

## CHAPTER 1

### Translating Sexual and Racial Borders

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The deployment of language as an identity practice only becomes accentuated when it steps across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

—Juana María Rodríguez (2003, 25)

This chapter critically analyzes 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 and 2006 in the District of Columbia with Stacey, Juan Fernando, Arlyn, Jade, Amarillo, and Roberto, 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 in San Salvador, El Salvador, in the summer of 2006. All interviews were conducted in Spanish. I will illustrate the way in which U.S. identity categories such as “queer” and “Latino/a” are not stable categories but are constantly invented, reinvented, and politicized confronting the apparent fixity of current understandings and interpretations of “race” and sexuality. Other authors such as Lionel Cantú (2009) introduce the concept of a “*queer*” *political economy of migration* that considers the importance of situating sexuality at the center of the migration experience bringing forward an approach to sexuality and migration as mutually constitutive.

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 theorized 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, xix), “America” was an invention forged in the process of European colonial history and the consolidation and expansion of the “Western” worldview and institutions.<sup>1</sup>

I cannot speak of “queerness” and “Latinidad” without acknowledging my subject positioning within the LGBT U.S.-“Latino” field of study. That is to say, I use my Latina/“queer”/migrant/white/mestiza<sup>2</sup> 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 the rejection by LGBT “Latinos” of the label “queer.”<sup>3</sup> 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, 195–96), which implies mapping the way in which dissimilar categories reorganize to create new nonnormative orders (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, 245). In a way similar to that of Denzin (1997, 38), I am treating transcriptions as texts to reconstruct a narrative from the field that analyzes discourses dialogically, joining people in tiny worlds of concrete experience (Bakhtin 1981) as the translation of sexual and racial borders will exemplify. To engage in an analysis of the racialization of “queer” and the sexualization of “Latino” without critically addressing the process of translation that border crossing entails would be futile. 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 reorganized according to hegemonic and discriminatory classifications of the new nation/entered nation. In the case of the United States, these classifications rely on a black/white dichotomy that emphasizes skin color and phenotype (Omi and Winant 1994). As Arrizón (2006) explains in the introduction to her book *Queering Mestizaje: Transculturation and Performance*, mestizo cultures represent more than the synthesis of indigenous traditions with those of Europeans and/or Africans. They epitomize the in-betweenness of identities produced by the impact of colonial/cultural encounters and their intimate relation to social processes.

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 “pre-history” 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. The controversy regarding La Malinche’s role as a spokesperson of Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés 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 Cortés to avoid total devastation of her people, whereas others say she aided the Spaniards in conquering her own people. None of these versions can be separated from a discussion on the gendered nature of La Malinche’s character, as she is commonly depicted first as Cortés’s lover. A process started by colonizers of what could now be read as “to act as anthropologists” producing texts rendered as an “accurate” account of the cultures in the so-called “New World,” a one-sided interpretation of such communities.

If translation is a recodification, a transfer of codes according to Rubel and Rosman (2003) 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, 22).

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—ways of talking back of “queer” Diasporic identities in relation to Latin 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.<sup>4</sup>

It will 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” “Latino.” Looking at the way meanings around how “queer” travel exemplifies the normative politics of translating language and culture as Derida and Venuti (2001) extensively discuss. The “queer” subject colored as “white” is enacted in the narratives of the “Latino” LGBT informants I have analyzed. The continuous negotiations 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, a creative though draining process. The term “Latin America,” originally developed in France, effaces indigenous and African communities as well as countries that do not speak any Latin-derived language. “Latinidad” was not used officially in the United States 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) uses Latinidad as a site where speaking Spanish is the basis for

identification. In any case, it illustrates the “ni de aquí ni de allá” (from neither here nor there), a popular saying where migrant status has been characterized by a need to occupy at least two spaces at the same time, by constantly rearranging its position.<sup>5</sup> Problematizing the very notions around the construction of Latinidad turns out to be essential when examining what generalizations and common sense will determine meanings attached to subject,<sup>6</sup> 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 a priori representation where conflicting and opposing notions of race, class, color, language, space, and history are brought together to create a marker that is essential to the nation-state project.<sup>7</sup> I will add that the imagined “Latinidad” is not only already racialized, genderized, and marked by class but also and mainly sexualized.

