

CHAPTER 10

Out of Place: Translations of 'Race', Ethnicity, Sexuality and Citizenship in Washington, D.C and San Salvador, El Salvador

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Introduction

The deployment of language as an identity practice only becomes accentuated when it steps across linguistic and cultural boundaries (Rodríguez 2003, p. 25).

This chapter critically analyses the intersections between identity and subjectivity to account for the instability of categories that are racially and ethnically constituted within renewed understandings of 'queer' and 'Latino', of 'race', ethnicity, sexuality and citizenship. I draw on six in-depth interviews collected between 2004-2006 in the District of Columbia with Stacey, Juan Fernando, Arlyn, Jade, Amarillo and Ticov, first-generation LCentro community members that self-identify as LGB or T and Latino. I also draw on two in-depth interviews with Romero and Amaranta collected during field research conducted in San Salvador, El Salvador in the summer of 2006. All interviews were conducted in Spanish.¹ I will illustrate the way in which US identity categories such as 'queer' and 'Latino/a' are

¹ This article is part of my doctoral research project in Cultural Anthropology at American University that focuses on gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender-identified first generation immigrant 'Latinos y Latinas' in the Latino Diaspora living in the District of Columbia by critically engaging the intersections of queer subjectivity with forms of racial subjectivity.

not stable categories but are constantly invented, reinvented and politicised confronting the apparent fixity of current understandings and interpretations of 'race' and sexuality. A possible reading looks at LGBT *Latinos/as* refusal to occupy a 'queer' and 'Latino' fixed identity by otherwise queering racial and sexuality understandings, as a way to contest a 'Western' (colonial, Eurocentric) 'authority' as embodied by these scripts and labels in a translation/border crossing continuous flux. I place my discussion of identities within a power/knowledge framework as theorised by Foucault (1972, 1978) and applied to the difficulty of translating sexual and racial borders when crossing borders that have been geographically and politically defined as the 'United States of America' for this particular research project. As discussed by Mignolo (2005, p. xix) 'America' was an invention forged in the process of European colonial history and the consolidation and expansion of the 'Western' world view and institutions.²

I cannot speak of 'queerness' and 'Latinidad' without acknowledging my subject positioning within the LGBT US-'Latino' field of study. That is to say, I use my Latina/queer/migrant/white/mestiza³ positionality as a tool that is activated in this research to map the way in which labels such as 'Latino/queer' get translated by LGBT 'Latinos' in the D.C. area. I am arguing for different ways of understanding, living and performing race and sexuality by looking at the implications of LGBT 'Latinos' rejecting the label 'queer'.⁴ To expand this further, I have added to the interpretive methodology a focus on 'the sites where taxonomies don't quite fit' following Quiroga (2000, pp. 195-196), which implies mapping the way in which dissimilar categories re-organise to create new non-normative orders

² America, as a continent and people, was considered inferior in European narratives from the sixteenth century until the idea was refashioned in the US after the Sp-Am War in 1898 when 'Latin' America took on the inferior role (Mignolo 2005, pg. 2).

³ Though its meanings have changed throughout the centuries, I am using 'mestiza' to acknowledge the mixture of Indigenous peoples and Spanish conquerors and as such illustrate its hybridity.

⁴ The term was brought up initially by grassroots activists and now theorised by academia through 'queer' theory. For further reading see Turner (2000).

(Fischer 2003). In the case of my research, this refers to socially constructed categories of sexuality and race: interpreting slices, glimpses, *and* specimens of interaction that display how cultural practices, connected to structural formations and narrative texts, are experienced at a particular time and place by interacting individuals (Denzin 1997, p. 245). In a similar way to Denzin (1997, p. 38), I am treating transcriptions as texts to reconstruct a narrative from the field that analyses discourses dialogically, joining people in little worlds of concrete experience (Bakhtin 1981) as the translation of sexual and racial borders will exemplify.

Translating Sexual and Racial Borders

To engage in an analysis of the racialisation of 'queer' and the sexualisation of 'Latino' without critically addressing the process of translation that border crossing entails would be futile. The symbolic and material implications of what appears as 'only' swimming across a river, 'only' walking through an imaginary or clearly defined national border constitutes in itself a corporeal process of translation. In crossing a border, prior understandings of self-identity, such as race and ethnicity, are re-organised according to hegemonic and discriminatory classifications of the new nation/entered nation. In the case of the US, these classifications rely on a black/white dichotomy that emphasises skin color and phenotype (Omi and Winant 1994).

