Sexual, Racial and Nationalist negotiations of Identity Amongst the ‘‘Latino/a’’ Immigrant Community in Washington, D.C

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Prepared for delivery at the 2007 Congress of the Latin American Studies Association, M ontreal, Canada, September 5-7, 2007

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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 2003:25)*.

This chapter critically analyzes the intersections between identity and subjectivity to account for the instability of categories that are racially and ethnically constituted in a system of cultural variation. I draw on 4 in-depth interviews with Stacey, Juan Fernando, Jade, Amarillo first-generation LCentro[1] community members that self-identify as LGB or T and Latino collected between 2004-2006 in the District of Columbia. 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[2].

I anticipate illustrating the way in which U.S. identity categories such as 'queer' and 'Latino/a' are not stable categories but are constantly invented and reinvented and politicized according to diverse constructions of race and sexuality. A possible reading is that which 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.

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/mestiza 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 brought up by LGBT 'Latinos' rejection

[1] LCentro is a Latino LGBT group aimed to provide the mostly D.C.-based Central American population access to health care as well as socio-political information to consolidate support networks that further strengthen common LGBT Latino struggles in the area (gentrification, police harassment, discrimination in work places to name a few).

[2] This paper is part of my doctoral research project in Cultural Anthropology at American University that focuses on gay, lesbian and transgender-identified first generation immigrant "Latinos y Latinas" in the Latino Diaspora living in the District of Columbia. A modified version is in press as part of the book Out of Place: Interrogating Silences in Queerness/Raciality, Raw Nerve Books, UK

of the label 'queer'[3]. 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, p. 195-196), which implies "looking at the messy residue that is left after different orders are juxtaposed"; in this case as 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 as Denzin (1997, p. 38), I am treating transcriptions as texts to reconstruct a narrative from the field that reflects the interviewee and the researcher positions dialogically. As discourse is analyzed dialogically, it joins people in tiny, little worlds of concrete experience (Bakhtin 1986) as the translation of sexual and racial borders will exemplify.

Translating Sexual and Racial Borders

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. 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-organized 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).

Anthropology's episteme rests upon the idea of been 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 constructing contradictory subject positions such as that 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. For some, she used her power, status and proximity to Cortez to avoid total devastation to her people whereas for others she aided the Spaniards in conquering 'her own people'. None of these versions could be separated for a discussion

[3] The term was brought up initially by grassroots activists and now theorized by academia through 'queer' theory. For further reading see Turner, William B. 2000. A Genealogy of Queer Theory. Philadelphia: Temple University Press

on the gendered nature of La Malinche's character as she is commonly depicted *first* as Cortez lover.

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 has potential to highlight the long history of the "West" misinterpretation of 'foreign' cultures. Translation goes then beyond linguistics to account to 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).

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 group'. This chapter will hence not only translate and illustrate points of resistance, 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 *urgente* project that triggers an analysis of race (and sexuality) as unstable and "decentered" social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle[4].

I cannot account for this without first bringing our attention towards a genealogy of language, discourse and the question of the subject related to the question on *Latinidad* and who (is able) to be a *Queer Latino/a*. 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". Rodríguez (2003:9) will define *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] popular saying where migrant status has been characterized by a need to occupy at least two spaces at the same time, constantly rearranging its position. Problematizing the very notions around the construction of *Latinidad* turns to be essential when examining what generalizations and common senses will determine meanings attached to subjects[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

[4] As discussed by Omi and Winant (1994)
[5] Spivak (1988a) has suggested that migrant urban public culture, by its very premises, hybridizes identity.
[6] Rodriguez (2003)

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.

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 globalization 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 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[7], I think about the LGBT Latinos in my research study. Although LGBT Latinos have lived in the "West" (some migrated to the United States as many as 12 years ago) they have seldom hear the word 'queer' except outside their communities and 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 United States since his childhood, finds the term offensive.