For instance, when discussing Indonesian gay and lesbian subjectivities, Boellstorff (2003, 227) advances what he calls a framework of “dubbing culture” to account for the relationships between globalization and subjectivities. Boellstorff’s analysis illustrates the way in which some Indonesians in his research study came to inhabit the gay and lesbian subject positions: not necessarily through their community or kin group. The author continues 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*.<sup>8</sup> I find similarities with the LGBT “Latinos” in my research study: although they had lived in the “West” (some had migrated to the United States as many as twelve years before), they seldom heard the word “queer” except outside their ethnic communities, and they relate to it as a word not to be embraced as an identity. Jade, who is politically visible in the area of D.C., plays with the “queer” subject positioning as a way to explain her *mariconadas*, as illustrated below. On the other hand, Amarillo, despite having lived in the United States since age seven, finds the term offensive, as will be further discussed throughout this chapter.

Jade is a Salvadoran male-to-female transgender in her thirties who came to the United States in her twenties 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 intelligent conversation. When we started talking about sexual identities, labels such as “loca” and “queer,” I asked Jade how she self-identifies. Jade responded as follows:

Sí, a veces [me identifico como mujer], poco más aburrida, más recta, más correcta, cuidar la imagen, no puedo ser muy puta, pero en mi ambiente cuando puedo ser “queer” lo soy y es más 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 proper. I can’t be that slut, but in my *environment* when I can I am “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 normalized symbolically through traits such as “correctness.” The latter considers that the label “woman” has been historically conceptualized and constructed using signifiers ranging from passivity to dependability. In addition, there’s a binary opposition in which “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 in way 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 correlations 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, they are distancing themselves from a term that is loaded with precisely the “Western” stereotype of whiteness and class. The latter terms, which are so attractive to Indonesians (Boellstorff 2003) and Philippines (Manalansan 2003), are rejected by LGBT “Latinos” as a way to fight assimilation discourses that produce a sexual hybrid subject that is unwilling to give up culturally located understandings of sexuality. This sexual hybrid subject is partially produced in a material place located, ironically, only two miles away from the White House, the current symbol par excellence of the “West.”

According to Niranjana’s (1994, 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 would learn about 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 United States and abroad as liberating terms 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 2003; Muñoz 1999, 2000; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1984; Guzmán 2006), inhabiting the “gay U.S.” world entails assimilation into the U.S. gay culture as well as a recognition that the “gay U.S.” agenda is not only not universal for all gays living inside or outside the United States but is also ambivalent regarding racial and ethnic difference. Guzmán (2006) goes to the heart of this debate by asking what is required of a subject who finds itself simultaneously under the sign of gayness and Latinidad. By doing so, he problematizes “the intersections between matters of sex, race and class in America.”

The category around gay as it is currently understood and mercantiled, particularly in the United States, confers on race and ethnicity an a priori attribute of whiteness (with the understanding that no identities are a priori, as discussed extensively by Judith Butler 1999) 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 Salvadoran leader in his thirties 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 sólo 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 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 "just" a faggot.

At first, this (homophobic) joke might appear to resemble Boellstorff's (2003, 30) discussion that being lesbian or gay and being Indonesian never perfectly match. Nevertheless, the *culero* (faggot) 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 socioeconomic constraints and the stigma associated with being *culero* and poor in 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, 237), but the Western drive to eagerly find parallels among radically different cultural formations gets contested. I will concur with Boellstorff (2003, 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 insist on acknowledging studies on hybridity and diaspora to ethnographically account for the nuances present in the sexual identities and subject positions of LGBT "Latinos." This methodology sheds light on the translocal 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 resignification 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 multivocal spaces. The latter produces alternative temporalities, as extensively discussed by Halberstam (2005).

Despite a presumed acculturation, given his age of entrance to this territory (seven years), and despite having heard "queer" many times, Amarillo not only distances herself from "queer" but also refers to it as "insulting":

[‘queer’] me parece un poco insultante. Pienso que no tiene una base específica positiva. En ningún caso he tratado de usarlo. [se usa] en grupos de personas anglos. Esta palabra es más 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 analyze Amarillo's text as he proposes rethinking translation as nonessentialist, making translation a strategy of resistance rather than one of containment. Amarillo provides several instances where "queer" is loaded with representations of a "Western" nonheterosexual sexuality, such as "Anglos," as well as the explicit reference to the English language. In addition, Amarillo emphasizes how the term "queer" is not used in the community. Although Amarillo's narrative could also be interpreted as transphobic, the framework provided for analysis speaks instead of a rejection of categories perceived as falling outside the Nicaraguan *and* "Latino" identity, situating U.S. categories as fixed and limiting.

