

Quotidian Violences, Silences, and the Burden of Citizenship in Queer Lives of All Colors

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I

It doesn't get better.

The latest spate of teen suicides and of horrific tortures involving gay or suspected to be gay men render spectacular violences that are routinely experienced in complex and differently articulated ways by women and men of various socio-economic backgrounds, races, classes, and orientations *in their socialization as women and as men*. While much of the reaction to the suicides, for instance, reassures LGBTQ-identified youth that there are people who “love you as you are” and that those should be your resource at moments when considering suicide, we continue to tell the victims to do all of the work of “reaching out,” “resisting,” or “not giving up” on life, as if that could solve the fundamental problem of the violent construction and policing of the gendered body in daily life. We continue to assume that they are lesbian or gay and we may be dead wrong: the issue can be often having same-sex relations (which alone doesn't make one gay or homosexual) but the usual issue involves gender dissent, or young women and men of various identifications (including trans) who do not live to the limited normative expectations of their gender. This suggests that we are not collectively invested in challenging the violence at the foundation of our socialization as women or men *in general*, that what we really seek, in telling these youth that “it gets better,” is that they *survive* this violence while we keep it intact. By

positing those who “love us as we are” as the antidote to this violence, we further (and naively) assume that love, violence, and regulation do not cohabitate. The bully, the torturer, the teaser, the gossip: they will all disappear, abracadabra, become a thing of the past in these communities where love, as the song goes, conquers all.

This essay turns to quotidian negotiations of homophobia to stress how the construction and sustenance of male privilege and of the very contours of the male subject require vigilance and careful policing of all presumably male bodies regardless of their sexual orientations.¹ Many masculinity studies scholars have rightly pointed out that homophobia and “gay panic” help construct and sustain masculinity.² Usually, this is a “panic” manifested most explicitly in phobia of homosexuality in its collapse with gender dissent. In psychoanalytic terms, the body of the sissy becomes the identificatory site traversed by the male subject en route to its constitution. However, I argue that our emphasis on the opposition between masculinity and femininity (even in dichotomous discussions that present “the sissy” as antithesis to the “masculine man”) has made it rather difficult to grasp where power in hegemonic masculinity resides. Based on an analysis of retrospective life history interviews with Dominican gay and bisexual immigrant men conducted between 2001 and 2002, I will propose that is at stake in quotidian exchanges that might lead to bullying and even physical violence is the fastidious work of calibrating the male body to signify “maleness” properly. The codes and signs associated with “sissies” are not the exclusive province of homosexual-identified men. It is precisely because they might erupt in *any body* that they need careful policing in quotidian exchanges as well as in communities of self-identified gay men.

The larger study from which this discussion draws took place with men who ranged in age from their early twenties to their late fifties, though most were in their mid-thirties. Most had immigrated to the United States as adults, except for one informant who had migrated at age 15. Some participants came from the capital city of Santo Domingo. However, most of them were originally from other parts of the country and migrated to either Santo Domingo or Santiago (the second largest city in the Dominican Republic) when they began their university studies. All participants had graduated high school, more than half had earned a college degree, and a few had advanced degrees in areas such as medicine and education. These attainments characterize this sample as possessing higher educational levels than those that appear in U.S. Dominican communities in general, where almost half of all people above the age of 25 had not completed high school as of 2000.³ Socioeconomic backgrounds varied. Most informants described themselves as middle class, a term that in the Dominican Republic accounts more for social than for material capital, for one might have an education, values, and aspirations of upward mobility without the financial security to sustain it. A few informants described themselves as “working class.” Others described themselves as “upper class.”

Masculinity--A Strai(gh)tjacket

The informants were typical in their preoccupation with the construction and sustenance of masculine identifications. They negotiated and constructed a sense of self in relationship to masculinity and from the vantage point of their identification as gay or bisexual, but they were not alone in feeling anxieties about themselves as men.

Anxiety may be part of the constitution of masculinity within patriarchy, and Dominican masculine formations have specific histories that merit consideration. Christian Krohn-Hansen argues, for example, that masculinity is a “legitimate problematic,” which he describes as a site of conflict produced by the unequal distribution of power and political legitimacy among men. The ability of individual men to authorize themselves and become viable in social life depends on how well they present themselves as men to others. But the centrality of masculinity to Dominican social life goes beyond enabling and sustaining relations among men. Krohn-Hansen argues that the “legitimate problematic” of masculinity helps construct a whole field of social relations within which power is negotiated. “Relations between leaders and followers, patrons and clients, are given meaning in terms of ideas about masculinity.”⁴ In this way, masculinity is central to the discourses of what is politically imaginable in Dominican society.

Many of the informants experienced and narrated “becoming men” as the process of internalizing rules, mostly manifested as interdictions from others. In his work on the socialization of boys in the Dominican Republic, E. Antonio de Moya captures the restrictive nature of the masculine self-fashioning and the circuits of visibility and surveillance that produce and regulate these bodies:

Mostly in the upper-middle and middle classes in the Dominican Republic, who are mainly concerned with social power, there is a relatively basic, clear-cut, stereotyped and paranoid (totalitarian) etiquette for gendering both the verbal and non-verbal behavior of young boys away from “femininity”....This spiral of no-no rules, this *panopticum*, is meant to avert any possible “femininity” in boys’ body language. It works as a straightjacket that automatically warns them, as a thermostat, against any innocent

gesture, movement, word or action that is not the best choice for prospective true males. . . .In this way Dominican males are socialized in a strongly restrictive and prohibitive environment, which surely cripples their spontaneity, authenticity and joy, and produces much hypocrisy and neurosis.⁵

De Moya's description of the etiquette that constitutes Dominican masculinity resonates with what many of the informants experienced growing up. His use of the word *panopticum* (in a nod to the mechanisms of discipline described by Michel Foucault) suggests that this "difference" can be located in the body. This difference registers as failure to cite proper masculinity when seen and evaluated by the informants themselves and/or their family and neighbors—in Eugenio Heredia's case, the onlookers crowded in front of the mirror. Since masculinity is so wound up with what is conceivable political agency, the problem is not a difference in sexual orientation *per se* but rather dissent that can be "read" onto particular bodies.