Anthropology's episteme rests upon the idea of being able to understand a culture or cultures other than one's own. This has historically involved translation not only of language, but also of concepts, meanings, customs, and understandings. Even in the 'prehistory' of anthropology, translation was vital in the colonial enterprise in order to conquer the territories and their peoples. This gave place to contradictory subject positions among the indigenous peoples as those who spoke their native and the conquerors' languages were abducted from their communities in order to serve as translators. This is the case of the Aztec woman La Malinche. La Malinche's controversy as a spokesperson of Spanish Conquistador Hernán Cortez is only one among many tensions caused by the process of translation and interpretation during the colonial period. Interpretations of Malinche: vary some say she used her power, status and proximity to Cortez to avoid total devastation of her people whereas for others she aided the Spaniards in

conquering 'her own people'. None of these versions could be separated from a discussion on the gendered nature of La Malinche's character as she is commonly depicted *first* as Cortez's lover. A similar story referencing the Incas is Huaylas chief's daughter Quispe Sisa whose union with Spaniard Francisco Pizarro was arranged by her chief father. Thanks to this union the Inca Army was defeated in Lima.

This is a process started by colonisers acting as anthropologists who produced texts rendered as an 'accurate' account of the cultures in the so-called 'New World', a one-sided interpretation of such communities. Looking at the way meanings around *queer* travel exemplifies the normative politics of translating language and culture as Derrida (2001) extensively discusses.

If translation is a re-codification, a transfer of codes according to Rubel and Rosman (2003) and has become a battleground between the hegemonic forces –the target culture and language, and the formerly subjugated 'non-Western' world, the subject position of 'native' anthropologists becomes particularly relevant as it has the potential to highlight the long history of the 'Western' misinterpretation of 'foreign' cultures. Translation then goes beyond linguistics to account for meaning-making practices of the communities studied. This process of translation involves more than merely translating languages; it involves translating cultures, values, and institutions of power (Rodríguez 2003, p. 22).

It would be fruitless to account for these translations without first bringing our attention to a genealogy of language, discourse and the question of *Latinidad* and who (is able) to be a *Queer Latinola*. The 'queer' subject colored as 'white' is enacted in the narratives of the Latino LGBT informants I have analysed. The continuous negotiation around place, belonging and ethnic/racial/sexual identities are articulated in those iterative moments that mark the possibility and impossibility of identity, presence through absence (Butler 1990). I will rely on Gloria Anzaldúa's (1990) metaphor of 'making faces' for constructing one's identity in order to exemplify the creative though draining process of 'making faces'. The term 'Latin America' as coined by the French effaces indigenous and African communities as well as countries that do not speak any Latin-derived language. 'Latinidad' was not coined officially in the US as an ethnic category until 1980. Rodríguez (2003:9) defines *Latinidad* as the site where different discourses of history, geography, and language practices collide whereas Dávila (2001:2) will use

Latinidad as a site where Spanish speaking is the basis for identification. In any case, it illustrates the ‘ni de aquí ni de allá’ [from neither here nor there],⁵ a popular saying where migrant status has been characterised by a need to occupy at least two spaces at the same time, by constantly rearranging its position. Problematizing the very notions around the construction of *Latinidad* turns out to be essential when examining what generalisations and common senses will determine meanings attached to subject,⁶ in this case gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender-identified first generation immigrant ‘Latinos y Latinas’ living in the District of Columbia. The construction of *Latinidad* hence functions as an *a priori* where conflicting and opposing notions of race, class, color, language, space, history are brought together to create a marker that is functional to the nation-state project. I will add that the imagined ‘Latinidad’ is not only already racialised, gendered and marked by class but also and mainly sexualised.

Although translation has been at the core of Anthropological work, differences between linguistic and cultural translations have received little attention, particularly when the ‘natives’ have come to study their ‘own’ (Slocum 2001; Narayan 1993). This chapter will hence not only translate and illustrate points of resistance and – ways of talking back of ‘queer’ Diasporic identities in relation to Latino/a American understandings of race and sexuality – but also act as a reminder that race-ing *queer* constitutes an *urgent* project that triggers an analysis of race (and sexuality) as unstable and ‘decentered’ social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle.⁷

For instance, when discussing Indonesian *gay* and *lesbi* subjectivities, Boellstorff (2003, p. 227) advances what he calls a framework of ‘dubbing culture’ to account for the relationships between globalisation and subjectivities. Boellstorff’s analysis illustrates the way in which some Indonesians in his research study came to inhabit the *gay* and *lesbi* subject positions: not necessarily through their community or kin group. As the author continues

⁵ Spivak (1987) has suggested that migrant urban public culture, by its very premises, hybridises identity.