Using a hybridity framework to understand Amarillo's delimitations of "queer" paired with the continuous disidentification<sup>10</sup> with the term further illustrates a quest for a communitary diasporic understanding of sexuality. Such understandings reenact a hybrid moment where new meanings around home, borders, and diaspora are enabled, following García Canclini, the Mexico-based Argentine anthropologist. García Canclini (1995) understands hybridity as encompassing the sociocultural processes that currently enable the generation of new structures (quintessential "Latino" barrios within the United States) and practices that produce renewed meanings around prior understandings of "race" sexuality, ethnicity, and citizenship. These new meanings need to be considered in lieu of the nomadic character of migrant and frontier identities. García Canclini 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, García Canclini echoes Foucault's reading on power when discussing the deterritorialization or reterritorialization 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, 18–19) further argues, "to live 'elsewhere' means to continually find yourself involved in a conversation in which different identities are recognized, 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 U.S. categories commonly used to "make sense" of non-U.S. communities' practices and culture. When talking about self-identification, Amarillo's choices to reinterpret the label is illustrative of what many will read as a transgressive sexuality where she not only rejects a monolithic identity but also 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, "Here comes the woman." 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 to assign myself one 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 those limits on ourselves!

Based on Amarillo's texts, I am not at ease speaking about the refusal of LGBT "Latinos" 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-U.S., nonheterosexual communities in the United States and abroad.

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 framework, 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 and 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 (1995) call to rethink hybridity not as a monolithic unit but as different intersections and transitions—translocations—which, in this particular research study, have 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 translocates and exceeds meaning, as further discussed in chapter 2.

In order to continue this analysis, I believe it is necessary to review the historicity of the term "queer" in the United States. 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 emphasized a unified experience of rejection by the mainstream of society,<sup>11</sup> Queer Nation sought

to subvert the politics of assimilation, while trying to mobilize 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 as to who is the "we" constructed here and who the "we" might be excluding. As I will discuss throughout this section, Foucault (1980) will argue that it is 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 San Salvador. The latter considering that one way of thinking about "culture" is in terms of these shared conceptual maps, 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 analyzed 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 make most sense. The question of agency remains at the heart of discussions of subjectivity. "Agency" brings us face to face with the political question on how to create social awareness that will contribute to reduce the social, gender, sexual, and economic gap faced by a great 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 thirties, goes even further by paralleling "queer" with a synonym of what he calls "gringo 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 United States 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” stands as 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,” enables at the same time the rejection of the term “queer” as well as the term “gay.” Homosexual is understood as closer to Guatemalan cultural understandings of homosexuality, whereas gay is reinterpreted as an Anglicism. This act of refuting serves as the basis for a talking-back-to-the-system strategy where distancing implies reinterpretation. Individuals may differ (by gender, race, ethnicity) but they will not be able to create meaning until they have identified with those positions which the discourse constructs, subjected themselves to its rules, and hence become the subjects of its power/knowledge (Hall 1997b, 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 United States (followed by Quiteña and Ecuadorian). Ecuador, is a multiethnic and pluricultural country, every region having its very specific particularities as pertains to “race,” class, and ethnicity. Coming from the Andean region, from the capital city and from an upper-middle-class heritage, my racial identification is apparently “white.” Whiteness in

this context is constructed principally against anything that appears to be indigenous. In light of 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 San Salvador was the difficulty in self-identifying 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 United States both legally and illegally (though these differ drastically, particularly as the latter implies the very material possibility of death and incarceration).

For Salvadoran Amaranta, currently living in El Salvador and the main founder of the only trans group in El Salvador, the term “Latino” resonates as someone that “is not from here” (El Salvador). Amaranta shares that from her understanding and experience, “Latino” does not encompass Salvadoran. This reading is in opposition to U.S. 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 Foucaultian method I just described. Nevertheless, I am rather talking about an agency regulated by power/knowledge (power that is constituted through scientific and valid knowledge) that makes “Latino” already negative and that makes “queer” a difficult place to inhabit if we consider that the “queer” episteme is (already) invested in “whiteness,” wealth, and U.S. 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, 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 in the United States, applicants are pushed into conveying a discourse that demonizes their home country, performing in this way the governmental discursive representation of, for example, a “transgender person.” The place of enunciation becomes at the same time the place of assimilation. As Stacey’s text will illustrate, although the United States has been represented as an “LGBT heaven” (not to deny that for many it has been) those same identity politics that are meant to provide alternative spaces become too rigid when crossing the border.

