweet words and caresses. It is almost as if the exposure of Mia’s vulnerability can only intensify the male desire to turn her body into a corpse.

With the male screams come insults and injuries, “concha-tu-madre” [Fuck your mother], “cabro” [faggot], “mierda” [shit]. This doesn’t mean that desire has abandoned the scene, but that actually a different kind of male desire has been awakened or exacerbated. One of the men says: “que me la chupe primero a mí” [let her suck me first]. So clearly they all expect or desire to have sex with Mia. Her beauty didn’t go unnoticed by them. These men continue undressing Mia, or actually tearing off her clothes. She is forced to suck some of their cocks. But this is only inferred because the camera hides this act from our vision.

In this violent scene we can hear the sound of travesti tears, the sound of travesti suffering. The three men have taken Mia next to their car. They force her to kneel next to the lights of the car. They want the lights of the car to expose and render totally accessible the travesti body to their gaze, almost as if preparing themselves to dissect her. The sound of her crying is stronger. These men start to cut her beautiful black hair. “Ya está pareciendo hombre” [Now she’s looking like a man] is one of the phrases they say. The moment in which the three men cut Mia’s hair is a very charged and complex moment. On the one hand, it seems as if these men desire Mia’s “return” to masculinity. But, this return to a presumed male heterosexuality is only possible for them through punishment. This is the kind of affect that the scene transmits: their punishing hands are disfiguring the beautiful face of a travesti. And the men find such punishment erotic. On the other hand, as the aggressors make obvious their attempt of (re)masculinizing Mia’s body, they interpellate her as a woman. The man that embraces her and traps her while her hair is being cut is one that says to the other man who is cutting the hair to do it “con cariño” [with tenderness]. The embrace is unquestionably violent, but an embrace nonetheless that ultimately betrays its transphobic intentions. This embrace inflicts violence and torture, but strangely also supports this travesti in pain. One of the men caresses Mia’s disfigured face. It is almost as if travesti’s tears and pain produces an unexpected reaction in the people who inflict the pain onto them. But what do we make of these generous gestures?

Perhaps the gestures that I am calling generous betray a certain knowledge about the kind of violence enacted upon travesti subjects. According to McCullough “el cuerpo de la travesti también es un sitio de constitución de lo que voy a llamar la identidad del pueblo y *la del guerrillero*... Además de ser un punto final textual, veo también en la producción discursiva del pueblo un repudio fundador que destierra a ciertos seres – homosexuales, maricas, machonas y travestis – al campo de lo abyecto” [the travesti’s body is representative of what I call the people

and the guerrilla's identity... In addition to being a textual end point, I also see in the discursive production of the people a founding repudiation that banishes certain beings – homosexuals, queers, butches and travestis – to the field of the abject] (123-124). McCullough puts emphasis on the continuities of the production and reproduction of the travesti body as abject within (authoritarian) right wing and left political nation-making frameworks. For McCullough the violent disavowal against travesti communities and people institutes an idea of the idealized Peruvian nation and of its idealized citizens.

In the parlance of some activist and human rights organizations, the crime against Mia can be read as a “crimen de odio” [hate crime]. Within that framework a crime against Mia, one singular travesti, is an attempt to exterminate a social category, all travestis. It is almost as if in butchering one (travesti) body the murderer delusionally hopes to eradicate a word (“travesti”). Reading this scene next to McCullough's text, it is possible to identify a paranoid dimension of this logic, since the same category/word (travesti) that some hateful people and communities desire to eradicate is actually cited and reproduced in the moment of the killing. A notion of travestismo, deeply associated with death, is simultaneously inaugurated and reified at that particular bloody moment. This is what McCullough calls “los usos del cadáver travesti” [the uses of the travesti corpse] (137). McCullough's prose reveals a constitutive trait of transphobia, the compulsive production of travesti subjects as corpses, or soon-to-be corpses bodies.

McCullough's reading of a mortal deployment of the signifier “travesti” can be put in dialogue with theoretical accounts of the queer intimacies that life and death share. In *Queen for a Day*, Marcia Ochoa frames the subversive potentiality of transformistas in Venezuela (akin to travestis in Peru) not only in gender or even racial terms, but also in deadly ones. Transformista existence inhabits, or is forced to inhabit, a space of liminality between life and death. In Ochoa's words “the potentiality of a *transformista* body comes not from her liminality in terms of gender but from how she is able to exist within a space of violence and death, to negotiate its excesses, and to make her body out of these excesses” (2014, 164). That liminality between life and death is where travesti subjects and communities flourish and thrive. Indeed, this is the case of Mia. Ochoa makes a compelling case for thinking on the possibilities of negotiation opened by such a liminal space. Nevertheless, *Loxoro* seems to be more interested in exposing a form of male desire that sees the liminal position that travestis occupy as an excuse to justify its murderous actions and fantasies. It is almost as if the travesti's liminality between life and death not only attracts people who want to dwell there, but also draws in people who want to materially turn a body into a corpse.

Néstor Perlongher's essay “Matan a una marica” [They kill a fag], originally published in 1988, theorizes the male desire of turning live bodies into corpses, especially those bodies marked as “marica.” Perlongher's “marica” is a capacious name that includes in a continuum of femininity effeminate homosexual men and travestis. For Perlongher there is something that all different kinds of “maricas,” with their different sexualities and gender presentations, have in common, and that is that they have to face homophobia. Perlongher defines homophobia as “una fornida fobia a la homosexualidad dispersa en el cuerpo social” [a strong phobia of homosexuality dispersed in the social body] (1997, 36). Homophobia has an essential social character that it needs to cultivate. For Perlongher, homophobia is intimately associated with a deeply rooted fear of excrement and anality. “Cierta organización del organismo, jerárquica e histórica, destina el ano a la exclusiva función de la excreción – y no al goce” [Certain organization of the organism, hierarchical and historical, destines the anus to the exclusive function of excretion – and not to jouissance] (37). Perlongher's homophobia is based on a

complex social presumption that the erotic capacities of anality are dangerous and also paradoxically sublime. According to Perlongher the pervasive desire to turn the marica's body into a corpse seeks to annul the subversive potential of anal sexualities and eroticisms. "Tal vez en el gesto militar del macho está ya indicado el fascismo de las cabezas. Y al matar a una loca se asesine a un devenir mujer del hombre" [Perhaps in the macho's military gesture is already indicated the fascism of the heads. When killing a fag a becoming woman of man is murdered] (40). Perlongher goes even further and thinks of the killing of a marica as a double murder. If "al matar a una loca se asesine a un devenir mujer del hombre" [when killing a fag a becoming woman of man is murdered], the men in Loxoro who kill Mia did more than exterminate her body. Following Perlongher, one might ask: are these men committing suicide without knowing it? Are they committing suicide on the body of Mia? If these men are committing suicide on Mia, it is not with her complicity. In turning the travesti body into a corpse, the suicide of a shameless anal femininity that traverses the whole social body is performed.

To be fair, for Perlongher the suicide of a shameless anal femininity takes place even in the subjectivities of gay men:

La persecución a la homosexualidad escribe un tratado (de higiene, de buenas maneras, de *manieras*) sobre los cuerpos; sujetar el culo es, de alguna manera, sujetar el sujeto a la civilización, diría Bataille, a la "humanización". Retener, contener. Y si esta obsesión anal, liga o ligamem en el lingem, pareció ante el avance de la nueva "identidad" homosexual, disiparse, es porque esta ultima modalidad de subjetivación desplaza hacia una relación "persona a persona" (gay/gay) lo que es, en las pasiones marginales de la loca y el chongo, del sexo vagabundo en los baldíos, básicamente una relación "órgano a órgano": pene/culo, ano/boca, lengua/verga, según una dinámica del encaje; esto entra aquí, esto se encaja allí... La homosexualidad, condensa Hocquenghem, es siempre anal. *Puto de mierda*

[The persecution of homosexuality states a treaty (of hygiene, of good manners, of *manieras*) onto the body; to subject the ass is, in some way, to subject the subject to civilization, Bataille would say, to "humanization." Withhold, contain. And if this anal obsession, seemed to the advance of the new homosexual "identity," to dissipate, it is because this last modality of subjectivation shifts towards a relationship "person to person" (gay/gay) what is, in the marginal passions of the loca and the chongo, of vagabond sex in the wastelands, basically an "organ to organ" relationship: penis/ass, anus/mouth, tongue/cock, according to a dynamics of fitting; this goes in here, this fits in there... Homosexuality, Hocquenghem condenses, is always anal. *Shitty faggot*] (38).

According to Perlongher the suicide of the becoming woman of a man occurs in male "homosexuales" also. For Perlongher the becoming of an identity of (male) homosexuality civilizes and sanitizes the disruptive potentialities of anal eroticism. In Perlongher's account, the passionate bonds between the "loca" (travestis are also locas) and the "chongo" (the racialized and working class male partner to the loca) are not trapped in the domesticated dynamics of the homosexual couple. For him, loca's sex, travesti's sex, offer a vintage from which to reorganize the desire of the individual and social bodies. Perlongher concludes his essay addressing those

homosexual subjects tempted by the murder and suicide of the anal “becoming woman,” reminding them that no matter how much they try, homosexuality is essentially anal. Perlongher reminds the homosexual subject that may be complicit with the murder and suicide of the “becoming woman” that no matter what he wants, for those heterosexual institutions he will remain an essential anal being, a “puto de mierda” [shitty faggot].

Perlongher seems to understand travestismo, even travestismo’s liminal relation to death, as essentially social. “Las locas y los travestis y su cohorte de erráticos, exóticos, lumpenes y policías, parecían jugar a la muerte teniendo como telón de fondo la torre sacra del templo majestuoso” [Locas and travestis and their cohort of erratic, exotic, underclass people and policemen, seemed to play with death having as background the sacred tower of the majestic temple] (56). Actually, when Perlongher explicitly pens the name “travesti” he enlists it attached to other stigmatized names: “En el celular van todos juntos: maricas, chongos, gays, entendidos, taxi-boys, malandros, marginales, borrachos, negros, maconieros, putas, travestis y transeúntes en general; a veces me pregunto para qué tanto empecinamiento en agruparlos en identidades separadas cuando el malandro transa con el borracho, la marica fuma con el maconiero, y la puta hace programa con el transeúnte, etcétera” [In the police truck they all go together: fags, chongos, gays, connoisseurs, taxi-boys, rascals, fringes, drunks, blacks, maconieros, whores, travestis and vagabonds in general; sometimes I wonder why so much stupidity in grouping them in separate identities when the trickster fucks with the drunk, the fag smokes with the maconiero, and the whore does a program with the passer-by, etcetera] (188). Perlongher’s mobilization of travestismo within an anti-identitarian framework that questions the life/death divide resonates with early theoretical takes on the signifier “queer.” In an article published in the edition of the journal *Differences* “Lesbian and Gay Sexualities,” in which famously the catchy term “Queer Theory” was famously coined, Sue-Ellen Case analyzes that “queer desire which seeks the living dead” (3). Case goes on to explicitly embrace the “unnatural” mortal resonances of “queer.” “Life/death becomes the binary of the “natural” limits of Being: the organic is the natural. In contrast, the queer has been historically constituted as unnatural. Queer desire as unnatural, breaks with this life/death binary of Being through same-sex desire” (3).

Whereas *Loxoro* seems to share Case’s interest in the “undead,” the movie offers an emphasis of the racial, class and gendered dimensions in which “undeadness” and deadly intimacies are unevenly distributed even within queer worlds. *Loxoro*, like Perlongher and Ochoa, is interested in the sociality of travestismo, even in the travesti liminality between life and death. For *Loxoro*, like for Perlongher, travestis can mobilize disruptive coalitional tendencies even when facing death. This is made explicit in McCullough’s and Ochoa’s accounts, and implicitly in Perlongher’s and Case’s accounts, *Loxoro* is an exploration of a nation’s state’s cultivation of a foundational militant homo-transphobia. Yet, *Loxoro* offers a contribution that none of those four theoretical works can. *Loxoro* mobilizes, in complex ways, travesti tears. It is as if with the focus on the sound of travesti tears *Loxoro* attempts to make such a scene, familiar in its transphobia, something more than simply a spectacle, but also painful, and almost unbearable for the audience. Instead of simply identifying the camera with the murderous gaze, the movie renders visible this identification and makes it not only illegitimate, but invites us to identify with a travesti body in pain, and with her tears. It is almost as if the liminal space between life and death that travestis occupy make those travesti tears, even the tears of those who are dead, able to hail and move audiences across the world. Nevertheless, in *Loxoro* travesti tears do not only work to gain the empathy of an audience. *Loxoro*, actually,

envisions a world in which travesti tears are not mystified or occluded. The biggest challenge of *Loxoro* is that it *thinks* travesti tears, and that invites us to *think* travesti tears.

## A Language for Tears

*Loxoro*'s thinking on travesti tears may be occluded by its most explicit concern with language, with a travesti language to be more precise. That's why the stakes of the language *Loxoro* need to be unpacked. According to the movie, *Loxoro* is the language supposedly spoken by Peruvian travestis, and especially Peruvian travesti sex workers. *Loxoro* is a travesti tongue, a queer language. This travesti language proliferates around the rhythms of sound. *Loxoro* adds similar sounding syllables to the syllables of any word. It has a play-like, almost child-like, character. One can see the effect of *Loxoro* in that word itself. One might focus on "lo" that has a masculine marker in it, but really isn't as clear-cut as the defined article "el". To "lo" two syllables ("xo"- "ro") are added echoing, mimicking, proliferating, exaggerating, deviating, its sound.

"Lo" is also the first syllable of a word that has a special resonance among travesti and queer communities in Peru: "loca." During the movie *Loxoro* is literally translated as "loca." Gloria Anzaldúa's take on *loquería* resonates with *Loxoro*'s loca. For Anzaldúa, in order for the lesbian mestiza to navigate the world she has to open herself up to *loquería*, that "is a path of knowledge – one of knowing (and of learning) the history of oppression of our *raza*" (2012, 41). For Anzaldúa mestiza's autobiographical narrative is only possible by allowing other knowledges (*locuras*) to work as a critical tool to access and to write different stories of violence and oppression that hegemonic western epistemes have attempted systemically to erase. To speak or write from *loquería* is not easy, and its difficulty lies in the fact that *locas* have to return and have to turn to see differently the past, a past that in many cases is marked by pain and violence. Queers have a very justified "fear of going home, and of not being taken in" (42). *Loquería* for queers is a form of return to those who were exiled, and the condition of *la mestiza queer* is that of an exile. Similarly, in the movie, *Loxoro* is the language of those who are exiled by transphobic social norms.

It is almost as if *Loxoro* iterates the homo-transphobic association of madness and queerness but does something different with it. Lynne Huffer reminds us that, "unreason is the name Foucault gives to the thing from the past, now called madness, that remains in our historical present, radically unassimilable and untranslatable" (2010, 51). As much as *loquería* resonates in *Loxoro*, so too does the "mad." *Loxoro* focuses on the unassimilable and untranslatable character of tears. Tears throughout the film stand in for the sufferings that travesti lovers endure, but there are also moments where tears and laughter are not mutually exclusive. The blurring of the boundaries between suffering and joy contributes to the association of *Loxoro* with madness. Most of the travestis that populate *Loxoro* seem insensitive to Makuti's suffering in her search for Mia. At one point, one travesti says "si me gusta su cuarto yo me quedo con su cuarto" [if I like her room I'll stay in her room]. This travesti is more concerned with Mia's room (and potentially with owning Mia's belongings) than with Mia's well being. Scenes abound in which the suffering of Makuti coexists with the laughter of other travestis in *Loxoro*. At one point, another travesti character calls Makuti "chalalón." that is translated in the movie as "bien dotado" [well endowed]. "Chala" in the Peruvian gay male working-class and travesti cultures means "someone with a big penis." For a travesti sex worker to have a big penis can be very profitable in her professional life. Nevertheless, for a travesti to have a big dick is



also a form of stressing the dissonance of her femininity and more normative femininities. “Chalalón” as a form of naming stresses the mutual imbrication of joy and suffering in *Loxoro*.

*Loxoro* is echoing another kind of queer tongue, one that has been usually understood as camp. Camp resonates with *Loxoro*. According to Esther Newton camp is “a system of laughing at one’s incongruous position instead of crying” (1979, 109). But in several key scenes of *Loxoro*, we don’t actually see laughter substituting crying—not completely anyway. More recently, David Halperin has proposed a sort of axiomatic definition of camp (very influenced by Newton’s account). According to him “*camp works to drain suffering of the pain that it also does not deny*” (2012, 186). Perhaps these travestis were attempting to drain the suffering without denying it? The suffering is primarily Makuti’s, but not exclusively. It is almost as if these travestis were acting under the belief that wounding through words can appease the pain that comes with death. *Loxoro* can certainly be read as echoing the travesti’s art of laughing while crying. According to Hélène Cixous “we do not know how to suffer, this is perhaps the worst. It is our greatest loss. And we do not know how to enjoy. Suffering and joy have the same root. Knowing how to suffer is knowing how to have such intense joy that it almost becomes suffering. Good suffering” (1997, 12). In Cixous’ reading a community like the one of travestis that attempts to comfort Makuti (while insulting her) can be read as a social laboratory in which joy and suffering are not mutually exclusive. In Cixous’ reading several of the travestis of *Loxoro* might be closer to imagining and experiencing “good suffering” than its more normative counterparts.

It is important to take into account that *Loxoro* is similar to another(?) travesti tongue known in Lima as “el húngaro” [the Hungarian]. The reference to the language spoken in Hungary is complex. It points to contradictory and conflicting desires and fantasies about racial belongings and racial hierarchies. The movie acknowledges such a linguistic kinship, when one of its characters, an oracle, speaks Hungarian to other queer and travesti subjects. The resonance among *Loxoro* and “el húngaro” is also a marker of the sonic difference between Spanish and *Loxoro*. The similarities between the use of “*Loxoro*” and “Hungarian” puts emphasis on the fact that a non-trained ear wouldn’t understand *Loxoro*. Or even more radically, that *Loxoro* is not only something to be understood, much less be translated or assimilated into fixed ways of knowing. One might paraphrase Anzaldúa and say that *Loxoro* is a “wild tongue [that] can’t be tamed” (76).

Another instance of the dynamics of the language *Loxoro* has to do with travesti first names. Makuti, the main character of *Loxoro*, is a travesti with blonde-orange hair. She doesn’t exhibit as much skin as the younger travestis that populate the movie, she seems “una persona seria” [a serious person]. Makuti’s femininity is sober. In a way her femininity seems so non-spectacular that she could pass as an adult cisgender woman. The first time Makuti appears on screen, she is searching for Mia in a crowded audience. The only character that joins Makuti in her search for Mia is La Pozo (performed by Pilar Gonzales). La Pozo’s poisonous tongue gives us the first hints of the history of Makuti’s name. On their way to Mia’s room, La Pozo calls Makuti “maricón.” It doesn’t take much effort to notice that both words (Makuti and maricón) start with the same syllable (“ma”). So between both names a kind of kinship is established, even if a disavowed one.

In this scene, Makuti and La Pozo are positioned as sharing a queer mother-daughter bond. This is a bond between a travesti mother who was a sex worker and travesti daughter who is currently a sex worker. It follows, then, that Makuti reads the complaints of La Pozo for her search for Mia as a scene of sisterly jealousy. In several occasions the movie uses subtitles to

translate between Loxoro and Spanish. And Makuti is translated as “madre” [mother]. Both words start with the same syllable/sound (“ma”). The film offers an alternative entry into the history of Makuti’s name. In one scene in particular Makuti is forced to face the transphobia of a taxi driver, who calls her “señor” [gentleman]. In response she states: “yo no soy un señor, soy una señora. Me llamo Maricruz” [I’m not a gentleman, I am lady. My name is Maricruz]. The label that Makuti reclaims for herself is “señora” [lady]. This is a marker of respectable female adulthood. In addition to this, Makuti also offers a new name: Maricruz. There is an echo of Makuti in Maricruz, and vice versa. Maricruz is a name with obvious religious connotations, “María,” the mother of Christ, and “cruz,” meaning cross. It is also a name widely used in Latin American soap operas for their female characters that eventually become respectable mothers and lovers. By this point it isn’t difficult to see that all the names with which Makuti is associated share something in common. Makuti, Maricruz, maricón, and even the most widespread and beloved iteration of mother (mami) contain the three letters of Mia’s name, starting with the capital M.

Unlike Makuti, “Mia” does not seem to be a word that is part of the language Loxoro. Mia is a given name that echoes the word “mía” [mine] in Spanish. In fact, “Mia” in Italian means “mía.” That name establishes an association with Italian, as another European language echoed throughout the film. For many travestis in Lima, like in many other cities of Latin America, the association of Italy with sex work is one that is powerful in the travesti imaginary.<sup>17</sup> Many travestis dream of traveling to Italy in pursuit of money, physical transformations and sex work. This is a promise that is not usually fulfilled, but one that commonly appears in the narratives that some travestis give about themselves. “Mia”, in this sense, is also an echo of a form of escape. This is paradoxical since “Mia” means “mine,” and through its content seems to attribute a quality of possession. “Being possessed” is precisely what is shown in the first minutes of *Loxoro*, in the scene of torture of Mia’s body. Her aggressors attempt to possess her. This is a murderous echo of her name, one that does not allow an embrace with unexpected responses. But it is important to recall that “mía” is also a word that can be addressed to a lover. Perhaps this is why every time Makuti pronounces the word “Mia,” one can hear the lesbian lover’s echo of “mía.”

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<sup>17</sup> According to anthropologist Julieta Vartabedian, these processes of Latin American travesti migration to Europe started as early as the decade of 1970’s. “Desde la década de los setenta, de forma continua llegan a Europa travestis procedentes de distintos países de Latinoamérica” [Since the seventies, travestis from different countries of Latin America have traveled to Europe] (2014, 277). In her account it is in the 1990’s that Italy becomes the focus of travesti migration. “Durante los años noventa y relativamente hasta la actualidad, Italia se convirtió en la gran meta de las nuevas generaciones de travestis. Países como España, Alemania, Suiza y Holanda son incorporadas a partir del año 2000” [During the 1990s through the present moment, Italy has been the great goal of the new generations of travestis. Countries such as Spain, Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands have also become desirable destinations since the year 2000] (287). For Vartabedian, the desire to migrate to Europe (and Italy in particular) becomes part of a travesti’s way of life. She states that “el viaje a Europa” [the trip to Europe] is very likely the last step “en esta carrera para transformarse en travestis” [in this carrier to become travestis] (284). Other accounts coincide with Vartabedian: “Dezenas de travestis brasileiras estão, neste momento, trabalhando na Itália, país que se transformou no sonho de ascensão de grande parte do grupo” [Dozens of Brazilian travestis are currently working in Italy, a country that has become the dream ascension for much of the group] (Pelúcio 2005, 242). “A vivência da prostituição e o sonho de trabalhar na Europa integraram o universo da travesti, compondo sua subjetividade” [The experience of prostitution and the dream of working in Europe integrated the travesti universe, composing its subjectivity] (Do Bonsucesso Teixeira 2008, 278).

After an unsuccessful search for Mia, La Pozo and Makuti say goodbye to each other with a friendly kiss and a “nos vemos” [see you later], a subtle promise of a future encounter. La Pozo’s final utterance in the movie is “Ojalá que la encuentres a la Mia, Mia, Mia” [I hope you find Mia, Mia, Mia]. On the most superficial level this statement portrays the concern of La Pozo for Mia’s whereabouts behind all the jokes, the insults, and the jealousy. But there is something more important: the repetition of Mia’s name. “Mia,” unlike “Makuti,” is not a name that is part of the language Loxoro. Nevertheless, in La Pozo’s iteration of Mia’s name, one that is repeated twice, Mia is reclaimed as part of the Loxoro language. It is almost as if the echo of her name is inviting Mia to inhabit Loxoro. Here we can see a new side of Loxoro. This is a travesti language that invites people to live in it, including people who have already being extinguished by the conjunction of authoritarian social norms.

### **A Language of the Wounded Lovers**

Any project of thinking critically about tears cannot but avoid engaging with Roland Barthes’ contributions to the subject. Barthes writes eloquently about the unavoidable tears that come with surrendering to love. *A Lover’s Discourse* is written as a set of fragments, all of which are more or less connected. These fragments are written from the perspective of the wounded lover, of the lover left behind. For Barthes, this lover is feminine, or occupies a feminine position; “this man who waits and who suffers from his waiting is miraculously feminized” (1978, 14). The uniqueness of the wounded and abandoned lover does not come from any prior interiority. It is the beloved who leaves that marks the particularity of the lover: “The other with whom I am in love designates for me the specialty of my desire” (Barthes 1978, 19), but “the more I experience the specialty of my desire, the less I can give it a name” (Barthes 1978, 20). The wounded and abandoned lover cannot give total and coherent meaning to her desires. Barthes’s critique implies that unlike the philosophic encounter, the amorous one is not governed by the totalitarian desire of given a (proper) meaning to everything. Mia is not the Barthesian abandoned lover, but rather the beloved who is going to abandon Makuti. Nevertheless, Mia is likewise not the masculine beloved either.

Unlike Barthes’ account, *Loxoro*’s portrayal of the wounded abandoned lover isn’t one tragically invested in monogamy. This is due not only to the fact that Mia’s profession demanded that she have ongoing sexual encounters with men. Makuti herself didn’t foreclose the option of finding love or pleasure in other people besides Mia. Important to note is that desire hasn’t abandoned the life of Makuti despite her being an aging travesti. She may not be a sex worker any more, but desire is still an important part of her life. One might recall Barthes’ deep sorrow here: “A sort of despair came over me, I wanted to cry. I realized that I would have to give up boys, because they had no desire for me” (2010a, 171). Makuti is desired, maybe not by boys, but indeed by men, as shown by the scene where a brown man invites her to dance a bolero in a *discoteca* [discotheque]. Makuti is a wounded lover, but she is still desired. Makuti differs from the seemingly inescapable death of desire that torments Barthes. “I’ll no longer have anything but gigolos” (2010a, 172) is the phrase that summarizes Barthes’ fears and tears. Perhaps Makuti would share with Barthes some of her wisdom: Sex workers are not bad company at all. You may love one, and be loved by one. And your love for a sex worker may irreparably break your heart, but not how you think. Loxoro seems an apt language for those who know that being a sex worker and a (wounded) lover are not mutually exclusive positions.

Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse* is a portrayal of a "feminine" wounded writing that does not attempt to know the totality of the love that was lost, but it is a form of preserving (or attaching to) certain forms of love even in the face of abandonment. For Barthes, an amorous encounter can take place within language. "Language is a skin: I rub my language against the other" (1978, 73). *Loxoro* portrays a language in which travesti amorous encounters can take place, can be cultivated, and can be mourned when lost. Barthes adds that "no one wants to speak of love unless it is *for* someone" (1978, 74) and that someone is always unique and particular, leaving a uniquely painful loss that is irrecoverable in the abandoned lover. Even after her body has been extinguished, the "unique and particular" name Mia keeps being cited in the language *Loxoro*, especially in disguise under the many names associated with Makuti.

In the final minutes of *Loxoro* Makuti's worst fears are confirmed. She gets a response from some oracles, through translation from Hungarian to *Loxoro*, but not the one she wants: "Mia ha cruzado la frontera. Y cuando cruzas la frontera no olvides que no hay reglas universales... incluso ésta" [Mia has crossed the border. And when you cross the border do not forget that there are no universal rules... even this one]. Makuti is confused. There is pain in her confusion: "No entiendo nada" [I don't understand anything]. What borderland/frontera has Mia crossed? The borderland/frontera between life and death can be surprising due to its own permeability. This permeability has a consonance with the precarious position in which travesti communities are put by a conjunction of social institutions. *Loxoro* portrays how precarious the possibility of the "love story" between Makuti and Mia is. The spectators of the film are never shown a scene that frames mother and daughter together. *Loxoro* demands a responsive viewer to do what the film is unable to do: to imagine Makuti and Mia as lovers with a less tragic ending.

Symptomatically, during the movie Makuti is unable to say "nosotras" in relation to herself and Mia. The difficulty for Mia and Makuti to be sustained by the pronoun "nosotras" is a thread woven through the film. The difficulty of *Loxoro* to imagine Makuti and Mia as "nosotras" is illuminated by Anzaldúa's writing on the feminine plural pronoun. For Anzaldúa the pronoun "nosotras" is itself a borderland/frontera.

The Spanish word "nosotras" means "us." I see this word with a slash (rajadura) between "nos" (us) and "otros" (others), and use it to theorize my identity narrative of "nos/otras." La rajadura gives us a third point of view, a perspective from the cracks and a way to reconfigure ourselves as subjects outside binary oppositions, outside existing dominant relations. By disrupting binary oppositions that reinforce relations of subordination and dominance, nos/otras suggests a position of being simultaneously insider/outsider, internal/external exile. (2015, 79)

Anzaldúa's "rajadura" helps to introduce another dimension of travesti tears. Tear is a noun, but in English it can work as a verb formation (or phrasal verb). "Tear apart" in English makes reference to the shattering of something into pieces. It also can refer to the incitation of some form of damage in human relationships. In a way, *Loxoro* portrays the tearing apart of Makuti and Mia's love relationship. Anzaldúa insists that the "rajadura," or the tearing apart of nosotras, has an enabling power of disruption. "Nos/otras has the potential to overturn definitions of otherness" (2015, 81). It is likely that that same potential becomes a heavy burden that inflicts wounds and pains. That rajadura may in part be responsible for the difficulty of imagining Makuti and Mia as *amantes* [lovers]. Unavoidably, that rajadura provokes so many travesti tears.

Anzaldúa's borderlands/fronteras has a temporal dimension that is important to take into account. The borderlands/fronteras that Anzaldúa's mestiza subject inhabits are those among the past, present and future. For Anzaldúa the past is not one, the present is not one, and the future is not one. For Anzaldúa (2012), time is-was-will be queer and *mestiza*. For instance, an autobiography instead of being the tale of one's past, can also be the tale of one's future. As the oracles say to Makuti: there are no universal rules once you crossed the borderland/frontera. They say that not even that rule is universal. The borderland/frontera between life and death is also that between the known and the unknown. If Mia now inhabits the unknown, Makuti seems to be so far from her. We, as the responsive viewers that *Loxoro* demands us to be, may want to imagine Mia whispering a quote from Sappho in Makuti's ears: "Let me tell you / this, someone in / some future time / will think of us" (Wittig and Zeig 1980, 59). Our imagination has made us future witness of a trans-lesbian passion.

The final scene of *Loxoro* shows Makuti walking alone and desolated. Tears come from Makuti's eyes to inundate her face. These are tears of deep pain and sorrow. The final scene of Mia is one of her crying; the final scene of Makuti is also one of crying. Perhaps this is a way of suggesting that some of the love secretions that both travesti lovers share(d) include tears. As Barthes' queer wisdom reminds us: "Each of us has his own rhythm of suffering" (2010b, 162). Makuti and Mia sufferings have their own rhythms. Our suffering witnessing their story has its own rhythm. Nevertheless, all these sufferings resonate.

Will Makuti's love for Mia "endure, persist, resist, and exist" (Trinh 2016, 128)? Will Makuti join to the love and suffer of other abandoned lovers-mothers across the world? As Trinh T. Minh-ha (2016, 111) writes, "known to endure through highs and lows, mother love enables the ordinary person to do the impossible. Refusing to give in to physical threats and other intimidations, she remains dauntless, with no concern for her own safety. Such continue to be the situations of women in many parts of the world, who by the sheer force of love for their lost ones, have learnt to turn grief into struggle..." Trinh's notion of "mother love" opens up the possibility of considering how naturalized gendered traits can be disrupted and disruptive. Suffering is not neutral in terms of gender. Women (and especially mothers) tend to be represented as beings that almost naturally suffer. Trinh's embracement of the mother's tears suggests that what in male centered economies of knowledge is considered a weakness may turn into strength. Taking into account Trinh's argument, can Makuti's tears be read as a call that incites to reach for the impossible?

Sometimes it is easily forgotten that "tears are a gift" (Trinh 2016, 153; and Barthes 1987, 183). And they can be a gift that awakens multiple process of becoming, of becoming otherwise. This resonates with an understanding of travestismo as an endless becoming, and not as a fixed identity. The vast notion of travestismo, that *Loxoro* hints at, challenges the gender syntax of the Peruvian nation. It even challenges the tendencies of some of Peruvian LGBTQ activisms that seek the approval of the nation-state, desire normality, and are complicit with neoliberal thinking. Makuti's tears in *Loxoro* are a gift to those LGBTQ activist communities, to remind them that the horizons of the possible and imaginable need to be disputed, not mystified. Makuti's tears are a gift to remind those communities (and many more) that they need to "advance marching together into another world" (Wittig 2007, 72).

The final scene of *Loxoro* is one of tragedy, a tragedy marked by Makuti's tears. And even at that moment of final dispossession, Makuti's tears are a gift, a gift to remember Mia, even after her violent death. For *Loxoro* Mia is never only a travesti body soon to be extinguished, she is also a travesti body to be loved and remembered. For literary critic Víctor

Vich “recordar siempre implica violentar una hegemonía, producir un conjunto de elementos disruptivos que interrumpen la fantasía dominante” [remembering always involves violating a hegemony, producing a set of disruptive elements that interrupt the dominant fantasy] (2015, 235). To remember Mia is to disrupt the dominant fantasy that would doubly kill her and erase her after death. Vich proposes something akin to Makuti’s tears that he calls poetics of mourning. “Las *poéticas del duelo* tratan de convertir el dolor en un recurso político que obligue tanto a restaurar la verdad de lo sucedido como a salvar a los muertos de la violencia a la que siguen sometidos” [The poetics of mourning try to turn pain into a political resource that forces both the restoration of the truth of what happened and saving the dead from the violence they are subjected to] (293). Vich’s “poetics of mourning” illuminates another dimension of travesti tears. The liquidity of travesti tears is threatening (for authoritarian political frameworks) because it cannot be contained. Travesti tears are an uncontainable cry for justice. Taking advantage of the pervasive association of travestismo and death, travesti’s tears in their liquid dispersion perhaps can even reach the dead.

That Makuti’s tears may reach Mia is of pivotal importance because the usual outcome for travesti death is impunity and forced amnesia. The short essay “Para una tumba con nombre” [For a grave with a name] (2014) written by transgender activist and scholar Lohana Berkins, is one of the most important reflections on the connections between travesti tears, death, mourning, and memory. The first line of the essay stresses how solitude is the encounter of death for travestis: “La muerte siempre es una experiencia solitaria” [Death is always a solitary experience] (Berkins 2014). For Berkins, in the case of travestis death is pervasive. For travestis death can be seen “temprana, vieja, espléndida, siliconada, travestizada, a la tarde, a la noche” [early, old, splendid, with silicon, travesti, in the evening, at night] (Berkins 2014). Indeed, this death which is not one! Travesti death can be multiple, but since public mourning for travestis is precluded loneliness cannot be avoided. It is because of this that, according to Berkins, travestis do everything they can to resist the condemnation to isolation in the encounter with death. In relation to the ritual of *velorio* [wake], “lo volvemos comunitario, entretejiendo lazos de solidaridad y amor para quitarle esa cuestión de la soledad de la muerte. Para que ninguna de nosotras pase por este mundo sin pena ni gloria” [we turn it communitarian, weaving ties of solidarity and love to remove that question from the solitude of death. So that none of us pass through this world without pain or glory] (Berkins 2014).

Berkins’ essay is a defense of the necessity of state sanctioned laws that offer recognition to travesti communities. For Berkins this recognition is important because it contributes to the proliferation of stories about travesti deaths. “Nuestras muertes empiezan a ser escritas y contadas también por otros, empiezan a circular por otros canales” [Our deaths are also beginning to be written and narrated also by others, beginning to circulate through other channels] (Berkins 2014). According to Berkins “la existencia de la nueva ley también nos asegura no morir en el anonimato. Algo tan simple como escribir el nombre de quien se vela en su propia lápida” [the existence of the new law also ensures that we do not die anonymously. Something as simple as writing the name of the dead on her own gravestone] (Berkins 2014). Berkins argues that the usual epitaph for travesti death was anonymity, a double erasure. Many travestis’ graves have male names assigned to them, making it even more difficult to mourn them publicly: “¡Cuántas veces nos ha pasado ir al cementerio a dejarle una flor y una vela y no encontrar su lápida porque no recordábamos, o hasta a veces, no conocíamos, su nombre anterior!” [How many times have we gone to the cemetery to leave a flower and a candle and not find her tombstone because we did not remember, or even sometimes, we did not know, her

previous name] (Berkins 2014). For Berkins one sign that times were changing was to witness graves with travesti feminine names inscribed on them. “Se inscribe quien realmente ha sido ella y no se borra la historia de su propia vida para quienes la conocen en detalle y para quienes la podemos imaginar” [It inscribes who she really was and doesn’t erase the story of her own life for those who know her and for those who can only imagine her] (Berkins 2014).

*Loxoro* doesn’t elaborate on the benefits or perils of a state sanctioned gender identity law. Nevertheless, the film is as equally committed as Berkins’s essay in producing different and multiple stories for travesti tears. Makuti’s tears allow Mia to “no morir en el anonimato” [to not die in anonymity]. Travesti tears may have the power to disrupt the enforced amnesia that the social body experiences in relation to travesti loss and death. Mia’s death doesn’t have to only be an experience of infinite solitude. Even if *Loxoro* ends tragically, there is an echo in Makuti’s tears: “Now is the time to cry a different cry” (Trinh 2016, 148).

### **The Tears of a Travesti Feminist Theorist**

In a diagnostic essay on the status of feminist theory in Peru, feminist scholars Violeta Barrientos and Fanni Muñoz (2014) assert that “el feminismo peruano, al igual que lo que sucedió con otros países latinoamericanos, surgió vinculado al Estado” [Peruvian feminism, like in other Latin American countries, emerged tethered to the State] (638) According to Barrientos and Muñoz this proximity of Peruvian feminism with the nation state reduces the spaces for theoretical debates with and within Peruvian feminist studies. Barrientos and Muñoz sound particularly critical of the most widespread tendencies in Peruvian feminist studies when they say that:

Las corrientes del pensamiento teórico feminista no llegaron a ser difundidas, ni tuvieron peso relevante para el feminismo peruano. El escaso número de sus participantes no era suficiente para dividirse en posiciones ideológicas. La cuestión no era si estaba en uno u otro feminismo, sino ‘¿militas o no militas?’. En realidad no era un feminismo teórico que se apoderara de las ideas europeas en boga explayadas por – Cixous, Kristeva o Irigaray. América Latina vivía otra realidad y resolvía pragmáticamente las demandas de las mujeres haciendo política a su manera.

[The feminist theoretical debates did not get to be diffused, nor did they have relevant weight for the Peruvian feminism. The small number of its participants was not enough to be divided into ideological positions. The question was not whether one was in one or another feminism, but whether ‘you are a militant or not?’ Actually it was not a theoretical feminism that took over the European ideas in vogue expounded by Cixous, Kristeva or Irigaray. Latin America lived another reality and pragmatically solved the demands of women doing politics in their own way] (642).

In their short essay, Barrientos and Muñoz don’t define what they understand by “theory.” Their paraphrasing in this passage is problematic since it presupposes at a certain level that feminist theory only takes place when the ideas of authors such as Cixous, Kristeva or Irigaray are cited. And yet, Barrientos’ and Muñoz’ essay is a plea for more feminist theory, and for more radical feminist theories in Peru. This call needs to be reiterated, but it also needs to expand what it

understands by “feminist theory” and by “feminist theorist.” Expanding the scope of what “feminist theory” is, allows us to encounter feminist theoretical and political contributions that don’t circulate in more institutionalized spaces such as Peruvian academy or governmental positions.

Barrientos’ and Muñoz’ call for more theoretical feminist studies has actually already been taken up, and from within the borders of the Peruvian nation. Peruvian transgender activist Belissa Andía is one of the most radical voices in feminist activism, and importantly, in Peruvian feminist theory.<sup>18</sup> Belissa Andía is not usually considered a feminist theorist, due to the fact that she doesn’t have any conventional academic training, doesn’t hold an academic position in a university, and isn’t a cisgender woman. Nevertheless, Belissa Andía’s mission in life is the endless search for spaces that allow thinking gender otherwise, and that is the essential gesture of feminist theory itself.

One cannot blame Barrientos and Muñoz for not including Belissa Andía’s theoretical contributions in their account, because Andía’s work hasn’t been published in text format in academic venues. Her published essays are very rare and short, and they aren’t as rich as some of her other work (that take other textual forms). Belissa Andía’s work expands the archive of feminist theory itself. One of the most original of Andía’s contributions to feminist theory takes place in the film *Loxoro*, where she plays the role of Makuti.

The original script of *Loxoro* had as its main plot the lesbian and incestuous relationship between a travesti mother and a travesti daughter, Makuti and Mia. Even though there is nothing about lesbian love and passions that make Peruvian transgender activist Belissa Andía uncomfortable, she was concerned about reinforcing transphobic stereotypes, and mystifying transgender lives: The myth “transforms history into nature” (Barthes 2012, 240). For Belissa Andía the idea of Makuti and Mia as wounded (lesbian) lovers was a myth. For her, myths should be contested. Andía rewrote the original script of *Loxoro*, sidestepping travesti pleasures in order to focus on travesti tears.

Belissa Andía was not only not happy about the lesbian premise of the “original” plot of *Loxoro*, she was also deeply dissatisfied with the “original” ending. The ending in the first script wasn’t tragic. Mia wasn’t killed, but the attack forced her to reevaluate her affective world and leave Makuti (and Peru). Mia was leaving her mother for the motherland of her name, Italy. No silent Makuti walking and crying at the end. Mia was actually supposed to send greetings through a video from Italy. Makuti would realize that she hasn’t become a mother without a daughter or/and a widow, just an ex-lover. Discussing the 2009 Greek film *Strella*, Judith Butler questions the desire for a tragic ending in relation to transgender life(s). “Some viewers of the film want it to end at the moment of inevitable catastrophe, where *Strella* is walking down the street near the Syntagma Metro dissolved in tears, in an open and public lamentation that seems to know no end, compelled to reconcile with an unbearable loss” (2013, 61). Butler’s description sounds similar to *Loxoro*’s ending, unlike *Strella* ending with a queer family gathering and celebration. One may feel that this is an additional reason to blame Andía for the conventional ending of *Loxoro*. And yet perhaps the tragic ending of *Loxoro* is not only tragic, and going a bit

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<sup>18</sup> Belissa Andía is one of the most publicly well-known transgender (and LGBTI) activists in Peru and Latin America. She is the founding member of the trans collective Claveles Rojos. She was a candidate for the Andean Parliament twice, in 2006 for Movimiento Nueva Izquierda and in 2016 for the leftist coalition El Frente Amplio por Vida, Justicia y Libertad. Andía is part of an NGO, Runa, which works with at risk travesti communities. She has been part of several documentaries denouncing state violence against transgender communities. Andía has also appeared several times on debates in Peruvian TV, radio, and newspapers.



further, perhaps the tragic ending of *Loxoro* is not an ending. As Anzaldúa states “there is never a final ‘fin,’ just a lot of small ones” (2015, 115). How could it be otherwise for someone so invested in feminist politics as Belissa Andía?

Here Barthes’ unforgettable question is pertinent: “who will write the history of tears?” (1978, 180). Perhaps Belissa Andía thought that she was a good candidate for the job of a historian of tears. It would probably be more accurate to think of Belissa Andía as a genealogist of tears. According to Michel Foucault, genealogy “must record the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality; it must seek them in the most unpromising places, in what we tend to feel is without history” (1977, 139). Andía’s genealogical project finds the power of travesti tears even in the “most unpromising places,” even in a name that in male centered economies of knowledge is posited as without history, motherhood. For Foucault, genealogy is the “writing [of] a history of the present” (Traub 2016, 67), and “opposes itself to the search of ‘origins’” (140). In *Loxoro* Andía doesn’t invest too much energy on thinking in the origins of motherhood nor travestismo. Andía embraces as her task “to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history’s destruction of the body” (Foucault 1977, 148). In her genealogical effort, Andía performs Makuti as a body imprinted by a history of suffering and dispossession that attempted to destroy her body, and that also attempted to destroy the mother in her. Thanks to Andía’s contribution travesti’s tears open a window to think and embrace “all of those discontinuities that cross us” (Foucault 1977, 162), and that in normative heterosexual frameworks are obliterated.

If Andía was going to perform a travesti character, Makuti, she was going to make sure to do justice to travesti tears. And indeed she did. But how did she do it? Andía probably was asking herself: how am I going to do the job of “awakening in me the mother” (Barthes 2010c, 40)? Belissa Andía allowed her own tears to resonate with those of Makuti. Andía wouldn’t deny differences in the name of collective labels. Andía is not so naïve as to think that her tears and Makuti’s, the good mother, are the same. Belissa Andía’s political life can match with one of the now famous axioms that gave birth to Queer Theory: “People are different from each other” (Sedgwick 2008, 23). Andía would add to the Sedgwickian axiom a Barthesian twist: People are different from each other, not because of what they are, but because their suffering and tears are different. Belissa Andía allowed the rhythm of her suffering and tears to resonate with the rhythm of Makuti’s.

Belissa Andía wasn’t going to participate in a celebration of sex work, and indeed she didn’t. And yet, Andía not only performed a character that is a former sex worker, but a character whose main object of love and desire was also a sex worker. It is curious that Andía would opt to raise such a critique as an actor. Recall that Barthes goes as far as to say that the body of an actor is a “prostituted body” (2010d, 61). In her performance as Makuti, Andía brings attention to what Leticia Sabsay calls “the performativity of sex work” which means “to attend to the ways in which sex work is constituted” (2011b, 215). And she does it not through a proper linguistic register, but mainly through tears. Again, Barthes’s wonderful prose: “Tears are signs not expressions. By my tears, I tell a story...” (1978, 182). Tears are signs, and they don’t signify the same thing all the time. Tears don’t only signify suffering. There are tears that signify joy, bliss, shattering pleasure, boredom, and the list continues endlessly. Perhaps Belissa Andía wanted to tell a story through her tears, and those of Makuti. And yet she is the first to admit that the mainstream media reception of *Loxoro* was far from the desired one. The story that the Peruvian mainstream media told about *Loxoro* was one that mystified travesti’s otherness, and the

otherness of the sound of *Loxoro*. Such representations don't care at all about travesti tears, nor about travesti sufferings.

Belissa Andía's feminist theory has at its core the power of travesti's tears. *Loxoro*, thanks to the contributions of Andía, is an effort of thinking gender otherwise. In *Loxoro*, thinking gender is not that far from thinking tears. Following Barthes, tears are gendered signs. *Loxoro* goes a bit further and invites its audience to think about tears as signifying gender itself. Mia's tears, during the torture scene, are a sign of what happens when gender is so strictly policed. Mia's tears are a sign of the violence that occurs when gender and sex are taken as synonyms, within a framework that constructs "sex" as an unmodifiable trait of nature. Makuti's tears signify differently. Makuti's tears are a sign that gender has several lives, and that gender persists even after the violent eradication of the bodies that enact it.

According to Judith Butler, "gender is received, but surely not simply inscribed on our bodies as if we were merely a passive slate obligated to bear a mark" (2015, 30). Gender can only be received, if gender itself is a gift. In *Loxoro* travestismo is an instance of the gift of gender. The travesti language *Loxoro* mimics the gift-logic of gender. In the language *Loxoro* a given syllable is accepted, and then repeated in echoes that differ from its "original" sound. Likewise, travestismo makes reference to the fact that the gift that is gender needs to be cultivated. In Butler's argument in order to become a subject, one is gendered, and usually within strict and hierarchical frameworks of what gender is understood to be. And yet, travestismo is a name that makes reference to the fact that the gender that is received never remains the same. The gender that is received is always transforming. In the scene of Mia's tears, her male torturers don't accept the gift of her gender. They refuse Mia's gift of gender, annihilating the giver. They close themselves off from acknowledging that they are also recipients of gender. Makuti's tears at the end of *Loxoro* are a utopian gesture to a different cry. Makuti's tears remind us that tears trouble vision. Tears trouble any will for indelible clarity and clear borders. Teary and blurry eyes, instead of being an obstacle to move in the world, become an instance of how to move accepting the opacity and mobility of gender itself. The end of *Loxoro* invites its audience to join Makuti in her walking in the world with teary eyes and a blurry vision, and always open and receptive to the gift of gender.

Makuti's silent walking with teary eyes, embracing the blurring of her vision, and the gift of gender, offers to her audience a final gift in the paradoxical form of a certainty. In the words of Jacques Derrida, "deep down, deep down inside, the eye would be destined not to see but to weep. For at the very moment they veil sight, tears would unveil what is proper to the eye" (1993, 126). The veiling of tears, or "the blindness that opens the eye" (Derrida 1993, 126), make absolutely clear (and almost to the point of tautology) that "she loves [Mia], from the very depths of her bowels" (Barthes 1987, 166). It is rather curious that Belissa Andía's radically anti-essentialist theory of gender may cultivate an essential(ist) attachment between two travestis in love. But if anything, in Mia's and Makuti's bond "love is [essentially] a state of creative being" (Trinh 2016, 265); and that's ultimately why in Belissa Andía's feminist theory, love is just another name for travestismo.

## Chapter Three

### Reclaiming the Travesti Histories of Giuseppe Campuzano

Travestismo is a name that has the power to transform everything it touches. This seems to be the thread that unites the oeuvre of the Peruvian artist, philosopher, activist, curator, and storyteller Giuseppe Campuzano. Campuzano's oeuvre, and especially his most well known project (however, still not as widely recognized as it should be), *Museo Travesti del Perú* [Travesti Museum of Peru], "traslada al travesti del margen al centro (estrategia de la Teoría Queer) para repensar la historia oficial" [moves the travesti from margin to center (strategy of Queer Theory) to rethink the official history] (2013, 84). For Campuzano the name travestismo radically alters the official accounts of Peruvian history. This chapter argues that Giuseppe Campuzano offers a Peruvian contribution to and remaking of queer theory, whereby "travestismo" is centered. As queer theorist Petrus Liu argues "Queer Theory is a transnational and transcultural practice of which its US instantiation is only part" (2015, 15). This chapter reads Campuzano's work as an original intervention in the transnational field of queer theory. For Campuzano, queer theory "lee todo desde otra perspectiva" [reads everything from another perspective] (237). Indeed, Campuzano's queer theory is a lens by which to read everything otherwise, but only when attached to the names "travesti" and "travestismo."

In Campuzano's work travestismo is a polyvalent name. Hence, to read the work of Giuseppe Campuzano demands from its readers the generous attitude of allowing themselves to be surprised. Campuzano's project as a whole spans across many different genres: fiction, chronicles, theoretical essays, political manifestos, historical accounts, paintings, photographs, videos, and performances. Travestismo works differently in each of Campuzano's projects. This chapter offers a close reading of Giuseppe Campuzano's essay "Reclaiming *Travesti* Histories" (2006). Campuzano's essay is one of the earliest iterations of his project *Museo Travesti del Perú*, and warrants careful attention. The reading of "Reclaiming *Travesti* Histories" that this chapter offers follows the essay's narrative and argument in sequential order and foregrounds the movement back and forth between theory and storytelling in Campuzano's essay. My reading of "Reclaiming *Travesti* Histories" traces Campuzano's playing with the signifiers "travestismo," "historia" [history], and "histeria" [hysteria]. In a very idiosyncratic manner, Campuzano mobilizes hysteria as a set of theories and narratives not exempt of prescriptive tendencies. This chapter appreciates the place of contradictions at the heart of Campuzano's theories, and argues that one name for those contradictions is hysteria. Campuzano moves between disidentifying in an almost misogynist manner with hysteria and identifying with the abject pleasures of the hysteric travesti historian. The chapter concludes with a reading of five photographs of Campuzano's performance *TransformaT*. These photographs allow us to envision the reparative tendencies of travestismo's transformational energies.