⁶ Rodriguez (2003).

⁷ As discussed by Omi and Winant (1994).

discussing how most Indonesians are unaware of these terms unless they have traveled to the ‘West’ or else think of *lesbi* and *gay* as English names for *waria*,⁸ I find similarities with the LGBT Latinos in my research study. Although LGBT Latinos have lived in the ‘West’ (some migrated to the US as many as 12 years ago), they have seldom heard the word ‘queer’ except outside their communities and they relate to it as a word not to be coined as an identity. Those like Jade, who is politically visible in the area of D.C., play with the ‘queer’ subject positioning as a way to explain her *mariconadas* as illustrated below. The contrast is provided by Amarillo who, despite having lived in the US since his childhood, finds the term offensive as will be further discussed throughout this chapter. Amarillo came to the United States from an urban area in El Salvador when he was 7 years old, that is to say, 18 years ago.

Jade is a Salvadoran male-to-female transgender in her 30s who came to the US approximately 10 years ago and is known as one of the most prominent Latina activists in the D.C. area. The first time I met Jade I was captivated by her charm and her open and smart conversation. When we started talking about sexual identities, labels such as ‘loca’⁹ and ‘queer’, I asked Jade how she self-identifies. Jade responded as follows:

Si, a veces [me identifico como mujer], poco mas aburrida, mas recta, mas correcta, cuidar la imagen, no puedo ser muy puta, pero en mi ambiente cuando puedo ser ‘queer’ lo soy y es mas fun. En el trabajo I am Ms. Jade [pero en realidad] soy ‘loca’. Yo he determinado mi sexualidad mi género y creo que esa es mi parte ‘queer’, que no la voy a dejar it’s always going to be there.

Sometimes I self-identify myself as a woman... more well-behaved, I can’t be that slut, but in my *ambiente* when I can I am

⁸ As Boellstorff (2003) further discusses, same sex activity took place before Indonesians interviewed thought of themselves as *gay* or *lesbi*.

⁹ *Loca* as a feminine adjective in Spanish is marked by suffix ‘a’ in contrast to the masculine ending ‘o’. Nevertheless, *loca* is used indistinctively for all genders by the ‘Latino’ LGBT community members I interviewed. The meanings around *loca* are broadly discussed in my doctoral dissertation.

queer and it's more fun. At work I am Ms. Jade [but truly] I am 'loca'. I have determined my gender sexuality and I believe that's my 'queer' part that I will never leave aside 'it's always going to be there'.

In Jade's initial text, 'queer' acts as a transgressive signifier with an essence of its own whereas 'woman' is normalised symbolically through traits such as 'correctness'. The latter considers that the label 'woman' has been historically conceptualised and constructed using signifiers ranging from passivity to dependability. In addition, there's a binary opposition where 'woman' and 'queer' stand as opposites. Jade reifies 'queer' through her struggle to keep what she considers a 'queer' essence while being forced to perform as a woman that parallels 'appropriate behavior', a *Ms. Jade act* she performs at work. That is to say, there is a tension between being a woman and performing femininity as prescribed by societal norms and gender normativity.

Boellstorff (2003) has suggested that co-relations between so-called 'native' understandings of sexuality and 'Western' terms are coined and inhabited when the proximity of the 'West' through the media or travel occurs. In contrast, the LGBT Latinos living in the D.C. area are actively refusing the 'queer' label. By doing so, this community is distancing themselves from a term that is loaded with precisely the 'Western' stereotype of whiteness and class. The latter terms, that are so attractive to Indonesians and Philipines as in Boellstorff (2003) and Manalansan (2002) studies respectively, are rejected by LGBT Latinos as a way to fight assimilation discourses that produce a sexual hybrid subject un-willing to give up a culturally-located understanding of sexuality. This sexual hybrid subject is partially produced in a material place located, ironically and interesting enough, only two miles away from the White House, the current symbol *par excellence* of the 'West'.