De Moya's suggestive use of the word "straightjacket" allows further elaboration on the masculinity of the "serious" man, or the unmarked site of masculine normativity in Dominican society. The restrictive bodily codes deployed to produce the effect of masculinity and legitimacy, as De Moya explains, reveal that what is opposed to masculinity on the surface of this body is not femininity *per se*, but *locura* (craziness). An expansive interpretation of *locura*, one that encompasses male effeminacy but that is also open to disruptions in the smoothness, seamlessness, and rationality of normativity, illustrates the ways in which power and legitimacy combine to produce masculinity as cover, as a "straightjacket," for bodies imagined as always already excessive, prone to break, and feminized. This is a phallogocentric regime that requires masculinity to control, to shield a femininity imagined as "essential" and "authentic" excess.

An expansive interpretation of *locura*, then, helps situate languages that produce masculine “seriousness” in relation to all of the other communicative practices that break that mold (which include male effeminacy but also, as I will explain below, *tigueraje*). In his research on masculinity in the Dominican Republic, Krohn-Hansen argues that the people he interviewed understood and negotiated masculinity around five interrelated ideas: “(1) of autonomy and courage; (2) of men’s visibility in public spaces; (3) of the man as seducer and father; (4) of the power tied to a man’s verbal skills; and (5) of a man’s sincerity and seriousness.”⁶ “Seriousness” is particularly relevant to the figuration of *la loca* precisely because of its circulation as a cluster of performative utterances I call gynographic⁷ and which are centrally associated with *relajo*, or joking, in Dominican culture. In the next chapter, I will explain in more depth the connection that the informants made of eruptions of *la loca*, *relajo*, and their struggles to be legitimized. For now, I emphasize that the figuration of the “serious” man is restrictive; it does not contemplate having a sense of humor.⁸ Krohn-Hansen elaborates:

People claimed that the serious man did not have recourse to the *relajo*; he didn’t “joke”...men in La Descubierta claimed that joking could be dangerous...A man did not know another man well enough to be able to joke with him unless they had already established some sort of friendship. One did not joke with a stranger. The *relajo* was, to some extent, based on a kind of *confianza*, or trust....Stories about how a friendship between two men became destroyed by a *relajo* were commonplace among the villagers.⁹

The “straightjacket” projected onto these male bodies also spills over to a social world in which men develop close personal relations with one another based on mutual trust, interpersonal proximity, or kinship ties (such as those of *compadrazgo*) that work so long as every man

involved remains mindful of the boundaries set by the other and the contexts of interaction (*donde están*). The disruptive potential of *relajo* constitutes the flip (or public) side of exchanges and homosocial intimacies between men that can cast doubt on their seriousness if aired in public. Two *compadres* may very well develop relationships shaped by inside joking and teasing; should one of the men attempt these jokes in the wrong context or in situations where strangers or people outside of trusted circles are also interlocutors, they could be jeopardizing the friendship. Parallel situations present themselves among the men I interviewed though, in their recollections, these questions (or proximity and/or intimacy with friends in public) are negotiated and worked through the figure of *la loca*.

II

Tenuous Intimacies

<p><i>Tú sabes que a veces entre nosotros, en diferentes grupos de amistades, se usa mucho el femenino para referirse el uno al otro. Te cambian el nombre. Te lo ponen en femenino o te dicen loca o te dicen maricón...hay gente que se relaciona con otra gente así. ¿Eso es algo que tú haces con algunas de tus amistades?</i></p>	<p><i>You know that sometimes, amongst us in different groups of friends, it is common for people to use the feminine to refer to one another. They change your name. They call you in the feminine or they call you loca or they call you maricón...there are people who have interpersonal relationships like that. Is that something you do with some of your</i></p>
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<p>Máximo Domínguez: Oh si, si. Si ‘tamo en grupo. Depende a donde tú estés y la confianza</p>	<p><i>friends?</i></p> <p>Máximo Domínguez: Oh yes, yes. If we are</p>
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que tú tenga' con el grupo...si tú eres de mi confianza pues tú dice, "mira e'ta loca y mira la Roberto o la Raúl. ¿Tú sabe? Tú pones "la." Pero que hay una confianza. Pero si hay una gente que no es de confianza...pues tú no va' a 'tá' con ese relajo.

¿Ha habido alguna ocasión en tu vida en la cual alguien lo haya hecho contigo, te haya hablado femenino y que a ti no te haya gustado?

