Translating the Queer

Body Politics and Transnational Conversations

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Antillón, and Milú Vargas. Their work in politics, research, art, and journalism has been influential in the recent history of gender and sexuality in Latin America, and I’m very fortunate for having had the opportunity to talk personally to all of them, as many of their ideas are central to this project.

Introduction: Troubles and travels of the queer

What is the place of queerness in Latin American culture and politics? How did it become an object of academic, artistic, and intellectual conversations? What meanings does queer acquire in its translation into Latin American cultural codes? This is a study of the queer as a field located in a specific geography and culture, not as a universal notion. Translating the Queer takes the Latin American region and its cultural diaspora as a territory of political action and conversation on issues related to transgressive sexualities and body conceptions. The field of queer in Latin America includes political actions, academic agendas, artistic movements, and economic development. Additionally, the queer noun and adjective can be applied to policies, movements, fields of representation, aesthetic practices, and moral debates. Latin America as a geographic demarcation of queerness involves a complex cultural dynamic in which bodies have conducted and been transformed by practices, meanings, and policies of sexuality that occur inherently to the historical processes of the region.

How gender, sexuality, and the politics of the body have been approached in Latin America in recent academic and political
debates is the main focus of this work. That is, this book addresses how queer criticism and theory have contributed to Latin Americanist scholarship and how the theory has transcended the field of sex and gender studies. As we will see, the field of queer studies is specific as it focuses on the cultural implications of sexuality and the body, but it is also extensive, as it intervenes in and affects cultural processes in general. Politics, norms, tastes, economy, and language are embodied, gendered, and sexualized. My focus is to understand how this politics, semantics, aesthetics, and ethics of sex and bodies has become one of the most transgressive meaning producers in contemporary Latin American culture.

In this book, it is my ambition to offer an inquiry into how queer phenomena have been represented and defined, and how they have constituted a set of cultural and political practices. Those deviant bodily practices were there, *avant la lettre*, before queer theory came to academia. Queer academic discourse, as well as political and artistic movements, constructed a corpus of representations, actions, and methodologies to illuminate obscured and denied aspects of cultural history, a rewriting of history that tends to go beyond the mere academic exercise. In this book, queer is a form of understanding the politics of the body. This implies a criticism of the hegemonic culture, the legal system, and the gender structure. Queering is an understanding of the deviant as a subject of historical change in the cultural and political realms. This is a study of the troubles and contentions that take place in representations and debates on body, sex, and gender in contemporary Latin America.

I chose the focus of the contention and troubles in consonance with the notion of queer as the point of destabilization, the fissure through which the order is challenged, and the point of fracture of what is considered natural, normal, or legitimate about body, sex, and gender.

Queering is a process of resignification of the conceptions and norms that control the body in Latin American culture. The distinctive conception and practice of the queer in the region will be the main object of this inquiry. What, then, are the specifics of a region that necessarily relocates the notion of queer? We can summarize, somewhat arbitrarily, the Latin American queer conversation in the following statements: a) Latin American queer studies have been undertaken in a transnational dialogue, which implies a politics of cultural translation; b) colonialism/decolonization is a tension implicit in the articulation of queer dissidences; c) queerness has been associated with modernity in most twentieth-century debates on gender and sexuality; d) queer is a methodology of critical thinking that by deconstructing the gender system questions the foundations of the nation and the state; and e) the machineries of consumption and disposability of neoliberalism complicate the processes of body liberation and queer expressions.

**Latin American queer studies have been undertaken in a transnational dialogue, which implies a politics of cultural translation**

My primary corpus of analysis is the scholarship produced in the past three decades by academics and intellectuals writing both from within Latin America and from abroad. This inside-outside crossing describes a number of contacts, influences, and contradictions that define the queer as a conjunctive that propels a crisis of the gender system. Latin American sex–gender culture and politics is an entity constructed from various cartographies and from multiple discursive and theoretical traditions. The travel of queer concepts and representational practices through the gay and lesbian research approaches, or through feminism, psychoanalysis, and sexology, has produced a rich corpus of cultural and political translation. Far from undertaking a process of acculturation by transplanting cultural systems and metropolitan theories, Latin Americanist queer
scholars and creators translocate discourses and cultural practices between radical Western debates and the troubled realities of the queer Latin American population. This is not a simple movement from the center to the periphery in a paternalistic gesture, but rather a collaborative exchange of ideas, politics, and representations. In her introduction to the anthology Translocalities/Translocalidades: Feminist Politics of Translation in the Latin/a Américas, Sonia Alvarez (2014) explains the cultural dynamics that characterizes Latin American translocality: “rather than immigrating and ‘assimilating,’ … many people in the Latin/a Américas increasingly move back and forth between localities, between historically situated and culturally specific (though increasingly porous) places, across multiple borders, and not just between nations” (2). In fact, many people from the south travel, write, and teach in the north and vice versa. Many people from the south work and teach in the south but maintain a dialogue with their northern counterparts. In fact, the great majority of authors and artists referenced in this book navigate within these transnational, translinguistic, transepistemological channels.

This border crossing, this transmigration of discursive practices, performs a politics of translation. Translation is a form of mediation that, as in the cases of feminist or queer discourses, deals not only with the logic that would communicate the semantics of the translated text but also with rhetoric, that untranslatable part that according to Gayatri C. Spivak is not expressed in the logic of language but in its disruption, the poetic fissure of language where the affect is performed. It is in this rhetoricity where we can find an alterity implied in the language, as a meaningful silence that demands an affective equivalence in the target language (Spivak 2012: 181). “The relationship between logic and rhetoric, between grammar and rhetoric, is also a relationship between social logic, social reasonableness, and the disruptiveness of figuration in social practice” (186–187). Is it then impossible to translate the silence of disruption, the resistance to the logic of reason, to the naturalized forms of oppression? Is then queerness untranslatable?

If we expect translation to reproduce the totality of the semantics and affective uses of the original text, then we believe that translation must be loyal to the seminal language system, rather than letting the discourse travel and undertake the adventure of discovering—or creating—a new set of meaning according to the politics of the translation itself. Rigid loyalty to the original in the translated version was, in effect, the intentionality of the translation of the doctrines and precepts that constituted the colonial discourse. What is lost in translation is untranslatable (Lavinas and Viteri 2016: 4). The politics of translation that disavows loyalty is rather concerned with the need of the discourse to be a liberating impulse from the precepts of the colonial—that is, a decolonizing translation. This politics of translation works for the formation of a new discourse in the travel destiny of the queer text. Rather than being focused on preserving its original stage (its social contexts, its cultural features, its political use staged in the drama of origin of the discourse), it is a rewritten discourse, as the social stage and culture into which the queer text is translated presents different challenges from those of the context from which it emerged. They are discourses that come to deal with other contexts where sexual dissidents and gender-nonconforming subjects demand an appropriation of queer knowledge’s liberating character.

Queer theory in Latin America is a method through which local troubles can be viewed. Its meaning is enriched through a complex intersectionality in which sexuality and gender expressions cannot be detached from economic determinants; religious and legal constraints; racial, class, and nationality exclusions; or political conjunctures. The translation of queer, then, is a political process that involves the recognition of the margins, exclusions, abjections, and oppressions of alternative bodies. In her introduction to the volume Gender in Translation, Sherry Simon (1996) proposes that, in the
translation of gender texts, it is most important to make clear the
effects and responses of the translated text in the target language
(7). This question allows us to understand translation of queer texts
as a political action that contributes to changes in knowledge and
practices of the body. How has this translation of theory become a
politics in the sex–gender system in Latin American culture? How
is power manifested in the act of transporting meaning, or remak-
ing it in the unavoidable paraphrasing that translation undertakes?
Simon’s proposal of translating gender texts in order to elicit a
response suggests queer text translation will also have a politics
implied in the translation itself.