According to Niranjana's (1994, p. 38) discussion of colonialism and the politics of translation, the European conquest language system functioned by conferring legitimacy to the dominant language. This ensured that the 'native' population could learn from their own past through the texts of the colonial rulers. Extrapolating this discussion into the current research renders problematic the 'Western'-constructed sexual categories such as 'queer' into 'non-western' populations. Labels such as 'gay' are commonly discussed by activists and academics in the US and abroad as a liberat-

ing term for ‘non-westerners’ once the latter group is able to encounter its existence, inhabit its subject position and –in some cases- enjoy its benefits. The framework used has provided the LGBT ‘non-western’ population with a term that can translate their practices, feelings and desires into a life-style that usually takes place in a country, space and language other than their own. As different authors have critically discussed, Manalansan (2002), Muñoz (1999; 2000), Anzaldúa and Moraga (1993), inhabiting the ‘gay US’ world entails assimilation into the US gay culture as well as a recognition that the ‘gay US’ agenda is not only not universal for all gays living inside or outside the US but is also ambivalent with racial and ethnic difference. That is to say, US gay confers race and ethnicity an *a priori* of whiteness intersected by class and education, as the following joke told by Romero during my interview with him in San Salvador illustrates. Romero is a leading gay Salvadorean leader in his 30s doing groundbreaking work in the area of LGBT rights in El Salvador.

Un chico le dice a su papá: ‘Soy gay’.

El padre le contesta: Tienes tarjeta de crédito? No

Tienes carro? No

Puedes mantenerte solo? No

Vas a la universidad? No

Ah, entonces solo eres un culero.

Para ser gay tienes que tener tarjeta de crédito, carro, ir a la universidad, plata para vivir solo... sino ‘solo’ eres un culero.

A young guy man comes out to his father as gay.

The father then asks him: Do you have a credit card?

His son replies]. No

Do you have a car? No!

Can you live on your own? No.

Do you go to the university? No

Ah, so you are (just) a faggot.

To be gay you need a credit card, a car,

[you need to] study at a university,

money to live by yourself, otherwise you are a faggot.

At first, this joke might appear to resemble Boellstorff's (2003, p. 30) discussion that being *lesbi* or *gay* and being Indonesian never perfectly match. Nevertheless, the *culero*¹⁰ versus *gay* distinction brought up by Romero's joke exceeds the rigid dichotomy of either / or by assigning a particular dissonance between both signifiers where *gay*, painted with upper-class mobility, allows *culero* to retain its local meaning around the multiple socio-economic constraints of the San Salvador LGBT community.

Translation in this context is not only undesirable but objectionable; not only is the idiom of translation no longer sufficient, as discussed by Boellstorff (2003, p. 237), but the 'Western' drive to eagerly find co-parallels among radically different cultural formations gets contested. I concur with Boellstorff (2003, p. 237) that binarisms commonly used to account for LGBT 'non-westerners' do not capture the possibility of subject positions with more nuanced and conjectural relationships to the 'West'. These relationships may stand outside usual definitions of identity politics as the case of the LGBT Latinos illustrate.

This said, I refute not acknowledging studies on hybridity and Diaspora to ethnographically account for the nuances present in the sexual identities and subject positions of LGBT Latinos. The latter sheds light on the trans-local nature of Diasporic communities. By calling attention to these nuances I want to further disrupt any linear, homogenous translation of 'Latino' and 'queer'. As much as I concur with the dialectics between homeland and Diaspora, I also want to acknowledge the continuous re-signification of the 'West' as intrinsically located within 'in-between' spaces in the Latino barrios as Amarillo's text illustrates. In this way, I am redefining Diaspora as not confined exclusively to geographical space as it reassesses questions of cultural identity in relation to multi-vocal spaces. The latter produces alternative temporalities as extensively discussed by Halberstam (2005).

Despite a presumed acculturation based on his age of entrance to this territory as previously discussed (7 years), Amarillo not only distances from 'queer' having heard it 'many times', but refers to it as 'insulting'.

[queer] me parece un poco insultante. Pienso que no tiene una base

¹⁰ The closest translation of *culero* would be faggot

específica positiva. En ningún caso he tratado de usarlo. [se usa] en grupos de personas anglos. Esta palabra es mas usada con los anglos jóvenes, angloparlante. En mi comunidad [no hay] nadie que se identifique como queer. Ya tenemos suficiente con esto de transgenders...

I find [queer] a little insulting. I believe it doesn't have a positive origin. I have never tried to use it. It's used among anglos. This word is used more among young anglos, English speaking. In my community there's no one who self-identifies as queer. We have had enough with that of the transgenders.

Niranjana's (1994:36) argument is useful to analyse Amarillo's text in light of the potential of rethinking translation as non-essentialist as it makes translating a strategy of resistance rather than one of containment. Amarillo provides several instances where *queer* is loaded with representations of a 'Western' non-heterosexual sexuality, such as anglos, as well as the explicit reference to the English language. In addition, Amarillo emphasises how the term *queer* is used by nobody in his/her community, correlating this idea with what could be read as a call of attention to labels when he says 'we have had enough with that of the transgenders'.