Oh si, una vez cuando...hace muchos años un dominicano. Ese muchacho no era amigo mío pero yo lo había visto en Santo Domingo...y me saludaba. Me saludaba y depué' yo lo veía aquí y un día yo estaba saliendo con este muchacho y me dijo [el conocido] "mira tú, loca." Y yo no le contesté nada. Yo lo ignoré y eso es lo peor pa' una gente. Yo como que no fue a mí. Y el muchacho que andaba conmigo ni se dió cuenta porque tú...si tú me ves con alguien a mí, por ma' confianza que haiga. Si 'tamo juntos pues 'tá bien o si 'tamo en el circulo que 'tamo siempre. Pero si tú me vez

with the group. It depends on where you are and the trust you have established with the group...if you are someone I trust, well, you say, "look at this *loca* or *la Roberto* or *la Raúl*. You know? You put the "la" [in front of the name, to feminize it]. But there is trust.

But if a person is not someone I trust...you can't start that *relajo* [joking around].

Has there ever been a situation in your life in which someone did that--addressed you in the feminine and that you did not like?

Oh yes, one time...a Dominican guy. That guy was not my friend but I had seen him in Santo Domingo...and he would say hello to me. He would say hello and later I would see him here (in the United States), and one day I was going out with this guy and this acquaintance says to me "hey you, loca." And I did not answer back. I ignored him, and that's the worst you can do to somebody. I acted like what he said had nothing to do with me. And the guy I was with did not even notice because you...if you see me with someone, not matter

con una gente extraña saliendo, ¿cómo tú me viene' a vocear a mí, "mira loca"? Y yo lo único que le hice al tipo fue que lo ignoré y él no me pudo decir nada. Porque ya sabe que con eso le dije todo. No le contesté nada.

how much trust there is between us. If we are hanging out together, ok, or if we are in the group. But if you see me with someone you don't know, how can you shout out "look here, loca"? The only thing I did was ignore him, and he couldn't say anything. Because I said everything with what I did. I did not answer back.

The informants navigated the worlds in which they lived through the use of verbal and other bodily communicative practices to engage others as close friends, strangers, or mere acquaintances. The mobilization of the distinction between "public" and "private" worlds was operative in the way they mapped out their relationship to their surroundings. Nevertheless, that distinction was not mobilized in ways characteristic of traditional liberal conceptualizations of public and private. These men deployed these categories in a sense closer to that described by anthropologist Susan Gal: "Public and private do not simply describe the social world in any direct way; they are rather tools for arguments about and in that world."¹⁰ Moving beyond the perception of "public" and "private" as distinct "places, domains, spheres of activity, or even types of interaction,"¹¹ this chapter follows Gal's suggestion to understand "public" and "private" as "indexical signs that are always relative: dependent for part of their referential meaning on the interactional contexts in which they are used."¹²

The interview excerpt above illustrates the way Máximo Domínguez described and enacted boundaries and proximities with others. Though it appears, at first glance, to describe dynamics remembered or projected to conjunctions of space, time, and bodies situated elsewhere, Domínguez also called attention to the interview encounter itself. In other words, Domínguez's words taught me the way he wanted to be addressed by others (including myself), regardless of their sense of proximity to him, and always in relation to a third party who might (or might not) be trusted. Once they appear in front of you, reader, Domínguez's words also mediate social relations through a series of ethical rules about the way actors like him related (or did not relate) to one another. To the degree that informants like Domínguez explained and enacted the dynamics they narrated with their use of language in the interviews, these men "did things with words" beyond mere description.¹³ The capacity of words and bodily movements to describe and do things (particularly in situations where a sense of belonging cannot ever be taken for granted, where "safe spaces" are not always safe, and where one's interlocutors are as multiply situated as one is) is central to the discussion that follows. I argue that as a gynographic performative, *la loca* was central to the way the respondents traversed the social sphere, negotiated boundaries with others while legitimating themselves, and nurtured an always contingent, often conflicted, and always tenuous sense of belonging.¹⁴

Attention to the dynamic exchanges of verbal and bodily codes of multiply-situated social actors in daily life demands an analysis of the political stakes in quotidian interactions and analysis of these men's collaboration with others in producing competent interpretations of the situations they faced and of their social locations.

In his response to my question in the excerpt above, Máximo Domínguez outlined the circumstances for interactions where verbal cues allow interlocutors to express closeness and/or distance with other gay- and bisexual-identified male acquaintances and friends. Mobilizing codes with multiple inflections may be a way for these men to practice belonging, but Domínguez's observations underscored that specific interactional conditions must be met in order for these signifiers to produce desired linkages between men. Some of these insights, which are quoted below, prompt the extended analysis that follows.

"Depende de donde tú estés." Domínguez astutely pointed out that usage of code swishing did not depend on who you are [*quien eres*] but of where you are [*donde tú estés*]. This was not a naïve reference to a physical view of "context" but rather an allusion to the conjunction of temporality, spatiality, bodily contact, and shared affective resources that result in being [*estar*] somewhere--what I call the *scene of interaction*.¹⁵ It might be tempting to assume that ambivalence about the figure of *la loca* would result in its avoidance. But part of the complexity of the travels of this word and figure through the narratives of the informants is related to the force it had in shaping the construction and sustenance of boundaries and intimacies among these men.

Loca had multiple meanings and uses. Some informants almost never used the word to talk about themselves or their close friends, but they used it to speak negatively about someone else. Older informants, for instance, might use *loca* or its diminutive, *loquita*, to signify crassness, lack of manners, low class, immaturity, and lack of direction in life. These were "defects" that stood in the way of one's upward mobility. When older men used the words, their commentary usually

referred to younger, working-class and darker-skinned men who “called” attention to themselves as homosexual men in explicit terms by behaving in “low class,” uncontrolled ways. The more middle-class an informant was, the less “public” he was in his expression of gender dissent.¹⁶

Loca also expressed intimacy. The word might operate as a put-down with words like *maricón* or *pájaro*. But in groups of older and younger Dominican immigrant men, these words also functioned as expressions of closeness among friends, depending on the context. In these situations, use of these words might have been accompanied by others, which were usually articulated in feminine form (e.g., “manita” for “hermanita” or “little sister”; “mujer” for “woman”; use of the feminine article “la” in saying, for example, “la José”).