Jade is a Salvadoran male-to-female transgender in her 30s who came to the United States 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'[8] and 'queer', I asked Jade how she will self-identify. 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 *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'.

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

[8] *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 Chapter 2 under construction which is part of my doctoral dissertation research.

Sexual, Racial and Nationalist negotiations of Identity Amongst the ''Latino/a'' Immigrant Community in Washington, D.C

In Jade's initial text, 'queer' acts as a transgressive signifier with an essence on itself whereas 'woman' is normalized symbolically through traits such as 'correctness'. The latter considering that the sign 'woman' has been historically conceptualized 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 feminity 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 such as Jade, Stacey and Juan Fernando 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 producing 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, 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 imposition of western-constructed sexual categories into non-western populations. Labels such as "gay" are commonly discussed by activists and academics in the U.S. and abroad as a liberating 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 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 U.S. but is also ambivalent with racial and ethnic difference. That is to say, U.S. 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 on his 30s.

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 car? [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 sight, this joke might appear to resemble Boellstorff’s (2003, p. 30) discussion on that being lesbi or gay and being Indonesian never perfectly match. Nevertheless, the *culero* 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 San Salvador LGBT community. Translation in this context is not only undesirable but objectionable; not only the idiom of translation is no longer sufficient as discussed by Boellstorff (2003, p. 237) but the ‘western’ drive of eagerly finding co-parallels among radically different cultural formations gets hereby contested. I will 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”, ones that may stand outside usual definitions of identity politics as the case of the LGBT Latinos.

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 as this shed light of the translocal nature of Diasporic communities. 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 as

follows. Despite an 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 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.

I find Niranjana's (1994:36) argument useful to analyze 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 emphasizes 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 transgenders".

Using a hybridity framework to understand Amarillo's delimitations of queer paired with the continuous disidentification with the term further illustrates a quest for a communitary Diasporic understanding of sexuality that re-enacts a hybrid moment where new meanings around home, borders, 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, objects and practices considering the nomadic character of migrant and frontier identities. The author invite us to address hybridity as a translation term between mestizaje, syncretism, fusion and other similar concepts used to designate particular fusions. In this sense, Garcia-Canclini echoes Foucault's reading on power when discussing the deterritorialization or reterritorialization of people and practices. Bhabha (1994) offers as well a useful linguistic reading of the concept of hybridity. 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 recognized, exchanged and mixed hence re-signifying the 'ni de aquí ni de allá' with 'de aquí **y** de allá' (from here **and** from there).

Sexual, Racial and Nationalist negotiations of Identity Amongst the ''Latino/a'' Immigrant Community in Washington, D.C

Amarillo's text is 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. Amarillo came to the United Status from an urban area in El Salvador 18 years ago. When talking about self-identification, Amarillo's choices to account for how he self-identifies is illustrative of what many will read as a 'transgressive' sexuality where she rejects not only a monolothic identity but rejects monolothic 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 have conflicts with these 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 text, I will not feel 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 will 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., non-heterosexual communities in the U.S. and abroad.

I will avoid referring to the LGBT population under study as the 'subordinated group' following Foucault's[9] (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 posses power[10]. As I am advocating for a theory of translation to illustrate the multiple intersections between lived subjectivity knowledge and the discursive limits of

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

[10] 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.

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 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 –trans-locations- that, in this particular research study, has enabled LGBT Latinos to create a space of contention where the barrio spaces 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.

Trans-locations

Translations are in Schopenhauer's (1985) opinion, always incomplete, always ineffectual and as such, false. Beyond this 'falseness' that this author discusses, I am arguing for a re-signification 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), 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 prefix of locations introduce 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, understandings.

Adopting the name 'queer' in the United States marked a rejection of the dominant politics of most lesbian/gay leaders (Seidman 2003). By taking up a label that emphasized a unified experience of rejection by the mainstream of society[11], 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's the 'we' constructed here and who the 'we' might be 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 area as I will next illustrate. 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.