Using a hybridity framework to understand Amarillo's delimitations of queer paired with the continuous disidentification¹¹ with the term further illustrates a quest for a communitary Diasporic understanding of sexuality. These understandings re-enact a hybrid moment where new meanings around home, borders and Diaspora are enabled following García-Canclini (2003). This author understands hybridity as encompassing the socio-cultural processes that currently enable the generation of new structures (quintessential Latino barrios within the US) and practices that produce renewed meanings around prior understandings of 'race', sexuality, ethnicity and citizenship. The latter needs to be considered *in lieu* of the nomadic character of migrant and frontier identities. The author invites us to address hybridity as a translation term between mestizaje, syncretism, fusion and other similar concepts used to designate particular fusions. In this sense,

¹¹ As extensively discussed by Muñoz (1999).

Garcia-Canclini echoes Foucault's reading on power when discussing the deterritorialisation or reterritorialisation of people and practices. Bhabha (1994) offers a useful linguistic reading of the concept of hybridity as well. I use both authors' ideas and theories to question the built-in 'Western' assumption of fixed identities that are smoothly extrapolated from the 'west' to the 'rest'. As Chambers (1994, p. 18-19) further argues, to live 'elsewhere' means to continually find yourself involved in a conversation in which different identities are recognised, exchanged and mixed hence resignifying the 'ni de aquí ni de allá' with 'de aquí y de allá' (from here *and* from there).

I find Amarillo's text particularly relevant to this discussion as it brings forward a critique of US categories commonly used to 'make sense' of non-US communities' practices and culture. When talking about self-identification, Amarillo's choices to re-interpret the label is illustrative of what many will read as a 'transgressive' sexuality where she rejects not only a monolithic identity but rejects monolithic practices and desires.

[Me identifico con] un poco de todo. Entonces el fin de semana como yo me siento digo 'saldrá la mujer'. Lo gozo. Practico otras cosas en donde no cabo. Siempre he tenido conflicto con eso [de las identidades] y tampoco quiero llamarlo confusión porque juego muchos roles y me gustan muchas relaciones heterosexuales, gays, el transgenerismo, un poco de todo... no tengo porqué ponerme un rol. No se que puede ser de donde uno venga, poca gente que yo conozca tengan ese pensamiento. Por decir, no con mujeres nooooo. Ponerse esos límites porque?!

[I self-identify with] a little bit of everything. So during the weekend depending on how I feel I will say 'the woman will come'. I enjoy it a lot. I practice other things where I don't fit. I have always had conflicts with this thing of identities and I don't want to call it confusion since I play many different roles and I like hetero, gay, transgender relations, a little bit of everything... I have no reason why to assign myself a role. I know few people that think like me. Like others will say, with women nooooo. I don't understand why we need to impose ourselves those limits?!

Based on Amarillo's texts, I am not at ease speaking about the LGBT Latinos refusal to inhabit a 'queer' category as a phenomenon 'distinctive' to LGBT Latinos in the D.C. Diaspora. I rather use this ethnographic research to question commonly made assumptions about the nature and scope of cultural translation and the 'Western' anthropological gaze on non-US, non-heterosexual communities in the US and abroad.

I avoid referring to the LGBT population under study as the 'subordinated group' following Foucault's¹² (1978) and Derrida's (1976) call to look beyond binaries as well as the need to look at the metaphysics of power where a person exercises but does not possess power.¹³ As I advocate for a theory of translation to illustrate the multiple intersections between lived subjectivity and knowledge and the discursive limits of translating cultural frameworks, I suggest going back to the 'question of the subject'. The following discussion links the meaningful discursive practices that people engage with in their everyday lives as well as the techniques that enable these communities to provide culturally-specific meanings to make sense of these practices. It also engages with García-Canclini's (2003) call to rethink hybridity not as a monolithic unit but as different intersections and transitions –translocations- that, in this particular research study, has enabled LGBT Latinos to create a space of contention where the barrios of Central America and Mexico are in a constant dialogue with the barrios of Central Americans and Mexicans in the D.C. area in an uninterrupted dynamic, whether 'real' or imaginary. That is to say, LGBT Latinos are engaged in a border-crossing continuum that constantly trans-locates and exceeds meaning.

¹² According to Butler (1999:177) although Foucault's work is usually traced to Nietzsche, Marx, and Merleau-Ponty as its intellectual predecessors, his reflections on history, power, and sexuality take their bearings within a radically revised dialectical framework.