Nonetheless, this queer politics of translation does not begin
with the actual translation into a second language. Before queer
is translated, it has already exercised a political effect in the
field of identity categories, politics, and knowledge of the body.
Annamarie Jagose (1996) observes that the AIDS pandemic has
been a determinant for reconsidering categories of identification,
power, and knowledge: this process coincides with what queer
theory does with respect to the sex–gender hegemony (94).
Questioning constituted identities and enabling the emergence
of new ones originating in the abjected and the excluded is the
political action that queer theory performs, according to Jagose’s
definition. I argue that, beyond the actual translation, the effect of
queer discourse in Latin America is the rearticulation of the social
and political meaning of the body, a disrupting reordering of the
gender system. In her analysis of the immigrant and ethnic literature
in the United States as a translating phenomenon, Martha J. Cutter
(2005) underlines the semantic findings undertaken in cultural
translation that enrich and subvert the hegemonic discourse itself
by conglomerating a variety of meaning systems (60). In the same
sense, translating queer politics and culture is itself a work that
disrupts codifications and threatens the order of meanings that
provides coherence to a culture. It is my purpose to analyze those

troubling points in which the intervention of queer theory and
representation opens the way to reconsidering norms, definitions,
tastes, and culture. In other words, my discussion will follow the
main political, intellectual, and academic conversations that have
been in place since LGBT culture and politics, and queer theory,
arrived in Latin America.¹

Ethnography, literature, and other forms of representation
have produced a field of knowledge of the nonhegemonic body,
its politics, its aesthetics, and its ethos. When the word queer
traveled, the trauma of its discriminatory origin stayed at home.
It came dressed as a field of study, a political position, an aesthetic
proposal, and a lifestyle. In all these actions, representations, and
approaches, works dealing with queer issues have been focused on
traumas, conflicts, and alternative subjectivities located in Latin
American societies.

It is not the intention of this book to debate about what is the
correct translation of queer. As a bordering concept, it cannot
be measured under any prescribing discourse (that would be a
colonialist view of translation). The place of queer, according to
Mexican American intellectual Gloria Anzaldúa (1999), is located
in between, is permanently in transit, a continuous escaping from
the boundaries of meaning (71). That movement is inherent to
both queerness and translation, as the trans morpheme describes a
displacement, the former from the hegemonic gender system and
the latter from one system of meanings to another. It is a poetics of
normalcy disruption. I call it poetics because its discursive nature
of breaking the logic of the binary social order is effective in both

¹ While I agree with Brad Epps when he pinpoints the impossibilities of
translating queer into Spanish, as it loses its pejorative connotations that make it
an emotionally loaded word in English, I also have to recognize that the concepts,
images, methods, and lexicon associated with queer have been useful in unveiling
practices, representations, fears, and desires and in constituting alternative
the field of meaning and the field of the body. If the queer body experiences the in-between rhetoric, it is itself an entity, or a subject, in a state of translation. The coincidence of the transnational/translocated site of conversation where queer Latin American studies occur, the theoretical task of translating as politics, and the in-between position of the queer subject confirm the liminality of queer studies. While I recognize that many nuances and much affective content of the concepts and images are lost in translation, I find it more productive to build on what is found in translation than to regret what is missed in that process.

Colonialism/decolonization is a tension implicit in the articulation of queer dissidences

Instead of talking about another liberating utopia—replacing the lesbian and gay agendas—what queer theory does, at least in the Latin American cultural contexts, has the effect of unveiling a variety of forms of disidentification that are in place as the invisible threads of sexual colonialism. Cuban American critic José Esteban Muñoz (1999) bases the idea of disidentification on his analysis of queer-of-color performance in the United States, which he deems nonconfrontational but also differentiated from the hegemonic gender–race structures through rhetorical strategies that enable the emergence of what he calls “identities-in-difference,” which refers to the rejection of the stereotype imposed by others where this rejection is expressed by appropriating such stigmatization in order to positively resignify it. Identity-in-difference stages a failure in socially imposed identity. In the case of queer people of color in the United States, it is clear that, while they are identified by the dominant ideology of the mainstream of racial and sexual differences, those interpellations are stereotypically negative, and consequently these people do not receive the privileges of white gays and lesbians. Their difference is sexual and racial, adding an intersectional aspect that complicates their identity formation (that condition would also question the need of the ontological question that asks about identity: Who am I?).

The mediating position of the Latin American colonized queer is not only aimed at the construction of a hybrid species of the field of dissident sexualities but also it seeks the deconstruction of the very notion of identity, undermining its exclusionary character and tendency to territoriality. By opening the rooms of identity, contaminating their defining features, and trespassing on their borders, rather than enacting a harmonious assembly, disidentification politics can be described as a battleground of meaning, as cultural turmoil that happens in the representations and theories of the colonized queer. As a place of encounter, collapse, and a continuous state of conflict, sex–gender meanings and practices are constantly redefined, forbidden, and sublimated. As American historian Michael J. Horswell (2005) observes in his Decolonizing the Sodomite, colonization reduced to the concept of sodomy all sex practices outside Catholic sanctions (15). This epistemological violence had the effect of dislocating a more fluid conception of gender and sex, of complicating even more those practices that were already problematic in pre-Columbian cultures. In the process of transculturation, I argue, colonizers and colonized people negotiated the rules of sex behavior and the place of identities. Although it is an asymmetric relationship, and the sexuality of the colonized became an object of scrutiny and surveillance, other factors beyond the judiciary system of the church enabled the clandestine practices of nonlegitimate sex. This silenced and denied zone of Latin American sexuality, with all its intersectionalities with race and class, has been the focus of attention in what we can call Latin Americanist queer scholarship.

If being a transnational conversation is one of the most remarkable characteristics of Latin American queer studies, does this fact signify a new theoretical colonialism and then another
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wave of colonized knowledge? That has been one of the most common criticisms of queer studies in some forums in recent years. The transnational and exogenous place of enunciation of the theory—very often written in US and European university centers, following the route of previous colonizing discourses—seems to be the main reason for perceiving queer studies as another colonialist intervention. Indeed, colonialism establishes a circuit of enunciation and translation that assigns the Latin American subject the role of a receptor of knowledge produced and authenticated in the hegemonic centers of meaning production—what Antonio Gramsci (1971) called the hegemonic apparatus. This binomial reduction of the colonial relationship hinders the possibility of valuing important efforts of liberating the subaltern queer body from the oppressive system in metropolitan societies. In fact, several academic studies produced in the northern hemisphere are decolonizing as they are concerned with sex—gender—race—class intersectionality of subaltern populations. Gloria Anzaldúa (1999, 2002, 2002b, 2015), Cherrí Moraga (1983), José Esteban Muñoz (1999, 2009), among other US Latino/a scholars, understand queer as the uncomfortable place in between, the no-place, or the place of disidentification, in which queer migrants and queer people of color find their place. It is precisely this unstable space that the colonized occupy as the site of their subjectification. That is, becoming a citizen with full rights depends on the way one's identity is rearticulated in order to make feasible a project of citizenship construction that is not violent against the queer and racialized body. This means not going anywhere outside the postcolonial, neocolonial, and colonial power relationships that characterize Latin American societies and instead acting from the inside of this colonizing political system. Queer Latin American theory, like many other aspects of cultural and knowledge production, is articulated inside coloniality; many of its concepts and arguments have even been articulated within the centers of power and written in the language of empire. Nonetheless, this queer-of-color production represents the uncanny side of the imperial corpus of knowledge. It constitutes the dissident side of the metropolis.

Queer expressions are cornered in the realm of the abject for both colonizing and colonized cultures. They are the area of the borderland, the place of the atravesados: “Los atravesados live here; the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulatto, the half-breed, the half-dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the ‘normal’” (Anzaldúa 1999: 25). This place of the abject described by Anzaldúa is the place of the borderlander, which is relatively undetermined—a geography that divides colonized from colonizer countries. Rather, the cartography of the abject—those excluded from the normal—inhabit the outsides of privileges, being racialized, gendered, or sexualized, regardless of the actual geographic location of this outside. Rosamond S. King (2014) defines the subject of queer criticism as translocal. Translocals are the transmigrants who inhabit the peripheral circuits of extreme capitalism, the last stance of colonialism. King observes that the place of the translocated is a privileged one, both in terms of being an agent of globalization of the local knowledges and in terms of functioning as a translator between the metropolis and peripheral colonized cultures. The risks of this mediation are intrinsic to the political and cultural challenges of this process of traveling meanings.

**Queerness has been associated with modernity in most twentieth-century debates on gender and sexuality**

In this process of translation, visualizing diverse sexualities functions as a contentious inscription of alternative forms of life in the national imaginaries, especially for the anticolonial tendency of liberal discourses that dominate Latin American intellectual
and academic spaces. Queer cannot be translated into a rational logic of the culture and gender system but is estranged from it. Queer culture and discourse have already emerged as the other’s tongue in their culture of origin. They had to be translated into the hegemonic discourse of metropolitan academia. Now, queer has come to be translated into another cultural system, which already has its own contradictions and political dynamics. I argue this translation of queer occurs as a countercultural intervention into the culture in which it arrives as a translated concept. But this intervention does not come without controversy: as a theory coming from the so-called global north, queerness has been under suspicion of being another expression of colonialism, as it is considered a distinctive mark of modernity. Nevertheless, it is arguable that queerness is, in fact, an instrument of decolonization, in which translation plays a key role as a linguistic process where meaning is put into crisis.