[11] Following Roseberry's (1989) understanding of society as socially constituted and socially constituting

Sexual, Racial and Nationalist negotiations of Identity Amongst the ‘‘Latino/a’’ Immigrant Community in Washington, D.C

Subjects personify in different ways the discourse that situates practices outside heterosexuality as marginal because of violating the gender norm creating particular evocative slurs such as *afeminado [feminine], machona [butch], mariposón* [faggots]. 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 most makes 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 we can motivate ourselves and others to work for social change and economic justice; that does mean life and death for vast numbers of people living in poverty (Hall 2004, p. 124-125).

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 on his 30s goes even further paralleling queer with a synonym of what he calls a ‘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 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 is a synonim 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 Status].

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, subjected themselves to its rules and hence become the subjects of its power/knowledge (Hall 1997, p. 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 (being right before Quiteña first and Ecuadorian next). Ecuador being a multi-ethnic and pluri-

cultural country, every region will have its very specific particularities as pertain 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 privilege 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 United States 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 main founder of the only trans-group in El Salvador, the term *Latino* resonates to 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 encompasses Salvadorean. This reading is in opposition to U.S. readings where all people south of the border are Latinos as well as those descended from 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 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 U.S. citizenship.

Borders have served many purposes in defining citizenship considering that these borders are social spaces that are use 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.

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 demonizes their home country performing in this way the governmental discursive representation of say a 'transgender'. 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 give you alternative spaces, become too rigid when crossing the border.

Stacey is a Salvadoran transgender in her mid-30s currently living in the U.S. 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 U.S., at no time dislocated from her understanding of what she calls 'medical' labels for non-heterosexual people in the U.S.

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. En 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'[12]. I will rely on Jasbir Puar's (2006) article on US homonormativities to further account for Stacey's struggle on been a woman/transsexual/transgender as she crossed borders from El Salvador to the U.S. The contradictions inherent in the idealization 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 U.S. to fit a very particular way of being 'transgender', a pre-discursive and prescriptive box with which she constantly struggles. Puar's (2006, p. 67) analysis is useful as it articulates the production of gay, lesbian and 'queer' bodies as crucial to the deployment of nationalism.

[12] 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.

To develop border crossing as intersected with identity I will 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 place*less*ness, 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 quests for identity (Knopp 2003) are 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 U.S. 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 normalization closely tied with the medicalization of the body as discussed by Foucault. Reading Stacey's text through Foucault's discussion on the various technologies of normalization unveils the rigid binary female/male, black/white dichotomies in which the U.S. 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 homogenized groups that according to Bhabha (1994) allows 'marginalized' groups to survive. In agreement with Niranjana (1994, p. 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.

'Queer no me da' or 'Queer Doesn't Suit Me'

If, as Saussure firmly established, language spoke us (1997, p. 42), how does this varies historically along racial, sexual, ethnic and gender lines as those found among LGBT 'Latinos' in the D.C. area? In a culture, meaning often depends on larger nits of analysis, narratives, statements, whole discourses which operate across a variety of texts, areas of knowledge about a subject which have acquired widespread authority.

For instance, Butler saw the need in 1993 to connect the formation of a concept and the contemporary use of the term [queer] and it's conflation with racial frontiers. In Bodies that Matter, Butler (1993, p. 228) devotes a chapter to exclusively discuss 'queer' and whether it's a term that represents a conflict when intersected with race, ethnicity, religion or sexual politics. By doing so, this author is posing significant questions on who is and who is not represented under the term and, directly related with this research study, how "'queer'" plays –or fails to play –within "non-white communities".

As mentioned in the previous section, subsequent developments[13] particularly those associated through the work of French philosopher Michel Foucault, became more concerned with representation as a particular source for the production of social knowledge, connected in more intimate ways with social practices and questions of power, with the production of knowledge (rather than just meaning) through what he called discourse (rather than language). Meaning continues to be produced through language in forms which can never be predicted beforehand and its 'sliding', cannot be halted (Hall 1997, p. 35) as the texts will illustrate.