¹³ Difference, he argued, can never be wholly captured within any binary system (Derrida, 1981). Binary oppositions are a rather crude and reductionist way of establishing meaning as noted by Derrida (Hall 1997:235). Derrida (1974) further argues that one pole of the binary is usually the dominant one, hence there will always be a relation of power between the poles of this binary opposition where we should really write *white/black*, *men/women*, *masculine/feminine*, *upper-class/lower class*, *British/alien* to capture this power dimension in discourse.

Trans-locations

Translations are in Schopenhauer's (1985) opinion, always incomplete, always ineffectual and as such, false. Beyond the 'falseness' that this author discusses, I am arguing for a re-interpretation that is not necessarily 'false' but one which extends the possibilities of meanings around a word. Philosophers of language such as Austin (2001), Jakobson (1984) and Davidson (2005) have extensively discussed the importance of context when describing meaning. Context, although attributed through space, does not account for the various mechanisms in which locations re-construct meanings and the practices around those meanings. *Trans*, used as a prefix of locations, is introduced in this section to illustrate how words and the trans-people who use them are already in translation not only in the Spanish-English transference but *within* the same language, Spanish in this case, as permeated by particular territories, communities and understandings.

In order to continue this analysis, I believe it is necessary to review the historicity of the term 'queer' in the US. Adopting the name 'queer' in the United States marked a rejection of the dominant politics of most lesbian/gay leaders (Seidman 1993). By taking up a label that emphasised a unified experience of rejection by the mainstream of society,¹⁴ Queer Nation sought to subvert the politics of assimilation, while trying to mobilise and unify queers. The key slogan of the movement was 'We're here, we're "queer", get used to it'. Using the framework I have introduced, the 'we' becomes questionable: who is the 'we' constructed here and who is this 'we' excluding'. As I will discuss throughout this section, Foucault (1980) will argue that it's precisely in these strategic fields of power relations where plurality of resistance can take place. The sign is 'queer', the signifier might be 'queer' as well, but the 'initial intended western-urban-mostly white-upper class' signified is constantly challenged, in this case by the LGBT Latino community in the District of Columbia and El Salvador. The latter considering that one way of thinking about 'culture' is in terms of these shared conceptual maps,

¹⁴ Following Roseberry's (1989) understanding of society as socially constituted and socially constituting.

shared language systems and the codes which govern the relationships of translation between them.

Subjects personify in different ways the discourse that situates practices outside heterosexuality as marginal because violating the gender norm creates particular evocative slurs such as *afeminado* [feminine], *machona* [butch], *mariposón* [faggot]. These discourses are historically-specific and hence occur in particular discursive regimes. As such, they are not to be analysed as absolute truths but as part of a discursive formation sustaining a regime of truth. In addition, discourse also produces a place for the subject (reader, viewer, who is also subjected to 'discourse') from which its particular knowledge and meaning makes most sense. The question of agency remains at the heart of discussions of subjectivity. 'Agency' brings us face-to-face with the political question of how to create social awareness that will contribute to reducing the social, gender, sexual, economic gap faced by a majority of people around the world.

If we are to agree with this theoretical take on the subject and apply it to the current discussion, LGBT Latinos/as' reading of 'queer' as mostly a signifier that is 'white' and 'Western' implies that LGBT Latinos/as have become subjects of a particular discourse and bearers of its power/knowledge. Guatemalan Juan Fernando, in his 30s, goes even further by paralleling queer with a synonym of what he calls 'gringa homosexuality'. He does this by self-identifying as a homosexual while clarifying that gay is an anglicism and that in Latin America [people] like using words in English because of the significant influence of the US on that region.

Queer es sinónimo de homosexualidad gringa. Para empezar yo tendría que decir [que soy] homosexual. Gay como un anglicismo. En América Latina gustan las palabras en inglés, influencia muy grande [de los Estados Unidos].

Queer is a synonym of 'gringa' homosexuality. To start with I will have to say that [I am] homosexual. Gay [is] an anglicism. In Latin America [people] like to use words in English [because of] the great influence of [the United States].