#### Translating Travestismo

"Reclaiming *Travesti* Histories" was published in 2006, in an edition of the *Bulletin of the Institute of Development Studies*, which it is based out of the University of Sussex. Two years later the same institution financially contributed to the publishing of *Museo Travesti del Perú* in book format in Lima. "Reclaiming *Travesti* Histories" was originally published in English, and was meant to be read by an international audience unfamiliar with both Campuzano's work and

travestismo. This is partially the reason why the word “travesti” is italicized in the title and throughout the essay. Another reason for italicizing travesti, I argue, is that the name travesti resists translation.

At the beginning of the essay “Reclaiming *Travesti* Histories” Campuzano offers this definition of “travestis” (in the plural): “*Travestis*, a term that has survived into contemporary times and is used in Latin America to describe those who cross genders, cross-sex and cross-dress, came from one of these suppressed identities” (34). Travestis is a noun, a plural noun, and yet Campuzano attributes the power of a verb to it. The name travestis doesn’t make reference to a congealed identity, but to a process, a crossing. Here Campuzano’s approximation to travestismo doesn’t differ significantly from widespread definitions of transgender. Campuzano must introduce a narrative of the origins of the name “travesti” in order to make explicit the stakes of his project: “The very concept of *travesti* (literally, ‘cross-dressing’) was born out of the colonizers’ fixation with gender binaries including the imperative to dress according to one’s place within a rigid gender dichotomy, in which there were two clearly defined sexes and two genders premised on these sexes. Pre-Hispanic gender was read through this lens; *travestism* became, within this schema, dressing across the binary” (34).

The name travesti in Campuzano’s account is a peculiar gift from the Spanish colonizers that needs scapegoats to produce and reinforce a heterosexual gender dichotomy. Campuzano presumes that Pre-Hispanic gender was more fluid than the Hispanic counterpart. This presumption seems to be a point of departure for Campuzano’s *Museo Travesti del Perú*. And yet I am not convinced that Campuzano offers this narrative as an accurate and totalizing account of origins for travestismo. Nevertheless, it is Campuzano’s theorization of travestismo as linked to pre-Hispanic gender(s) that has gained notoriety in the still very few theoretical readings of his work. For instance, according to feminist theorist Rita Segato:

Las presiones que impuso el colonizador sobre las diversas formas de la sexualidad que encontró en el incanato han sido relevadas por Giuseppe Campuzano en crónicas y documentos del siglo XVI y XVII. En ellas se constata la presión ejercida por las normas y las amenazas punitivas introducidas para capturar las prácticas en la matriz heterosexual binaria del conquistador, que impone nociones de pecado extrañas al mundo aquí encontrado y propaga su mirada pornográfica.

[The pressures imposed by the colonizer on the various forms of sexuality that were found in the Inca period have been retrieved by Giuseppe Campuzano through chronicles and documents of the XVI and XVII centuries. In them the pressure exerted by the norms and punitive threats introduced to capture the practices in the binary heterosexual matrix of the conqueror, that imposes notions of sin strange to the world here found and propagates his pornographic gaze, is verified.] (2015, 93)

It is unlikely that Campuzano would reject or disidentify with a pornographic gaze, or that he would theorize pornography or a pornographic gaze as an exclusive property of the Hispanic colonizers, as Segato does. Campuzano would agree more with queer historian Michael Horswell characterization of the political stakes of his project: “the *Museo travesti* sought to vindicate those who have had a long history of exclusion due to heteronormative and gender-normative

imperatives introduced by colonial discourse and that led to the transculturation of pre-Hispanic gender systems and norms” (2016: 225).

Campuzano’s take on travestismo also resonates with widespread definitions of “queer” in queer studies: “While *travesti* was originally a pejorative adjective, it has been reworked into a political noun by Argentinean and Peruvian *travesti* activists, renaming the ‘duality as power’” (34). Travesti and queer have a similar trajectory in this sentence: from pejorative adjective to a political noun. And yet, again, although definitions of queer or queerness usually do not take into account geographical and national borders, Campuzano circumscribes this movement rather curiously to Argentina and Peru. This is a curious movement since one could argue that travestismo is a powerful name in other Latin American countries. It is peculiar also because Campuzano’s archive focuses mainly on Peru, and he doesn’t elaborate on the particularities of Argentina. Campuzano doesn’t discard everything that usually comes attached with travesti(s) as a pejorative adjective. In Campuzano’s retelling of travestismo, travestis retain something that the Spanish colonizers couldn’t eradicate completely, an intimate relation to non-dualistic thinking and embodiment. For Campuzano:

the Peruvian *travesti* remains as the hinge between pairs, previously connecting the pre-Hispanic worlds of gods and humans and the living and dead, and now, linking past to present. *Travestis* persist in performing mediating roles within society, then as shamans and now as beauticians or witches, therapists that listen and transform –by injecting liquid silicon into the bodies of their peers. (36)

For Campuzano, travestis perform mediating roles, or in-between states. In Campuzano’s account, travesti is a name that allows thinking on non-hierarchical and non-mutually exclusive relations between life and death, and also between the past and the present. The temporal dimension of Campuzano’s take on travestismo is important. Campuzano proposes that the name travesti can work differently in the past (this is in stark contrast to a normative theory of Peruvian history). He goes further: The name travesti can open up the virtualities of the past, including those virtualities that persist and remain (even if tenuously) in the present. Campuzano seems to agree with feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz, who writes that “we need to look more carefully at the *virtuality* laden within the present, its possibilities for being otherwise, in other words, the unactualized latencies in any situation which could be, may have been, instrumental in the generation of the new or the unforeseen” (2005, 77).

### **The Magic of Travestismo**

Campuzano relates the name travesti with signifiers such as shamans and witches, introducing a mythical dimension to his reelaboration of travestismo. Campuzano suggests that there is something magical about the name travesti. The magic that still inhabits the name travesti(s) persists and endures in the present especially in the signifiers of the beautician and the therapist. Campuzano reading of the name travesti is at this moment its most utopian or even mystifying, and yet it is also powerful and suggestive. The fluidity that Campuzano attributes to pre-Hispanic genders and as a consequence to the name travestismo has a certain correlation with the fluidity of a liquid – liquid silicone that is. This bond that Campuzano identifies between the signifier travesti and liquid silicone is far from being the Irigaryan embracement of female fluidity. To begin with, liquid silicone commonly administered from one travesti to another tends to congeal

and become very stiff. Actually, that stiffness for an author like Luce Irigaray could be related with masculinity and erections. This stiffness resonates with an idealization of cisgender femininity as the ultimate point of reach. Unfortunately, or not, for all travestis this fantasized goal of naturalized femininity is unachievable. Campuzano is cognizant of this as he later elaborates in the essay. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that in the early part of the essay, Campuzano privileges the role of travestis in producing, sharing, and managing beauty.

The name travesti(s) is not only related to the production and cultivation of beauty within the travesti community. Due to economic exclusion and severe gender policing, one of the very few occupations available to travestis without excessive police harassment is to be beauticians. As Campuzano asserts elsewhere: “Hay una profunda falta de opciones de trabajo para los travestis en todo el Perú. En Lima, las opciones se limitan al trabajo sexual y la peluquería” [There is a profound lack of job options for travestis throughout Peru. In Lima, the options are limited to sex work and hairdressing] (2013: 149). Travesti beauticians face a cruel paradox. According to heteronormative gender norms, most travestis are not beautiful; and yet they are the ones called upon to beautify the bodies and especially the faces and hair of cisgender women. Campuzano attempts to make visible this gendered division of labor, and to legitimize and honor the magic that the travesti beautician performs.

Campuzano asserts that “*Travestis* connect the different sides of beings: spiritual and material, reality and dream. They and their roles have not disappeared. They have mutated” (36). It is almost as if the name travesti(s) designates a different form of relationality. The name travesti lies somewhere between reality and dreams, and allows one to think of reality and dreams as not mutually exclusive. This is important, since Campuzano’s project revisits Peruvian history and its “official” accounts of travestismo. Perhaps for Campuzano the historian of travestismo, a role he performs in this essay, needs to dream, and to imagine different temporalities in order to do justice to the name travestis. For Campuzano, the historian of travestismo has to engage with the magic that travestismo is all about.

## **Travestismo and Transgender**

In Campuzano’s narrative travestis haven’t disappeared, even though several social and political agents and norms worked and continue to work very hard to achieve the social and material death of travestis. Travestis haven’t disappeared, but they have become something different. It is at this point of the text that Campuzano introduces “the twenty-first century *travesti*” (36). In order to characterize the travestis that inhabit the “now,” Campuzano needs to make reference to transgender identity.

Modern legal battles around transgender identity recognition are subject to and reproduce gender normativity. Even the most progressive, as in Belgium, Germany, the UK and Spain, fail to validate ambiguous gender self-expression. While people in these countries have won certain rights to change sex, they do not yet have any rights to choose to stay at an in-between state, or transit back and forth. Concepts like ‘gender dysphoria’ or ‘gender identity disorder’ are used to justify transsexual operations and legal recognition of changed sex. However, these concepts are in themselves anchored to gender normativity, denying intersexualism and occasional *travestism*. (36)

As the activist Belissa Andía, whom we followed in chapter two, Campuzano is skeptical of the widespread notion that transgender life can only flourish in the West. He mentions European countries in which laws concerning gender identity and transgender rights have passed and been approved. Campuzano stresses that these so-called political successes also foreclose (gender) ambiguity. What happens with those genders that do not fit, neither desire nor can't fit within a heteronormative polarization of sexual difference? As Campuzano states, transgender people in these countries can switch or travel from one gendered pole to the other, but only once. What European transgender people lose, in this account, is to make of an in-between state a permanent place to live within.<sup>19</sup> To iterate, Campuzano is arguing that travestismo is an in-between state, and that travestismo has a constitutive relation with in-betweenness. As a corollary, if an imperialist version of transgender identity and rights triumphs, travestis and their in-betweenness may face extinction.

Campuzano in this quote also seems to implicitly argue that the medicalization of the transsexual body has a privileged relation to transgender identity, and that this is not necessarily the case for travestis. In Campuzano's account of travestismo the role of Spanish and European colonizing enterprises in the Americas plays a more prominent role. In Campuzano's view the transsexual subject in order to exist and occupy a viable social position needs to accept (at a certain level) the notions of "gender dysphoria" or "gender identity disorder." It seems to be the case that travestis, that for Campuzano stand for mediators with the in-between, cannot be read mainly or exclusively using the normative "gender dysphoria" or "gender identity disorder" paradigms. Here Campuzano is criticizing the pathologization and medicalization of the transgender body. Campuzano adds a reference to "intersexualism," by which he means that there are not only two sexes, but that many people live in in-between sexual states. He also mentions "occasional travestism," by which one could presume he is making reference to the inherent contingency of gender, of any gender.

### **Travesti Hysteria**

In Campuzano's account, transgender and transsexual subjectivities are marked, almost determined, by gender normativity. Like transgender people, travestis also inhabit contexts of gender normativity. "In this context of gender normativity, some *travestis* have adopted 'hysterical' practices pursuing an idealised femininity" (36). This is at once a paradoxical and complex statement. Within the same text Campuzano also critiques the medicalization of the gendered body and its language, but here he is introducing an adjective that occupies an important place in such a history, "hysterical." Campuzano uses quotation marks to frame this word. As such, one could presume that the 'hysterical' practices he attributes to some travestis differ from widespread accounts of hysteria. One might also wonder if Campuzano was referencing feminist critiques of hysteria. For instance, according to Juliet Mitchell "in the body of the hysteric, male and female, lies the feminine protest against the law of the father" (2000, 404). In a similar vein, Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément write that "hysteria is necessarily

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<sup>19</sup> The gender regulations that Campuzano makes reference in this short essay obviously do not remain the same, and some include third gender options. "While some states, namely, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Nepal, countries with historically acknowledged 'third gender populations,' have added third gender categories, others such as Australia and New Zealand have attempted to expand the possibilities for self-definition, introducing an 'X' category on passports, and still others, such as the Netherlands, have open the debate over the necessity of sex/gender markers and registration more generally" (Camminga 2017, 70).

an element that disturbs arrangements” (1986, 156). Are these travesti hysterical practices a protest or revolt against the law of the father? Are these travesti hysterical practices disturbing the social and political arrangements of heterosexuality? It is difficult so say, since Campuzano decides against defining hysteria and hysterical practices in this essay, or elsewhere.

In “Reclaiming *Travesti* Histories” Campuzano’s use of hysteria, like that of travestismo, is polyvalent. As we will see later, some of his uses of “hysteria” are conventional and somewhat misogynist. Though to be fair, throughout Campuzano’s entire oeuvre “hysteria” and “histerical” are never used in consistent manners. For instance, Campuzano attributes to himself a fetishistic hysteria (2013: 99). He also adjudicates hysteria to contemporary masculinity (2008: 32), and to certain theories of Freud (2008: 60). Certainly, Campuzano seems to like the use of the word *histeria* [hysteria], which in Spanish perhaps symptomatically looks and sounds very similar to *historia* [history]. “Histories” is a word that is prominent in the title of Campuzano’s essay. As its title suggests, Campuzano’s project reclaims travesti histories and introduces these histories in order to “outline” travesti hysterical practices (2006: 36).

Campuzano (36) doesn’t define hysteria, and yet he offers six instances of travesti ‘hysterical’ practices that pursue an idealized femininity: “Body transformation, Choice of ‘macho’ partners and violent relationships, Denial of their sexually active role, Denial of the ‘former’ male they were, The worst of both gender roles, and Post-feminist transgender?” The first five hysterical practices are more or less cohesive. Campuzano denounces the social, economic, and political violence that travestis introject into their own bodies in their pursuit of idealized forms of femininity. Notably, the final practice is the only one that doesn’t fit as easily in Campuzano’s characterization of these travestis hysterical practices. In fact, as we will see, the last one “Post-feminist transgender?” seems to be his proposed solution to the previous five hysterical practices. It is puzzling that Campuzano includes “the poison” and “the cure” together, and both under the name “hysteria.”

Campuzano uses individual histories in order to present each of these six travesti hysterical practices. This is a logic that also motivates Campuzano’s *Museo Travesti del Perú*. As Campuzano asserts, elsewhere, in a powerful manifesto tone: “El Museo Travesti del Perú nace de la necesidad de una historia propia—una historia del Perú inédita” [The Travesti Museum of Peru emerges out of the need for its own history—an unprecedented Peruvian history] (2008: 8). Campuzano uses the word “necesidad” [need or necessity], marking the urgency of his project. In *Museo Travesti*, Campuzano establishes a parallel between the need to tell one’s own travesti’s history and the need to rewrite Peruvian history from a travesti viewpoint. In “Reclaiming *Travesti* Histories” such a need is also palpable. Since Campuzano’s *Museo Travesti del Perú* and his “Reclaiming *Travesti* Histories” essay resonate so much, one may only wonder if hysteria also plays a role in *Museo Travesti del Perú*. Is Campuzano embracing the role of a hysteric historian?

### **Carla and the Making of a Travesti Body**

In “Reclaiming *Travesti* Histories,” the first travesti “hysterical” practice goes under the sub-heading of “Body transformation” where Campuzano introduces the travesti history of Carla:

One friend, Carla, for example had injected liquid silicon into her forehead, cheeks, chest, hips and buttocks to achieved the desired voluptuousness. After emigrating to Europe and earning enough money, her aesthetic and procedure



perceptions changed. She decided to go for silicone implants. The surgeon told her that in order to do so, they would have to remove all the liquid silicon, including from those parts of the body to where it had migrated, prior to proceeding. Carla decided to go ahead with this painful procedure that has now left large scars. When I asked her if she was satisfied with the results, she answered affirmatively. Might she have pursued different aims or used different methods without normative pressures? (37)

In this travesti history, Carla, someone that Campuzano identifies as a personal friend, transforms her body to achieve a desired voluptuousness (that Campuzano seems to understand as an aspiration of idealized femininity). Carla transforms her cheeks, chest, hips, hips and buttocks. In Campuzano's paraphrasing Carla is the sole agent. Nevertheless, it's likely that, as Campuzano elaborated earlier, other travestis literally helped Carla's with her body modifications. Carla's body was transformed, and in that sense, her travesti body was produced, by the hands of the travesti therapists and beauticians that Campuzano commends so much in the first part of the essay. Here, a paradox seems to be palpable: the travesti mediators of the in-between also contribute to the reinforcement of idealized forms of femininity.

Carla migrates to Europe. Campuzano doesn't specify here to which country. So one might wonder if Carla migrated to one of the European countries that Campuzano mentions earlier in the essay in his reference to transgender subjectivities and rights. In any case, Carla earns enough money to get silicone implants. Again, even if unmentioned, readers can presume that Carla was a sex worker, and that very likely she was working without papers. In this particular narrative, it is almost as if the moment Carla comes into contact with European transgender subjectivities and cultures "her aesthetic and procedure perceptions changed." The liquid silicone in the travesti body that Campuzano idealized earlier shows a less friendly face in Carla's history. Carla isn't the only one to migrate; the liquid silicone also migrates to different parts of her body. The procedure of removal of the liquid silicone, now turned into stiff and dangerous in the travesti body, is painful and leaves large scars. After submitting to these medical procedures, Carla seems to be satisfied, and yet Campuzano ends this history with a question: "Might she have pursued different aims or used different methods without normative pressures?" (37). The question is an important one that resists foreclosing Carla's history, raising the possibility of an alternative gendered embodiment for Carla.

Nothing else is said about Carla in Campuzano's "Reclaiming *Travesti* Histories." Carla's story is very stereotypical, and her name is rather common in Peru. Nevertheless, it seems important to mention that the name Carla appears in another essay of Campuzano, "De engendro fabuloso a performatividad creadora" [From fabulous spawn to creative performativity] Here Campuzano introduces Carla (again?):

En 2003 mi amiga Carla migró de Perú a Italia. Se deshacía entonces de algunas cosas, entre ellas estos zapatos viejos que le pedí me regalara. En 2004 empecé a exhibirlos como parte del Museo Travesti, ya tildados de *objet trouvé* artístico. Cuando le contaba a Fiorella (ya para entonces le gustaba llamarse así), sobre aquellos montajes, ella siempre ofrecía enviarme unos nuevos y yo le repetía que prefería esos como símbolo de sus viajes (transgénero, transnacional).

In 2003 my friend Carla migrated from Peru to Italy. She got rid of some things, including these old shoes that I asked her to give me. In 2004 I began to exhibit them as part of the Travesti Museum, already branded as an artistic *objet trouvé*. When I told Fiorella (since then she liked to call herself that), about those montages, she always offered to send me some new ones and I repeated that I preferred those as symbol of her travels (transgender, transnational)] (2008: 98)

The Carla of “De engendro fabuloso a performatividad creadora” like the Carla of “Reclaiming *Travesti* Histories” migrated to Europe. In “De engendro fabuloso a performatividad creadora” Campuzano specifies that Carla migrated to Italy, a country that in the travesti imaginary and trajectories occupies an important place. In that same essay, Carla owns a pair of shoes that Campuzano desires. Campuzano wants Carla’s shoes to be part of the archive of his *Museo Travesti*. In this narrative Carla doesn’t seem to have a monogamous relationship with her own name and begins to go by the name Fiorella. Carla who is now Fiorella offers to buy Campuzano a new pair of shoes, but Campuzano wants those that belonged to Carla. Campuzano prefers the old shoes because they were a symbol of her transgender and transnational journeys.

“Reclaiming *Travesti* Histories” was published in 2006, and “De engendro fabuloso a performatividad creadora” in 2013 as part of Campuzano’s posthumous collection *Saturday Night Thriller y otros escritos 1998-2013* [Saturday Night Thriller and other writings 1998-2013]. Unlike the first Carla of which Campuzano raises questions of alternative temporalities, the second Carla suffers an unquestionable death. “A Carlita la asesinó en 2008 un cliente. En 2009 busqué los zapatos una vez más, en esta ocasión para mostrarlos en Bogotá, pero no los encontré: mi madre los había tirado a la basura. Luego de un instante de histeria fetichista, logré reencontrar su sentido travesti y entonces simplemente conseguí otros” [Carlita was murdered in 2008 by a client. In 2009 I looked for the shoes once more, this time to show them in Bogota, but I couldn’t find them: my mother had thrown them in the trash. After a moment of fetishistic hysteria, I managed to rediscover their travesti affect and simply went out and got another pair] (98-99). Campuzano here uses the name Carlita, a form of stressing an intimate and affective bond with Carla. A client of Carla murdered her in 2008. In 2009 Campuzano searched unsuccessfully for Carla’s shoes, to exhibit them in Colombia as part of his *Museo Travesti*. Campuzano’s mother threw Carla’s shoes in the trashcan because she assumed them to be garbage. Campuzano’s mother’s reading of Carla’s shoes as garbage is a corollary to the widespread belief in Peru that travesti histories and lives are garbage and belong in a trashcan.

Campuzano makes reference once again to “hysteria” here. Campuzano after realizing the loss of Carla’s shoes describes himself as a temporary victim of fetishistic hysteria. We can see that, even if temporarily, Carla and Campuzano share a bond with hysteria. Campuzano replaces the lost shoes with new ones. Campuzano adds a long sentence: “Esa Carlita falsificada fue la que expuse en Bogotá y que cercené como ritual mimético del viaje trunco, para exhibirlos en la Trienal de Chile, en el Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Santiago, aunque debo acotar que La Carlita original jamás existió” [That counterfeit Carlita was the one I exhibited in Bogota and I curtailed her as a mimetic ritual of the truncated trip, to exhibit them in the Triennial of Chile, The Museum of Contemporary Art of Santiago, although I must note that the original Carlita never existed] (99). The replacement of shoes produces a “falsified Carlita.” Campuzano embraces such falsification, adding that he curtailed that falsified Carlita. He even admits to have gained some form of profit from the exposure of the falsified Carlita, presenting the new shoes in Museums in Chile and Colombia.

Campuzano includes a mention of the adjective “mimetic” in order to describe his “falsification” of Carla. Hysteria and mimesis appear close to each other in two consecutive sentences. According to feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray: “Hysteria is silent and at the same time it mimes. And – how could it be otherwise – miming/reproducing language that is not its own, masculine language, it caricatures and deforms that language: it ‘lies,’ it ‘deceives,’ as women have always been reputed to do” (1985, 137). For Irigaray, hysteria is a silent revolt that mimes/repeats a dominant language, simultaneously exposing the contingency of such a language. Irigaray also associates hysteria with lies. Here there seems to be some coincidence with Campuzano’s account of Carla. Campuzano concludes his history of Carla with a puzzling statement: “aunque debo acotar que La Carlita original jamás existió” [although I must note that the original Carlita never existed] (99). The original Carlita never existed. This statement of Campuzano may make reference to a Butlerian reading of the performativity of gender. In that reading the idea of original genders that are imitated by copies is contested. Actually, what never existed is an original version of any gendered being, including of course La Carlita. “Aunque debo acotar que La Carlita original jamás existió” (99) can also be read as a final punch from Campuzano to his readers. Some readers may be already invested in the histories of the beloved Carlita, and yet Campuzano seems to partially disavow such an investment. Is Campuzano lying to us, his readers? Is Campuzano inviting his readers to produce fictitious accounts of Carla?

Campuzano certainly raises an invitation to engage with lies in *his Museo Travesti del Perú*. According to Campuzano, his *Museo Travesti* is a “museo ‘falso’—como el apelativo de ‘falsa mujer’ con que este lenguaje maniqueo nos adjetiva” [false museum—as the appellation of ‘false woman’ with which this manichean language modifies us] (2008: 8). Campuzano embraces the association of the name travesti(s) with lies. In that same sense, in “De engendro fabuloso a performatividad creadora” Campuzano shares an anecdote that included the reception of some of the readers of *Museo Travesti del Perú*. “En Marzo de 2009 recibí la invitación para participar en un encuentro de literatura fantástica, invitación que me sorprendió ya que mi réplica inmediata fue: ‘pero yo no hago literatura’; no obstante, pensé: ‘¿Y si leyeron mi libro Museo Travesti del Perú como ficción?’” [In March 2009 I received the invitation to participate in a colloquium of fantastic literature, an invitation that surprised me since my immediate reply was: ‘but I do not do literature;’ nevertheless, I thought: ‘what if they read my book Travesti Museum of Peru as fiction?’] (2013: 90). Campuzano was surprised that the travesti histories he produced, in his *Museo Travesti*, were read as literature, and as fantastical literature in particular. Campuzano embraces the invitation of these readers to think of his work as fiction. We can extend such an embracement and read the travesti histories Campuzano offers (and Carla’s history in particular) as simultaneously history and literature, as truth and lies, as reality and fictions.

Feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero writes that “the identity of a unique being has its only tangible unity – the *unity* that he/she seeks because it is *unique* – in the tale of his/her story” (2000, 39-40). Campuzano’s travesti histories would seem to disagree with Cavarero. The travesti histories of Carla that Campuzano writes may have unique elements, but they also sound stereotypical. What Campuzano and Cavarero might agree on is that “each narratable self has a life about which a story can be narrated” (2000, 74). In “Reclaiming *Travesti* Histories” Campuzano offers travesti histories/stories not only of Carla, but also Rosa, Gata, and Jana. Indeed, these travesti histories are at the heart of Campuzano’s essay.