Stacey is a Salvadoran transgender in her midthirties who has lived in the United States for five years and is the only Latina working at a D.C. health care clinic that mostly serves “whites.” The text refers to the intersections and understandings of “transgender” when juxtaposing memories from El Salvador and the United States, at no time dislocated from her understanding of what she calls “medical” labels for nonheterosexual people in the United States:

El problema es que en este país mucha gente [principalmente la comunidad estadounidense transgénero] 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” . . . [P]eople 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 teased you if you said that you are a transgender, and you don’t have breasts, or you haven’t gone through surgery. En El Salvador, I didn’t feel social pressure from the community. For the general public I was *a loca*. Here [in the United States] 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” a “problem” accompanied by the overarching need to leave the “non-democratic dangerous third-world chaos” which, looking at binaries, constructs the United States as a “queer paradise.”<sup>12</sup> Rodríguez (2003, 113) uses the case of a Brazilian man named Marcelo Tenorio and Luis Mott to illustrate how both are “inescapably inscribed by the circulating discourses of deviance, desire, nation, and law.” Tenorio was granted political asylum on the basis of sexual persecution in his country of origin. After being beaten by “gay bashers” in Rio de Janeiro, he entered the United States illegally, and the Immigration and Naturalization Service appealed his political asylum. Rodríguez (2003, 113) seeks to accentuate the “totalizing implications of the discourses surrounding Tenorio and Mott . . . the language and laws that threaten to engulf will and agency.” The author reflects upon how Tenorio’s desire *to live with freedom* is a desire that cannot be explained away by (post)(neo)colonial constructions of subjectivity, even as these are informed and constituted through these discourses.

I rely on Jasbir Puar’s (2006) article on U.S. homonormativities to further account for Stacey’s struggle with being a woman/transsexual/transgender as she crossed borders from El Salvador to the United States. The contradictions inherent in the idealization of the United States 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 United States 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, 124), who discusses how being simultaneously in and out of place, and seeking comfort as well as pleasure in movement, displacement, and placelessness, are commonly sought-after experiences. In line with Knopp, Fortier’s (2003, 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 a roof over their heads or to keep their family warm, safe, and sane.

“Queer” has been in straight opposition to the construction of identities around a normalized body that precludes desires and practices. This regulated body has become 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. These in turn illustrate conflicting notions between Salvadoran and U.S. meanings around transgender people. Note the use of “transsexual” as gay or as a person without a sex change. The text addresses the processes of normalization closely tied with the medicalization of the body as discussed by Foucault (1978).<sup>13</sup> Reading Stacey’s text in the context of Foucault’s discussion on the various technologies of normalization unveils the rigid binary female/male, black/white dichotomies in which the United States operates.

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 homogenized groups that, according to Bhabha (1994) allow “marginalized” 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.

Translating across cultural understandings of race, ethnicity, and sexuality is not an easy task, as illustrated in the material lives of these Salvadoran activists. Building on a power/knowledge framework that provides the context through which identity markers can be interrogated (Rodríguez 2003, 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 reframing 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, 10).

Some further questions that this chapter raises are those related to policies or politics that the normalization 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, and the normalization 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 transgressing those technologies, as illustrated through Stacey, Juan Fernando, Arlyn, Jade, Amarillo, Roberto, Romero, and Amaranta’s lived texts. Following Niranjana’s (1994, 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 reinscribing 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 2005, xix) beyond the restrictive categories of “race,” ethnicity, sexuality and place. The rigidity around which a transgender persona is constructed and defined within a particular aesthetic in the United States as shared by Stacey, speaks of a type of reification of traditional meanings around “feminine” in a “male-bodied” person. I

believe we need to carefully look at the implications in the analysis brought forward in which Stacey couldn't belong to the D.C. transgender community because she would need "to have long hair, wear makeup, have [or wish to have] a vagina, breasts, use hormones." This perceived and experienced gender rigidity has allowed "Latinos" in this study to critically confront U.S. sexual and gender categories. In doing so, they are simultaneously confronting racist, classist, and ethnocentric categories as they intersect with that which is deemed as the norm.