La loca can express both distance (through its deployment as an insult) and intimacy (through its use as a term of endearment). This underscores the fact that its performative force is “happy” (if it successfully distances or brings together speakers) or “unhappy” (if it is incorrectly mobilized or, as Austin might put it, “misfires”)¹⁷ given the specificity of what Austin calls “the total speech situation.”¹⁸ But the expressive potential of *la loca* as a performative obtains from both the specificity of its deployment in specific situations and the history of usages it invokes. As might be explained by Judith Butler, *la loca* is a performative that “does” things in the world in the moment it is mobilized, “and yet to the extent that the moment is ritualized, it is never merely a single moment...[it] is a condensed historicity: it exceeds itself in past and future directions, an effect of prior and future invocations that constitute and escape the instance of the utterance.”¹⁹ Yet the “total speech situation” or “condensed historicity” of *la loca* were only partially available to interlocutors like the ones Domínguez described in his commentary. Like other social actors,

then, Domínguez was aware of the history of multiple usages of terms like *la loca*²⁰ in his life and in others' lives, but the exigencies of daily life demanded skill in the interpretation and response to specific scenes of interaction. The accuracy and correctness of his (or his interlocutors') apprehensions of a given scene were manifested in what he and others considered (in)appropriate responses, practices that corroborated the correctness/felicity or incorrectness/infelicity of the performatives mobilized.

“*Tú pones ‘la.’ Pero [es] que hay una confianza.*” As a gynographic performative, *la loca* materializes relations that connect various social actors through temporally, situationally, and interactionally specific and interarticulated subject positions. Domínguez explained that using feminine articles, feminizing male names, and using words in the feminine form depend on a trust, a *confianza*, established before all interlocutors understand these practices as appropriate in one another's presence. It cannot be taken for granted that the valence of these connections was always positive. Thus, not every one of the informants welcomed code swishing, these *jueguitos* (little games, referring to the feminization of words and names) or *mariconerías*, and even those who engaged in these signifying practices given certain conditions.

Most informants were conflicted about which situations made the use of these terms acceptable. When I asked an informant if addressing others in the feminine or using the word *loca* to address his friends were things he did, he replied angrily that he did not and that he considered men who called each other *loca* to be “*lacras humanas*” (human waste). Other informants reported not engaging in these exchanges at all, making a point of addressing even their closest gay-identified friends in the masculine. But a third group of people played those games only with people he

considered very close to him. These games were most likely to take place in “private” contexts where his masculinity was unlikely to be compromised.

*“Pero si hay una gente que no es de confianza...pues tú no va’ a ‘tá’ con ese relajó.”*²¹ Like Domínguez, many of the men with whom I spoke revealed awareness of the need to discern where it was appropriate and where it was not appropriate to use *mariconerías* to interact with other people. If there is no trust, there is no joking; appreciating the conceptual frames that Domínguez brought to his evaluation of social interactions helps understand his view of the operations of the social order and the way one connects with others within it. These are views echoed in the commentary provided by other interviewees, and they offer clues about the way some of these men understood and engaged the social.

One’s viability as a male subject in power-laden relations depends on projections of seriousness that garner the recognition and respect of others. In a classic article, anthropologist Anthony Lauria argues that in order to command the respect of others, actors must project “proper demeanor” in ways that are publicly recognizable, in addition to demonstrating deference toward others. As he writes, “one shows that one has sufficient regard for one’s self, to be allocated a self in society.”²² In this model of sociality, the self does not surface from an individual; it is not a projection of an internal, ontological “truth” of being. Rather, it is “allocated” to someone once an actor (demarcated in Lauria’s reading as a man) demonstrates that he abides by a specific ethical (and normative) regard of the self. Apart from framing the discussion of *respeto* in Puerto Rico in terms of men’s relations with one another, Lauria usefully posits it as “a quality ascribed to the properties,”²³ and later on as a “value” that Puerto Rican men “give each other.”²⁴ Thus,

social viability and mobility depend on negotiating power and the recognition of its locations in the social: a man must produce a presence that commands the respect of others, but this respect, this value, must be recognized and ratified by one's observers. The value is not inherent to self-presentation but is realized in relations of exchange.

“Serious” masculinity, the type that commands deference, is produced as a wholesome, ordered, discreet, and measured body in the social and requires individual and collective recognition for its access to privilege within patriarchal regimes to be realizable. Theorists of seriousness posit it as a value realized through an ethical (and compulsory, I would add) commitment to existing social hierarchies.²⁵ For philosopher Jorge Portilla, “seriousness” represents an ethical commitment to the future of the status quo in a given sociality. “La seriedad es el compromiso íntimo y profundo que pacto conmigo mismo para sostener un valor en la existencia” (Seriousness is the intimate and profound pact with myself to sustain a value in existence).²⁶ The particular value in question is not that which is upheld by an individual but rather that which is agreed upon and upheld by a collective. Nevertheless, this internalization of the “pact” (it is an “intimate” and “profound” pact, after all) sutures actors to the social order.