The particularity of the history of Carla is the disavowal that Campuzano makes of the original status of Carla: “La Carlita original jamás existió” [The original Carlita never existed]

(2013, 99). Cavarero establishes an important difference between life-stories and invented stories: “life-stories, like destinies, have no author. Only invented stories, it seems, have an author” (138). Campuzano’s claim that the original Carlita has never existed may be an attempt on his part of mastering the story, a story that he labeled as marked by hysteria. Like the stereotypical male analyst, Campuzano may be trying to discipline the “hysterical” travesti stories. Nevertheless, it seems to me that this path of reading forecloses one of the richest possibilities of Campuzano’s take on travesti histories. Perhaps, responding to Cavarero, for Campuzano life-stories, and travesti life-stories in particular, are also invented stories. In that vein, Campuzano’s deployment of the idea of travesti histories also seems to make the case that histories are always invented stories, especially those that have forgotten where they’ve come from.

### **Rosa and the Travesti Love for Machos**

We can now return to our close reading of Campuzano’s “Reclaiming *Travesti* Histories,” knowing that in these histories, imagination and fiction play an important role. The second travesti hysterical practice according to Campuzano is the “Choice of ‘macho’ partners and violent relationships” (2006: 37). Campuzano uses the word macho with quotation marks. I argue that if the original Carlita never existed, the original macho never existed either. To introduce this second “travesti hysterical practice” Campuzano introduces the travesti history of Rosa.

I met Rosa when we were teenagers. Some years later I ran into her at a club and asked where she had disappeared to. She answered that she now has a violent and controlling partner who does not allow her to leave home, and that she was out partying only because he was away on a work trip. After some time I met her again, She told me everything was better, that things changed since they started ‘modern’ (exchanging active and passive roles) sex, and the beatings, verbal violence and isolation had stopped. Gender-busting practices have liberated both partners. (37)

As with Carla’s history/story, Campuzano starts telling Rosa’s story establishing or marking his own connection to Rosa. Campuzano met Rosa when both were teenagers. However, Campuzano doesn’t introduce Rosa as a friend, as he does with Carla. In this story, it seems that both of them lost contact with each other. Actually, for Campuzano, Rosa disappeared, because a controlling “macho” partner forbade her from “leaving home.” Rosa could only party when her “macho” partner was working somewhere afar. In this account, Rosa is faithful to the religious associations that her name takes in Peru. Rosa, like the Peruvian Santa Rosa de Lima, is a Catholic icon for self-torment and martyrdom. So far, Campuzano offers a history/story in which a travesti subject gets (near) the feminine gender she wants when she is in a rigid, violent, and hierarchical sentimental relationship with a man. The fact that this “macho” man is probably working class contributes to this stereotypical narrative.

Campuzano offers a cliché reading of Rosita’s history. Campuzano writes that he had an additional encounter with Rosa, in which she told him that her relationship with her “macho” partner was better, because they started to have “modern” sex. In Campuzano’s narrative, the fluid movements between active and passive roles particularly in anal sex resonate with the gender fluidity that travestismo stands for. The violence that Rosa once faced stopped when she

penetrated her “macho” partner. Campuzano ventriloquizes the language of a prescriptive sociologist dictating how travesti sex should be performed. Whereas in Carla’s history, Campuzano ends with a question, he concludes Rosa’s history with an affirmation. “Gender-busting practices have liberated both partners.” Rosa and Carla, after facing different forms of violence, realized that they were in better positions “now” than in the past. Campuzano doesn’t reinforce Carla’s belief that her present was better, but he does this with Rosa and the progress narrative he attributes to her story.

One might wonder if what Campuzano is implying is whether the opening of the anus (i.e., bottoming) that Rosa’s macho partner experienced should be more broadly practiced by masculine subjects and communities (of any sexual orientation). Campuzano may agree with feminist theorist Marta Segarra, for whom “*lo trans* está siempre en relación con la naturaleza ambigua e indeterminada del agujero, entre dentro y fuera” [*trans* is always in relation to the ambiguous and indeterminate nature of the hole, between inside and outside] (2014, 94). Campuzano here seems to be trying to endorse a sort of universal engagement with travestismo. Travestismo would offer for everyone the opening of their orifices, especially of the male anal orifice. Taken to its limits, this theory assumes that the biggest contribution straight men can offer to gender justice and sexual democracy is the opening of one’s anus (ideally to everyone).

Campuzano mobilizes humor in the project of reclaiming travesti histories. Rosa’s story with its anal morale is undeniably humorous. Campuzano takes an anecdote and leaves the job of radicalizing its emancipatory and humorous potential to his readers. Campuzano elsewhere recognizes that in his project he takes “la anécdota como historia” [the anecdote as history] (2013: 190). As Jane Gallop writes: “‘Anecdote’ and ‘theory’ carry diametrically opposed connotations: humorous vs. serious, short vs. grand, trivial vs. overarching, specific vs. general. Anecdotal theory would cut through these opposites in order to produce theory with a better sense of humor, theorizing which honors the uncanny detail of lived experience” (2002, 2). With Gallop as companion, Campuzano seems to argue that the historian of travestismo needs to not only have an acute sense of humor, but to theorize from within it.

### **Gata and the Travesti Desire for Family**

The third “travesti hysterical practice” is, according to Campuzano, the travesti “denial of their sexually active role” (37). In consonance with the previous hysterical practice, Campuzano here attributes to travestis an uncontroversial “sexually active role.” This is why Campuzano without hesitation uses the possessive pronoun “their.” In this section Campuzano introduces the travesti history of Gata.

Travestis commonly admit to taking only a passive role with their sexual partners, and may ridicule those who do otherwise. When I met Gata at a discotheque, we quickly started talking about men and sex. Later a common friend told me Gata had a female partner and two children and that she does sex work as the breadwinner for her family. I asked our common friend why Gata had not told me. The friend explained that other travestis tease Gata about it, to which she objects violently. Gata had somehow developed two genders, one for her social scene and work, and one for her family life. (37)

Whereas in the two previous travesti hysterical/historical practices Campuzano starts the paragraph directly with the story of Carla and Rosa, in this third instance he attributes a more generalized attitude to travestis: Travestis admit publicly to taking only the passive role (in anal sex). To do otherwise publicly is to bring shame to oneself. Campuzano is implicitly making reference to a strict policing of gender that takes place within travesti communities themselves. In the second sentence of the paragraph, Campuzano properly introduces Gata. Here, the story of Gata is stereotypical: travestis talking about men and sex in a discotheque. The policing of gender and sex that takes place within travesti communities, and that Campuzano denounces, presumes that travesti sex can only take place with men, and that those men who have sex with travestis are “real” men (in opposition to passive homosexual men). It is not Gata who breaks this idealized narrative, but a common friend who shares with Campuzano a sort of travesti sexual secret: Gata has a female partner, and two kids. What this history/story introduces is the possibility of thinking of male heterosexuality and travestismo as able to coincide in the same subject. The most widespread approximations to travestismo presume that travestis desire heterosexual men, and vice versa. Of course, the male heterosexual desire for travestis is usually disavowed in heteronormative public spaces. Campuzano is opening up the possibility for theorizing a male heterosexual (or bisexual) desire for travestismo, for performing travestismo. Campuzano’s intervention also raises the question of the travesti desire for the conventionalities attributed to (male) heterosexuality. With regards to Gata one can easily say, as Campuzano seems to do, that “conventionality is her object choice. This is how she can seem queer and normative simultaneously” (Berlant 2008, 189).

In the account of the common friend, that Campuzano retells, sex work plays a sort of utilitarian role. Sex work allows Gata to become a “breadwinner for her family.” It’s unclear whether Gata performs femininity in her house with her wife and kids, or if her travestismo is unknown to her family. In the first case, sex work allows the maintenance and cultivation of a sort of lesbian household. In the second case, Gata’s travestismo would be a sort of open secret to her family. In either case, Gata’s travestismo is well known among other travestis. Gata’s sexual and gendered history and its supposed exceptionality give certain coherence to some communities of travestis. For Campuzano, this enforced travesti coherency needs to be troubled.

Campuzano concludes Gata’s story stating that “Gata had somehow developed two genders, one for her social scene and work, and one for her family life” (37). Here Campuzano is likely saying that Gata performs femininity in sex work spaces, and masculinity at home. Through inverting gender stereotypes, Campuzano implies that Gata’s masculinity is domestic and private, and that Gata’s femininity is essentially public and social. And yet, travestismo doesn’t seem to be primarily about a simple inversion of already rigid gender stereotypes and social positionalities. It is noteworthy here that Campuzano coincides with Cixous and Clément for whom “the hysteric... is split between man and woman, between the two figures of her bisexuality” (55). But unlike Cixous and Clément, Campuzano doesn’t celebrate the hysteric’s “bisexuality.” He seems more interested in the material and psychic burdens that travestis, like Gata, pay for daring to disrupt the heterosexual (cis)gender system.

The second and third travesti hysterical practices deal with a travesti policing of sex and gender. In the story of Rosa, her “transcendence” of stereotypical sexual practices offers her emancipation from violence. Campuzano doesn’t make the same naïve generalization in Gata’s story. And yet, one may wonder if Rosa were able to “transcend” stereotypical gender knowledges could she emancipate herself? Is Campuzano here making the case for the political pertinence of a transcendence of gender? Gayle Rubin makes a similar move in “The Traffic in

Women” where she proclaims that “the feminist movement must dream... of the elimination of obligatory sexualities and sex roles. The dream I find most compelling is one of an androgynous and genderless (though not sexless) society, in which one’s sexual anatomy is irrelevant to who one is, what one does, and with whom one makes love” (2011, 61). As we will see later Campuzano embraces more clearly this transcendence of gender in his sixth travesti hysterical practice.

### **Jana and the Travesti Claim to Speak Back**

The fourth “travesti hysterical practice” in Campuzano’s essay is the travesti “denial of the ‘former’ male they were” (37). Campuzano uses the word “former” with quotation marks, so it remains unclear what exactly he means by the term. This is to say, it isn’t clear if Campuzano endorses the belief that masculinity is something that remains in the past of travestis, or if similar to Gata two genders can coincide in travesti embodiment. The paraphrasing of this “hysterical” practice is risky. He attributes “denial” to travestis as a sort of foreclosure to a reality principle. Here, Campuzano dangerously echoes the pathologization of transgender lives and experiences (which for the most part his oeuvre criticizes). Moreover, Campuzano doesn’t define what he understands by “denial” and instead appeals to storytelling to make his case:

When he decided to dress as a woman, Jana tore up family photographs of herself where she appeared as a man, and asked her mother to give away all her men’s clothes to the church. At the same time, he gave up work as a teacher of religion and she became a hairdresser. Some days later she bumped into ‘himself’ at home; her mother had disobeyed, giving her past clothes to her brother. Today Jana is a travesti activist with a Masters degree in gender studies. When watching a family video, she came across a strange man on the screen; suddenly she realised that man was herself. When prompted on what she experienced when facing up to ‘himself’ again, she could not describe the feeling. A sort of pity, maybe embarrassment, maybe nostalgia, filled her face: ‘it seems that man should have happened a long time ago.’ (37)

Jana is the protagonist of this fourth story. Campuzano uses the masculine pronoun to refer to Jana while introducing her: “he decided to dress as a woman...” The pronoun “he” is the agent and catalyst of the action “decided to dress as a woman.” Campuzano after marking his subject as a “he,” introduces Jana by her chosen proper name. Jana destroyed the family photos of her “former” male embodiment, and asked her mother to throw away the clothes that were a material reminder of the male subject she was usually perceived to be. It seems that in this narrative Jana is a subject who wants to construct herself in the feminine, and to re-elaborate the gendered memory that she and others have of herself. And yet, Jana’s efforts are not enough for Campuzano. Campuzano reminds everyone (including Jana) that no matter what she did, does, or will do she cannot “deny” her “former” male subjectivity. This is one of the (not very few) normative instances in Campuzano’s theorization (but that always coexist with his emancipatory impulses). One might also wonder if, as Campuzano implies, Jana was so invested in denial, why did she ask her mother to give away her “masculine” clothes to the local church. Why didn’t Jana just throw away her clothes, like the photographs? One can easily imagine that some of Jana’s neighbors or family members (as indeed has happened) became the beneficiaries of her clothing

donation. In this hypothetical case, Jana would be able to face male subjects (and also female subjects) by giving new uses to her previous clothes. This doesn't sound like the radical "denial" that Campuzano portrays.

The becoming travesti of Jana was accompanied by a radical change of profession. Jana was a teacher of religion. Her travestismo is perceived by her, and by Campuzano, as incompatible with her teaching Catholicism to children and teenagers. Here, we can see how the "denial" that Campuzano attributes to Jana actually denies the radical journeys and becomings that she was actively engaged with at the time. Jana becomes a hairdresser. Interesting to note however, is that Campuzano doesn't use the word "beautician," a term that he previously lauded.

The most peculiar thing about this narrative is the class mobility of its protagonist. For anyone cognizant of LGBTQ activism in Peru, Campuzano's "Jana" is easily recognizable as transgender activist Jana Villayzán. Indeed, Jana has a M. A. in Gender Studies (from a prestigious Peruvian university). Thus, Campuzano cannot presume that the subject of his story lacks the ability to talk back to power. Indeed, Jana is well known among Peruvian LGBTQ activist communities as particularly vocal and combative. Campuzano takes risks paraphrasing Jana's life story in pathologizing and dismissive terms. Yet, it is important to repeat that Campuzano's essay was originally published in English in 2006, and was only published in Spanish eight years later as part of his posthumous collection *Saturday Night Thriller*. So, perhaps there was some comfort for Campuzano in knowing that it was unlikely that Jana herself would encounter the text (in its original English version). It should be said, that if that was a source of comfort for Campuzano it was baseless, since Jana is an avid reader and a proficient speaker of English.

It is not outside the realm of possibility that Campuzano wrote this story of Jana fully knowing that she would eventually read the piece. Unlike all the previous travesti histories, Jana's seems more a personal attack, than a depiction. Is this a form of vengeance? And what kind of vengeance? And why against Jana? Campuzano seems to target Jana for embodying the kind of travesti/transgender activism from which he wishes to disassociate himself from. One may only speculate here, but perhaps Campuzano is attributing to Jana a claim for authenticity, and at the same time rejecting it. In this sense, Jana is an easy target since in Campuzano's story she seems to treasure an essentialist notion of femininity. This speculation lacks more substantial textual evidence, but at the same time one absence in particular is telling of the point I wish to make. In the previous (hi)stories Campuzano situates himself in relation to his protagonists in explicit terms. Campuzano describes Carla, Rosa and Gata as friends or disco's acquaintances. It's only in the story of Jana in which Campuzano avoids mentioning the kind of relationship, if any, they have to one another. Perhaps it is this absence that allows Campuzano to be more than unfriendly, but merciless, in his depiction of Jana.

What Campuzano is paradoxically denying in his fourth travesti hysterical practice is that travestis can speak back to the very stories he's crafted. Jana watches a family video, but she isn't able to recognize herself immediately. At first, Jana reads herself as "a strange man on the screen." But once she looks again; she doesn't foreclose herself from what she sees. Here, Campuzano doesn't seem to value the process through which a gendered "self" makes foreign and strange to itself. According to Campuzano, Jana couldn't describe what she felt during this encounter with her "former" self. Campuzano, though, believes himself to be able to grasp some of Jana's feelings: a mixture of pity, embarrassment and nostalgia. Jana's utterance "it seems that man should have happened a long time ago" doesn't sound, again, like a radical denial. Jana doesn't say that that "man" never happened. One could speculate that for Jana her travestismo is



a radical reimagination of her relationship with time. However, Campuzano's story doesn't allow one to raise such a question.

In "Reclaiming *Travesti* Histories," storytelling plays an important role, as evident with the travesti histories of Carla, Rosa, Gata, and Jana. And yet, one cannot but ask why Campuzano's storytelling practice is so conventional. For Clare Hemmings feminist theory is about "experimenting with how we might tell stories differently rather than telling different stories" (2011, 16). As we will see, Campuzano reads his own project as intimately related to feminist struggles, he tells different stories/histories of travestismo. Campuzano in this essay doesn't experiment (enough) with a practice of telling these stories differently. What at moments, and especially in Jana's story, is shocking is how often Campuzano uses heteronormative and male-centered social and political conventions to tell these stories. In these moments, it is impossible not to think that Campuzano's framing of "hysterical" practices may be more loyal to heteronormative gender dichotomies than one would like to acknowledge.

### **Travestismo as the Worst of Both Genders**

Campuzano's fifth travesti hysterical practice is "the worst of both gender roles" (37). Here, Campuzano doesn't leave much room for redemption. "*Travestis* have inherited the worst of both gender roles" (37). In Gata's story she "developed" or performed two genders. There wasn't an explicit dismissive appreciation on those gender traits. In his fifth hysterical practice, travestis not only "developed" two genders, but "inherited" the worst of the masculine and feminine social positionalities. Campuzano may again be using humor here, or that's what one would like to believe. But if this is a joke, it's a very cruel one. Aren't travestis here once more the object of social opprobrium?

This is the moment in the essay where Campuzano makes more explicit the stakes of his use of "hysteria": "Through their journey, from dresses to bodies, *travestis* have turned the 'hystericisation of the woman's body' – that Foucault argued in an early draft of his *Histoire de la Sexualité* – into an essence, and appropriated it within their own discourse; transmuting the violence outside and taking it inside their minds and bodies" (37). So, indeed Campuzano's use of hysteria is the masculine-centered and conventional one. Hysteria works in travestis, like in women, as an internalized form of self-destruction, or at least of self-punishment. Travestis takes the "hystericization" of the "woman's body" as an essence. In this account, travestis are dupes of heterosexual social and political norms. The bodily transformations of travestis hide a deeper transformation: Travestis transmute the violence of the outside world into their own minds and bodies. Without knowing it, travestis are their own worst enemies.

The fifth hysterical practice, "the worst of both gender roles," has the retrospective power of rewriting the previous four travesti histories. Carla is a victim who internalized beauty norms to the point of destroying her health. Rosa was very close to commit suicide choosing an authoritarian and violent male partner. Fortunately, in Campuzano's account, Rosa realizes that the anal orifice of her partner is the key to travesti emancipation. Gata internalizes the "outside" gender dyad onto her own body. Jana suffers because she cannot make peace with the "former" man she used to be.

Campuzano's reactionary tendencies cohabit with his most progressive views on travestismo. In the same section that corresponds to his fifth travesti hysterical practice, Campuzano states that: "*Travestis* need freeing from normative pressures, to enable them to actualise their own self-expression. Far from being unreflexive products of culture, travestis

undergo critical processes of self-examination, which might usefully be deployed in a wider context” (37-38). According to Campuzano travestis may have inherited the worst of both genders, but they are not “unreflexive products.” Travestis engage with processes of “self-examination,” and, we might add, of self-critique and self-reinvention. Campuzano’s take on travestismo is at moments explicitly contradictory. In this quote, it seems that for Campuzano, in travestis lies a world-(re)making potential (“which might usefully be deployed in a wider context”). Here Campuzano is almost echoing Monique Wittig’s take on the name “lesbian.”

Monique Wittig argues that heterosexuality is simultaneously the cause and the consequence of the category of sex. On the one hand, “the category of sex is the political category that founds society as heterosexual” (1992, 5). On the other hand, “the category of sex is the product of a heterosexual society in which men appropriate for themselves the reproduction and production of women and also their physical persons by means of a contract called the marriage contract” (6). Like with Campuzano’s own inconsistencies, one can forgive Wittig’s own inconsistencies in her argument for the sake of its more radical implications. For Campuzano “it is not simply a matter of assigning *travestis* a unique gender or sexuality, not taking for granted their homosexuality or their desire to become a genital woman” (37). This is a timid plea for not thinking of travestis and travestismo within the hegemonic logics of cisgender heterosexuality. Wittig is more radical in this respect: “the category of sex is a totalitarian one... It grips our minds in such a way that we cannot think outside of it. This is why we must destroy it and start thinking beyond it if we want to start thinking at all, as we must destroy the sexes as a sociological reality if we want to start to exist” (8). One might wonder if for Campuzano given that travestis “inherited the worst of both genders” they can only aspire to a beyond “both genders.” Travestis, for Campuzano, like Monique Wittig’s lesbians, work in the struggle of living and thinking beyond “the straight mind.”

In Wittig’s most utopian moment “a lesbian *has* to be something else, a not-woman, a not-man, a product of society, not a product of nature, for there is no nature in society” (13). It seems that a travesti “has to be something else” also. There is an important difference in Campuzano’s and Wittig’s theories on the resistance to the existent sex-gender systems. Wittig champions the name “lesbian”: “Lesbian is the only concept I know of which is beyond the categories (woman and man), because the designate subject (lesbian) is *not* a woman, either economically, or politically, or ideologically” (20). Lesbians’ survival depends on the destruction of (the name) “woman” because “what makes a woman is a specific social relation to a man, a relation that we have previously called servitude” (20). Wittig’s idealizing of the name lesbian works because she turns the name “woman” almost into an abject. Campuzano is less coherent than Wittig. Campuzano believes that he can champion and also ridicule the name “travestis.” Campuzano perhaps is asking the names “travestis” and “travestismo” to do too much work. Or perhaps, like the “proletarian” subject the travesti subject needs to fight for her own eventual demise as a class.

To think Campuzano’s travesti subject as the worst of both genders has undeniable misogynistic and transphobic implications. It is almost as if the aggression against a specific travesti subject, Jana, of the previous story/history takes a more generalizable and radical form in this fifth travesti hysterical practice. It seems that Campuzano needs to undo a wide spread notion of travesti subjecthood in order to offer another path for a renewed travestismo. In *Empire of Signs*, Roland Barthes offers an analogous movement in relation to what he calls the “oriental transvestite.”

The transvestite actor (since the women's roles are played by men) is not a boy made up as a woman, by dint of a thousand nuances, realistic touches, costly simulations, but a pure signifier whose *underneath* (the truth) is neither clandestine (jealousy masked) nor surreptitiously signed (by a waggish wink at the virility of the support, as in Western drag shows: opulent blondes whose trivial hand simply *absented*; the actor, in his face, does not play the woman, or copy her, but only signifies her; if, as Mallarmé says, writing consists of "gestures of the idea," transvestism here is the gesture of femininity, not its plagiarism... (1982, 89)

Barthes seems to despise the naïf character of the "Western transvestite." In Barthes' account "the Western transvestite wants to be a (particular) woman, [whereas] the oriental actor seeks nothing more than to combine the signs of Woman." (91) Like in Campuzano's account, in Barthes' take there is an unexplored misogynistic undertone, since one may consider that the desire to be a woman that he condemns in the "Western transvestite" may also be present in many cisgender women. With that caveat in mind, it is important not to foreclose Barthes' nor Campuzano's theoretical contributions to thinking gender otherwise. If for Barthes "the Oriental transvestite does not copy Woman but signifies her" (53), perhaps for Campuzano the travesti subject as the worst of both genders also signifies the heteronormative (cis)gender polarity in order to expose it to much needed merciless critique. Campuzano's travesti seems to understand femininity, but also masculinity as signifiers that must be read critically.

### **Travestismo, Feminism, and Transfeminism**

The sixth travesti hysterical practice is "Post-feminist transgender?" This is the only one of Campuzano's hysterical typography that includes a question mark. Instead of an assertion, it is an interrogation. This last hysterical practice at first glance doesn't even appear to be one and clearly differs from the previous five as it makes no reference to internalized violence in travesti lives. Actually, it suggests that lastly the term the Campuzano champions is not travesti, but transgender. Importantly, this "transgender" is not only feminist, but "post-feminist." However, Campuzano never explicitly states the stakes of this "post." As such, this sixth hysterical practice demands closer inspection.

Where is the post-feminist transgender? When did vestments as symbols of power, the androgynous as double synonym of perfection, get lost? How did the enriching multiple points of view (before: a female within a male body; after: a male within a female body) as a major advantage, become denied? The effort to reclaim *travesti* subjectivity has ramifications that also affect women. The challenge to *travesti* exclusion is not enough by itself. It needs to be paralleled by studies of the subjectivities of Pre-Hispanic Peruvian women, to challenge the stereotypes that excludes and oppress them. The demand from *travestis* that they be recognised and empowered as the women they visibly are, challenges the stereotypes that the poverty and powerlessness of Peruvian women is natural, and can be allowed to remain. Thus the demand for *travesti* rights is inextricably bound up with the aims of the feminist movement to emancipate women, of all kinds, everywhere. (38)

Campuzano instead of beginning with the question “what is the post-feminist transgender?” asks “where is the post-feminist transgender?” The question (“where...?”) already presumes the existence of the “post-feminist transgender.” Then, Campuzano makes a link with the past, with the pre-Hispanic androgynous. Campuzano is suggesting here that the “Post-” feminist transgender may be found in the “Pre-” Hispanic (cis)gender system. At this point it seems that the question mark in “Post-feminist transgender?” may be interrogating the “post-” part. This is another instance in Campuzano’s project where it is clear that he is attempting to gesture towards a different relation to temporality.

Campuzano while speaking on the “post-feminist transgender?” introduces the name “travesti.” In this case travesti subjectivity isn’t relegated exclusively to travesti people and communities. Women themselves can be transformed by their encounter with travestismo. Campuzano also reclaims for (cisgender) women as for travestis a bond with Pre-Hispanic subjectivities. Returning to the past for travestis and women alike is a necessity in Campuzano’s view. Reading the previous five travesti hysterical practices from the perspective of this last one makes for a different point of view to emerge. The previous five travesti hysterical practices refer to travesti investments in Hispanic (naturalizing and colonizing) notions of femininity. For Campuzano, to transform the body according to cisgender feminine ideals of beauty, the choice to be with violent machos for partners, the denial of their penis and the pleasure of penetrating, and the rejection of their “former” male subjectivities and embodiments can only lead to travesti’s losing. This is why travestis unknowingly “inherited the worst of both genders.”