Colonial anxiety contextualizes several phenomena: the arrival of queer modernity in the period of modernismo (a Hispanic aesthetic movement that arose at the turn of the twentieth century); the controversies of revolutionaries and queer intellectuals in Mexico and Cuba; the military persecution of sexual dissidents (deemed antinational bodies) in the Southern Cone’s Dirty War; and even the sexual tourism and human trafficking of the neoliberal system. These are some instances in which queer thought and representations have gone and still go through multiple processes of resistance that end up constituting alternative identities and undertaking a politics of recognition, of liberation, and of the establishment of rights. Moreover, queer modernization foments an economy and a wide range of aesthetic expressions and forms of social participation. This troubling moment of cultural translation of liberating discourses on gender and sexuality and their contestations in Latin American culture contextualized the emergence of alternative identities that would be recognized as modern.

The modern history of sexual dissidence departs, then, from the state’s strategies of exclusion and advances toward inclusion of gender and sexual dissidence within citizenship. In this process, we can observe the constitution of queer modern myths: queer is the avant-garde of modernization; queer represents foreign and colonialist influences; an important sector of creative and intellectual elite places the queer topic in the public scene as part of cosmopolitan and universal culture; and queer politics, like feminism, places the body on the agenda of public concerns and constitutes one of the largest civil movements of our time. This meaning formation of the queer as an expression of modernity describes a traveling culture that takes the route of modern Western civilization, the route of sexual knowledge, as described by Foucault (1990) in his History of Sexuality: from its status of nefarious sin to criminalization, medicalization, and finally a politics of identity and of inclusion in citizenship. For the historiographical works discussing the incorporation of the queer into the national imaginaries, this narrative of modernization as the incorporation of sexual dissidence transgresses the traditional gender structure, identified as Catholic and patriarchal, and advances toward the paradise of freedom, where nonhégemonic desires finally enjoy legitimacy. Both colonial and liberation agendas coincide in this queer modernity. In this sense, LGBT activism came from metropolitan countries as a liberation movement; it is part of the paradoxes of the postcolonial condition. The movement’s exogenous character has been one of the main points of rejection from nationalistic discourses, such as the revolutionary ideology in Mexico and Cuba and in Southern Cone twentieth-century dictatorships. It seems like the main struggle queer modernity has to face is this rejection from the national identity, which leads to one of the main subjects of conversation in queer Latin Americanist scholarship.
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Queer is a methodology of critical thinking that by deconstructing the gender system questions the foundations of the nation and the state

Inscribing the queer in the national community is one of the main topics we find in a series of national histories of nonhegemonic sexualities: Emilio Bejel’s *Gay Cuban Nation* (2001), Osvaldo Bazán’s *Historia de la homosexualidad en Argentina* (2004), and James Green’s *Beyond Carnival* (1999), to name a few of the most representative monographs. Historiography provides evidence of a proscribed bodily culture. It is a form of writing whose main endeavor is the compilation of stories, images, places, practices, and symbols that pertain to underground excluded communities. To depict the life of the excluded is to expose those images and sexual practices that have been covered, denied, and punished. They make visible what is considered obscene (i.e., what is not proper to be shown in public). The politics of the history of sexual diversity is to incorporate the marginalized sexuality into the realm of citizenship. Then, queer historiography proposes a reconfiguration of the national subject, overcoming the patriarchal and heterosexual basis of the modern liberal state.

This inscription places the queer subject as a symptom of the modernization of Latin American culture. I use the word symptom on purpose to underline medicalization as one of the mechanisms of exclusion and control of sexual dissidence undertaken by modern institutions. The second strategy of exclusion and control of sexual dissidence is criminalization. When homoeroticism becomes an illness to be treated and a vice to be corrected, it stops being an unspeakable practice and instead becomes a topic of body knowledge. The first approaches to sexual differences were the medical and criminalist treatises written in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These scientific works aimed toward the establishment of public policies regarding sexual and gender dissidence and are now one of the main materials used by historians of homosexuality in Latin America. This disciplinary archive offers a unique compendium of bodily accounts that allows historians to understand how subjects were excluded, the mechanisms of exclusion, and the formation of cultural imaginaries that would provide elements for the remaking of national demarcations and inclusions.

The nationalization of the queer is a trope we can find performed in a substantial number of artistic projects all around the continent. In 1994 the Chilean artist Juan Dávila triggered one of the most significant controversies regarding nationalism and queerness with his painting of a transvestite Simón Bolívar, the most fatherly image in the South American national imaginary (Long 1994). As carnival has become one of the central sites of representations of Brazilian nationalism, the figure of the transvestite has become prominent in the image of Brazilianness. The Neomexicanist School is an artistic movement in Mexico whose major proposal is to include queer subjects in the inventory of national subjects. These are some of the most visible interventions of the queer artistic production and they clearly deal with the national contention of the queer subject. The queer criticism of the nation has been one of the most important interventions intended to open the doors of citizenship to queer bodies.

This process of inclusion not only affects the queer population itself but also consists of a deep transformation in the framework of gender and sexuality that sustains patriarchy. This brings us to the political struggle for the legalization of practices and the assignation of rights traditionally reserved for heterosexual population. This deheterosexualizing of the law conveys a process of deheterosexualizing the state as well, and, in the long term, it sets out the path to removing the endemic relationship between patriarchy and the state. Nationalizing queer subjectivities, then,
has an effect that goes beyond the minority rights field to a structural reconfiguration of patriarchy-ruled politics and culture. In E. K. Sedgwick’s (1990) terms, the presumed sexual minority tends to be universalized. This does not mean that the increasing visibility of sexual diversity in Latin American media and the approval of important law reforms that recognize equal rights for nonheterosexual populations have reduced homophobic violence in the region. The efforts to achieve rights and inclusion have clashed with the naturalized oppression of patriarchy. In my analysis of this political unrest between citizenship aspirations and heterosexist reaction, the project of inclusion of dissident sexual and gender expressions is also conceived as an antihomophobic agenda that is concomitant with the general politics of human rights.

In spite of its Westernizing status, LGBT politics is experienced as a liberation saga. Nevertheless, recent scholarship and activism have turned to local systems of knowledge and practice, as they offer other categories that problematize the universal assumption of the modern Western sex–gender system. Queer Western politics tends to conceive bodies from a liberal and universalist perspective. In a different direction from this civilizational narrative, scholarship on native sexualities opens up the discussion of non-Western sexualities and aims to decolonize questions of gender, sexuality, and uses of the body. At the same time, native queer politics challenges the notion of nation to prioritize the notion of community, and it also challenges the notion of universalizing the Western sex–gender system, instead prioritizing multicultural practices of sexuality. The utopia of universal liberation promises to lead to a global continuum of LGBT culture, which for various critics corresponds to the global expansion of the neoliberal economic system. On the other hand, the utopia of multiculturalism and decolonization looks for practices and conceptions of non-Western cultures as a way to escape the coloniality of gender and sex. Out of utopian constructions, an increasingly critical community has focused its interest on finding the place of sexuality in subaltern cultures in times of neoliberalism, as discussed in next section.

The machineries of consumption and disposability of neoliberalism complicate the processes of body liberation and queer expressions

Questions regarding the scope of queer theory in the neoliberal era are challenging, to say the least. If we maintain the liberationist or vindicationist view of the twentieth-century civil rights movements, queer theory and politics assign to the word queer a positive meaning of improvement of life conditions and social relations. This is the political sense of the LGBT movements. In the neoliberal era, the peripheral spaces—the ones we locate as the in-between places—have produced a form of exploitation that, because they deviate from the rules of patriarchal and heterosexual systems, can be defined as queer, although as a non-championable cause. Sex slavery, child pornography, pedophilia, sex tourism, and violent sexuality are forms of body exploitation and violations of human rights that signal one of the most disastrous effects of the market hegemony in present times. In her analysis of extreme capitalism, Capitalismo Gore, the Mexican philosopher Sayak Valencia Triana (2010) reflects on a form of capitalism that bases its accumulation of wealth on the consumption and destruction of subaltern people’s bodies.