The flip side of “seriousness” or, to put it more precisely, its “suspension,” is what Portilla defines as *relajo*. As Portilla explains, the pause in seriousness is directed toward a particular value upheld by a group, and to work as *relajo*, requires the complicity of others.²⁷ “La conducta regulada por el valor correspondiente es sustituida por una atmósfera de desorden en la que la realización del valor es imposible” (The behavior regulated by its corresponding value is substituted by an atmosphere of disorder in which realizing that value is impossible).²⁸

Philosopher Jorge Mañach y Robato, in his *Indagación del choteo*, suggests that it is not a coincidence that the word *relajo* means both “to joke” and “to relax” (the body) in Spanish. “Pues ¿qué significa esta palabra sino ese, el relajamiento de todos los vínculos y coyunturas que les dan a las cosas un aspecto articulado, una digna integridad?” (So what does this word mean if not this relaxation of the linkages and conjunctures that give things the aspect of being fully articulated, a dignified integrity?).²⁹ By analogizing the “relaxation” of muscles and joints in the human body to the loosening, temporal disaggregation, and smoothness of the body politic, Mañach y Robato points to the capacity that *relajo* has to effect a momentary suspension of the power of authority and, thus, to “level” unequally-situated social actors.³⁰

While “seriousness” is an important value of masculinity, and *relajo* effects a momentary affront or “suspension” of the smooth trajectories of normativity, *mariconerías* stage an assault and interruption of the seamless, wholesome, and apparently fully articulated contours of masculinity itself.³¹ What makes *mariconería* a specific form of *relajo* is the explicit centering of practices associated with *la loca*—practices that call attention to the gendered dissent of the actor(s) who engage in them but that ultimately challenge the apparently strict boundaries between “serious” masculinity and *locura*. Although same-sex desire is central to informants’ negotiation of *mariconerías*, and although the appearance of these codes in Dominican popular comedy can cast suspicion on a comedian’s sexual orientation, this is a form of *relajo* with effects that are not unilaterally stigmatizing of the sissy and that settle in any certain way the “truth” of a comedian’s sexuality.

Nevertheless, the conditions of possibility for *mariconerías* in general impacted quite specifically the informants' negotiation of the social. For these men, there were requirements in situations for them to feel comfortable enough to practice this kind of humor. Lauria writes that *confianza* “refers to an invasion of that social space surrounding the self which is demarcated by the ritual avoidances enjoined by the maintenance of generalized respeto.”³² Other informants helped elaborate and expand on characterizations of scenes of interaction by rendering the distinctions that mattered to them in spatial terms. Aníbal Guerrero, for example, mentioned that one of the advantages of interacting with men in “gay spaces” was the facility with which one could interact without fear of being singled out or shamed for acting effeminate. As he explained, “si se me sale mi partidera y mi vaina nadie me va a estar, ¿tú entiendes? ‘Oh. Look at este pato. Mira este pájaro.’ You know? Porque si yo hago mis manierismos—yo no los hago pero si por mano ‘el diablo se me salen en un sitio straight, van a decir, ‘Oh. Pero mira este maricón’ (if I want to behave in an effeminate way nobody will be, you know? ‘Oh. Look at this fag. Look at this fag.’ You know? Because I engage in mannerisms—I don’t do them but if for some reason they slip out in a straight place, they are going to say, ‘Oh. But look at this faggot’). The distinction Guerrero posited was not between a space of absolute “freedom” of bodily movement vs. one of absolute restriction of it. His argument was not anchored in a sense of complete mastery of the use of his body either, for it was clear to him that despite “not engaging” in mannerisms, they may “slip out” of him. What was at stake for Guerrero and for many other men I interviewed, in fact, was the ability to inhabit spaces where those “slips” were tolerated. In this way, “straight” spaces were imagined as restrictive of men’s behavior to a degree that made many of these participants avoid them.

Guerrero preferred gay spaces because of their tolerance of the occasional “pluma” (feather) he may have let out every so often.³³ Still, there were limits to tolerance, even by gay-identified people in and out of gay spaces. Readers will recall that when I asked him to characterize the people with whom he associated, Guerrero mentioned that he did not like “personas escandalosas” (scandalous people). I asked him to elaborate.

Escandalosas, ¿en qué sentido?

Like a flaming queen. Porque como yo me comporto como soy, que aparento ser straight pero no lo soy, a mi no me gusta andar con una persona que este partiéndose al lado mío... cuando uno está caminando, uno no sabe quién lo está mirando y eso. Y a mí no me gusta que me estén...catalogando de que “¡Ah! Mira una loca ahí donde va.” ¿Tú entiendes? Porque yo ande con él, a mi me van a catalogar de loca también.

Scandalous, in what sense?

Like a flaming queen. Because I behave the way I do, that I look straight but I am not, I don't like to hang out with someone who is acting effeminate [partiéndose] next to me...when you are walking, you don't know who is looking at you. And I don't like people...categorizing me: “Ah! Look at that queen there.” You know what I mean? Because if I am walking with him, I will be categorized as a flaming queen too.

Guerrero distinguished between the relative³⁴ tolerance of the gay bar and the street as a space of transit where one came across strangers. This particular distinction was central to many of the other men I interviewed, and it captures their necessarily contradictory relationship to *la loca*: this performative allowed them to stage connection and belonging with others as long as it did not cast doubt on their public masculinity to the detriment of their legitimacy, as long as it did

not make them vulnerable to physical or verbal insult, or as long as it did not make them erotically unappealing. Walking down the street with someone “letting out feathers,” then, rendered Guerrero as someone who could be “catalogued” as a *loca*. To return to Domínguez’s phrase, if there is not an already established trust among the interlocutors in a given scene of interaction, *mariconerías* are unacceptable forms of *relajo*.