By the sixth hysterical practice, Campuzano seems to offer some redemption for the name travesti, that he at several moments in the essay denies. Unlike Wittig’s lesbian that in her struggle needs to reinvent the whole world from scratch, Campuzano’s travestis need to look to the past. In the Pre-Hispanic past, the seeds for a different present and future lie. The past needs to be revised and opened up in order to imagine different gendered and sexual worlds. For Campuzano the struggles for “travesti rights” are “inextricably bound” with feminism. The “post-feminist transgender” is feminist or, I dare say, transfeminist.

Campuzano’s “post-feminist transgender” resonates with some takes on transfeminism. For instance, for transfeminist theorists Susan Stryker and Talia M. Bettcher:

*Transfeminismo*, rather than imagining itself as the articulation of a new form of postidentitarian sociality (as queer did), is considered a polemical appropriation of, and a refusal of exclusion from, existing feminist frameworks that remain vitally necessary; the trans- prefix not only signals the inclusion of trans\* people as political subjects within feminism but also performs the lexical operation of attaching to, dynamizing, and transforming an existing entity, pulling it in new directions, bringing it into new arrangements with other entities. (2016, 12)

According to Stryker and Bettcher the prefix trans- of transfeminismo dynamizes and transforms feminism. Like in Campuzano’s work, the prefix trans- embraces the virtualities of time. This gesture allows for the recognition of the opening up and embracement of feminisms that are yet to come as an integral part to feminist thinking and practice. In a similar vein, queer theorists Karine Espineira and Marie H el ene/Sam Bourcier argue that “*feminism* is a noun without a verb form, but *trans* is grammatically polymorphous. *Trans* is not about resignification; rather, it is about rematerialization. It can be a noun as well as a prefix that attaches to and dynamizes other words, providing new directions for them, bringing both feminism and queerness into new

assemblages” (2016, 90). The polymorphous character of the prefix *trans-* is something that Campuzano’s project undeniably treasures. Indeed, if Campuzano’s “postfeminist transgender” is transfeminist, the pre-Hispanic androgynous may also be transfeminist.

The nexus between the prefixes *trans-* and *pre-* is particular in Campuzano’s theories of travestismo, and what makes it different from widespread accounts of transfeminism, or even of transfeminismo. The bonds between the prefixes *trans-*, *pre-*, and even *post-* in Campuzano’s account are related to his radical critique of Western gendered and sexual colonialism. For Campuzano, travestis and women need to look back to the past, but from a trans-feminist perspective or standpoint. Elsewhere Campuzano has clearly stated that “el cuerpo travesti ya no heredero de clichés prefeministas sino como preservación del andrógino originario y de la teatralidad católica” [the travesti body is no longer heir to pre-feminist clichés but is a preservation of the original androgynous and Catholic theatricality] (2013, 73).

In the final part of the essay, Campuzano continues making the case for a critical return to the past:

For Peru’s *travestis* the struggle for rights and for recognition can be fortified if only we could reclaim our history. Revisiting Pre-Hispanic traditions that show the existence of in-between genders reveals how we have been forced to fit colonial gender binaries. Peruvian *travestis* are not alone: indigenous transgender identities existed across cultures, space and time the world over, suppressed and reviled by colonial Christianities. Reclaiming our history calls for us not only to reconstitute the inclusive culture of the past, but to reclaim *travesti* identities in all their variety. We need to enquire into *travesti* pasts in all regions of our country to affirm *travestis* in the present, and build respect for contemporary travestis’ desires and needs, whether as consumers, religious people, sex workers, bisexuals, parents or women. (38)

The *travestis* return to the past is an exercise of “revisiting.” Revisiting the Pre-Hispanic past denaturalizes the Colonial present. This denaturalization also goes against the reification of “colonial gender binaries.” The “in-between genders” that Campuzano champions at this final point of the essay resonates with the “in-between times” that his theoretical and political project proposes. The “Re” before the verb “visiting” suggests that Campuzano’s is not a naïf investment in an actual return to a petrified past. Campuzano, someone so invested in trans-feminist politics and theories, cannot simply take for granted the existence of a previous *travesti* “matriarchy-like” world.

Campuzano’s return to the past also makes the case for the possibility of coalitional politics. In his own words “Peruvian *travestis* are not alone.” “Indigenous transgender identities existed across culture, space, and time...” The “in-between genders” opens up the space for imagining “in-between” cultures, spaces, and times. In this argument, “Colonial Christianities” attempted to eradicate most of the “indigenous transgender identities.” And they partially succeed in this murderous enterprise, as in the case of the pre-Hispanic androgynous that interests Campuzano so much. And yet, there are debris and remnants of those “in-between genders” in the present. For Campuzano, “travestis” is a name for some of the heirs of those mediators of genders, sexualities, spaces and times. This *travesti* inheritance seems also to be a burden for the psychic lives of many *travestis*. This is why Campuzano invests so much time and energy exploring these so-called “hysterical practices.” The *travesti* hysterical practices at this

point in the essay look as the price that travestis pay for even daring to inhabit in-between genders, sexes, times and spaces. For Campuzano the hysterical practices are symptomatic of a colonial genocide of gender that took place in the past, and that was never acknowledged as such. Hysteria in travestis is a reminder that travesti survival can never be taken for granted.

The travesti return to the past must affirm the travesti life of the present. Campuzano's project is a plea to stop the colonial extermination of in-between genders, times and spaces. This is why Campuzano mobilizes the notion of "respect." Again, this is not a naïve investment in respectability politics. Campuzano in this plea includes many travesti social roles, including travesti sex work. "Build respect for contemporary travestis' desires and needs" in order to stop a gender-genocide. Of course, one may also argue, that Campuzano himself disrespects some of the protagonists of his stories/histories while making his case. In any case, what one cannot accuse Campuzano, in the essay under consideration, is of being indulgent with contemporary travesti lives.

Campuzano closes the essay reflecting on travestis as gendered subjects: "Travestis are indeed objects of gender. But they are also subjects, capable of gender self-determination, as many feminists in the 1960s demanded. It is time to listen to the wide range of critical inter-sex and transgender narratives and learn from their problematisation of conventional gender thinking, and from their experiences" (38). Indeed, in "Reclaiming *Travesti* Histories" Campuzano creates a space for "inter-sex and transgender narratives." Campuzano also establishes a difference between being an object and a subject of gender. The subjects of gender are "capable of self-determination." The objects of gender presumably are not. Campuzano encourages listening to travesti histories of Carla, Gata, Rosa and Jana. And yet, Campuzano classifying these travesti histories as "hysterical practices" also forecloses possible entries into these travesti histories. Campuzano would agree with queer theorist Gayle Salamon, for whom "how we embody gender is how we theorize gender, and to suggest otherwise is to misunderstand both theorization and embodiment" (2010, 81). That's why Campuzano recognizes Carla, Gata, Rosa and Jana as theorists of gender. Nevertheless, Campuzano seems to believe that he is a better theorist of gender than the four protagonists of his histories. Such a belief is not only an elitist one, but it goes against the stakes of Campuzano's overall project.

In the final sentence of "Reclaiming *Travesti* Histories" Campuzano sounds stiff, using a language destined to cater to the institution that financed part of his work. "Applying the principle of gender relativity would result in a healthier and wiser development, one in which people can claim their rights to combine genders, to transit and to choose" (38). Campuzano reframes his theory of gender as "gender relativity." For him, taking such a theory of gender relativity seriously would enable a better world, that he, in a nod to the language of NGO's, calls a "healthier and wiser development." Campuzano also puts emphasis on the verbs "transit" and "choose." One cannot help but think that Campuzano wishes to conclude his essay as a humorous theorist, and perhaps he is mimicking the (neo)liberal language of the individual who is essentially a being who chooses.

Even though, Campuzano doesn't conclude with art, the last sentence of the penultimate paragraph does more justice to his project. There, Campuzano states his utopian belief in art's political power. "As this article suggests, and as activities such as the *Travesti* Museum of Peru – a travelling exhibition celebrating pre-Hispanic and contemporary *travesti* culture – demonstrate, art's political dimension can be useful to powerful effect in this struggle" (38). Gonzalo Portocarrero's echoing this belief asserts that "el arte recrea lo social a partir de entender lo dado como una materia plástica y moldeable. Entonces no se trata solo de representar los estratos más

profundos de la realidad, sino de imaginar los mundos que allí están contenidos” [art recreates the social from understanding the given as a plastic and moldable matter. Then it is not only a question of representing the deepest strata of reality, but of imagining the worlds contained there] (2015b, 8). Like transfeminism, art is of pivotal importance in Campuzano’s project of denaturalizing gender, because “that’s what art is about: a crossing” (Cixous 2012, 18). Travestismo for Campuzano seems also to be a living proof of the power of the arts. Ultimately, Campuzano present himself as a travesti artist because for him travestismo is the most sublime art of all.

### **Coda: The Afterlives of Travesti Performance**

In 2013 Giuseppe Campuzano (1969-2013) passed away. For those of us who were Campuzano’s friends, readers, and *compañeros de lucha* [comrades in struggle], what we lament most about this painful loss is all that Campuzano had left to offer. At the time of his death Campuzano’s *Museo Travesti* was gaining international recognition, and his theoretical work was beginning to be part of hemispheric and transnational discussions. The curator Miguel López did us an enormous favor by editing a posthumous collection including most of Campuzano’s writings, *Saturday Night Thriller y otros escritos 1998-2013*. Most of these collected essays and creative pieces are deserving of their own detailed close readings. These essays aren’t a unified corpus, nor do they portray a single picture of travestismo. Campuzano didn’t have enough time to continue exploring and complicating the limits of his own original thinking.

Miguel López, as an editor, faced a challenge: How to translate performance? How to translate Campuzano’s performances into book format? How to do justice to the fact that Campuzano was an “artist,” an artist-activist that “use[s] performance to intervene in political contexts, struggles, and debates” (Taylor 2016, 147). Luckily, *Saturday Night Thriller y otros escritos 1998-2013* succeeds in attempting to translate Campuzano’s performances. From the book cover one can feel that performance is at the center. The book cover is black, and the book is a bit heavy. The most eye-catching element in the cover is a religious *estampita* [stamp] with the picture of Campuzano performing as a saint travesti. The picture demands a close reading of its own, one that I will not indulge in here. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that the *estampita* makes the book as a whole unconventional. The protuberance of the *estampita* makes the book almost unfit for a bookshelf. As if the book is demanding to be exhibited and shared, and not to be forgotten in a pile.

As performance theorist Diana Taylor reminds us “placing an event/image outside of its familiar context or frame can be, in itself, an act of intervention” (2016, 17). The image of a travesti Saint Giuseppe is a reminder that religious Catholic symbols occupy an important place in Campuzano’s oeuvre. In a way, “Reclaiming *Travesti* Histories” is exceptional in his oeuvre because there are no explicit references to Catholic religion and rituals. One can only infer that in “Reclaiming *Travesti* Histories” Catholic religion is part of the baggage of the colonizing gender dyad that we would do well to emancipate ourselves from. Elsewhere Campuzano seems very skeptical of dominant forms of secularism: “Travestis empecinadas en los rituales por un mundo que, cree, los ha superado, habiéndolos suplantado tan sólo” [Travestis, insistent on the rituals for a world that, believes, has surpassed them, having altered them alone] (2008, 74).

Unavoidably, so much of the power of Campuzano’s performances are lost once they are translated into book format or essay format. Of course, in loss there are also some gains. Perhaps it is in trying to compensate the almost vanishing of performance in “Reclaiming *Travesti*

Histories,” that Campuzano chooses to centralize storytelling in his argumentative construction. Indeed, in that essay “Reclaiming Travesti Histories” Campuzano’s stories don’t always follow his most explicit or avowed intentions. In this chapter I have suggested some of the forms by which Campuzano’s storytelling goes against (or works in tangential ways in relation) to his central claims. López as editor knew very well about the dilemma of translating Campuzano’s performance into publishable work. This is why López included so many images, especially photographs, in *Saturday Night Thriller y otros escritos 1998-2013*. Most of these photographs, like Campuzano stories, don’t exemplify or prove his theoretical arguments. Indeed, many of these photographs attempt to translate Campuzano’s performances.

López includes six pictures in the translated edition of “Reclaiming *Travesti Histories*” in *Saturday Night Thriller*. Five of them are a material record of photographer Frank García “Photon” of Campuzano’s performance *TransformaT* (2006). The name of the performance insists on the transformative power of the “T”, a T that may stand for travesti and trans. The name *TransformaT* is also a direct interpellation to the viewer and reader. *TransformaT* sounds exactly like *transformate* [transform yourself], which is a verb in the imperative mode addressed to the singular second person, you. Indeed, Campuzano invites his readers to engage in transformations across genders, sexes, times, and spaces. Similarly, film theorist Kaja Silverman writes of photography as “the world’s primary way of revealing itself to us” (2015, 10). If this is the case, what worlds reveal to us through these five photographs? The five photographs show us Campuzano and María Gracia Morán, apparently a cisgender woman. The readers/viewers don’t have any way of knowing what kind of bond unites Campuzano and Morán. In the photographs, they seem friendly to each other. Three of the five photographs portray the preparation of a disruptive gender performance. Campuzano and Morán are transforming their bodies. What the photographs record is the process of gender transformation. The viewers don’t have any way of knowing the “before” to the transformation event. Perhaps the photographs suggest that there is no before to transformation. Morán and Campuzano are dressed in tight black attire making so that both bodies resonate with each other. The photographs don’t presuppose that one gendered presentation is the original and the other the copy. Actually, the transformative promise and process make everyone alike. Perhaps “to recognize oneself in another is to recognize him or her as another embodiment of the same flesh” (Silverman 2009, 43), and of a flesh that never remains the same.

The other two photographs show us Campuzano and Morán posing for the photographer’s frame in what seems to be a museum or art gallery. However, the specific location of this performance is not specified though and it’s unclear whether there were spectators to this performance. In any case “a performance implies an audience or participants, even if that audience is a camera” (Taylor 2016, 19). There is a prominent element in these two photographs, the black and Medusa-like hair of Morán. The prosthesis in Morán’s head, that look like Medusa’s hair, extend to Campuzano’s body. In this performance, the transformative process suspends the clear borders between both bodies. Morán’s defiant appearance may also remind us that “the body does not stay in its own place” (Butler 2015, 149), and that especially the hair does not stay in its own place. The first of these two photographs show Morán laughing and with her eyes closed. She is almost giving her back to the camera, exposing a black tattoo on her naked back that extends the Medusa-effect of her hair. In the second photograph Morán looks directly to the camera, perhaps defying the future viewers of the image and their conventions. As Hélène Cixous writes “you only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she’s not deadly. She’s beautiful and she’s laughing” (2010, 38).



Echoing Morán's medusa-like hair, Campuzano's black attire covers most of his face and makes him look almost non-human, and serpent-like. Campuzano's lips are stressed and magnified with two different colors of lipstick. On his upper lip he wears a strong red color that resembles almost a red moustache. And on his bottom lip he wears black. Campuzano's lips are certainly not the Irigarayan lips that touch themselves and invest mostly in autoeroticism. Campuzano's lips and gender presentation here wouldn't be read as "travesti" by most people. Indeed, some of the controversy around Campuzano's deployment of "travestismo" has to do with the fact that for many, especially many travestis, Campuzano's gender presentation is actually "drag." Campuzano himself offers a definition of "drag" and travesti" in a glossary that concludes his book *Museo Travesti del Perú*. "Lo drag puede corresponder a una profesión, pero no a un estilo de vida, como sí el travestismo" [Drag can correspond to a profession, but not a way of life, as travestismo does] (89). It is rather curious that Campuzano reads "drag" as a profession, and not as way of life like he does with travestismo. Campuzano adds in his glossary that "el travesti se desarrolla a un nivel cotidiano, mientras el drag queen lo 'performa'" [the travesti develops himself daily, through the quotidian, while the drag queen 'performs' it] (89). Campuzano elsewhere reclaims the name "travesti" for himself and his project, and yet in his quotidian life his gender presentation was normatively masculine and remained more loyal to this first name than most other travestis. Importantly, Campuzano referred to himself using male pronouns. This is to say that Campuzano's *TransformaT* performance, and his life on an ordinary basis, doesn't necessarily align itself with his own theories regarding gender, and sexuality.

Campuzano offers this definition of travesti in the glossary of his *Museo Travesti del Perú*. "Persona que asume las características del 'sexo opuesto'. Éste, aunque un propósito legítimo, resulta en un compuesto de características masculinas y femeninas que, si bien toda persona posee en distintos niveles, el travesti explicita mientras comprueba las inadecuadas normas de género imperantes—lo masculino y femenino exclusivos" [Person who assumes the characteristics of the 'opposite sex.' This, although legitimate, results in a composite of masculine and feminine characteristics that, even though every person possesses at different levels, the travesti makes explicit while ascertain the inadequate prevailing gender norms—the exclusive masculine and feminine] (89). Travesti exposes the inadequacy and illegitimacy of gender norms. Campuzano almost echoes Judith Butler's take on "drag" here. "In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency" (Butler [1990]2006, 187). What is curious about this Butlerian echo is that it destabilizes Campuzano's consistency. In and through performance Campuzano makes room for many different takes on travestismo, including his own multiple (and sometimes contradictory) views on travestismo. This is another instance where Campuzano's performances work as less prescriptive terms than some of his own theories. Beyond that, Campuzano's performances remind us that "performance is world-making" (Taylor 2016, 208). Campuzano's performances allow to envision a world where the name "travestismo" is not only open to travestis, but also to drags, *transformistas*, cisgender women, transgender men, and to anyone who dares to dwell in endless transformation.

## Chapter Four

### The Urgent Promise of a Travesti Nosotrxs

We—Such a difficult pronoun! The difficulty lays in the fact that any utterance of a “we” raises questions of competing notions of community and belonging. “We” can also suggest the solidification of a desire to not only speak, but to speak in a collective way. Some of the discontents of such a pronoun may be more obvious in the Spanish language. The pronoun *nosotros* is unavoidably marked by gender even as it claims universality. However, every time one hears or speaks the presumably neutral *nosotros*, the absence of the feminine *nosotras* is made visible even if in a ghostly and disavowed form. *Nosotras* marks a female collective that cannot aspire to the same horizon of universality as its masculine counterpart. And yet in the case of Peru, *nosotros* is not only a problematic pronoun due to its gendered dimension, but also its racial signification. To say *nosotros* in Peru is particularly challenging due to the legacy of colonialism and racism very much alive in Peru.

*Nosotros* can be elusive, and yet there is a pervasive desire to sustain it. In *La urgencia por decir “nosotros”*: *Los intelectuales y la idea de nación en el Perú republicano* [The Urgency to Say “Us”: Intellectuals and the Idea of Nation in Republican Peru] (2015a), sociologist Gonzalo Portocarrero explores the troubling urgency for affirming a *nosotros* in Peru of the XX and XXI century. Portocarrero’s project begins with an exploration of one of the most widespread *nosotros* in Peru, a *nosotros* that is attached to a powerful adjective: *criollo* [creole]. Portocarrero defines *el criollo*, one of the idealized subjectivities of the Peruvian nation, as “negación de lo indígena. Entonces, la ambivalencia es sustancial al criollo al mismo tiempo que invalida lo indígena y se apropia de su historia y de la justicia de su reclamo” [“negation of the indigenous. Then, ambivalence is substantial to the creole at the same time as it invalidates the indigenous and appropriates its history and the justice of its claim”] (123). As Portocarrero makes explicit in his reading, any effort in Peru to affirm a *nosotros* that is based on *la subjetividad criolla* [creole subjectivity] is destined to fail, due to its paranoid racism. A *nosotros criollos* is a sort of oxymoron that will have to vacate and erase endlessly its indigenous markers. A *nosotros criollos* is a promise, but one far from being utopian. An unachievable and authoritarian promise that condemns as abject anything and everything marked as *indio* or *cholo*.

Performance theorist Diana Taylor writes that the Peruvian “national imaginary is shaped not only by what it chooses to remember, but also by what it chooses to forget... Peruvians participate by forgetting, not just by remembering” (2003, 196). A *nosotros criollos*, in order to be sustained, chooses to forget race. According to feminist scholar Rita Segato there is a systematic forgetting (and foreclosure) of race in the Americas: “al continente le cuesta hablar del color de la piel y de los trazos físicos de sus mayorías” [the continent has difficulty speaking about the color of skin and the physical features of its majority inhabitants] (2015, 215). Nevertheless, in Portocarrero’s account this forgetting of race is more radical in Peru and constitutive of its character as a “modern nation.” Portocarrero turns to another *nosotros*, one that promises not to forget race so easily: *nosotros mestizos*. And yet, the amnesic continuities between a *nosotros criollos* and a *nosotros mestizos* become palpable from the very beginning. Portocarrero goes on to say:

El mestizo oscila entonces entre un admiración, que termina siendo una autoinjuria, por lo blanco-occidental y, de otro lado, un desprecio, no exento de ternura, por lo indígena-nativo. El criollismo es un compromiso necesariamente

superficial, pues reprime el dolor de la injuria y el apego de la ternura para definir al mestizo—simplemente—como un criollo más, alguien que admira lo occidental y desprecia lo indígena.

[The mestizo then oscillates between an admiration, which ends up being self-denial, for the western-white and, on the other hand, a contempt, not exempt of tenderness, for the indigenous-native. Creolism is a necessarily superficial compromise, because it represses the pain of injury and the attachment of tenderness to define the mestizo—simply—as a creole, someone who admires the western and despises the indigenous] (259).

This account of the mestizo subject in Peru differs greatly from Gloria Anzaldúa's *mestiza*. Anzaldúa's *mestiza* is a fluid subject that defies borders and gatekeepers. *Mestizo* according to Portocarrero works in Peru as a form of affirming a phantasmatic continuity and loyalty to whiteness, and at the same time forgets any bond or kinship with indigeneity.

*Nosotros*—Such a difficult pronoun: neither *criollo*, nor *mestizo*. For Portocarrero “es reveladora la falta de un nombre convincente que, para empezar, la población designada asuma y reconozca como propio. Esta situación no puede ser gratuita y obedece sin duda a una falta de consenso entre los que tienen el poder de nombrar y aquellos que suelen ser nombrados” [“it is revealing of the lack of a convincing name that, to begin with, the designated population assumes and recognizes as its own. This situation cannot be wanton and is undoubtedly due to a lack of consensus among those who have the power to name and those who are usually named”] (334-335). According to Portocarrero, there is no agreement between those who are supposed to assign names and those who are supposed to receive them. This lack of agreement is consubstantial with Peru's process of becoming a nation. Many of the different political projects invested in creating a *nosotros*, implicitly a *nosotros peruanos*, have taken for granted the lack of voice of *cholos* and *cholas*. So what about the signifier *cholo*? Portocarrero explains,

El término “cholo” está aún cargado de connotaciones negativas. Lentamente está siendo resignificado, y el germen de este proceso se basa en potenciar las escasas resonancias positivas que el término siempre contuvo, tal como aludir a alguien recio y luchador. No obstante, tampoco es que sea asumido “a boca llena”, con orgullo, por la población que designa. “Cholo” es un término aún demasiado controversial. La mayoría prefiere el menos cargado de “mestizo”

[The term “cholo” is still loaded with negative connotations. Slowly it is being resignified, and the germ of this process is based on enhancing the few positive resonances that the term always contained, such as alluding to someone tough and fighter. However, it is neither assumed “with full mouth,” with pride, by the population that it designates. “Cholo” is still too controversial. Most prefer the less loaded “mestizo”] (335).

In certain Anglo-speaking contexts “queer” became a noun through which a “we” can affirm itself, even if problematically. *Cholo*, however, is a name more difficult to redeem. As a signifier, *cholo* seems to be associated with a form of paralyzing shame. To call oneself *cholo* using the first person pronoun, either singular or plural, is still full of discontents. Most of the

limits and possibilities of the name *cholo* have to do with its proximity to indigenous subjectivities. If *cholo* is a name that is timidly assumed in the first person, *indio* [Indian] or *indígena* [indigenous] is disavowed even more. According to anthropologist Marisol de la Cadena “the word *Indian* must have been a knot of translational tension. While the term has acquired a positive valence in the United States, this is not the case in Latin America. In Cuzco, and I would say also in Peru as a whole, the word ‘Indian’ is an insult; it denotes a miserable social condition that those who may fall into the category...distance themselves from” (2015, 220-221). The simultaneous difficulty and urgency of saying *nosotros* in Peru, that Portocarrero cleverly maps and identifies, has to do with the impossibility of assuming a *nosotros cholos* or *nosotros indios* as a nation.

### **A troubling T: Between B and Q?**

In Peru, *nosotros* is a difficult pronoun to affirm, especially without endorsing a colonial legacy of racism. This has been and continues to be one of the biggest challenges of LGBTQ politics and activism in Peru. What does it mean to desire a *nosotros peruanos*, when such a pronominal construction is itself an unachievable utopia? Moreover, isn't the desire for a *nosotros peruanos* heterosexist and racist by definition? The assumption of the acronym LGBT in Peru dates from the early 2000's. This was within a context of political possibilities in Peru after the fall of the authoritarian and conservative government of Alberto Fujimori.<sup>20</sup> In that context, “LGBT” promised a more habitable horizon from which to reclaim a *nosotros* that was neither heterosexual nor exclusively homosexual or lesbian. Still, a *nosotros* LGBTQ is a polemical terms in its own right. The acronym both affirms inclusion at the same time it undoes the pronoun *nosotros*.