In view of the rampant growth in Latin America of these forms of forced sexuality, in which the subject does not perform the sexual practices willingly, we need to deal with the ethics and politics of the troubling zones of the culture of the body. Latin American studies cannot ignore this emergent phenomenon, and indeed it has not ignored it in scholarship on gender and sexual violence produced in the past few decades across various disciplines. It is my intention to retrieve in this study various perspectives on the violent practices
of sex and their connection to criminal neoliberalism or *capitalismo
gore* (Valencia Triana 2010: 49–50). The archive concerned with
these forms of coercive sexuality includes narratives related to sex
abuses under the dictatorships in the region, especially in Guatemala
and the Southern Cone; reports on femicides in Mexico, Central
America, Brazil, and Argentina; works related to sex slavery trade in
the Caribbean, Mexico, Central America, and the Southern Cone;
analyses of the sex tourism economy in Mexico and the Caribbean;
and reports on child pornography in Mexico (Altman 2001; Cacho
2006; Cruz-Malavé and Manalansan 2002; Domínguez Ruvalcaba
2007).

Addressing these areas of body exploitation has enabled a
confluence of feminist, queer, postcolonial, and decolonial
perspectives. The studies of the body, including the dead body,
represents a great challenge to academic agendas related to the
study of gender, race, and migration, to name three of the most
important areas of debate at present. The confluence of views and
epistemic positions around the enslaved and killed people of our
times, and the very fact we are witnessing the construction of a
society that perceives itself as victimized, urges a reorganization
and redefinition of the role of sexuality, gender, and body studies
in collective efforts to instate freedom from this violent system.

CHAPTER 1

Queer decolonization

The theoretical contributions to the studies of the colonial
Latin American queer—or the queering of the colonial—in the
collections of Latin Americanist academia can be summarized
as follows: a) queerness in Latin America is seen as a process of
cultural translation whereby the multiplicity of pre-Columbian
erotic practices is reduced to a normativized system of sexuality
as a political strategy of control of bodies (or a biopolitics);
b) colonizers deem nonreproductive sexualities sinful and
condemnable/punishable, which in turn enables the emergence
of hybrid, underground sexual practices that constitute an archive
of the abject; c) indigenous third-sex theory reveals the conflict
between a Western binary gender system and the three-sex system
of some Amerindians, exposing homophobia as a colonial strategy;
d) and a queer decolonizing proposal would aim not necessarily
to reconstruct a native ancestral sex–gender system but rather
to dismantle coloniality and disrupt its exclusionary and violent
effects. In this chapter, my objective is to review some of the key
ideas that have oriented discussions on the queer implications of
coloniality.
Coloniality and queerness:  
A discursive invasion

Since the 1990s, several academic discussions have developed around the postcolonial condition of Latin America, mainly animated by readings of subalternist South Asian scholars but, more importantly, by the questions that emerged after the end of the Cold War and the advent of neoliberalism. Marxism, psychoanalysis, and structuralism were well established as the prevalent theoretical frameworks in the humanities and social sciences for understanding Latin American realities during the Cold War period. However, new questions emerged after what Jorge Castañeda (1993) calls the disarmament of the utopia. Long-term agendas (such as psychoanalysis, Marxism, and structuralism) that had informed the capitalism–socialism contradiction now began to address questions of gender and sexuality, along with race, disability, and other minority issues in Latin America. By the end of 1980s, studies on gender, sexuality, racial issues, youth cultures, and migrations had taken hold in academic environments with increasing levels of transnational exchange, paving the way toward a transdisciplinary, transnational, and subalternist mode of knowledge production. The epistemic turn from class struggle and alienation to an axis based on the colonial brought about the inclusion of questions about the subject, the body, and multiculturality in Latin Americanist research agendas. Contradictions and differences between exogenous cultures are deepened in times of neoliberal politics and global reconfigurations of markets and cultures.

Two events relating to bodies ignited the prominent academic incursion into the study of sexuality: the increasing number of serial killings of women in the continent made gender studies and feminist activism intensify their presence and influence in the public sphere, and the AIDS pandemic activated discussions on sexual identity and homophobic violence. These two immediate emergencies precipitated several forums that gathered academics from Latin American, European, and US universities, and those present began a transnational exchange addressing issues under postcolonial and subalternist theoretical reconfigurations. Unlike conventional disciplinary approaches, the emergent academic discourse was inclined to interrogate rather than to give answers, to deconstruct rather than to make assertions, and to cross disciplines rather than to narrow its work under a single disciplinary field.

It was then a palatable enterprise to review and ultimately to rewrite the history of the continent by returning to the literary, cultural, and historical canon. Critics searched in the canon for the keys to Latin America’s colonial condition, the formation of the nation, the construction of repressive apparatuses, and the archeology of pleasures and perversions. The colonial condition, or coloniality, refers to the persistence of contradictions and forms of domination in multicultural, postcolonial societies, regardless of institutional and government changes (Quijano 2000). Sexual domination is one of the most significant forms of colonial interaction between colonizers and colonized. To name just one example, the trope of rape appears in various analyses as a foundational narrative of the mestizo culture.¹ What we might call a coloniality of sex, following Aníbal Quijano’s (2000) notion of coloniality, refers to the punishment of difference as a way of correcting gender expressions and sexual practices. Sexuality, then, seems to be at the center of a multifaceted violence that includes physical pain, fear, exclusion, invisibility, moral condemnation, and even death. Colonial biopolitics has developed a complex bureaucracy, punishment techniques, and a discursive apparatus

¹ The most widely known work in this respect is Octavio Paz’s Labyrinth of Solitude (published 1950). Rape is a leitmotif in nineteenth-century foundational novels such as Tránsito, by Brazilian José de Alencar (published 1865), and Camanda: un drama entre salvajes, by the Equadorian Juan León Mera (published 1879).
aimed at devaluing the colonized body. We cannot conceive of a Latin American sex–gender system without considering the traces of trauma left on colonized bodies; their painful expression would nurture a specific sensibility in the popular arts, as Mexican American scholar Laura Gutiérrez (2010) asserts in her work on the Mexican artist Astrid Hadad’s performance (4).

The relation between the queer and the colonial can be seen as a question of transculturation of the body through the public policy of the colonial state. To subject sex to strict codes of mandatory heterosexuality is a colonizing action. Queerness is found in the interstices of cultural differences, the gaps left in translation. In the first place, queerness is not what describes the nonreproductive sexual practices admitted or tolerated in the native cultures of America; instead, I want to argue that queerness starts with the estrangement and condemnation of native sexual cultures, making criminal and sinful practices that used to be sinless. To expel, to condemn, to render invisible, and finally to proclaim their extermination ultimately engenders a zone of proscription, a zone defined by the unspeakable act of the body, which becomes abject. Queer people are noncitizens, they must cause revulsion, and their rejection is deemed pious, official, and mandatory.

If sexuality is not to be mentioned, it cannot be found in the archives, or only in the form of condemnation. Otherwise, there is not any category in the colonial archives that refers to the proscribed sexualities. The methodology of constructing knowledge of that which is unclassified consists of collecting the textual fragments spread all around the literature of and about Latin America, and interpreting the silences wherever sexual infractions are suggested. A careful rereading of the canonized works of literature and history and the review of legal codes, confessional manuals, and criminal archives are the routes scholars have taken to trace that zone of the colonial abject or what we call the colonial queer.

Queer colonial and translation

The queer colonial subject was formed as the result of a cultural process of translation in which native sexual conceptions were reduced to Christian rule. American historian Pete Sigal’s (2007) essay “Queer Nahuatl: Sahagún’s Faggots and Sodomites, Lesbians and Hermaphrodites” offers a keen analysis of the translation process deployed in the Florentine Codex. Bernardino de Sahagún’s translation team—which included children of the Nahua nobility educated in the Franciscan school of Tlatelolco—drew and wrote this text in the late sixteenth century in New Spain (Mexico) (Sigal 2007: 10). The collaborative bilingual project includes illustrations, Latinized Nahuatl text, and a Spanish translation of that text. The codex itself shows the steps of the translation process, from pictograms to a Latin-alphabet Nahuatl transcription (a step that effectively reduces a multilayered graphic text to a word or phrase), and from the Latinized Nahuatl text to the Spanish version (a second step that simplifies the Amerindians’ multiple sexual practices to the excrementary term “nepotous sin,” reinforcing the binary configuration of Europe’s moral system).

Sigal’s analysis focuses on how the criteria that organize the Nahuatl-into-Spanish translation are governed by the religious need to repress sexual practices. Sahagún and his team decided what to say and what to keep silenced according to religious and political interests. One result of this strategy is that we often find the retelling of Indian stories within a Judeo-Christian mythology. The colonial practice of translation reinvents the Indian world (even the word “Indian” is a colonial invention, a simplification of a multifarious and complex world) and controls the archive of the defeated civilization by pursuing specific political goals. For instance, several stories reported by the friars and conquerors from different regions of Latin America coincide to tell the disasters of giant sodomites who were extinguished by plagues before the
Spaniards came (Bazán 2004: 64–66). The fact that the same biblical-resembling plot appears in the Spanish narratives of very different geographical regions shows how far colonial translation can go toward displacing local cultural memory, forging a convenient past for the colonizers. Translation is a twofold process—a disarticulation and a rearticulation of a cultural text. It is a writing, a political process whereby the system of meanings and values that would control colonial society is strategically resemanticized, enacting an erasure of a native sexual culture in order to force it into a restrictive mandatory heterosexuality.