Undoubtedly, internalized homophobia has something to do with many of these men’s conflicted relationship with *la loca*. Yet internalized homophobia has limited explanatory power. This categorization neglects a serious consideration of how astute these men are as theorists of their own realities. They recognized that in order to survive and thrive in a heteronormative and homophobic world, they had to be strategic in the way they carried themselves in settings where appearing as *locas* foreclosed access to the privileges of masculinity. Furthermore, they understood that recognition, legitimacy, and respect were contingent upon social actors’ ability to exercise some control in the way they were perceived. While the men with whom I spoke recognized that they had limited control over their bodies’ significations, we will see below that they generally did not give up on the effort to demand the respect of others.

“*Con eso le dije todo. No le contesté nada.*” Although informants strove to exercise control of the way others addressed them, many of them were also aware of their ultimate inability to control language. In interview after interview, the men recounted there moments when a person acquainted with the informant used what the informant considered an inappropriate form of address. It may have been inappropriate because they did not really know each other as well as the speaker thought or because the speaker used the term in the wrong context. It was up to the

person who heard the “incorrect” address (usually the person recounting the incident) to “correct” the interlocutor, to put the other “back in their place.”

It might be argued that in addressing people with these terms, persons whose invitations to code switch “misfired” did not mean for them to be interpreted as they were. Informants mentioned walking away from someone who addressed them incorrectly. They also mentioned watching their friends walking away from them for having done the same. This tended to baffle the person who first engaged in the *mariconería*. “Pensaba que éramos amigos” (I thought we were friends), they said.

Returning to the specific situation Domínguez helps unpack the workings of power in specific scenes of interaction. Furthermore, underscoring Domínguez’s deployment of silence suggests that the exercise of power resides not only on the one who issues a call but also in the scene of interaction in which the call is issued.³⁵

The man in question was a fellow Dominican, and Domínguez recalled having interacted with him in the Dominican Republic and then in New York City. On one occasion, which happened to coincide with a time when Domínguez was going out (on a date?), the couple crossed paths with this acquaintance, who shouted at Domínguez, “mira tú, loca” (look here, loca). Domínguez’s response was silence, which neutralized the call, because Domínguez’s date did not notice the interaction, which Domínguez also suggested hurt his acquaintance. As Domínguez set, through silence, a firm boundary between the couple and the acquaintance in this scene of interaction, he also foreclosed the possibility of interaction and social legibility of his interlocutor. Whereas

Domínguez said everything with his silence (“...con eso le dije todo. Ne le contesté nada”), his acquaintance was effectively silenced (“...lo ignore y él no me pudo decir nada”).

This scene suggests the importance of heeding J. L. Austin’s advice that an examination of the scene of an utterance is crucial for a full grasp of a performative’s success or failure in “doing” something in the world. In this way, Austin’s view helps revise the Althusserian scene of interpellation. In Althusser’s frame, subjects are inaugurated into subjecthood through the operations of ideology in the famous allegorical scene of the “call” issued by an authority figure (in the street scene, he offers the example of a cop) in the form of a “Hey, you there” that is recognized by the individual who (walking down the street and after hearing that call) “turns round, believing/suspecting/knowing that it is for him, i.e. recognizing that ‘it really is he’ who is meant by the hailing.”³⁶ In her reading of Althusser, Butler suggests that it is not always necessary to “turn around in order to be constituted as a subject”³⁷ and that the power of the hail need not always stem from its being issued by a voice; this is Butler’s attempt to disarticulate Althusserian interpellation from authority, which derives from what she calls the “divine voice.”³⁸ That disarticulation of power from figures (the cop, the king, the father) or sites of authority (the state) is necessary to understand the multiple and multisited operations of power in the social. But that disarticulation is not enough. Attention to the performative aspects of the hail itself *as issued in the scene of interaction* suggests that Domínguez’s silence trumps the happiness of this utterance.

In the situation that Domínguez presented, he clearly was “hailed,” regardless of his nonresponse to the hail itself. He knew that he was the “loca” being called out by his acquaintance. This is

consistent with Butler's rereading of Althusser. Yet Domínguez's "ignorance" of the hail and his silence before it further disentangle the power of hailing as a performative from the authority of the one who emits the utterance. In this situation, recognition of the hail did not equal capitulation to its potentially stigmatizing power, for nonresponse, a refusal "to turn back" after hearing the call, jeopardized the happiness of the call itself. What was staged here was not misrecognition of the hail; after all, Domínguez heard and understood it as addressed to him. What he illustrated was that given a scene of interaction in which the alignments of power are not clearly derived from alignments with the state or its institutions (this was an acquaintance, after all, not a cop), a lack of acknowledgment or indifference before the call can suspend a potentially stigmatizing trajectory of power.

For these men, there was a lot at stake in the use of language in daily life, and part of their consistently tense and contentious engagements with one another stemmed from their being embedded in worlds where being respected by others was crucial to be viable (as a community member, worker, and family member). The sections below examine more closely what was at stake for the informants symbolically and materially in specific cases. They also underscore the challenge of boundary-setting in a world where one could pay a high price for being perceived as effeminate.