Often times the T is the final letter of the acronym. Sometimes the T is between a B and a Q, or between a B and an I. Regardless in all cases the T is the more troubling letter of the acronym. The T makes difficult the possibility of a *nosotros* LGBTQ. Why? Perhaps it is due to the fact that it is unclear in Peru whether the T stands for trans, as a sort of umbrella term, or for transgender, or for travesti. Within the acronym LGBTQ trans or transgender makes a sort of alignment of Peruvian LGBTQ politics within an international (political and theoretical) framework. Travesti, however, plays a more paradoxical role. Paraphrasing Gayle Rubin one could say that travestis are at the bottom of “a hierarchical system of sexual value” (2011, 149). However, travestis are not only at the bottom of the sexual and gender respectability hierarchy. Travestis are also at the bottom of racial hierarchies within LGBTQ communities. Perhaps it is the intimate relationship between travesti and *cholo/a* that is particularly troubling for any effort to sustain a *nosotros* LGBTQ.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps it is the T of Travesti that exposes how a *nosotros*

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<sup>20</sup> Alberto Fujimori governed Peru from 1990 to 2000. He is currently incarcerated in Peru for his role in human right violations and systematic corruption. During his government, and betraying his political base and campaign promises, neoliberal policies were put in place through a presidential coup (in 1992) that dissolve the Congress.

<sup>21</sup> According to feminist scholar and poet Violeta Barrientos Peruvian, since its origins LGBTQ activism has faced a similar dilemma. In her words: “El Mhol ha existido desde 1982, fundado por intelectuales de izquierda y amadrinado por el feminismo peruano como parte de la ‘liberación sexual’. Desde su creación, tuvo en claro una identidad ‘chola’ que rechazaba el clasismo y el racismo” [Mhol has existed since 1982, founded by left-wing intellectuals and enshrined by Peruvian feminism as part of the ‘sexual liberation.’ Since its inception, it has had a clear ‘chola’ identity that rejects classism and racism] (2017, 185).

LGBT is not beyond race, but is itself a racialized construction especially when disavowed and silenced.

The gender and racial politics of language mobilize this chapter. In particular, I examine the play *Desde Afuera* [From the Outside]. *Desde Afuera* directed by Gabriel De la Cruz and Sebastián Rubio is an LGBTQ theater production by the “No Tengo Miedo” [I’m not Afraid] collective, which debuted on June 21, 2014. Its first season consisted of thirteen dates with its first four dates coinciding with the celebrations of “Orgullo LGBT” in Lima, Peru. A year later, thanks to its critical acclaim, *Desde Afuera* had a second season in June 2015 with four more dates. Throughout this chapter I explore the tensions and possibilities that *Desde Afuera* represents and performs in its (de)construction of a *nosotros* LGBTQ. My reading pays special attention to the T of the acronym LGBTQ. Within the play the T stands for transgender, transsexual, trans, and travesti. Sometimes these designations work simultaneously together and at other times are placed in juxtaposition to one another.

The title of the play, *Desde Afuera*, stresses the systematic condition of exclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and travesti subjects from an idealized *nosotros peruanos*. The title marks an outside usually condemned to silence in contemporary public discussions in Peru. And yet one wonders if there is perhaps more than one outside. This is one of the tensions that the play stages and explores. The forms of violence that Peruvian lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgenders, and travestis in Peru face, and that the play refers to are not the same systematically. *Desde Afuera* presents itself as *teatro testimonial* [testimonial theater], or as an activist proposal. The five actors of the play were cast to perform “themselves” and their struggles in contemporary Peru.

*Desde Afuera* contributes to the collective effort of producing public spaces of encounter in which LGBTQ communities can tell their stories, and attempts to produce and perform a *nosotros*, that actually is a *nosotrxs*. Unlike the masculine *nosotros*, *nosotrxs* is both a gender neutral term that critiques the gender binary. In the case of contemporary Peru, using the reading of Portocarrero, the construction of a *nosotrxs* LGBTQ is an important achievement. In the case of *Desde Afuera*, the *nosotrxs peruanxs* LGBT that the play claims and stages is a construction and is not something that the play takes for granted. It is precisely in the effort of inventing a *nosotrxs peruanxs* LGBT, that travestismo plays a paradoxical role. Travestismo in the play appears both as the promise of a *nosotrxs*, and the barrier to such an effort.

### **The Intimacies of Male Homosexuality and Travestismo**

In *Desde Afuera*, Yefri (performed by Yefri Peña) is “the travesti” character. Yefri embodies travestismo, not only due to her own gender identifications and performances, but also her racially and classed marked social position. In the play, Yefri doesn’t identify as a *chola* or *india*, but several moments throughout the play implicitly mark her as such. At the beginning of the play, the five characters introduce themselves. Yefri says that she is a health promoter and an activist invested in HIV/AIDS prevention in trans communities. At thirty-six years old she is the second oldest character in the play. Her introduction clearly contrasts with Enrique (performed by Enrique Leguía). Enrique is fifty-six years old and describes himself as a Peruvian architect, and artist. Immediately after marking his national belonging, Enrique stresses that he has done professional projects in the United States, Europe, and the Middle East. He adds that he is currently single and has four kids. The contrast between Yefri and Enrique is evident at several moments throughout the play. Most notably in the contrast between Yefri’s brown skin and

Enrique's white complexion. Yefri wears comfortable sporty clothes, while Enrique's dresses more fashionably and is physically fit. Although one might read markers of effeminacy in Enrique's presentation, his body is unequivocally marked as male. Perhaps the moment in which Enrique departs from the other four characters and especially from Yefri further announces his class position when he mentions that somewhere in his family tree there is a former Peruvian president. One could speculate that the reference is to Augusto B. Leguía who served twice as president of Peru, from 1908 to 1912 and 1919 to 1930.

Indeed throughout the play class performs a central role in how each character gives an account of herself. In a scene entitled "Anécdotas de niños" [children's anecdotes], in which the five characters talk about their childhoods, Enrique remembers how he was the object of affection of his aunts; all of whom praised his beautiful blue eyes. He received many kisses and embraces from these aunts. He disliked such excessive attention. Yefri confesses that she has "una envidia sana" [a healthy envy] because her childhood wasn't a happy one. Stressing a mark that associates her with the signifier travestismo, Yefri goes on to state that since she was thirteen years old she was a sex worker.

In another scene the contrast between Yefri and Enrique is the main focus. Fittingly, the title of the scene is "Oposiciones" [Oppositions]. The scene starts with Yefri affirming that she was a sex worker. Immediately, Enrique says that *su primera vez* (his first sexual experience) was with a prostitute. He adds that this was a horrible experience. This exchange is not quite a dialogue, but not quite a monologue either. The voices of both characters follow one another while gazing directly at the audience:

Yefri: Fui prostituta. [I was a prostitute.]

Enrique: Mi primera vez fue con una prostituta y fue horrible. [My first time was with a prostitute and it was horrible.]

Yefri: Mi primer cliente no me gustó. [I didn't like my first client.]

Enrique: Yo salí traumatado. [I came out of it traumatized.]

Yefri: Yo también estaba traumada. [I was also traumatized.]

Enrique: Me tomó meses recuperarme. [It took me months to recover.]

Yefri: Yo tenía que adaptarme a la fuerza. [I had to force myself to adapt.]

Enrique: Yo fui empujado por mis amigos del colegio. [I was pressured into it by my school friends.]

Yefri: Yo lo hice por necesidad. [I did it out of necessity.]

The opposition between Yefri and Enrique is stressed through economic terms, but it marks a commonality surrounding trauma. Yefri didn't like her first client. For Yefri it was very hard to get used to sex work. Whereas Enrique was forced to "lose his virginity" with a sex worker by his male friends and peers, while Yefri was forced by necessity. *Desde Afuera*, like many cultural and political productions in contemporary Peru engages with silence in relation to race in contemporary Peru. However, in the contrast between Yefri and Enrique it is race that is marked more strongly:

Yefri: Vivo en Vitarte. [I live in Vitarte.]

Enrique: Miraflores

Yefri: Colegio estatal y laico [Public and laic school]

Enrique: Colegio privado y católico [Private and catholic school]

Yefri: Padres separados [Separated parents]  
Enrique: Familia unida [United family]  
Yefri: Papá de Piura, Huancabamba [Father of Piura, Huancabamba]  
Enrique: El mío es limeño, nacido en Paris. [Mine is from Lima, born in Paris.]  
Yefri: Mamá de Tarapoto [Mother of Tarapoto]  
Enrique: Mi mamá es de la hacienda, en Huarmey. [My mother is from the plantation, in Huarmey.]

Here Enrique is ambiguous, but pretentious in terms of marking the ascendancy of his kinship. Is his father French or a Peruvian born in France? It's unclear. The race of his mother is likewise ambiguous. Enrique says that her mother comes from Ancash, more specifically from Huarmey, and from a *hacienda*. Here, Enrique's class affiliations are marked as upper class, more specifically as owners of land and property. The next line is puzzling. Yefri says "mis abuelos son dueños de la mitad de la laguna de las Huaringas" [my grandparents own half of the Huaringas lagoon]. Puzzling because it doesn't make sense in relation to the previous accounts of Yefri's class and racial backgrounds. This line, then, is not only ironic, but is also engaging with a kind of mimetic style, mimicking the style of upper-class pretention that saturates Enrique's performance. It is a style that gestures towards a desire for stereotypical upper class femininity and gayness. Enrique, however, doesn't catch the irony of the statement. He immediately retorts: "Mi abuelo fue senador y mi tío bisabuelo fue Presidente del Perú" [My grandfather was a senator and my great grandfather was president of Peru]. Yefri's humor is both racialized and classed, more akin to the humor of *cómicos populares* [street comedians]. Most of the *cómicos populares* are Andean migrants and make use of their own displacement in racist landscapes. According to Víctor Vich "humor here is simultaneously a critique of material hardship (*escasez*) and a substitute for it" (2004, 51). This certainly seems to be the case when Yefri claims that her grandparents are owners of a lagoon, performing the intimate connection between humor and social critique, and suggesting her attachment to a notion of collective indigenous ownership. Enrique however, remains dense to Yefri's irony and social critiques.

Yefri: ¿Sabes? [You know?]  
Enrique: ¿Qué? [What?]  
Yefri: Me gustan los hombres maduros. [I like mature men.]  
Enrique: Me gustan los chicos jóvenes. [I like young guys.]

In interpellating Enrique, Yefri breaks with the monologue dynamic. More, she suggests with her gaze, gestures, and tone of voice that she may find Enrique attractive. Enrique playfully discards such an attraction and makes clear that he prefers masculine young men. In their dialogue, Yefri says that "la primera vedette trans que vi en la tele fue la Coco" [the first trans vedette I saw was Coco]. Yefri is referring to Coco Marusix, one of the firsts (and very few to date) trans celebrities in Peru. Enrique instead of commenting on Coco Marusix, mentions instead that "yo vi a la Coccinelle" [I saw Coccinelle]. Enrique here is referring to the famous French actress and performer Coccinelle, one of the first transsexual celebrities in Europe. Yefri knows that Enrique is mocking her dreams of glamorous femininity, personified by a famous diva such as Coco Marusix. She returns the blow: "En esa época yo aun no nacía" [I wasn't even born yet during that time period]. Implicitly, Yefri is calling Enrique an old faggot. The friendly and poisonous dialogue between both characters becomes nostalgic for Yefri. Yefri makes a

reference to another European diva, the Italian singer and performer Rafaella Carrà. “La primera vez que pisé un escenario hice el show de Rafaella Carrà” [The first time I stepped on a stage I did the show as Rafaella Carrà]. Yefri awakes the curiosity of Enrique, and he asks her about the beginnings of her professional work as a former trans performer.

In a screen, images of Coco Marusix appear. The audience is watching some of the images that inspired Yefri. Such images are important because in Yefri’s account this was the first time that a becoming homosexual/trans for her was crystallized as possible. “Cuando tenía catorce años, prendí la tele y vi que Gisela (Valcárcel) decía que iba a aparecer un homosexual bailarín muy conocido que se llamaba Coco Marusix. Ese día no fui al colegio para ver a Coco” [When I was fourteen, I turned on the TV and saw that Gisela (Valcárcel) was saying that a well-known homosexual dancer named Coco Marusix would appear. I didn’t go to school that day and instead went to see Coco]. Indeed, how many queer kids have been inspired by the beauty, glamour, and queerness of Coco Marusix! The thirteen-year old Yefri found in the image of her adored Coco the strength to perform in a working-class stage for the first time. This memory is playful and layered. Yefri watched the light-skinned Coco performing as Rafaella. In a way, then, Yefri’s performance doubles as an impersonation of both Rafaella, and her beloved Coco.

Taking into account Portocarrero’s argument, it is clear that in this scene *la dificultad de decir nosotros* is being performed. Every time the possibility of an affirmation of a *nosotros* between Yefri and Enrique appears in the horizon, Enrique disavows such possibility. Using Portocarrero’s language, Enrique investment is in *criollismo*, and in disavowing the *cholo* and *indio* that is materialized in the signifier travesti and Yefri’s body. Enrique’s performance aligns itself with a stereotypical version of cosmopolitan white gayness. In this sense, the scene performs some of the racialized encounters between the signifiers “gay” and “travesti.” For poet and anthropologist Néstor Perlongher “la actitud del travesti—y del marica afeminado en general—implicaría un distanciamiento, una ruptura con los prototipos de comportamiento y gestualidad masculinos, evidenciando una especie de ‘devenir mujer’” [the attitude of the travesti—and the effeminate fag in general—would imply a distance, a break with the prototypes of masculine behavior and gesture, evidencing a kind of ‘becoming woman’] (1999, 19). According to Perlongher the signifiers “travesti” and “marica” are both marked by the “feminine,” a becoming woman. Perlongher is obviously echoing the exemplar character Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari attribute to “becoming woman.” Deleuze and Guattari famously assert that “although all becomings are already molecular, including becoming-woman, it must be said that all becomings begin with and pass through becoming-woman. It is the key to all the other becomings” (1987, 277). Unlike Perlongher’s and Deleuze and Guattari’s embrace of the radical potential of “becoming woman,” this scene of *Desde Afuera* does not endorse the possibilities of a shared *devenir mujer* [becoming woman]. The *devenir mujer* of the *marica* is foreclosed. This scene is an important and complex one that stresses the differences between Yefri and Enrique, in order to clearly distinguish between the signifiers “travesti” and “gay.” Importantly however, *Desde Afuera* partially disavows such efforts. Enrique is not exclusively gay, or at the very least he has had straight sex before and romantic relationships with women. He was married with a woman, and has kids from that marriage. Coco Marusix, as Yefri rightfully recalls, was considered not the first trans celebrity of Peru, but the first homosexual one. In the Peruvian national imaginary, travesti instead of marking a radical scission between trans women and male homosexuals marks a continuity between both categories. Often what is disavowed in efforts to produce the “particularity” of trans and male homosexual identities is the



role race plays in such dynamics. The merit of Enrique and Yefri's exchange is that it makes visible the erasure of race from the rhetoric of mainstream homosexual identity politics.

The scene under discussion, "Oposiciones" [Oppositions,] is paradoxical. Yefri tells Enrique and the audience about her first time performing in a disco, inspired by her beloved Coco Marusix. "Bailé en la discoteca Uranio, con seis coreógrafos. Me puse mis medias de coco, mis plataformas de acrílico. Llevaba puesto el conchero y encima el calzón de lentejuelas, que usaban todas las vedettes. Y me fue muy bien." [I danced at Uranio discotheque, with six choreographers. I put on my coconut stockings, my acrylic platforms. I wore the conchero and on top of that my spangle underpants, which all the vedettes used. And it went really well]. Yefri recalls some images of her past in which travestismo opened possibilities not yet explored by her. Importantly, she makes reference to a *conchero*—a word that derives from *concha*. *Concha* is a name that in working class Peruvian communities references female genitals. So, *conchero* is a device or accessory that helps in the visual effort of the becoming *concha* of a penis. Here again, Enrique asks Yefri to define *conchero* for him, and for the audience. He claims to not know what *conchero* means. Enrique's curiosity of Yefri's first public performance as travesti is ultimately an invitation for her to show him how she danced that night. The audience joins Enrique in asking Yefri *a bailar*, to dance again.

According to art critic and feminist theorist Nelly Richard "la memoria designa una zona de asociaciones voluntarias e involuntarias que se mueve entre el pasado y el presente, ambos concebidos como formaciones incompletas en las que se entrelaza lo ya consumado con lo aún no realizado... el pasado es inconcluso" [memory designates an area of voluntary and involuntary associations that moves between the past and the present, both conceived as incomplete formations in which the already consummated and the not yet realized are intertwined...the past is unfinished] (2010, 16). Memory is not simply an exercise of remembering a petrified past. Memory, in Richard's account, shows time's contingency and the inability to secure closure of the past. Richard gives privileges to a notion of *memoria viva* [alive memory] "receptiva a los indisciplinamientos del presente" [receptive to the indisciplines of the present] (2010, 163-164). This is to say, the present is undisciplined, but also the past. "El pasado no es un tiempo irreversiblemente detenido y congelado en el recuerdo según el modo de lo *ya sido*. El pasado es un campo de citas atravesado por voluntades oficiales de tradición y continuidad pero, al mismo tiempo, por discontinuidades y cortes que frustran cualquier deseo unificante de un tiempo homogéneo" [The past is not a time irreversibly stopped and frozen in the reminiscence according to the mode of the *already been*. The past is a field of quotations crossed by official wills of tradition and continuity but, at the same time, by discontinuities and cuts that frustrate any unifying desire of a homogenous time] (2007, 110). Richard's theorization on the past, and her investment in its discontinuities, resonates with queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz's emphasis on the performative dimension of the past. According to Muñoz "it is important to call on the past, to animate it, understanding that the past has a performative nature, which is to say that rather than being static and fixed, the past does things. It is in this very way that the past is performative" (2009, 27-28). Richard and Muñoz suggest that the past is also present, and that the borders between the two are permeable. Such a permeability, I argue, is resonant with travestismo.

In the scene under discussion, Enrique, a character who disavows his bonds with travestismo, invites Yefri to reenact her first travesti public embodiment. And the memory that Yefri reenacts is one that breaks another important opposition between performer and audience. Similarly performance scholar David Román writes, "the imaginary line between audience and

company is finally obliterated” (1998, 80). The five members of the play appear on stage and Yefri attempts to teach them and the audience how to dance to the rhythm of Rafaella Carrà’s “Fiesta.” Richard stresses the potential of memory to undiscipline the present. This scene in particular stages the problematic division between male homosexuality and travestismo. In order for this division to work, the femininity inherent to male homosexuality must be disavowed, or at the very least recognized as an abandoned relic of the past, as any bond with *cholas* and *indias* subjectivities. For *criollismo*, *indio* is a name that signals a disavowed past. Travesti is a signifier that is marked as anachronistic, as a name that signals an attachment with racialized forms of femininity, that for many seem stereotypical and outdated. And yet, Yefri, thanks to the invitation of Enrique, makes an appeal of travestismo as full of possibilities. Travestismo appears as a memory that disturbs the normalizing desires of contemporary LGBTQ politics in Peru. Travestismo resists the trappings of the LGBTQ acronym and instead reclaims itself as powerful and capable of disruption.

According to queer theorist Deborah Vargas “the power of music is not so much in its function as a mode of cultural resistance as in a mode of submission to inappropriate desires and sexual acts” (2012, 64). In this scene, Yefri reclaims travestismo as an embodied memory. And it is music, a musical memory, the one that returns to the present a set of “inappropriate” desires and sexual possibilities. The audience starts to applaud and to dance. It is almost as if the audience is witnessing Yefri’s first embodiment of travestismo. Instead of passive audience members attending *Desde Afuera* in such middle class spaces as Centro Cultural España or Universidad del Pacífico, the audience can instead imagine itself as attending the working class *disco de ambiente*, Uranio. On the stage, Enrique clearly enjoys the dance sequence. His body seems trapped by the rhythm of Rafaella’s song. Perhaps unexpectedly, Enrique (as the audience) engages with travestismo as a form of musical memory that disturbs the LGBT investments in respectability and an idealized and implicit whiteness. Bodies start to move, dance and clap in unexpected ways, engaging in what theater scholar Ramón H. Rivera-Servera calls “*choreographies of resistance*, embodied practices through which minoritarian subjects claim their space in social and cultural realms” (2012, 161).

## **The Gender of Travestismo**

Transgender studies scholar Susan Stryker’s writing about transsexual sadomasochism resonates with the celebratory scene in *Desde Afuera*. “Transsexual sadomasochism in dungeon space enacts a *poesis* (an act of artistic creation) that collapses the boundary between the embodied self, its world and others, allowing one to interpenetrate the others and thereby constitute a specific place” (2008, 39). Indeed, in this celebration the theater transforms into something akin to the working class *disco de ambiente* in which Yefri performed for the first time. Perhaps this kind of collapse between a self and its environment suggests a coming to terms with the urgency of articulating *nosotros*. Such a *nosotros* wouldn’t be a simple addition of singular and individual selves, with clearly established borders. In the becoming disco of the theater, travestismo is mobilized as that “something” that can start to form the seeds for a non-totalitarian *nosotrxs*, which would renounce the universality of the masculine “o.” Similarly, Stryker defines gender using a sonic vocabulary writing, “gender is a percussive symphony of automatisms, reverberating through the space of our bodies before there is an awareness of awareness itself” (42). Stryker’s characterization of gender as intimately related to rhythm and sound is pertinent

again in the analysis of this scene. The engagement of the audience with travestismo is one that awakes through rhythms and sounds.

In Vargas and Stryker's analysis of gender, there is a shared presupposition of the body's receptivity to sound. Travestismo, as mobilized in this scene of *Desde Afuera*, resonates with both Vargas and Stryker's theorizations of gender, but as we will also see, there is also an uneasiness to conceptualizing travestismo as sonically disturbing. Stryker's treatment of transsexual sadomasochism assumes a certain gender symmetry or neutrality. This is where travestismo and Stryker's transsexual sadomasochism depart from each other. This is to say, travestismo has its own particularities that are not only gendered but also racialized and sexualized that make difficult any easy collapse between the signifiers travestismo, trans, and transsexual sadomasochism.

The second transgender character of the play is Marco (performed by Marco Pérez). Marco introduces himself as an artist, and student of Psychology. Even though Yefri and Marco can be read as transgender in certain contexts, Yefri carries the burden of travestismo. The exclusion from formal patterns of education seems one of the biggest and most common forms of marking travestismo in a body. *Desde Afuera* makes visible the asymmetry between both transgender positionalities. Whereas Marco could access education at the university level, which wasn't an option for Yefri. Although Yefri does make reference during the play to an educational achievement: "Cuando estaba en el colegio, siempre me gustaban los hombres maduros y tenía una fascinación por el profesor de religión. Y llegué a estar con él" [When I was in school, I always liked mature men and I was obsessed with the religion teacher. Eventually we were together]. Marco, a transgender male, claims to be an artist, similarly to Yefri. Marco can also be read as a racialized subject—as *cholo*. Marco faced several forms of violence, one of which happened very recently. He also introduces himself as *desempleado* [unemployed]. He is unable to find a job, even after many years of professionalization. This is a common way in which transgender people are kept disenfranchised albeit differently for male transgender subjects than for travestis.

At least for now travestismo only signifies male to female transitions. This gender asymmetry is made explicit throughout the play. While Yefri recounts her first day as a disco diva, Marco is the character who is most visibly uncomfortable taking part in the dance sequence. Whereas Enrique, the character who disavows his commonalities with travestismo, surrenders himself and his body to the pleasures of dance and music, Marco is the stuck and rigid subject. Marco's resistance to join the dance sequence stresses the masculine/masculinist anxiety surrounding spectacularized femininity. For Marco the dangers of submitting to an effeminate gender performance are several: threatening physical and psychic violence, the erasure of his masculinity and enforced return to a socially imposed femininity, and the naturalization of cisgender maleness as the audience of such a spectacle. Marco resists joining the dance, but he doesn't completely refuse it either. He is stiff on the stage, but nonetheless remains next to the other performers learning from Yefri.

Another difference between Yefri and Marco is that Yefri doesn't narrate her bodily transformations. In Marco's performance the surgical transformations of his body are very important. There is one scene that explores Marco's becoming trans(sexual.) "Operaciones" [Operations] is the title of the scene. In it Marco narrates (with the visual help of Enrique) the twenty surgical operations that he experienced. He didn't want to be limited to "lo que mi cuerpo me da" [what my body gives me]. Marco refuses to accept the body as an immutable surface. He also acknowledges the different bodily transits of male trans subjects, and yet he shares a

narrative of his. Transgender scholar Jay Prosser's notion of "body narrative" (1998, 4-5) makes reference to the centrality of narrative for the construction and sustenance of transsexual subject positions. And yet, in Marco's detailed narrative of his surgeries the economic conditions that allow such procedures are not mentioned. This omission is particularly important, when taking into account that social security in Peru doesn't offer coverage for trans subjects. It is very likely then that these treatments and operations were covered by Marco, or by some of his friends and family. This implies yet another class schism between Marco and Yefri.

Marco concludes his narrative with a powerful statement about the many "failed" surgeries his body endured:

A veces me siento más como un Frankenstein que como un hombre.  
Todo este proceso tomó cuatro años de mi vida.  
Tal vez no tenga la erección y el pene más alucinante del mundo, pero esto no lo he hecho para satisfacer a nadie.  
El único que tiene que estar satisfecho soy yo y lo estoy...  
Así que a la mierda todo lo demás.

[Sometimes I feel more like Frankenstein than a man.  
This whole process took four years of my life.  
Maybe I do not have the world's most amazing erection and penis, but I have not done this to satisfy anyone.  
The only one who has to be satisfied is me and I am...  
So, fuck everything else.]

Although Marco's family and community think of his body as abject he nonetheless feels a certain kinship with the monstrous. Marco's bond with Frankenstein's monster is an enabling one and his affinity for the "monster within him" echoes Stryker's manifesto on monstrosity: "The transsexual body is an unnatural body... Like the monster, I am too often perceived as less than fully human due to the means of my embodiment; like the monster's as well, my exclusion from human community fuels a deep and abiding rage in me that I, like the monster, direct against the conditions in which I must struggle to exist" (1994, 238). There is rage in Marco's words, but his transgender rage is not against his penis, but against the institutions and values imposing normative views of what a body can be. Marco is satisfied with his penis. Marco's love for his penis may be related to the fact that his penis departs from an idealized construction of what a penis should look like. Marco states that his penis satisfies him, and that his penis is not a ticket to social approval. Yefri doesn't make reference to her penis during the play other than tangentially, when talking about the *conchero* that helps her hide her penis. This contrasts with the importance Marco places on constructing a penis through phalloplasties. Neither Yefri or Marco attribute innate value or attractiveness to the penis. Ultimately, the empire of the penis is disavowed in both of their accounts. Yefri's penis becomes a *concha* thanks to the *conchero*, and Marco makes peace with his "monstrous" penis.