By using the concept of “authorial filter,” Sigal (2007) applies a methodology of reading the process of translation in order to uncover the process of colonization of sexuality (13). Sigal underscores two forms of sexually colonizing translation: the reduction of a variety of sexual practices to the words *sodomita* (sodomite) and *puto* (faggot) and the change in affective value the Spanish words hold when compared to the original Nahuatl. To illustrate the latter, the word *zochihua*, which in Nahuatl would mean literally “the flower bearer,” in the *Florentine Codex* was translated as *puto* (faggot). Native categories are silenced and subsumed to the colonizer’s categories. Colonizing translation is an act of epistemic violence that affects the very foundation of the meaning system. The violent effect of this translation consists of placing the body under a scrutinizing discipline imposed by the colonizer as a form of political control.

However, this violent subjugation to a discipline meets resistance in the cultural response to colonization. According to Sigal (2007), the fact that the concept of sin did not have any equivalence in the Nahuat cultural system prevented the strategies for disciplining the body from neatly acculturating Amerindian sexuality; instead, a hybrid sexual system was created, one that still survives today in many indigenous and mestizo communities (13). Although Sigal does not offer further details about how this hybridity happens or where we can go to find instances of it, I would like to take his insight as a point of departure to argue that, by overcoming the constraints of the disciplinary/punitve framework with this hybridity, colonized sexuality is a place of identity formation. This identity emerges, then, in the interstices of the clash between a diversity of race, ethnicity, gender, and moral systems. Proscribed sexual practices become secret and residual. Their documentation in the criminal archives of the church and in civil government allows scholars to collect textual fragments about instances of sexual dissidence under colonial repression.

In his analysis of queer transculturation throughout different periods of colonial writing in the Andes, Michael Horswell (2005) asserts that the transcultured writers who produced the colonial indigenous accounts of pre-Columbian cultures occupy a queer space, as read in his comment on the seventeenth-century historian Santacruz Pachacuti:

His singular narrative is barely intelligible to an uninitiated reader of Andean colonial writings by newly converted indigenous historians, whose language, style, and world view can be characterized as queer, that is, as eccentric to the Spanish metropolis’ official histories and suspicious of even his indigenous contemporaries’ versions of history. His text is queer in another sense of the word, that is, as it applies to what I consider to be the “subaltern knowledge” cryptically transmitted by the author in this text, knowledge that challenges his contemporaries’ versions of Inca history, mythology, and, especially, Andean gender and sexual cultures. (140)

Horswell locates the queer colonial in the interstices of cultures and languages. Based on these assertions we can argue that the very process of cultural translation is in fact a queer process because of its refusal to adhere to the imperial dogma of sex and gender and because
of its self-conscious suspicions regarding misrepresenting native gender culture. This in-between space recalls the queer bordering space of Gloria Anzaldúa (1999), in which identity consists of a continuous performance of translation itself. Horswell notes that the logic of these queer cultural liminal spaces is characterized by its eccentricity and its suspicion of misrepresentation. The narratives by Andean Christianized indigenous writers to which Horswell refers detail the role of androgyrous and transversed characters in pre-Columbian rituals. The depiction of third-sex subjects in these narratives demonstrates the centrality of androgyrous and effeminate characters in Andean mythology. Catholic surveillance did not prevent these characters from being incorporated into the traditional Andean ceremonies and rituals that still take place today.

Paradoxically, it is in the sphere of the major control of consciences that sex talk happens. At the Catholic confessional, intimate sexual practices are continually interrogated, and thus a space for talking about sex, fantasies, desires, and fears is established. It is a space of interdiction derived from the moral struggle under the control machinery of colonial power; diverse bodily practices in a multicultural environment are put within a Western signifying regime by colonial authority. The obsessive interest of the church in knowing the intimate concerns of the population can be understood as a strategy of control of bodies (or biopower, in Foucauldian terms); as a way of gauging the effectiveness of acculturation or evangelization; or as an opportunity for sexual encounter between confessor and parishioner, extending colonial sexual violence to clerical spaces. The practices of surveillance of colonized bodies reveal that colonizing power is multifaceted: it controls souls, supervises the civilizing process, and sexually consumes colonized bodies.

The works of Michael Horswell (2005), Noemí Quezada (1989), and Pete Sigal (2007) read translation as a way of colonizing the very meaning of sexuality. In sum, colonization consists of disarticulating the epistemological, affective, and moral structure of preconquest so as to establish a new order of categories, a restrictive frame of coherence under which the fragments of a disarticulated culture persist and take place in the non-written discourses, or performances, of subalterns. Horswell’s study of the tinkuy, or the third sex in Andean pre-Columbian culture, is based on the traces that the masculine-centered colonial order left visible. He chooses the ritual performances where the tinkuy’s cross-dressed character is prominent. By addressing the performance, Horswell leaves the written archive in the background and concentrates on what Mexican scholar Diana Taylor (2003) calls the repertoire, that permanent set of symbols and narratives that is always updated according to the political and cultural tensions of the present (20). The third sex is nearly erased and transcultured, Horswell (2005) asserts (4). As in the colonized translation pinpointed by Sigal, Horswell is dealing with the residual. In the colonial structure the queer is repressed, denied, abject, and masked; in its proscribed space, however, the queer is represented by terms of condemnation and public scorn. This is the hybrid place of queer sexuality to which Sigal referred. It is a conflictive hybridity rather than the harmonious diversity of “mestizaje” as depicted in most official representations, as cultural critics such as Cornejo Polar and Yudice have pointed out (see Arroyo-Martínez 2003: 12–14). Cultural translation of any material related to sex and gender practice is scrutinized in this tense interaction between the colonizers and the colonized. Transculturation is visible in those bodily practices that the implacable repression of the colonial system renders possible. In this sense, colonial sexuality is the site of resistance for bodies subjugated by a moral discourse. This phenomenon is an object of attention in queer scholarship.

Noemí Quezada (1989) offers a suggestive method of analysis of proscribed cultural practices related to love and sexuality in Aztec culture. She investigates magic spells, rituals, and drug treatments so
as to better understand the way pre-Columbian sexual conceptions are translated into the colonial order. Quezada reviews inquisitorial documents, confessional manuals, and chronicles in order to trace the manner in which pre-Columbian religions (whose ceremonies foregrounded sexuality prominently) and a series of social and economic activities related to sexuality were institutionalized and displaced by Christian sex-phobic doctrine. She then offers a view of the residual practices—considered magic and superstitions by colonizers—that remain (in partial form) of pre-Columbian ritual.

Quezada’s review mentions homoerotic practices only twice, maybe due to the silence imposed on the nefarious sin, itself defined as the unspeakable. The first reference appears in her reading of the Chant of Chaco Women, an erotic and satiric Nahuatl poem intended to mock the Aztec emperor Axayacatl in celebration of the defeat of the Aztecs by the Chaco army. Throughout the poem, a group of women are trying to arouse Axayacatl, who remains indifferent to any stimulation. One of them reminds the king of his reputation as being “Eagle” and “Tiger” at the same time, an ambiguity that Quezada interprets as bisexuality. She also refers to the circulating gossip that Axayacatl sleeps with his enemies (Quezada 1989: 67). The homoerotic is used to demean the enemy, just as Federico Garza Carvajal (2003) has described in his analysis of the military discourse of the Spanish cavalier in the colonial era (30). The homoeroticism disguised within these military metaphors may reveal some traces of the pre-Columbian same-sex practices associated with war. What we can infer from the text is a lack of condemnation of homoeroticism; it is rather a more gentle scolding of a mischievous behavior that causes a lack of sexual appetite: “Is it true you make mischief with your enemies?” (Quezada 1989: 67, my translation).