Finally, this analysis has also argued that once the hail is taken out of Althusser's "little theoretical theatre" of subject formation,³⁹ and once we follow Butler's suggestion to disarticulate authority from structural and institutionally-sanctioned "voice" of the power that hails, interpellation emerges as a performative that can be "happy" only to the degree that a

“turn” (or another form of acknowledgment) inaugurates a subject engulfed by its chain of signification. Nonresponse to and ignorance of the hail might not rupture its full reach, and the informants understood this all too well. But they also knew that ignoring the hail, acting as if they were not the ones being called, interrupted its trajectory, put on “pause” the others’ ability to injure, marginalize, or express inappropriate proximities.

III

[Oscar Wao and Yunior; Dominican news]

¹ In his ethnographic research on masculinity and male intimacy in urban parts of Hermosillo and rural Sonora, México, Guillermo Núñez Noriega remarks on the ways in which local men tended to experience others’ surveillance of their masculinity. “El cuerpo de los hombres está sometido a una vigilancia estricta en cuanto su expresividad pública: en el modo de hablar, de dirigirse a los otros, de caminar, de expresar emociones, de conversar y de bailar. Es tal y tan evidente esta vigilancia del cuerpo que un hombre me comentó que él nunca cruzaba la plaza cuando había gente, en cambio prefería rodearla. Otro amigo me narró un caso extremo acerca de un vaquero que el solo hecho de imaginarse atravesando la iglesia para casarse, lo hizo desistir de casarse, de hecho, cuando lo hizo, la boda se celebró en un rancho” (The body of men is under strict surveillance in its public expression: the way of talking, the mode of addressing others, the walk, the way of expressing emotions, the way of talking and dancing. This surveillance of the body is so intense and so evident that one man told me that he never crossed the plaza when there were people; instead, he preferred to go around it. Another friend told me of the extreme case of a cowboy who decided not to marry just because of his fear of walking down the church to marry; in fact, when this man married, the wedding took place in a ranch.) See Núñez Noriega, *Masculinidad E Intimidad*, 116 (my translation).

² An important introduction and overview of the masculinities literature is Connell, *Masculinities*. Two relevant essay collections are Adams and Savran, *The Masculinity Studies Reader* and Whitehead and Barrett, *The Masculinities Reader*.

³ See Hernández and Rivera-Batiz, *Dominicans in the United States*.

⁴ Krohn-Hansen, “Masculinity and the Political among Dominicans,” 108.

⁵ de Moya, “Power Games and Totalitarian Masculinity in the Dominican Republic,” 72-73.

⁶ Krohn-Hansen, *Political Authoritarianism in the Dominican Republic*, 138.

⁷ The informants’ work of self-fashioning focused on what could be seen, and the possibility of the eruption of *la loca* in the visual field was ever-present for them. Indeed, to the degree that this specter exerted an important force in their lives, despite their being directly or indirectly implicated with it, *la loca* will name figures, stylizations and movements of the body and speech patterns as *performative utterances* that express dissent from the languages of normative masculinity in daily life. This is a dissent expressed not in the *desire to be a woman*, (as many students of Latin American homosexualities and as many of the informants perceived men they considered effeminate), but rather in a male body that stages “femininity” through the deployment of stereotypes associated with women. Writing about renowned Cuban author Alejo Carpentier’s fashion articles for *Social*, a Cuban magazine for which Carpentier wrote under the pseudonym “Jacqueline” and which has been largely forgotten in literary discussions of

the master's work, Ben. Sifuentes-Jáuregui argues that the female-named "author" of the articles "is a pretension of what can be called a *gynographesis*, writing inscribed with the inventions of 'feminine' signifiers that address and inform questions for, by, and about women." *La loca*, following Sifuentes-Jáuregui and borrowing his neologism to analyze corporal language use, is a *gynographic performative*, an "imagined form of femininity" staged as excess on a male body.

⁸ The importance of seriousness and the orientation of male socialization toward work also appear in Barbara Finlay's research among rural women and their childrearing practices in the province of Azua. "For sons, after the major goal of education came the traditional male activity, work. For about half of the community sample and almost half of the workers, one of the most important things to teach a son was 'to work,' or 'to have a profession,' or (for example) 'to be a good farmer.' So, although the women put education above other things for both sons and daughters, they followed that with household chores for daughters and work skills for sons....A few women mentioned such things as 'to be responsible,' 'to be serious,' or not to steal or drink too much. These last two items were never mentioned for daughters." See Finlay, *The Women of Azua*, 111.

⁹ Krohn-Hansen, *Political Authoritarianism in the Dominican Republic*, 146.

¹⁰ Gal, "A Semiotics of the Public/Private Distinction," 79.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹² *Ibid.*, 80.

¹³ In this sense, the statements by the respondents were constative (in that they described something) and performative (in that the description itself "did" something in the context of the interview) as proposed by philosopher J. L. Austin. See *How to Do Things with Words*.

¹⁴ The informants' engagement with the figure of *la loca* is roughly parallel to Manalansan's account of his Filipino male informants' engagement with the *bakla*. As he explains, "Filipino gay men do not readily assimilate into modern gay personhood and instead recuperate the *bakla* as a way to assert a particular kind of modernity." See Manalansan, *Global Divas*, x.

¹⁵ In defining scenes of interaction in this way, I take cues from the literature on "context" in linguistic anthropology, which parts way from reductive definitions of it as physical environment to conceptualizations that account for the convergence of bodies, spaces, temporalities, and linguistic practices. For a discussion of the various meanings of "context," see Goodwin and Duranti, "Rethinking Context."