Marco's investment in masculinity isn't predicated upon the repudiation of "the feminine." Marco can be uncomfortable in the dance sequence with Yefri, but his body remains on the stage. Marco doesn't reject travestismo in the dance scene. His body may be stiff but Marco doesn't disavow the possibility that travestismo can be a name under which the utopic urgency of saying *nosotrxs* can be envisioned. Marco's statement "a la mierda todo lo demás"

[fuck everything else] echoes the memory that Yefri invites the other performers and the audience to embrace. Only *mandando a la mierda* the desire for social respectability, for an implicit whiteness in the project of the *criollo*, and the desire for sexual cleansing and normality, can the audience allow themselves to imagine as being part of the working-class audience of the *disco de ambiente*. Perhaps this is the only way of imagining a collective reclamation of the possibility of a *nosotrxs cholxs*, travestis and proud!

### Who Will Write the History of Scars?

Marco isn't the only one a bit reluctant to be part of the dancing spectacle. Yefri herself while being the star of the scene, the one who receives the applauses, seems also a bit reluctant. There is uneasiness to her movement and in her facial expressions during this scene. To understand the significance of this celebratory scene, its possibilities and discontents it is necessary to explore a previous scene, one that (re)tells a traumatic memory of Yefri. The title of the scene is "Cortes" [Cuts]. After the five performers fight and insult one another using the homo-transphobic mass media representation printed in newspapers to call each other, they tear apart the newspapers. There are cut pieces of newspaper on the floor, like piles of garbage. Simultaneously, Yefri departs from the group and the stage goes dark. The audience can hear Antony and the Johnsons' song "Hope There's Someone." The song is melancholic, and the audience can feel the change of mood on the stage. Yefri begins to undress herself. Yefri slowly changes her sports and casual clothes for a dress that shows more of her skin, and especially her legs. The other four performers start to disappear from the stage, while picking up the cut pieces of newspapers in trashcans.

Mary Ann (performed by Mary Ann Eyzaguirre) is the only character that shares the stage with Yefri in the scene "Cortes." Yefri doesn't talk. The audience can only hear the voice of Mary Ann. Mary Ann is a character that introduces herself as a singer. Indeed, the character speaking in this scene is the one who can sing. Mary Ann reads from a paper in her hands:

Fue un 27 de Octubre del 2007.

Salí a trabajar como promotora, con chicas trans. Mi trabajo era darles información sobre derechos ciudadanos, infecciones de transmisión sexual y repartirles preservativos.

Cuando llegué a la esquina donde trabajaban mis ex compañeras de la calle, no encontré a ninguna de ellas.

De pronto, aparecieron unos chicos de la nada. Uno de ellos me metió un cabe y me empujó contra la pared. Uno de ellos se agachó con una Gillette para cortarme la cara.

En ese momento pensé muchas cosas, desde mi muerte hasta que ya no quería vivir. De pronto, no sé cómo me zafo, y lo primero que vi fue una tanqueta.

Estaba muy cerca de donde hoy cumple condena Fujimori. Me acerqué. Ellos me dijeron: "No te podemos ayudar. Resuelve tu problema". Yo sangrando les dije: "Trabajo para el Estado".

Los chicos volvían hacia mí. Vi una cantina y pensé que mis amigas estaban ahí. Para mi mala suerte no estaban. Así que me escondí en la barra. Uno de ellos entró y me sacó. Se sentó en mi encima y comenzó a hincarme la espalda. Yo me hice la muerta. Uno le decía: "huevo, ya la mataste. Está muerta". El me seguía

hincando hasta que se levantó y se fue. Luego regresó. A mí se me había salido el hueso del codo, pero seguía haciéndome la muerta. Él me comenzó a hincar como si fuera un pedazo de carne. Se volvió a ir y regresó con otro chico. Uno me hincó con el pico de botella en las prótesis que yo tenía. Y luego entre los dos comenzaron a cortarme la cara.

Quería morirme. Ya para qué vivir así. Estuve como quince minutos tirada en esa cantina. Y lo único que vi fue a los policías que miraban lo que me habían hecho. Por suerte vino un serenazgo. Yo le di cien soles y le dije “toma, llévame a otro lado, pero no quiero que mi familia me vea morir así”.

Me llevaron y me paré en la tolva. Trataba de tomarme la sangre que me salía. En la clínica, no paraba de sangrar. Tenía una prótesis en la mano y otra puesta. Oriné sangre. Me tomé la sangre.

Me metí a la ducha, y me tomaba el agua. Estuve como quince minutos así. Hasta que me dijeron “vamos a coserte”.

Luego de un tiempo llegó mi madre. Los doctores le dijeron “Póngase guantes y limpie a su hijo, que nosotros no lo vamos a limpiar”. Yo boté a mi madre, y le escupí a la enfermera. Le dije “Dios quiera que no viva, pero si vivo se van a acordar de mí toda su perra vida”. Yo estaba convulsionando.

Luego, vino mi hermana con mi madre y les dijeron que se despidan de mí. Ella me dijo: “Tato, Tatito, ya te vas”. Yo le dije: “Perdóname si alguna vez me porté mal contigo”. Luego me dieron por muerta porque quedé inconsciente por quince minutos. Yo escuchaba que la enfermera le decía “consígase un cajón por acá”, y me tapaban con una bata blanca.

En ese estado vi a mi hermano mayor, que es finado y me dijo: “Tienes frío, espérame que te voy a traer una chompa”.

Luego, recobré la conciencia. Me cosieron y trataron de reconstruir. A las once de la mañana me dan de alta.

Me dolía tanto, que luego entré en coma. Estuve veintiocho días sentado. Mi madre llamó al hospital, y allí dijeron que no me lleven.

Un 28 de Noviembre desperté y dije: “Mamá, tengo hambre”.

[It was October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

I went out to work as a promoter, with trans girls. My job was to inform them about citizen's rights, sexually transmitted infections and give them condoms. When I got to the corner where my former girlfriends worked the street, I couldn't find any of them.

Some guys appeared out of nowhere. One of them tripped me and pushed me against the wall. Another one of them bent down with a Gillette to cut my face. In that moment I thought about many things, about my death until I didn't want to live anymore. I don't know how I managed to get away, and the first thing I saw were a couple of police officers. They said to me: “We can't help you. Solve your own problem.” I was bleeding and I told them “I work for the State.”

The guys were coming back to me. I saw a bar that I thought my girlfriends were at, but to my misfortune they weren't. I stayed hidden at the bar, but one of them found me and pulled me out. He sat on me and started cutting my back. I pretended to be dead. One said to him “you bastard, you killed her. She's dead.”

He kept cutting me until he got up and left. Then he returned. My elbow bone had come out, but I kept pretending to be dead. He started to cut me like a piece of meat. He left and went back with another boy. One cut me with a bottle in the prosthesis I had. And then between the two began to cut my face.

I wanted to die. Why bother living like this? I spent about fifteen minutes in that bar. And all I saw was the policemen looking at what they had done to me.

Luckily a municipal police officer came. I gave him a hundred soles and I said “take it, take me somewhere else, but I do not want my family to see me die like this.” They took me and I stood in the hopper. I tried to drink the blood that came out of me.

At the clinic, I kept bleeding. I had a (breast) prosthesis in my hand and the other in my chest. I pissed blood. I drank the blood.

I took a shower and drank the water. I was in there for fifteen minutes until they told me “we’re going to operate on you.”

After a while my mother arrived. The doctors told her “put on gloves and clean your son, because we are not going to do it.” I sent my mother away, and I spat at the nurse. I told her “God doesn’t want me to live, but if I do you’ll remember me for the rest of your fucking life.” I was convulsing.

Then my sister came with my mother and they told them to say goodbye to me. She told me: “Tato, Tatito, you’re leaving.” I said to her: “Forgive me if I ever behaved badly with you.” They thought I was dead because I was unconscious for fifteen minutes. I heard the nurse saying “get a coffin here,” and I was covered with a white coat.

In that state I saw my older brother, who is deceased and he said: “You’re cold, wait for me to bring you a sweater.

Then I regained consciousness. They sewed me up and tried to rebuild. At eleven in the morning I’m discharged.

It hurt so much that I went into a comma. I was seated twenty-eight days. My mother called the hospital, and they told her not to take me there.

On November 28<sup>th</sup> I woke up and said, “Mom, I’m hungry.”]

The first-person account, as read by Mary Ann, is presumed to have been written by Yefri herself. The audience hears Mary Ann’s beautiful feminine singing voice narrating Yefri’s story of extreme violence and dispossession. Yefri was dispossessed of many things, including her femininity and almost her life. In this scene, Mary Ann’s voice is reparative rehabilitating a violently disavowed femininity. Indeed, *Desde Afuera* attempts to offer some form of reparation to Yefri. The male aggressors who cut her body mercilessly and disfigured her face, punished Yefri for what they perceived as a dissonance between her body and her gender. The feminine voice narrating in the first person attempts to repair Yefri’s femininity, “de los escombros, sale la voz” [from the debris, comes the voice] (Masiello 2013, 296). Indeed, in this scene the beautiful feminine and singing voice emerges from the debris. Mary Ann’s voice caresses the audience, and even, one might add, delicately touches Yefri’s scars.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Yefri’s scars are not only skin deep, but are present in her voice. One of the long-term consequences of this vicious attack is that Yefri’s vocal chords were affected and that her voice transformed radically. Indeed, Mary Ann’s voice was also offering some reparation to the scarred voice of Yefri.

Malú, performed by Malú Machuca, is the fifth character in the play. She introduces herself as a sociologist, and later in the play as queer and polyamorous. Malú and Mary Ann are the youngest characters of the play. Both are in their twenties. Like Mary Ann's voice, Malú's hands play an important role throughout the scene. A dim light focuses on Yefri making the traces of her scars more visible. The simultaneity of Mary Ann's reading of the violent episode of dispossession and the subtle lights on Yefri stresses the material consequences of violence on Yefri's face and body. Malú caresses and combs Yefri's long hair—another signifier of femininity. Malú's caresses try to repair, but also remind Yefri and the audience of the tactile dimension of memory. And yet this is a curious way in which to repair a wounded body. As Hélène Cixous suggests "isn't hair always the body's foreign part, its secret place?" (2012, 124). The hair is liminal in relation to the rest of the body. Yefri's hair leaves intact the brutal aggression inflicted upon her. Her hair doesn't have scars, but it is through her hair that some form of reparation is being performed and achieved. This form of reparation also holds consequences for the audience. Perhaps Malú's caressing of Yefri's hair reminds the audience of "el puntilloso archivo de una memoria que se niega a la volatilidad de la ceniza" [the punctilious archive of a memory that refuses to the volatility of the ashes] (Eltit 2008, 247). Yefri's scars, the cuts on her body and face, are an unavoidable reminder that her memories don't deserved to be trapped in impunity, circling around like volatile ashes.

The scene "Cortes" demands from the audience an active engagement with memory. *Desde Afuera* insists upon the necessity of engaging with memory, and with the limits of what narrative can say or do. In the words of sociologist Leonor Arfuch: "Cómo hablar—de los otros y de uno mismo—, qué zonas de lo traumático pueden entrar en las lides del discurso, cómo traducir el horror en palabras, dónde la voz se acalla o se entorpece" [How to speak—of others and of oneself, —which zones of the traumatic can enter the struggles of discourse, how to translate horror into words, where the voice is silent or dull] (2013, 38). Indeed, in order to work with such horrendous memory an active engagement with imagination is necessary. According to Toni Morrison "the act of imagination is bound up with memory" (2008, 76-77). For Morrison, memory does not simply reflect an unproblematic previously constituted "past". But since in domination this past is obliterated, and sometimes there are no written registers of the marks of past lives (especially of marginalized communities), one must rely upon imagination. The past is not something that one simply remembers, but something that one must imagine. Importantly, for Morrison, memory is embodied: "It is emotional memory—what the nerves and the skin remember as well as how it appeared. And a rush of imagination is our 'flooding'" (77). In this scene what Malú attempts to repair are Yefri's skin and nerves. Perhaps Malú's caresses can help Yefri remember all the times she has been touched and caressed with love. Perhaps through Malú's hands Yefri can start to remember all the traces that love left on her skin.

"Cortes" confronts the traces of violence that get left on the skin. More specifically, "Cortes" highlights the production of borders, borders that become scars on Yefri's face and body. Nelly Richard questions the definition of a border: "¿Qué es una frontera? Una línea de demarcación espacial—natural, convencional o imaginaria—que separa y a la vez junta los territorios que se encuentran de lado y lado de su trazado. Las fronteras actúan como zonas político-estratégicas que están siempre en disputa" [What is a border? A line of spatial demarcation—natural, conventional, or imaginary—that separates and at the same time brings together the territories that are on both parts of its outline. Borders act as politico-strategic zones that are always in dispute] (2014, 9). Borders are political. For Richard, there is a perennial dispute between *marcos de contención* and *fuerzas de desborde*. This dispute leave traces, bodily



traces. In the case of Yefri, those bodily traces take the form of scars. In *Fronteras Sexuales: Espacio urbano, cuerpos y ciudadanía* [Sexual Borders: Urban Space, Bodies, and Citizenship] (2011), a project that resonates with many of Richard's concerns, Leticia Sabsay analyzes the production of sexual borders especially around travesti communities in Buenos Aires. For Sabsay "el trabajo sexual se daría como el Otro que funciona como pilar y garante de este imaginario normativo, y en este sentido, como la condición de posibilidad de que pueda darse este espacio público como el sitio donde se realizarían potencialmente los ideales de la comunidad" [sex work would be given as the Other that functions as a pillar and guarantor of this normative imaginary, and in this sense, as the condition of possibility that this public space can be given as the place where the community's ideals would potentially be realized] (73). Using Sabsay's framework it is possible to read the violent episode as productive of a national community, a *nosotros*. The violent aggression against Yefri may have produced a *nosotros*, a masculine, homo-transphobic and racist *nosotros*. "Cortes" brings to the public sphere the asymmetric costs in the constitution of a *nosotros*. An effort to produce a *nosotros* in Peru can easily leave scars on the bodies of those who are excluded.

It is important to mention that in its first run *Desde Afuera* was staged at Centro Cultural España. The same place and stage where in July 2009 Red Peruana TLGB and Promsex, in the context of a presentation of a report on LGBT human rights, gave an award of recognition to Yefri. Whereas the format of the presentation was very formulaic and predictable, the award given to Yefri was an unexpected and touching moment. Yefri was recognized for her public legal struggle after the brutal aggression that left her a victim. Yefri is unable to hold back her tears. She is overwhelmed by the moment of recognition. Several people in the audience likewise couldn't contain their tears. In that moment, Yefri thanked her mother, who was in the audience, and who was her source of sustenance during her process of recovery. Several of the people who attended the award ceremony were LGBT activists and their friends. In its first run the audience of *Desde Afuera* was primarily LGBT activists and friends. In its first run, the show was free and was offered as a gift to LGTB activist communities and those who loved them. People would wait in line for hours to get a ticket before each show. Friend, lovers, ex-lovers, and comrades greeted and professed kisses and hugs to each other. Many of them also engaged in *chismes* [gossip], and shared stories. It is likely that many who witnessed the moving recognition of Yefri in 2009 were also in the audience of *Desde Afuera* in 2014.

Perhaps some who witnessed both of Yefri's moments of recognition were able to foresee the role that Yefri's mother plays in *Desde Afuera*. In Mary Ann's retelling of Yefri's memories, Yefri's mother appears as a witness to two acts of dispossession. First, Yefri's mother sees her disfigured and close to death. Second, not even the doctors and nurses wanted to clean the wounds of Yefri's body. Perhaps they imagined Yefri's body and wounds as uncleanable. Yefri's body is rendered abject and capable of spreading disease or infection. The doctor's negligent indifference was an echo of the same kind of violence that Yefri's aggressors inflicted on her, but also of the police officers who watched the torture take place and refused to intervene. Yefri's mother however, didn't hesitate to clean her beloved "son's" wounded body. The audience can only attempt to imagine such a horrible scene: the gesture and faces of the indifferent doctors. And yet, the relation between life and death can be paradoxical. Perhaps some of these hateful doctors and nurses became witnesses of a miraculous scene: a scene of love between a mother and a daughter that "aman sólo por la necesidad atávica de amar" [love only because of the atavic need to love] (Errázuriz and Eltit 2010, 73).

According to Judith Butler, “fantasy is part of the articulation of the possible; it moves us beyond what is merely actual and present into a realm of possibility, the not yet actualized or the not actualizable... Fantasy is what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise” (2004, 28-29). Butler’s approximation to fantasy is helpful for reading the scene “Cortes.” Fantasy, in this scene, is offered in a veiled way, and yet it helps to articulate realms of possibility. Perhaps some of the people who attended both events at Centro Cultural España were able to engage with fantasy in such a way. When Yefri woke up after being unconscious for several days the first person she addressed was her mother: “mamá, tengo hambre” [mom, I’m hungry]. After Mary Ann reads that line, a song, a bolero can be heard: Lucho Barrios and Pedrito Otiniano’s “En el cielo” [In the Sky]. The song promises an encounter in the afterlife and speaks of illicit love that sounds particularly queer in the soft voices of two men: “libres no tendremos que escondernos como antes para vernos por temor al que dirán” [free we will not have to hide as before for fear to what they will say]. “En el cielo” is a sonic invitation to imagine that fantasy and reality are not mutually exclusive. José Quiroga’s approximation to boleros resonates with Butler’s definition of fantasy: “Boleros exchange reality for something else: they erase what is and create what could be” (2000, 152). Indeed, “En el cielo” seems a perfect fit for the scene. It is a reminder to Yefri and everyone else that even in the face of dispossession, unexpected things can happen.

There is another reason why “En el cielo” is important. It was Yefri who picked that song to be used in the play. At the end of that scene, Marco invites Yefri to dance to the melancholic rhythm of that bolero. Both embrace each other generously. Marco’s embrace is another form of reparation. When Yefri was in that clinic after being attacked, the first thing she remembers when watching the face of her mother, was that there was a song played on a radio in the clinic. That song was “Desde el cielo.” Her mother embraced her and at that moment she thought the bolero to be prophetic. Perhaps Yefri thought that that song was prophetic of her future. And even if death were not a future that Yefri wanted to embrace, some peace was afforded to her by the possibility that she can encounter her mother even after death “en el cielo.” The audience in *Desde Afuera*, some without knowing it, witness Marco, a transgender male, reenacting the motherly embrace that has sustained Yefri in her hardest times.

Portocarrero stresses the reparative power of music. According to him: “la música nos reconcilia con la vida, pues hace más tolerable lo difícil y nos ayuda a procesar lo traumático” [music reconciles us with life, because it makes the difficult more tolerable and helps us to process the traumatic] (2015b, 30). In “Cortes” Yefri, who was at that threshold between life and death, receives some kind of comfort. The song helps the audience to cope with a traumatic subject matter, but also engage with it. The scene “Oposiciones” invites the audience to imagine themselves as being part of a *nosotrxs* that celebrates a proliferation of racialized bodies and pleasures. “Cortes” invites the audience to join Mary Ann, Malú and Marco in offering some reparation to Yefri, imagining a *nosotrxs* that embraces travestismo and its tears. Marco’s embrace is symbolic of Yefri’s mother embrace, and for the audience’s potential (motherly) embrace. The sonic embrace of the bolero joins Marco’s embrace of Yefri. The bolero embraces the whole stage, and the theater itself. As Portocarrero says, music has the potential to offer reconciliation with life, even in the hardest times. The promise of reconciliation with life for Yefri takes the form of her mother, and of her love for her mother. Perhaps Yefri would agree with film theorist Kaja Silverman, for whom “it is through loving the mother that we are able to love the world” (2000, 123).

In Mary Ann's retelling, the doctors and nurses couldn't believe that they were witnessing the formation of a precarious *nosotrxs*, formed by two people, a mother and a daughter. In the scene "Cortes," the audience is a witness to a veiled representation of motherly love. And yet, the difference is that the audience is invited to be part of that embrace, of being part of that *nosotrxs*. The *nosotrxs* that is being staged in this scene of *Desde Afuera* is one that doesn't disavow "the feminine." The *nosotrxs* embraces "the feminine," under some of its most stereotypical names: "mother" and "travesti." Not everyone in the audience may be totally cognizant of this scene of motherly love. Not everyone may know that what is reenacted in Marco's embrace is that of a mother's love. But the audience may be able to imagine it with the help of the bolero. As Elizabeth Grosz writes, "music sounds what has not and cannot be heard otherwise" (2008, 57). Perhaps it is through the sound of the bolero that Yefri's love for her mother can be heard loud and clear.

A precarious and yet permeable *nosotrxs* is being staged in this scene. Eve Sedgwick writes beautifully of the first person plural: "Promiscuous we! Me, plus anybody else. Permeable we!" (1999, 106). Like Sedgwick's "we," the *nosotrxs* that is staged and imagined is non-dualistic and non-totalitarian. And yet, it is again race that challenges the desirable permeability of such a pronominal formation. "Cortes," Yefri's scars, the one hundred eighty stitches that cover her skin must be read with an attention to race. Such scars wouldn't have the same valences on white skin as that of brown skin. Yefri's scars marked her even more as *chola*, and on top of that an unredeemable one at that. Yefri's scars reinforce her association with crime and delinquency, always already a racialized association. Instead of being the recipient of compassion or even pity, in many instances Yefri feels that people are afraid of her and her scars. Yefri sometimes may want to forget the radical violence of which she was a victim, but as literary critic Victor Vich argues "las cicatrices son lugares a los que el sujeto siempre retorna" [scars are a place to which the subject always returns] (2013, 122). Yefri always returns to her scars. In a way, the scars produced her current subjectivity. It is a *nosotrxs* with scars.

It is easy to forget that scars are also signs that make resignification possible. Some authors have taken this dimension to its limits. For instance, in *Lesbian Peoples: Materials for a Dictionary* (1980), Monique Wittig and Sande Zeig define a scar as: "Embellishment added to the skin and practiced on its surface or through several layers of flesh by cuttings, burnings, stitchings, puncturings. They are marks, lines, tattoos. Scars are of every color and every shape. Some cover the face, starting from the temples" (1980, 137). One doesn't have to subscribe to this utopian reading of scars, and yet the idea that scars don't mean a single thing seems pertinent. Scars, as the scene "Cortes" suggests, open a discussion of visibility and opacity. Yefri's scars have made her visible in a way that she finds undesirable and even dangerous at times. Because of this she covers her scars with heavily applied makeup. Malú helps Yefri apply make up to her face. Makeup affords Yefri some autonomy deciding how visible her scars will be.

Yefri seems to reclaim opacity to some degree. Indeed, Yefri would make a terrible native informant. She is not fond of giving direct answers and keeps many things to herself. She likes to delay interviews. In this sense, her silence in the scene "Cortes" suggests a rejection of the stereotypical victimized travesti. Through silence Yefri refuses to make a spectacle out of travesti suffering. The *nosotrxs* as performed in the scene "Cortes" is one that echoes the pertinence of opacity. That *nosotrxs* is responsive to postcolonial theorist Édouard Glissant's claim: "We clamor for the right to opacity for everyone" (2010, 194). This *nosotrxs* respects

opacities and silences among its constituents. This *nosotrxs* doesn't presume that it needs to know everything.

Portocarrero's argument claims that to say *nosotros* in Peru is urgent and yet (almost) impossible. The paradoxical position that this pronoun occupies is related to the reality of racism and colonialism in contemporary Peru. Usually, several *nosotros* are erected producing borders among "us" and "them." The production of these borders is sustained through the belief that there is nothing opaque about people, about one's gender, sexuality and race. The production of these borders produce figural and literal scars. The urgency of saying *nosotros* in Peru has to do with a disavowal of the history of scars.

*Desde Afuera* introduces the importance of opacity in the construction of any *nosotros*. Indeed, that *nosotros* can't be anymore a masculine one. It must renounce to the "o" and its privileges. The imagined pronoun in these scenes is a *nosotrxs*. *Nosotrxs* is difficult to pronounce. It sounds like an "e" with an extra syllable. That "x" makes your tongue doubts its ability to weave the appropriate sounds. *Nosotrxs* responds to the urgency of saying *nosotros*, and yet it introduces doubts and questions about its own assertions. *Desde Afuera* raises the question then: in the production of a *nosotrxs* can the scars be distributed less asymmetrically? Can the production of borders be less definitive and tortuous? In the scenes under discussion, the answer seems to be affirmative. A *nosotrxs* can distribute scars less asymmetrically only if it is feminist, or at least if that *nosotrxs* has an intimate proximity with feminism. *Nosotrxs* is akin to the kind of feminism that Nelly Richard envisions: "El feminismo no debería renunciar al juego heteronómico de la oscilación entre lo *propio* y lo *impropio* e, incluso, lo *inapropiado*; un juego que hace vibrar críticamente las fronteras entre *identidad* y *desidentificación* rompiendo así con el mito del sujeto unitario y la comunidad plena que se condensan míticamente en torno a un significado esencial de la diferencia-mujer" [Feminism should not renounce the heteronomous play of oscillation between the *proper* and the *improper* and even the *inappropriate*; a game that critically vibrates the boundaries between *identity* and *disidentification* thus breaking with the myth of the unitary subject and the full community that are condensed mythically around an essential meaning of difference-woman] (2013, 117-118). *Nosotrxs* is inappropriate and improper. *Nosotrxs* identifies and disidentifies itself simultaneously. Richard adds that "intercalar estos planos de identidad y desidentidad (con todos sus juegos de atracciones y refracciones) le da fuerza al "sujeto" del feminismo para ser siempre otro para sí mismo: para no tener que comportarse siempre del mismo modo ni narrarse en el mismo tono" [listing these planes of identity and disidentity (with all their games of attractions and refractions) gives force to feminism's "subject" to always be another for itself: not to have to behave always in the same way or to be narrated in the same tone] (2008, 62). Any production of *nosotros*, *nosotras* or even *nosotrxs* produces some scars. And yet, *nosotrxs* produces scars that it attempts to repair and heal. When *nosotrxs* inflicts damage onto others, it wounds itself deeply. This may be related to the fact that the x in the pronoun *nosotrxs* is literally a scar. This x is an indelible reminder that *nosotrxs* is other to itself. Might we conclude that *nosotrxs* offers a better history of scars than *nosotros*?