Knowledge, then, does not operate in a void (empty space) but is put to work through certain technologies and strategies of application, in specific situations, historical contexts and institutional regimes (Hall 1997, p. 49). Take for example the inaccuracy in the perception that bilingualism hinders learning in other areas (in fact, the opposite is the case) but if everyone believes so and punishes parents and kids for trying to keep two languages, this will have real consequences for both parents and children and will become 'true'[14].

However, what are the implications of closely looking at these meaning-making practices that cut across the field of Anthropology? It might well entail not only acknowledging Ferdinand de Saussure's work that opened the ground for the study of the 'question of the subject' as theorized by Michel Foucault but also entails looking more carefully at the positionality of subjects confronting linguistic and cultural translations in our everyday lives as Latinos and Latinas. Foucault 'subject' is produced through discourse[15] in two different senses or places. First, the discourse itself produces 'subjects' –figures who personify the particular forms of knowledge which the discourse produces (Hall 1997, p. 56). A question pertaining to this research project is related with the way in which knowledge about Latinos and Queers gets 'translated' in hybridity has been constructed and produced. To expand this further: who are the 'queer' subjects? Who are the "Latino" subjects? Who can inhabit a "Latino queer" subject position?

Although signifiers such as 'woman'[16], 'Latino', 'queer' have served as the basis for political projects of recognition within disputed democracies as claimed by Butler (1993, p. 4-5), the persistence of *dis*identification is equally crucial to facilitate a reconceptualization of which bodies matter, and which bodies are yet to emerge as

[13] Saussure's model was expanded by Charles S. Peirce (1839-1914) who paid deeper attention to the relationship between signifiers/signifieds and what he called referents.
[14] Extrapolating from Foucault (1980, p. 131).
[15] The concept of discourse that he Foucault brought into the social sciences is not about whether things exist but about where meaning comes from and how this is reproduced.
[16] Alcoff (1998) arrives at what she calls 'a concept of positionality", noting the difficulties that the identity category "woman" poses because the concept 'woman' is central for feminist theory and yet it is a concept that is impossible to formulate.

critical matters of concern. For instance, Queer theory is translated as 'Teoría Queer' in the Latin American academe. For the 'Latino' LGBT community of informants I interviewed the term 'queer' is another way of consuming North American notions:

- A *gringo* term that attempts to include the transgender community
- A term adopted by U.S. American teenagers that contests all norms
- An academic term introduced by "white" academics
- A synonym of gay in the U.S.

During the summer of 2006 I had the opportunity to conduct field work in San Salvador interviewing prominent LGBT activists. One of the most salient ones is Romero, a leading gay Salvadorean leader on his 30s, one of the few well-known outspoken gay activists in El Salvador. Once I laid out the overall purpose of my research through an initial phone conversation, he was very interested in talking further about what he called "sexual categories [coming] from the U.S." The following example illustrates the category of 'queer' as an unstable category, painted with privilege, and racially as well as ethnically constituted.

'Queer' no me da asi como no me daba la palabra gay. La cambiamos y le dimos nuestro propio significado, el 'ser gay'.

'Queer' means nothing to me, as gay used to mean nothing. We changed it (gay) and we gave it our own meaning, 'to be gay'.

'Ser gay' no es sinónimo de homosexual. 'Ser gay' implica un cambio político, reinvindicación término que incluye a la comunidad trans, bisexual, lesbiana. Salir del closet no es salir y gritarlo. Es vivir tranquilo que te aceptés como gay en tu casa. Autoaceptarse no implica [necesariamente] ir a la marcha ni hablar frente a la TV.

'To be gay' is not to be taken as a synonym of homosexual. 'To be gay' implies a political change, a reivindication of the term that includes the trans, bisexual, lesbian community as well. Coming out of the closet should not imply going out and shouting it. It has to do with accepting oneself as gay in your own house. Self-acknowledgement doesn't necessarily imply attending the marches or showing up on T.V.