Another mention of homoeroticism in Quezada’s work is in reference to a description of a magic spell found in a colonial text that represents the abduction by the god of the night (Tezcatlipoca) of the love goddess Xochiquetzal. In the last verse, Tezcatlipoca declares: “I myself am the young man, I’m the enemy. / But really I’m not the enemy: I’m femininity” (Quezada 1989: 73, my translation). Tezcatlipoca’s gender ambiguity has drawn the attention of Pete Sigal in his analysis of the translation strategies in the Florentine Codex. For Sigal (2007), Fr. Bernardino de Sahagún (the leader of the translation team) misunderstands the complex nature of this god, effectively reducing Tezcatlipoca’s identity to the Spanish derogatory word for homosexual, puto (26). By contrast, in Nahuau culture’s understanding of the god, Tezcatlipoca is a respected, powerful warrior and no derogatory words are used; having a sexual ambiguity does not diminish Tezcatlipoca’s virility and power. The problem of the translation has to do with the affective aspect of meaning. Culonli (the Nahuatl word translated into Spanish as puto) only describes a man whose sexual practice consists of being penetrated by another man. The fact that the term culonli could be used to describe honored divinities such as Tezcatlipoca shows that sodomy was not a condemned behavior in the Nahuau conception of sexuality. The Spanish version resorts to derogatory terms that only show that the act of translation functions as a strategy of rejection when it comes to issues of sexual diversity. Pete Sigal (2007) demonstrates how colonial translations hide the positive meanings of homoerotic practices in pre-Columbian Nahuau culture by reducing them to condemnatory terms. In this case, evangelization triggers a process of devaluation and persecution of practices and bodily expressions that enjoyed approval and even privileges in the preconquest system.

Translation, functioning here as colonial political action over bodies, also operates on a poetic level by throwing into the zone of the unspeakable (pecado nefando or nefarious sin) a significant part of a culture. Expelling the queer identities xochibua and tinkuy from their place in Nahuau and Quechau cultures, respectively,
dehumanizes them. The colonizing process of making meaning does not stay on a purely rhetorical level; it is, as mentioned, a biopolitical strategy that involves a variety of disciplinary actions, such as spectacles of public scorn meant to serve as a lessor for virtual offenders or secret punishments for erotic practices intended to prevent the emergence of possible imitators. The flower bearers and the transvestite wise man were treated as practitioners of an unnatural and then unspeakable sin; they were expelled from what was deemed normal and were even removed from all forms of representation. Nefarious, unspeakable, counter-nature, and so forth were the concepts used to describe these figures; these negative concepts referred explicitly to a prohibition against being represented and to the condition of being outside the “normal,” which in the monolithic culture of imperial Spain was a sufficient reason for exemplary public death: scorn in this context is the pious expression expected from the good Catholic citizen.

**Reading the visceral**

The vast silence about nonheterosexual sexuality defines this translation of sexual cultures. The history of queer bodies in Latin America is the history of the facts excluded from records, the history of that which is deemed nonhistorical. In that sense, writing a history of a colonization of bodies results in a history counter to mainstream colonial studies. In his essay “Visceral Archives of the Body,” Zeb Tortorici (2014) reflects on the nature of the archive of proscribed sexualities in colonial Mexico. Tortorici looks at the criminal cases in which sexual transgressors confessed their sexual practices to authorities and were sometimes punished with a death sentence. The texts are nasty dialogues in which the confession produces repulsion; the story itself functions as an instrument for punishment. Queerness is then found in the visceral side of the judicial archives; the excrescence that emerges from those colonial documents was discarded from mainstream historical research and left untouched until a queer interest brought them into our academic discussion. The construction of a visceral archive, as Tortorici proposes, performs a completely different politics from the one it did when the confessions were actually written down. Queer criticism deals with marginalized bodily practices of the past and, by doing so, connects affectively with them. In that way, queer criticism produces a knowledge of the hidden side of the history of the body. Scholarship on the queer colonial aims to establish an archeology of queerness in Latin America; the colonial archives are an unavoidable source for understanding the factors that articulate the modern Latin American sex–gender system. By stating that queerness is an expression of coloniality, queer historians aim to trace the line of the decolonizing impulse since the time of its foundational repression.

The visceral nature of queer colonial archives, according to Tortorici (2014), enables an affective reading of sexual events through the repulsive reactions manifested by the scribes, the interrogators, the archivists, and even the historians (407). The abject reappears each time the document is read, making the repulsive reaction a constitutive part of queer textual production. The archive queers itself by recording and keeping those uncomfortable documents: “[t]he cases of necrophilia, fellatio, and sex with the Devil, holy images, and the Eucharist all present the colonial archive as a space that, in some regards, queers its own convention” (Tortorici 2014: 431). Criminal narratives describing judicial procedures against sexual differences are invaluable sources for historicizing the formation of queer spaces of meaning in Latin America. Colonial queerness is produced in the context of institutional actions against sexual difference. For bodily practices to be deemed queer, they have to be read as a defiance of the norm; their actions and desires are threats to the institutions that implement a biopolitical, administrative form of control over bodies. It can be argued, however, that the diversity of bodily practices exists independently
from the norms that sanction them. Diego Falconí Trávez (2016), commenting on colonized populations whose culture included the figure of La Tunda—a queer mythological Amazonian character whom it is believed abducts people to sexually abuse them—resorts to mythological narratives to open up a space outside colonial repression (312).

The repressive colonial administrative machine has the effect of suppressing sexual identities and practices sanctioned by the preconquest order. At the same time (and perhaps counterintuitively), the ruling ideology itself generates queer fantasies, as in the visceral archive of Tortorici (2014). A similar dialectical relationship occurs in the sacred realm as well; sacrilegious fantasies involve the conversion of a religious object into an object of sexual desire. Both the suppressed sexual practice and the sacrilegious act perform queerness in the underworld of the colonial system. They are produced as illegal, forbidden, and dejected; the lives of their enactors are constrained to secret, invisible, and unstable spaces. (At least this is the location they occupy as represented within the criminal archives of queer, bodily practice.) In any case, opening the visceral archive of colonial records is itself a gesture of retrieving the proscribed, of finding in the margins of colonial history the very archeology of Latin American queerness. It is assumed in this archaeology that non-Western, non-patriarchal, ancestral people enjoyed sexuality without guilt.

Third-sex theory, which informs Sigal’s (2007) and Horswill’s (2005) work, accentuates the contrast between the West’s binary gender order and the multiplicity of the pre-Columbian one. The third-sex framework makes clear that colonization’s cultural clash is centrally located in the contradictions and conflicts that occurred in the sexual and gendered fields. Decolonization, then, would have to deal with redefining and restructuring the discourses, rules, and practices of the body in order to effectively counter the colonial havoc wrought within Latin American society.

The third-sex trope is the main theoretical basis of Marinela Miano Borruzo’s (2003) ethnography of the *muwe*’; a queer gender asignment of Oaxaca, Mexico. Miano Borruzo shows how the *muwe*’ system opens up a gap within the dominant Catholic ideology that treats nonheterosexual sexualities as anathema, unpronounceable sinful acts. The unrepentant acceptance of *muwe*’ is a feature of a pre-Colombian third-sex system that persists in the isthmus region as if it were untouched by the imposition of colonial binaries. Nevertheless, Miano Borruzo asserts that Zapotec culture is not a monolithic, closed nation, anchored to its ancestral customs. It has taken from others a diversity of cultural elements and has appropriated them without losing its autonomy. Zapotecs want to be modern as long as they remain Zapotec (Miano Borruzo 2003: 36–37). This ethnography places the third-sex model in another frame of reference beyond the pre-Columbian source. Miano Borruzo underlines the flexibility of Zapotec gender conceptions in contrast to traditional homophobic Mexican culture; at the same time, she shows the influence of Western gay politics in the Zapotec community. In her description of the queer geography of the town of Juchitán, she observes that gays tend to be less visible in the most wealthy sector and that the trans population (characterized as *muwe*’) is concentrated in the working-class area. Miano Borruzo suggests a subtle colonialism of the Zapotec society along the lines of the traditional mestizo gender standards (i.e., the dominant culture of the country). In this analysis, *muwe*’ culture is identified as a local ethnicity, affiliated with an ancestral Zapotec gender system. While the mestizo is related to modernization (marked as the professional, middle-class, gay-identified subject), the *muwe*’ is an identity rooted in Zapotec culture, and its citizenship is legitimated in the discourse of indigeneity (Miano Borruzo 2003: 159–160). Although their alternative gender expression is admitted, they are still far from proposing a clear politics against the patriarchal system of inequality. According to Miano Borruzo, the
\textit{muxe}' express a frustrated desire to be treated as traditional women, often staying at home and depending on a husband who supports them (162). Does this mean that \textit{muxe}' culture is part of a Zapotec patriarchal system and that it can in no way be considered part of the liberating agendas of feminist and LGBT movements? At most, we can observe in Miano Borruso’s ethnography that Zapotec patriarchy is a much more benevolent one than mestizo’s in terms of the level of acceptance of sexual diversity. Although part of the fantasy of the \textit{muxe}' involves dressing like TV divas and wishing to marry as a traditional woman would, their place in society is one of respect and recognition of the Zapotec cultural heritage they represent. Often, Miano Borruso underlines the vaunted social position of the \textit{muxe}' to insist on the contrast between the mestizo and the Zapotec. As in Hoswell’s (2005) study of the \textit{tinkuy}, in Miano Borruso’s study the very event of the performance itself constitutes the representational moment in which we can locate the elements of a queer indigenous subject and appreciate that subject’s central place in social and religious rituals as well as in daily life. Through this strategy of contrasting the indigenous as the culture that assigns a place for a queer subject and the mestizo as a largely colonizing and repressive culture, Miano Borruso proposes a decolonizing way of signifying queerness. By having a place in the community and enjoying the prerogatives of indigenous identities, queer subjects are able to take on positions of leadership and power in their very difference. According to Miano Borruso, the \textit{muxe}' are the main custodians of tradition within their community, leading the traditional saint-related \textit{velas} (community festivities) as well as the \textit{velas} for the \textit{muxe}' themselves, which were started in the 1970s. The \textit{muxe}' then, took over the leadership in order to enact a politics of ethnicity as a form of decolonization and of queering local politics at the same time. Where a colonizing sexuality is seen as the imposition of a binary system, the central role of the \textit{muxe}' in keeping ethnic cultural expressions alive can be read as a decolonizing strategy. Miano Borruso’s ethnography, then, can be taken as the articulation of a fully formed cultural system because the \textit{muxe}' exist as a legitimate identity.