My reading in this chapter has privileged two scenes of *Desde Afuera* because it is in these moments that a *nosotrxs* invested in travestismo is imagined and sustained. Nevertheless, there are other scenes in the play that offer a conventional *nosotros* that implicitly invests in whiteness or *criollismo*. This kind of narrative is at moments conventional and adds to a naïve investment in the belief that there is a univocal and unidirectional temporal line for the respect and affirmation of LGBTQI people. For instance, in a scene in which Enrique tells the story of

his love relationship with his former wife, the audience can read a paper displayed on a screen on stage that in 1989, Denmark was the first country in approving a law allowing civil union for homosexual couples. On that same screen during the scene “Operaciones” we can read that in 2010 Australia became the first to recognize a third gender. In the final scene curiously titled “Presentación Real” [Real presentation] the audience reads that “aun no se aprueba en el Perú la ley de unión civil de parejas del mismo sexo” [the civil unions between same-sex couples has yet to be legalized in Peru]. The documents that we see are written by the actors themselves and projected onto the screen. Marco writes and the audience can read that “aun no existe en el Perú una ley de identidad de género” [there is still no law pertaining to gender identity in Peru]. Then Yefri writes that “2013: El Congreso rechaza proyecto de ley de crímenes de odio” [2013: Congress rejects the hate crimes bill]. A possible reading of these screening appearances can polarize the situations of LGBTQI people in Peru against those in “First World” countries. LGBTQI people living in Peru should aspire to be part of an imagined “we,” formed by LGBTQI people living in the “First World.” In *Desde Afuera* there is a paradoxical desire to be part of an international LGBTQI “we.” At the same time, there is an implicit critique of the Peruvian State and it’s made clear that it is the law that remains the true obstacle to achieving an international LGBTQI “we.” *Desde Afuera* at times seems to imply that it is politically easier to say “we” than *nosotrxs*. In these moments *Desde Afuera* doesn’t do justice to its name, claiming its belonging to an “inside” that naturalizes privilege and reinforces rigid borders.

More, there are moments in the play where a *nosotrxs* bound to travestimo is disavowed for a nameless fluidity of genders and sexualities. In the final scene each performer gives an account of oneself. Malú describes herself as a “maricón escandaloso” [scandalous fag], Mary Ann as someone who is lesbian in practice, pansexual in conscience, heterosexual by upbringing, and bisexual throughout her adolescence. Marco describes himself as a heterosexual trans men, and Yefri as a trans woman that loves macho older men. In these final lines, none of them identify as travesti nor do they disavow travestismo either. Enrique is the only one who implicitly does. In his final intervention Enrique says: “Odio las etiquetas, gay, lesbiana, bisexual ¿qué importa? Todos somos humanos y cada uno es un universo. ¿Por qué tenemos que diferenciarnos? Bueno, pero si me quieren etiquetar soy fluido” [I hate labels, gay, lesbian, bisexual, what does it matter? We are all human and each is a universe. Why do we have to differentiate ourselves? But ok, if you want to label me then I’m fluid]. Enrique’s investment in fluidity echoes what Brad Epps (2001) calls the “fetish of fluidity.” The problem is that “Desde Afuera” investment in fluidity comes at the expense of a name and identity that is already rejected by so many social and political actors in Peru, travestismo. In such a movement what is erased are the memories that circle around travestismo. Such a movement eludes the difficulty of saying *nosotrxs* in Peru.

At its best *Desde Afuera* mobilizes travestismo in an effort to respond to the urgency of articulating a *nosotrxs* in Peru. After witnessing the performance of *Desde Afuera*, the audience leaves asking themselves, “what if performance challenges strict divisions about where the art ends and the rest of the world begins?” (Jackson 2011, 15). Perhaps *Desde Afuera*’s attempts at articulating a *nosotrxs* in Peru need not end in the theater and instead move uninvited into the rest of Peru.

## Epilogue

How to mourn a dissertation? How to let it go? In this process of mourning, as something I am letting go, the final pages of Juana María Rodríguez's *Queer Latinidad: Identity Practices, Discursive Spaces* (2003) offer me guidance. According to Rodríguez, the end of a project "is not a conclusion, conclusions are not possible, the stories told within these pages have not ended. All that has ended is my role as narrator" (155). To let the dissertation go, I end my role as narrator, and the academic impulse to master the story. More, Rodríguez also points to a threshold between endings and beginnings: "At this moment of factitious endings it seems fitting to return to other beginnings, to other texts that I could have produced, other rhizomatic routes I could have followed" (153). Taking inspiration from Rodríguez, I would like to conclude by opening up a different set of questions that envision an alternative path than the one I have taken.

The first chapter begins with a queer theoretical reflection on the role of friendship in ethnography. While I explicitly state that Sandra is a friend of mine, none of the other chapters work theoretically with any notion of friendship. This is curious, particularly because the archive I've built for this dissertation is concerned with the affective life surrounding the textual objects gathered for each chapter. With Sandra, Belissa, Giuseppe and Yefri I share(d) a queer bond of friendship. Without these bonds, any possibility of thinking travestismo otherwise would have been impossible. Like Rodríguez's, my project attempted to "demonstrate how these subjects, individually and collectively, had already initiated the questions, answers, and dialogue that I wished to make evident in my own textual production. In the process, I also sought to validate textual forms...not as objects of study but as other forms of theoretical production" (2003, 159).

Queer friendship, even if implicitly, haunts the whole dissertation. In each chapter, I consider each of these friends as theorists of gender. Each of the four chapters explore the different works that four theorists do on and around travestismo. These four theorists are Sandra, Belissa Andía, Giuseppe Campuzano, and Yefri Peña. I met each of them in the context of Peruvian travesti activism, and each of them happens to be a friend of mine. My readings sometimes align with Sandra's, Belissa's, Giuseppe's, and Yefri's views and their theoretical and political work, and other times they clash. Part of my dissertation's contribution is that it takes as its archive the work of these four Peruvian travesti subjects, and puts it into dialogue with other more institutionalized (or majoritarian) theorists. These dialogues are not always fluid, neither do they transcend regimes of power. For instance, at some moments I refer to each of these four travesti subjects by their chosen first name, while I always use last names to talk about all the other (established) theorists that I engage and dialogue with. Indeed, this choice may reproduce conventional hierarchies of knowledge production. I choose to think with these four travesti subjects and stress the importance of their travesti names. There is something improper and inassimilable in the politics of travesti naming that my project treasures. But in each chapter what exactly this "something" is moves and doesn't remain the same. In the case of Belissa Andía and Giuseppe Campuzano, I use their last names, with the intention of mobilizing them as established authors that deserve to be cited in more books, articles, and dissertations. In the case of Sandra, she chose her name especially for this dissertation, and refused to have a last name. I've respected her right to opacity. Yefri Peña didn't have any reservations about her last name. She has been very open about mobilizing her identity as part of public testimony regarding the terrible violence committed against her. Nevertheless, it was impossible for me to write that final chapter using her last name. Her narrative and her performance demanded a specific form of

intimate embracement. This is why I use only her first name, a short name that is sweet to the ears and feels like a caress.

Queer friendships are messy. And each chapter dwells on the different kinds of the messes produced by queer friendship. Here, it is pertinent a turn to Michel Foucault (an author I mostly avoided in this project). Foucault's take on queer friendships, in his interview "Friendship as a Way of Life" (1996), has rightfully become part of queer theory's canon. According to queer theorist Tom Roach, in this interview "Foucault designates friendship the becoming of queer relationality...The ethics of discomfort guiding these friends opens onto communal forms that cannot be contained by sadistic social hierarchies of identitarian difference" (2012, 8). Indeed, Foucault's notion of friendship is not exempt of embracing discomfort. In Foucault's account, queer friendships are intimately related to "a desire, an uneasiness, a desire-in-uneasiness that exists among a lot of people" (309). Foucault doesn't use the words queer, trans, and it would have been impossible for him to use the word "travestismo." Nonetheless, I am trying to put in dialogue travestismo with Foucault's take on friendship. Like Foucault, for whom (queer) friendships "short-circuit it and introduce love where there's supposed to be only law, rule or habit" (309), travestismo in my dissertation at moments names an extreme love of gender, a passionate love in inventing, imagining, and embodying gender and gendered bodies. The passion for gender, which is travestismo, in many instances short-circuits many regimes of power. Travestismo refuses to be a law of gender; instead, it unashamedly embraces its love for gender.

Nevertheless, there are dissonances among travestismo and Foucault's theories on queer friendships, and the forms of erotic asceticism he is rooting for. In Foucault's interview, gender occupies a very visible position. Foucault's concerns have to do with male homosexuals, and forms of male homoeroticism. For instance, Foucault asks "what is it, to be 'naked' among men, outside of institutional relations, family, profession and obligatory camaraderie?" (309) Or when contrasting the certainties of heterosexuality with the openness of male homosexuality, Foucault asserts that "between a man and a younger woman the marriage institution makes it easier: she accepts it and makes it work. But two men of noticeably different ages—what code would allow them to communicate?" (309). These asymmetries of gender in Foucault's "Friendship as a Way of Life" need to be better theorized, but this is not the time or the place for that. Scholars such as queer theorist Kadji Amin are working on the specificities of the gendered bonds that Foucault roots for. Amin doesn't agree with the genderless and ageless characterization of Foucault's notion of friendship and controversially argues that "Foucault's repeated returns, throughout the interview, to the dissymmetry of age differences suggests that 'Friendship as a Way of Life' is better read as a speculation on the potential of *pederastic relations that cross one or more significant social differences* to create 'diagonal lines' in the social fabric that allow 'virtualities to come to light' than as a more general case for the world-building potential of uninstitutionalized queer friendship" (2017, 22). The male framework for queer friendship that Foucault offers in this short interview needs to be put in critical dialogue with feminist theories across the world. Retrospectively, I wonder if mobilizing travestismo may counter some of the male gendered implications of Foucault's theories on friendship.

There are three particular moments in Foucault's "Friendship as a Way of Life" that needn't remain the exclusive property of male intergenerational bonds. In the first moment, Foucault claims that "homosexuality is not a form of desire but something desirable. Therefore we have to work at becoming homosexuals and not be obstinate in recognizing that we are" (308). In my project, travestismo, I hope, can also be read as "something desirable." Each

chapter offers alternative becomings for travestismo, without any attempt of offering a single prescriptive narrative for every travesti subject. These chapters also suggest that travestismo may make room for several more bodies, people, and communities than usually thought. In the second instance, Foucault takes a name with a bad reputation among progressive militants in order to open it up to radical potential. In the words of Foucault, “asceticism as the renunciation of pleasure has bad connotations. But the askesis is something else: it’s the work that one performs on oneself in order to transform oneself or make the self appear that happily one never attains” (309). Foucault’s askesis as the work that one performs on oneself to transform oneself echoes travestismo’s most treasured potential for transformation. Indeed, this is an erotic form of askesis, because travestismo is a name for many pleasures. In the third moment, Foucault affirms that friends “have to invent, from A to Z, a relationship that is still formless, which is friendship: that is to say, the sum of everything through which they can give each other pleasure” (309). In this dissertation, travestismo has been theorized as the movement(s) that invent “from A to Z” ways of life that have been proscribed from the current norms of gender. This dissertation has been an invitation to treasure the formless potential of travestismo.

In *Trans\*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability* (2017), Jack Halberstam champions the name trans\*, in a manner that resonates with my take on travestismo. According to Halberstam, “the asterisk modifies the meaning of transitivity by refusing to situate transition in relation to a destination, a final form, a specific shape, or an established configuration of desire and identity” (4). Halberstam’s refusal of the final destination of trans\*, or of trans\* as a final destination troubles the definition of travestismo that my project used as a point of departure. The beginning of my project assumes, like most theoretical accounts of travestismo, that the final destination of travestismo is femininity. Each of my chapters acknowledged that travestismo isn’t free of gendered, racial, and class-based restrictions. One of those restrictions is that travestismo, unlike transgender, did presume a certain direction for gender migrations. Nevertheless, in each chapter the femininity that travestismo constructs as a horizon is never a final destination. The femininities that travestismo dreams with, in each of my chapters, are mobilized as points of flight, as radical exercises of memory that allow envisioning worlds in which femininity is not the unfortunate opposite of masculinity, but something else. Halberstam also questions the (uneven) workings of gender within the name trans\*. He states that “it may be that trans\* embodiment is more different than similar for transgender men and women” (27). It is not that travestismo hasn’t had to do anything with male transgender subjectivities and communities, but that there is something about femininity that travestismo treasures, and to make justice to its contributions we must pay more careful attention to travestismo’s workings around gender. In my last chapter I highlight points of encounter between travestismo and male transgender subjects and it’s my hope that travestismo can be a name mobilized by many more of those of us who are considered gender outcasts.

Halberstam, in accordance with Foucault’s embracement of intergenerational friendship, states that “cross-generational contact has been crucial for trans\* people over the past four or five decades, making it possible for young people to imagine themselves as trans\* adults” (64). Each of my friendships with the four gender theorists that this dissertation surveys are intergenerational. Even Sandra, the youngest one, is at least a decade older than me. It’s only in (re)reading Foucault and Halberstam that I realized how important queer intergenerational bonds have been for this project. This is more explicit in chapter two where I offered an account of an erotic intergenerational friendship between travestis. The bond between Mia and Makuti is not only portrayed as a challenge to social norms, in the film *Loxoro*, due to gendered and sexual



considerations. But perhaps something about its intergenerational character has to do with the impossible realm that that queer erotic bond occupies in the film. My reading appreciates *Loxoro*'s invitation to imagine that queer intergenerational trans-lesbian friendship. That bond isn't framed as a friendship, and yet it suggests that what we are witnessing is, in the words of Jacques Derrida, "the becoming-friendship of love" (2005, 66).

The transition between the first and second chapter is less abrupt than how it might appear. Both chapters share a certain poetic aesthetic that attempts to make the case for a kind of writing that resonates with travestismo's becoming(s). The first chapter performs this job more explicitly with the ever-changing nouns, pronouns and positionalities of witnessing. The first chapter establishes a critical dialogue with ethnography, a discussion that the second chapter seems to discard. And yet, the second chapter was written partially in response to ethnographic accounts like Don Kulick's (1998) and its categorical assertions about travesti subjectivities. In the words of Kulick: "I have had nothing to say about maternal feelings or desires among travestis in this book largely because they hardly exist" (234). In the second chapter, I explore maternal desires concerning travesti subjectivities, to contest some of the fixity with which travestismo is usually thought. Here, I mobilize motherhood not as a final destination, but as a point of departure for a much needed transfeminist coalitional politics.

Halberstam poetically asserts that "trans\* bodies represent the art of becoming, the necessity of imagining, and the fleshly insistence of transitivity" (136). "Imagining" and "becoming" are gerunds that I mobilize throughout in relation to travestismo. The second half of the dissertation pays more attention to the racial dynamics of such becomings. There, I argue that travestismo is both a gendered and a racialized category. Especially, the fourth chapter makes a case for thinking travestismo as a name that cultivates a bond between racialized indigenous subjectivities. In *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability* (2017), Jasbir Puar proposes that "*becoming trans* is a capacitation of race, of racial ontologies, that informs the functioning of geo- and biopolitical control. Becoming trans is a process that not only courts the transformation of bodies in terms of gender but also solicits the capacity of race to reinvent its terms" (58). Puar deploys the notion of becoming trans with the intention to forge coalitions between categories usually thought as disparate from each other as transgender, disabled, and non-human. Puar's project is clear about the utopian stakes that her notion of becoming trans holds. "*Becoming trans*, then, as opposed to trans becoming must highlight this impossibility of linearity, permanence, and end points" (56). In a similar tone, Puar adds that "becoming trans, as suggested by race racing, would be a politics of manifesting beyond what control can control, a molecular line of flight, a moment of intensification in the process of becoming that is characteristic of race racing" (61). It seems to me that the project of thinking radically about gender that trans\*, becoming trans, and travestismo perform need to be accompanied by a radical thinking of race.

Chapter three and four theorize travestismo as deeply racialized, particularly in chapter four where I consider how such racialization might reimagine the nation state and notions of community belonging. In my dissertation, blackness doesn't appear explicitly, and yet to think the bonds of travestismo and blackness seems a project of pivotal importance. In *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (2017), C. Riley Snorton argues that "gender is itself a racial arrangement that expresses the transubstantiation of things" (83). Snorton argues that there are no boundaries between race and gender. Snorton also offers "an attempt to find a vocabulary for black and trans life" (xiv). Snorton's scholarship is a model for the kind of research and the set of questions that transgender, queer, feminist, and critical race studies need to continue

raising. One of Snorton's questions particularly resonates with my project: "How does one think about and express genres of life that are reiteratively, transitively, and transversally related to death?" (185). Such a question has been turned into a powerful declaration by the editors of the *TSQ* volume on *The Issue of Blackness*. Treva Ellison, Kai M. Green, Matt Richardson, and C. Riley Snorton state that "*black* is a modifier that changes everything. The power of blackness to change all that comes after is part of its close relationship to death" (2017, 166). Throughout my dissertation, travestismo is not only a name for utopian drives and projections, but it is also a name haunted and surrounded by death and by the dead. The systematic violence against travesti subjects and communities, which usually goes unacknowledged as such, needs to be more fully theorized. We need better tools to understand such horrific forms of violence. Puar's take on the notion of becoming disabled can also open fruitful conversations. In her words, "becoming disabled is not a before-and-after event but an ongoing navigation with quotidian forms of blockage that draw populations in and out of debilitating and capacitating experiences" (2017, 161). My dissertation, I want to believe, is a celebration of travesti life. Nevertheless, such a celebration cannot foreclose the importance of thinking the racialized intimacies of travestismo and death.

One of the possible paths that my dissertation could have followed was a more sustained dialogue with Peruvian feminist studies. In retrospect, I understand that part of this omission has to do with the fact that in Peru there hasn't been published a single feminist monograph on travestismo. Nevertheless, I wonder what would happen if travesti memory and politics are deployed as methods to read texts that allegedly are not about travestismo at all. I am particularly curious about what such a dialogue would look like with the most essential monograph of Peruvian feminist studies, Maruja Barrig's *Cinturón de castidad: La mujer de clase media en el Perú* [Chastity Belt: The Middle-Class Woman in Peru] (2017), originally published in 1979. The influence of Barrig's book can't be stated enough even in spite of the few works that actually cite such a landmark contribution.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, even though Maruja Barrig has been teaching for several years in Gender Studies programs in Lima, she is not a tenured professor. There is a suggestive moment in *Cinturón de castidad* where Barrig states that "lo femenino implica no solo la represión de la sexualidad, sino también un conjunto de barreras ideológicas impuestas y asumidas por la mujer como un cinturón mental de castidad" [the feminine implies not only the repression of sexuality, but also a set of imposed ideological barriers assumed by the woman as a mental belt of chastity] (16) that has kept me thinking about travestismo. How might I have reframed my project to better echo Barrig's assertion? How can one think together travestismo's desire for femininity as a non-fixed point of arrival with Barrig's interpretation of femininity as a "mental belt of chastity"?

Barrig's text argues that the "the feminine" in Peruvian cisgender bourgeois women is a "mental belt of chastity." Nevertheless, she also understands "the feminine" as not marked by genitalia and biological sexual difference. Barrig roots for the possibility that "la pequeñoburguesa" [the petit bourgeois woman] (16) can free herself from the "mental belt of chastity" that some forms of normative femininity stand for. In Barrig's words, "ella vive en soledad sus contradicciones con el sistema e ignora quizá que sus frustraciones no son producto de un interno desajuste individual, sino de una permanente sojuzgación cuyas causas debe identificar en la sociedad" [she lives in isolation her contradictions with the system and perhaps ignores that her frustrations are not the product of an internal individual maladjustment, but of a permanent subjugation whose causes she must identify in society] (16). For Barrig, the petit

bourgeois woman needs to live and think gender otherwise. This gesture coincides with my mobilization of the name *travesti*, and the necessity for radical theories of gender.

Barrig also theorizes the confinement of the *petit bourgeois* woman to the realm of the reactionary, and especially to reactionary politics. Barrig asserts that “no es extraño entonces que la mujer sea considerada como una fuerza retardataria en los procesos sociales de avanzada; el espacio al que se la redujo la mantuvo desvinculada del mundo exterior, y precisamente por esa falta de ‘contaminación’ asumió una actitud conservadora que, al mismo tiempo, debía transmitir a los hijos, cuya educación le había sido encomendada” [it is not strange, then, that the woman should be considered as a retarding force in advanced social processes; the space to which she was reduced kept her disconnected from the outside world, and precisely because that lack of ‘contamination’ she assumed a conservative attitude that, at the same time, she had to transmit to the children, whose education has been entrusted to her] (34) In this fascinating passage, Barrig speaks about “the woman” in general, without any other qualification. It’s not that Barrig is simply discarding the association of a normative image of a “woman” with reactionary politics. Barrig is poignantly interrogating the framework that freezes the name “woman.” Barrig, in a language that seems to echo *travestismo*, is making the case for an embracement of the contamination of the name “woman.” The “contamination” to which Barrig is pointing may be related to the questioning of what kinds of resources would make possible the living and thinking gender otherwise.

In each chapter of my dissertation, I attempt to take on the association between *travestismo* and sex work through different angles. My intention isn’t to disavow such a bond, but to think through and with it. In Barrig’s book there is also an attempt to think sex as labor, and sex work, in relation to the name “woman.” In the words of Barrig, “si la pureza y el culto a la virginidad fueron difundidos por el catolicismo apelando a toda suerte de castigos para quien osara infringir esta virtud cristiana, la conservación del himen intacto se convirtió más en una ventaja social que en una prueba de ascetismo espiritual. A lo largo de este siglo, en verdad hasta hace pocos años, la virginidad adquirió la calidad de ‘valor agregado’ en un producto: la mujer de la pequeña burguesía” [If purity and the cult of virginity were spread by Catholicism appealing to all sorts of punishment for those who dared to violate this Christian virtue, the preservation of the intact hymen has become more a social advantage than a test of spiritual asceticism. Throughout this century, indeed until a few years ago, virginity acquired the quality of “added value” in a product: the woman of the *petit bourgeoisie*] (52). In tracing the utopic longings of Barrig’s text, the refusal to adhere to respectability politics is important. Barrig refuses the association of “woman,” and purity. The theories of gender that Barrig is calling for are impure, resisting any kind of sexual purity. *Travestismo* is a name that also signals a refusal of sexual and gender purity. Barrig’s “*pequeñoburguesa*” and my own take on the *travesti* subject are “improper sexual subjects of feminist politics” (Rodríguez 2014, 152). And precisely for that reason future projects need to research the improper sexual and gendered bonds of the names “woman,” “*travesti*,” and “sex work” in the effort of reconstructing and imagining alternative genealogies of Peruvian feminist theories.

I would like to conclude with a brief consideration on accountability. I agree with queer sociologist Salvador Vidal-Ortiz when he states that “we operate within institutionalized constraints and, whether we do gender successfully or not, are held accountable” (2009, 100). This includes gender normative subjects, or those who are considered to be such, as well as queer, transgender and *travesti* subjects. Vidal-Ortiz is also a critic of the burden placed on transgender and transsexual subjects when it comes to much-needed projects of thinking gender

otherwise. In his words, “some feminists place a greater responsibility on transsexual people to disrupt dual gender systems, a responsibility I have argued elsewhere does not account for the responsibility all people have in the project of undoing gender” (2008, 438) I share Vidal-Ortiz belief that it is the responsibility of all to think and live gender otherwise. At the same time, I have to concur with queer anthropologist Eric Plemons, for whom “the stakes are high for those whose lives depend not on thinking about trans- bodies but surviving in them” (2017, 128). My dissertation has been an attempt to acknowledge the extraordinary labor of four travesti subjects, Sandra, Belissa, Giuseppe and Yefri, in thinking and living gender otherwise while also trying to survive. In the case of Giuseppe, I want to recognize the effort he put towards critically reinventing travestismo while dying, and even in and after his death.

To be accountable in this project means to openly acknowledge that I myself am an “improper sexual subject” for even conducting this research. For now, I consider myself a cisgender queer man. Here, I am not simply returning to a naïf confessional mode of sexual subjectivity, but rather I want to highlight how the thinking of travestismo, and more generally of the project of thinking gender otherwise, can only be enriched by the active presence of travesti subjects in spaces such as school and university classrooms, centralizing travesti subjects as an integral part of academic communities. Their critical labor needs to be sustained. I hope this dissertation is a small step in such a direction. In many instances, I have wondered how to think about the possibilities for reparation in relation to travesti communities in Peru and elsewhere. It seems to me that only when travesti subjects begin to be part of institutions like the “academy” and the “university” some of these questions about reparation can be more accurately addressed. Only when travesti communities and subjects can count on supportive (institutional) environments that sustain them, can we all begin to consider seriously the question of how (to attempt) to forgive the unforgivable. Perhaps in this utopian future, travestismo may be another name for friendship. If this is the case then we have much work to do in order to build such a travesti utopia.

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