¹⁶ In the Argentine context, Sívori observes that important class-based distinctions exist among men who frequent homoerotic environments but that they tend to be framed in moral terms. "Determinadas conductas son vistas como contrarias a lo que se considera un tránsito decente por el ambiente. Ciertos verbos como 'putanear' y 'loquear' son utilizados por personas gay para referirse a la manifestación de una conducta homosexual desvergonzada y moralmente contaminante, opuesta a una conducta carente de otra calificación, no marcada" (96). As a consequence of these divisions, which manifest within gay "communities," Sívori suggests that the analytic inquiry cannot simply oppose its investigation of a subculture on its antagonism to a given "establishment" but that it needs to investigate frictions and tensions internal to that specific group. See Sívori, *Locas, Chongos y Gays*.

¹⁷ As Austin explains, "when the utterance is a misfire, the procedure which we purport to invoke is disallowed or is botched: and our act (marrying, &c.) is void or without effect, &c." The act "botched" in this instance is not "marriage" but rather a specific stitching of social actors with one another as fellow gay men. See Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 16.

¹⁸ Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 52.

¹⁹ Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 3.

²⁰ Butler's reading of Austinian performatives is almost exclusively devoted to the injurious aspect of their social lives. As a counterpoint, this chapter stresses that views of performatives like *la loca* miss their polyvalence if they attend only to their usage as injurious speech acts.

²¹ For a treatment of *relajo* among Mexican rural immigrants in Chicago, see Farr, *Rancheros in Chicagoacán*. For a treatment of humor in Puerto Rican literature, see Reyes, *Humor and the Eccentric Text in Puerto Rican Literature*. A text that might also be of interest is Barradas, "Cursi, Choteo, Guachafita."

²² Lauria, "'Respeto,' 'Relajo' and Inter-Personal Relations in Puerto Rico," 56.

²³ *Ibid.*, 55.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 56.

²⁵ The distinction of various forms of the second-person singular pronoun ("you") in Spanish ("tú," "usted," or "vos") is indicative of complexities in regional usage and interpersonal relations that are central to colonial and contemporary histories of the language. For some discussions of comparative historical and regional differentiations in usage, see Gutiérrez Marrone, "Temas Gramaticales"; Russinovich Sole, "Correlaciones Socio-Culturales..."; and

Schwenter, "Diferenciación Dialectal Por Medio De Pronombres." For a rich history of legitimacy in the Spanish colonial project in the Américas particularly concerned with the struggles of illegitimate children of elites to be recognized by fellow elites and by authorities in the metropole, see Twinam, *Public Lives, Private Secrets*. Readers might be particularly interested in the "Antecedents" Section (pp. 3-34), where Twinam presents an incident that sparked a controversy and that prompted her to undertake this research: an encounter between two elite men in which one of them sued (a private citizen of elite status) before the courts in the metropole because his interlocutor (a Royal official) did not use the "Don" (formal title preceding the name and exchanged among class peers) to greet him when they crossed paths on the street.

A comparative example of the way that respect and deference are built into linguistic structures is what Duranti calls the "Samoan respect vocabulary." As he explains, "the Samoan hierarchical system, with its distinctions between untitled and titled individuals, chiefs and orators, ordinary and high-ranking title holders, is reified by lexical distinctions that faithfully and routinely remind everyone of who-is-who in the sociopolitical arena. At the same time, the availability of such a taxonomy makes such a simple task as lexical choice into an art, unconscious at times, cunning on some occasions, merciless on others." See Duranti, "Language in Context and Language as Context."

²⁶ Portilla, "Femenología Del Relajo," 19.

²⁷ Admittedly, the conceptualization of *relajo* I use in this chapter can be extended to address ritual inversions of the social order that involve humor such as carnival. For a conceptualization of *relajo* in this register, explored through ethnographic reflections on the Santo Domingo festival in Managua, Nicaragua, see Linkogle, "*Relajo*: Danger in a Crowd."

²⁸ Portilla, "Femenología Del Relajo," 25.

²⁹ Mañach Y Robato, *Indagación Del Choteo*, 7.

³⁰ Mañach y Robato further explains that "una de las causas determinantes del choteo es la tendencia niveladora que nos caracteriza a los cubanos, eso que llamamos 'parejería' y que nos incita a decirle 'viejo' y 'chico' al hombre más encumbrado o venerable" (7).

³¹ The legitimacy of masculinities in the context of intense racial and class antagonisms may be worked through the figure of the homosexual, as it is among middle- and working-class men in Argentina documented in the work of Gustavo Blázquez. According to the author, the usage and mobilization of different usages of the word "gay" in Argentinian Spanish effects a leveling effect between men of various class backgrounds (differences that are racialized to the degree that working class and poor men are seen as "negros" by middle-class participants in the sites documented in this ethnography). The result is the mobilization of the terms "gay" and "gay panic" for the stabilization of masculinities in specific class and racial locations. See Blázquez, "Gays Y Gaisés En Los Bailes De Cuarteto."

³² Lauria, "'Respeto,' 'Relajo,'" 62-63.

³³ Within these networks, someone who "lets out a feather" every once in a while stands in a different position from someone who is always perceived as a *loca*.

³⁴ It is important to underscore here that it is relative. I have already suggested that effeminacy constituted a source of tension and distinction among these men, distinctions that were generally framed in terms of the way someone's gender dissent might make that person appear "without future," "crass," or "uncontrolled."

³⁵ In this particular discussion, I will move through Domínguez's narration of his ignoring the acquaintance who called him out in front of a third party to offer a reading of Althusserian interpellation as performative, underscoring the importance to its happiness of what I call the *scene of interaction*.

³⁶ Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," 174-175.

³⁷ Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 31.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

³⁹ Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," 174.