It goes without saying that the way in which Juan Fernando is able to position himself within a very particular discursive regime, in this case the

Guatemalan understanding of 'homosexual' regime, enables at the same time the rejection of the term *queer* as well as the term *gay*. This act of refuting serves as the basis for a talking-back-to-the-system strategy where distancing implies reinterpretation. Individuals may differ (gender, race, ethnicity) but they will not be able to take meaning until they have identified with those positions which the discourse constructs, subjecting themselves to its rules and hence becoming the subjects of its power/knowledge (Hall 1997:56) as Juan Fernando's use of *gay* illustrates. An example that I believe parallels the voice of Juan Fernando is the way I came to occupy the subject position of an apparently fixed homogenous and monolithic category 'Latina' once I entered the US (followed by Quiteña and Ecuadorian). Ecuador, being a multi-ethnic and pluri-cultural country, every region has its very specific particularities as pertains to race, class and ethnicity. Coming from the Andean region, from the capital city and from a middle-upper class heritage, my racial identification will be apparently 'white'. Whiteness in this context is constructed principally against anything that appears to be indigenous. Based on my privileged whiteness before crossing the border and 'passing-as-a-white Latina' after crossing the border, a remarkable common denominator of all the five people I interviewed in El Salvador was the difficulty in self-identifying themselves within a racial and ethnic category. This difficulty makes visible the unexpected importance these categories take when crossing the border where representations around 'Latinos' are activated and applied to the people entering the US both legally and illegally (though both differ drastically, particularly as the latter implies the very material possibility of death and incarceration).

For Salvadorean Amaranta, currently living in El Salvador and the main founder of the only trans-group in El Salvador, the term *Latino* resonates with her as someone that 'is not from here' [El Salvador]. Amaranta exemplifies in her discourse the unfamiliar scenery of *Latino* as Salvadorean bringing attention to the fact that in her reading, *Latino* does not encompass Salvadorean. This reading is in opposition to US readings where all people south of the border, as well as their descendents, are 'Latinos'. To further clarify this act of refuting, the fact that I am attributing agency to the LGBT Latino community might seem to contradict the Foucauldian method I have precisely described. Nevertheless, I am rather talking about an agency regulated by the power/knowledge that makes Latino already

negative and which makes 'queer' a difficult place to inhabit if we consider that the 'queer' episteme is (already) invested in 'whiteness', wealth and US citizenship.

Borders have served many purposes in defining citizenship considering that these borders are social spaces that are used to delimit sexual-identity positions following Bell and Binnie's (2000, p. 110) discussion of sexuality and belonging. Nevertheless, this same space of the social opens up the possibility of reconfiguring sexual identities usually driven by government-regulated agendas. Particularly within a framework of transnational sexual citizenship, these socio-political agendas are based on a universal gay identity that obscures differences of class, race and ethnicity, to name a few as Leap (2005) illustrates through his work on Cape Town, South Africa.

The multiple contradictions embedded in these processes become particularly visible when critically looking at political asylum. In order to successfully be granted political asylum, non-US applicants are pushed into conveying a discourse that demonises their home country, performing in this way the governmental discursive representation of, for example, a 'transgender'. The place of enunciation becomes at the same time the place of assimilation. As Stacey's text will illustrate, although the US has been represented as an 'LGBT heaven' (not to deny that for many it has been) those same identity politics that are meant to give you alternative spaces, become too rigid when crossing the border.

Stacey is a Salvadoran transgender in her mid-30s, who has lived in the US for 5 years and is the only Latina working at a D.C. health care clinic for mostly 'whites'. The text refers to the intersections and understandings of 'transgender' when juxtaposing memories from El Salvador and the US, at no time dislocated from her understanding of what she calls 'medical' labels for non-heterosexual people in the US

El problema es que en este país mucha gente podría [verme] y decir que no soy transgénero... la gente te encaja en una categoría. En El Salvador como mujer transexual no hay formas de hacerse procesos [cambios quirúrgicos visibles] para la gente común todas las transexuales son locas. En el Salvador el concepto básico es como una se identifica no importa si hay una combinación mente-cuerpo. Cuando me moví acá la misma comunidad LGBT te friega si dices que eres transgénero y no tienes senos o

no te has hecho cirugía. En El Salvador no sentía presión social de la comunidad, para la gente común yo era gay. Acá el pelo debe ser largo, debo llevar maquillaje, debo tener [o querer tener] una vagina, senos, estar en hormonas se vuelve super imperativo.

The problem is that in this country many people could see me and say that I am not ‘transgender’... people put you in boxes. In El Salvador, the main concept is how one identifies with disregard to whether there’s a match between mind-body. When I first moved here the LGBT community teases you if you say that you are a transgender and you don’t have breasts or you haven’t gone through surgery. In El Salvador, I didn’t feel social pressure from the community. For the general public I was gay. Here I have to have long hair, wear makeup, have or [wish to] have a vagina, breasts, use hormones, all this becomes imperative.