Romero's refusal to occupy a 'queer' identity as well as the way in which 'gay' (ser gay) is being re-signified to speak against a western definition of 'queer' whereby sexualities constructed within racial and economic privilege. Romero's narrative is a reminder of the urgency to analyze meanings around sexuality and race as unstable and "decentered" social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle[17]. Romero's references to the delineated spaces of 'home' against 'street' parallels what has

[17] As discussed by Omi and Winant (1994)

been studied as 'private' against 'public' speaking against monolithic readings of the closet. The meanings around 'in' and 'out' speak to Fuss' (1991) discussion on the inside/outside rhetoric in which she suggests that to be out is to be in: most of us occupy these two positions 'in and out' at the same time but also 'in-between'. Decenas (2004, p. 17) uses the concept of the 'tacit subject' to shift the analysis away from self definition towards an investigation of the way that informants wrestle with the reductionism gayness undergoes in the public sphere. Using this grammatical structure as a metaphor to explain the way people perceive others lives, the "sujeto tácito" suggests as well that "coming out" may sometimes be redundant as Romero's references against shouting one's sexual identity illustrates. In other words, "coming out" can be a statement of the obvious.

Let's now turn our attention to the *affect* produced by bisexual bodies in relationship with 'queer', 'loca' and 'Latino'. In the following text Romero talks about the way he self-identifies in El Salvador as pertains to his sexual and gender identity:

Me identifico como bisexual. Es mi identidad verdadera. Políticamente soy gay porque es más fácil. Bisexual ha sido como ser infiltrado en la época de guerra. 'Bi' es relacionado con confusión, se dicen machorras, locas, gay femenino. Incluso si eres bisexual y eres hombre masculino caes en el estereotipo de lo 'femenino'

I self-identify as bisexual. It's my true identity. Politically I am gay because it's easier. Being bisexual is like having been infiltrated during the war years. 'Bi' is related with confusion, [bi people] are called machorras, locas, femme gay. Even if you are a masculine man as a bisexual you end up in the 'feminine' stereotype.

Romero talks about been bisexual as 'his true identity', using it as an essence, a core while juxtaposing 'gay' as merely political and because it's an easier identity to inhabit. He further explains that the term 'bisexual' is understood by many in El Salvador as a parallel to a 'war infiltrator'. That is to say, being bisexual carries a negative load and is condemned by the LGBT community in El Salvador as infiltrators were during the civil war in the 1980s. Because of their crucial role in dismantling the opposition, the infiltrators were tortured and most of the time 'disappeared' by the police.

'Loca' in Romero's narrative acts as a discursive sign to signify 'feminine' or else related with feminity. He clarifies that even those gay men who will look 'machos' (himself) ran the risk of been feminized by other gays, lesbians and transgenders for the bisexual label. Of particular interest is the way 'loca' constitutes a hallway to bisexual as well as to feminine gays.

I will close this section with Bajtin (1986, p. 17) reminding us that Stacey, Juan Fernando, Jade, Amarillo and Romero are not *only* objects of an apparently 'western'

discourse on sexuality and race but also subjects of such discourse. That is to say, their lived texts illustrate the way hegemony and domination is intertwined enforcing the division of culture into dominant and fragmented orders.

Conclusion

As this paper 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' sounds, '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 (2004, p. 10).

Some further questions that this paper raises are those related with policies or politics that the normalization of 'queer' bodies entails. As developed throughout the LGBT Latino texts, these ranges from cultural nationalism to assimilationism, the creation and perpetuation of real and fictitious borders, increasingly hostile anti-immigration policies, the normalization of 'Latino' LGBT bodies for identity politic agendas and funding as well as for political asylum. The lives of 'Latino' 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, Jade and Amarillo'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 already "in translation" and seeking to reclaim the notion by deconstructing it and re-inscribing its potential as a mode of resistance.