Miano Borruso (2003) reads Zapotec sexuality against the backdrop of mestizo culture. To explain some events of aggression against \textit{muxe}', Miano Borruso assigns blame to a westernized mestizo culture in which there exists no conceivable alternative to the hereronormative binary. Heterosexuality is the only admitted sexuality in the hegemonic mestizo gender system, even though homoerotic practice is overwhelmingly present. Despite the mestizo-dominated landscape, the phenomenon of the \textit{muxe}' endures, located in the most pure extreme of the Zapotec cultural spectrum, where it is part of a traditional conception of gender (Miano Borruso 2003: 160). Miano Borruso is indeed referring to the gendered culture of the mestizo when she observes that the feminine model the \textit{muxe}' try to emulate is not the strong, self-sufficient Zapotec woman but the docile, subjugated mestizo one (162).

It can be argued, however, that the \textit{muxe}' diva fantasy reinstalls \textit{muxe}' identity within the scope of coloniality. Miano Borruso records the intense cultural exchange between the mestizo, the national, and the international diva iconographies, aesthetic trends, and so on but at all times she emphasizes the place of the \textit{muxe}' within a unique gender structure in which—as soon as the first signs of effeminacy are visible in their childhood—\textit{muxe}' are trained to be \textit{muxe}' by their mothers as a third-sex construction. The \textit{muxe}' are highly appreciated in Zapotec society, especially by mothers, for having the mind of a man and the sensibility and industry of a woman. They are hard workers; they take care of children and elders and they contribute to the household better than heterosexual children (Miano Borruso 2003: 162–163).

But the education of a \textit{muxe}' does not end in the home, as they also need to be a \textit{muxe}' in the social sphere, where the interaction of a queer sexuality with a mestizo, homophobic culture raises many
risks. In her analysis of the most important *muxe*’ celebration, Vela de las auténticas intrépidas buscadoras de peligro (Vigil of the Authentic and Intrepid Danger-Seekers), Miano Borruso (2003) discovers a process of cultural translation that is visible in *muxe*’ performance: a complex representation involving wardrobe, parody, and ritual allows the *muxe* to arrive at a specific queer place that presents itself as an endemic, local gender expression. But a *muxe*’ does not perform inside the specifically Zapotec scenario; she situates herself in the intersection of the Zapotec nonbinary gender system and the mestizo double-standard heteronormative constraints. Even though the ethnic legitimizing of the *muxe*’ places queerness at the center of the symbolic performance of Zapotec identity, this centrality does not protect them against homophobic attacks, mostly from mestizos. They then need to learn how to defend themselves, physically, verbally, and through organized political action. The *muxe*’ are reputed to combine the best of the woman and the best of the man. While mothers educate *muxe*’ in the domestic and economic activities assigned to *muxe* such as embroidery, cooking, selling goods in the market, and caregiving for children, elders, and the sick, it is the responsibility of the community of *muxe*’ to train each other in individual and group self-defense. On the one hand, the education of the mothers is intended to preserve Zapotec tradition in the face of colonizing cultural pressure; on the other, they are educated by their peers in the political struggle, in the social and sexual realm, and against the structural violence of dominant patriarchy. *Muxe*’ are educated to perform a double decolonizing fight: first, a fight for endurance through the preservation of the cultural elements that construct ethnicity and, second, a struggle of conflictic coexistence with homophobic culture. The latter has led to a continuous and systematic troubled state of culture in which, despite having existed in tandem for centuries, the irreconcilability of the mestizo binary gender system and the Zapotec third-sex conception hinders the possibility of a full cultural translation. The climate of tolerance this coexistence has precipitated does not prevent the *muxe*’ from being at risk when the homophobic rules of dominant society are applied on them violently, as they have been since the time of the conquest.

Colonial heterogeneity can be depicted as a cultural and political battleground, a permanent state of tension in the multicultural experience in which coexistence is defined by conflict. Peruvian cultural and literary critic Antonio Cornejo Polar (2003) observes that narratives addressing indigenous cultures deal with the contradictions between nations (207). The *muxe*’ group Intrepid Risk-Seekers in the Tehuantepec region is a collective movement that challenges hegemonic Mexican homophobia, not only by cross-dressing but also by appropriating political spaces in the community. This reveals one of the main roles of the *muxe* in Zapotec culture: they do not seek acceptance from their community, which is taken for granted since they are already legitimizied in their gender system; rather, they work to take over the leadership of the community, especially in those aspects of social life relating to the practices of Zapotec identity.

The complex cultural location of the *muxe* illustrates the borders of sexual coloniality: by confronting homophobic mestizo attacks, the *muxe*’ organize a type of decolonial action. The tension depicted in Miano Borruso’s (2003) ethnography offers an instance of the epistemic colonial violence applied to cultural practices. According to Garza Carvajal (2003), cultural difference concerning sexuality provided an excuse for the colonial project, as it was another “just cause” for cultural domination (24). For him, the construction of imperial manliness was a strategy for the conquest of non-European cultures; even more, he deems the “prosecution of sodomites” to be “one [of the] constitutive principles of imperialism” (33). In his reading of catechist manuals used to evangelize the population subjigated following the Andean conquest, Horswell (2005)
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asserts that sodomy is one of the most obsessed-over topics in doctrinal literature and also one of the most punished and rejected behaviors. He notes that the biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah is constantly compared to the destruction of Andean civilizations, as both narratives invoke cataclysm as a sign of God’s anger toward the nefarious, unpronounceable, and abominable sin (Horswell 2005: 210–211). The reference to the nefarious sin in the characterization of the Amerindians in colonial narratives is notoriously abundant. A diverse sexual practice became, then, a triggering cause of invasion and destruction.

In his Historia de la homosexualidad en la Argentina, Osvaldo Bazán (2004) shows that the accusation of sodomy and the use of cruelty to punish are forms of pedagogy against what are understood as counter-nature sexual practices—practically, any nonreproductive sexuality is severely punished. For Bazán, these condemned sexual practices were admissible in many pre-Columbian cultures and even sanctioned as another gender identity, which coincides with Horswell’s (2005) and Miano Borruso’s (2003) findings. The process of conquest and colonization involved disciplining sexuality as a method of domination. In one of the earliest expeditions through the Panama Isthmus, commanded by Vasco Núñez de Balboa, Spaniards made their war-dogs devour a group of effeminate men from the native elite. Bazán’s account of this and myriad other events related to the violence against “sodomites” in the conquest and colonization highlights the political use of sexuality and the body as one of the principal tactics of colonial expansion. The biopolitics of imperial Spain consisted of placing the body at the center of the colonial imaginary. Like Garza Carvajal (2003) and Horswell (2005), Bazán (2004) underlines the importance of the concept of sodomy, an all-purpose word that seems to include a diversity of nonapproved sexual practices in the Catholic doctrine that the Spaniards used to evangelize the natives. Colonizers claimed for themselves the mission of converting the infidels, hetero-normativizing their intimate life (i.e., imposing a norm over the body for political, colonial purposes) as a mechanism of domination through the control of practices related to biological functions of bodies, such as sexuality. Colonialism’s clash of cultures necessitated the creation of a sexual code that reduced sexuality to one function (the reproductive one) and the establishment of a political system whose major concern was the somatization of the empire: as long as Spanish rule prohibited, blamed, and cruelly and spectacularly punished the transgressors, the dominion over the colonized was secured. Although the technology of war played a decisive role in the enterprise of conquest, the process of colonization would not have been successful without the biopolitics centralized on the control of sexuality. Scholars addressing queer issues of the colonial condition interpret queerness as the result of a system of disciplining the body in order to dominate it.