This representation carries an emphasis on surgery to ‘fix’ their ‘problem’ accompanied by the overarching need to leave the ‘non-democratic dangerous third-world chaos’ which, looking at binaries, constructs the US as a ‘queer paradise’.¹⁵ I rely on Jasbir Puar’s (2006) article on US homonormativities to further account for Stacey’s struggle with being a woman/transsexual/transgender as she crossed borders from El Salvador to the US. The contradictions inherent in the idealisation of the US as a gay-friendly, tolerant and sexually liberated society (as opposed to any third-world country such as El Salvador) are made visible by Stacey’s text where she speaks of the pressure she felt when coming to the US to fit a very particular way of being ‘transgender’, a pre-discursive and prescriptive box with which she constantly struggles. Puar’s (2006) analysis is useful as it articulates the production of gay, lesbian and ‘queer’ bodies as crucial to the deployment of nationalism.

To develop border crossing as intersected with identity I rely on Knopp (2004, p. 124) who discusses how being simultaneously in and out of place, and seeking comfort as well as pleasure in movement, displacement, and

¹⁵ See Jakobsen, Janet R. (2002) for a critical analysis of the way in which the ‘West’ has been constructed as a paradise for ‘non-Western’ queers.

placelessness, are commonly sought after experiences. In line with Knopp, Fortier's (2003, p.130) discussion is relevant as a reminder that home is not simply a sense of place, but that it is also a material space, a lived space, inhabited by people who work to keep the roof over their heads, or to keep their family warm, safe and sane.

'Queer' has been in straight opposition with the construction of identities around a normalised body that precludes desires and practices. This regulated body became the basis of the male/female restricted dichotomy. This is exemplified in Stacey's notions of belonging and cultural understandings as they simultaneously intersect with sexuality. This in turn illustrates conflicting notions between Salvadoran and US meanings around transgender people. Note the use of transsexual as gay, or else the use of transsexual as a person without a sex change. The text addresses the processes of normalisation closely tied with the medicalisation of the body as discussed by Foucault (1978). Reading Stacey's text through Foucault's discussion on the various technologies of normalisation unveils the rigid binary female/male, black/white dichotomies in which the US operates, another of the multiple range of disciplining practices.

Having said this, I close this section with an invitation to question categories in light of an understanding that there are diverse manifestations of agency and a range of hybrid subjectivities within artificially homogenised groups that according to Bhabha (1994) allow 'marginalised' groups to survive. In agreement with Niranjana (1994:36), I don't attempt to propose a 'new' way of theorizing translation and cultural interpretation; instead, I want to push the frontiers of these two domains to map the economies within which queer and Latino are produced.

Conclusion

As this article has discussed, translating across cultural understandings of race, ethnicity and sexuality is not an easy task, as illustrated through the material lives of these Salvadoran activists. Building on a power/knowledge framework which provides the context through which identity markers can be interrogated (Rodriguez 2003, p. 7), 'queer' sits epistemologically *outside* the daily life of the 'Latino' immigrants that are part of this project. As inclusive as the term 'queer' might sound to some, 'Latinos' have not only

not assimilated the term into their discursive and political practices but are in fact using it as a way to contest standard ways of framing and re-framing sexuality and race. Queer theorists would generally argue that power and knowledge, far from being distinct, antagonistic realms in modern 'Western' culture operate in tandem, as highlighted by Turner (2000, p. 10).

Some further questions that this article raises are those related to policies or politics that the normalisation of 'queer' bodies entails. As developed throughout the LGBT Latino texts, these range from cultural nationalism to assimilationism, the creation and perpetuation of real and fictitious borders, increasingly hostile anti-immigration policies, the normalisation of 'Latino' LGBT bodies for identity politic agendas and funding as well as for political asylum. The lives of 'Latino' gays, bisexuals and transgenders are constantly permeated by what Foucault calls technologies of power, though creatively engaged in transgressing those as illustrated through Stacey, Juan Fernando, Arlyn, Jade, Amarillo, Ticov, Romero and Amaranta's lived texts. Following Niranjana's (1994, p. 36) discussion, the rethinking of translation becomes an urgent task for a postcolonial theory attempting to make sense of 'subjects' living 'in constant translation' and seeking to reclaim the notion by deconstructing it and re-inscribing its potential as a mode of resistance. Illustrating the production of subjectivities in a translation/border continuum might 'shift the geography and the geo-politics of knowledge' (Mignolo 2003:xix) beyond the restrictive categories of 'race', ethnicity, sexuality and place.

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