Queer decolonization

Centrality of the liminal

A multicultural environment defined by the accumulation of abuses is necessarily a field of cultural struggle. It is a commonplace to refer to this cultural plurality as a space of negotiation, a harmonious syncretism in which the very phenomenon of mixing races—mestizaje—will solve the conflicts between races. Essentially this optimism is embodied in the creole construction of the national imaginary of most Latin American countries. Canonical authors such as José Vasconcelos (1929) in Mexico with his concept of “cosmic race” and Sérgio Buarque de Holanda (1936) in Brazil with his concept of “the cordial man” (o homem cordial) believe that mestizaje has overcome the biases of the defenders of racial purity. However, this idealization of the mixed race prevents us from seeing that syncretism and hybridity are nothing but a continued series of politically driven translations, tactical misunderstandings, and conscious efforts to mislead. In a semantic space defined by
many layers of cultural translation, meaning is necessarily quite unstable. The most prominent effect of this instability is a calling into question of colonial rule broadly speaking; also, we see a field of meaning characterized by a complex syncretism opening up, one in which native cultural strata find their way into the cultural negotiation, as many ethnographers of Latin American indigenous communities have discussed. Transculturation is one of the most accepted critical concepts used to define this liminal space (Alvarez 2014; Ortiz 1973).

For Horswell (2005), the process of transculturation in the sexual realm occurs in the intimate interrogation of the confessional. He observes three facets of this process: "how the confessional separated the penitent from his or her community; how confession separated him from his ritual practice; and how new notions of acceptable sexual behavior were introduced" (Horswell 2005: 212). The space of interdiction par excellence inserts colonial power into the native subjectivity by disarticulating community and rituality and by surveilling sexual behavior. Politics of disempowering communal cohesion, replacing religious and moral systems, and punishing the body coincide in the transculturation project. Religious culture and the establishment of new punishable behavioral codes of conduct work together in the assembly of a colonial machinery.

The accounts of sexual repression in colonial history and their resonances in present-day ethnographies of sexuality describe a colonizing force that broke apart any institutional systems that did not repress several specific sexual practices (arguably this would characterize the majority of pre-Columbian nations). However, to invoke an idealized ancestry in which sexuality was not repressed and patriarchy did not exist only amounts to a political strategy comparable to the idealization of the mestizaje as embodying harmonizing race interrelations, mentioned above. In his discussion of the invisibility of HIV/AIDS in indigenous communities, Mexican anthropologist Guillermo Núñez Noriega (2011) observes it is a generalized perception that, because Amerindians are thought to be close to nature, homosexuality has not spread among them. While the conquerors used any suspected sodomy as an excuse for invading and dispossessing the natives, the indigenous advocates Núñez Noriega interviewed were reluctant to talk about sexual diversity in their communities for fear that the stigmatization used against them could become even worse (Núñez Noriega 2011: 16–17). Nature and ancestry are then tropes of a metaphysics for (not) discussing indigenous sexuality, but the two tropes are contradictory: while the former is used to demonstrate Amerindians are close to nature and thus cannot be homosexuals, the latter tries to erase possible discourses that would admit the existence of a pre-Columbian heterosexual patriarchy.

Lorena Cabnal, a Mayan communitarian feminist, admits there is a millenarian, ancestral, Mayan patriarchy that is repurposed when in contact with Western patriarchy; she and other communitarian feminists such as the Bolivian Julieta Paredes call this phenomenon the entronque patriarcal (patriarchal junction) (see Gargallo 2014: 18–19). Their conception of a double patriarchy allows us to suggest that a Latin American gender system cannot be understood without drawing a map of a chain of oppressive, conflictive, and seductive relations in which race, class, ethnicity, and sexuality, among other marks of identity, intersect. In this complex intersectionality plotted in the colonial system, the queer body, the most rejected subject since the conquest saga, is for that very reason a canvas upon which colonial hate was obsessively inscribed. While the systematic oppression of heretics, idolaters, and Jews ceased after the Holy Office and colonial administration were replaced by liberal institutions, the repudiation of the sexual and gender dissidents continues to the present, constituting the most dominant feature of the current coloniality of sex. In effect,
the coloniality of sex, whose most prominent expression is the punishment of difference, is the most supported form of exclusion across the entire social spectrum.

Rita Segato (2011) offers a suggestive interpretation of transformations within the gender system of Latin America following Western colonization, laying out two central processes. Firstly, Segato notes that an existing Amerindian patriarchy was enhanced by the colonial introduction of a Western patriarchy that increased intolerance of sexual difference and female agency. Segato’s second assertion is the central axis, as described in this chapter, of colonial queer studies: in several Amerindian nations, a third sex was institutionalized. Segato is responding to Eurocentric feminism that conceives of patriarchy as universal, as well as positions such as those of María Lugones (2007) and Oyeronke Oyewumi (1997), who assert that a patriarchal gender order was nonexistent in the precolonial period (Segato 2011: 31–32). According to Segato, the arrival of Western patriarchy meant a painful reconstitution of gender relations and norms of sexual practices. Needless to say, examples of this new imposed sexual order abound: the objectification of women’s bodies and the criminalization of sexual diversity are expressions of the pornographic character of the colonizer’s gaze.

Federico Garza Carvajal (2003) focuses on the oppression of queer bodies within the colonial system, recovering the discourse of pain that has nurtured the criticism of torture of native bodies from Bartolomé de Las Casas to the literature of testimonio in post–Cold War Latin America. A look through the main scholarship on Latin America reveals how centrally a discourse of pain dominates the analysis of culture and politics. Trauma, scars, resentment, and torture become the articulatory metaphors used to understand political phenomena such as military dictatorships, misogynist and homophobic violence, racial exclusion, and migratory conflicts. Trauma and its most closely affiliated genre, the testimonio, have nurtured a politics of human rights and subaltern empowerment, which analyses have found evident in Southern Cone dictatorships, in the abuses of guerrilla groups, in paramilitary and organized crime in Colombia, in critical treatments of femicides in the Mexican–US border zone, and in the gross human slaughter during the Guatemalan, Nicaraguan, and Salvadoran civil wars. Similarly, Gloria Anzaldúa (1999) uses the metaphor of the open scar to refer to the painful uprooting of migrant populations and the unrest of living “in between.” The trope of the body in pain (Scarry 1985) also informs the scholarship on what we can call the colonial condition of the queer body.

In his substantial review of the archive of sodomy-related judicial processes in early modern Spain and New Spain, Garza Carvajal (2003) compiles a series of archival documents describing interrogations, events of public scorn, and the cruelties of torture and execution. The fierceness of punitive actions speaks to how capital importance the regulation of dissident sexualities was to the process of colonization. The so-called sins against nature (sodomy, anthropophagy, incest, and human sacrifice) served as a type of “just cause” rationale for the conquest. The extreme and spectacular nature of the torture against the sodomite itself proves that the colonizers viewed these so-called sinful actions as detestable. For Garza Carvajal (2003), the spectacle of punishment functioned as a mechanism to make the colonized population believe in the supremacy and desirability of vir, the idealized heterosexual Hispanic–Catholic warrior man (104). To reiterate, this characterization of colonial order does not negate the fact that pre-Hispanic indigenous culture might have developed a form of patriarchy that ruled its gender and power relations; Garza

1 Testimonio is a literary form based on oral narrations of people who lived or witnessed events and conditions that either are erased or misrepresented in conventional history and literature.
Carvajal only suggests that Hispanic patriarchy imposed a series of hierarchies: men over women, heterosexual over homosexual, and Spaniard and European men over Amerindians, blacks, and mestizos. Thus, colonization can be defined as a reconfiguration of body politics in such a way that sexuality, race, ethnicity, and religion intersect in the practices of exclusion, oppression, and dispossession of the human bodies of the colonies.

Decolonial trends in Latin Americanist discourses emphasize coloniality as the articulatory principle of oppression, replacing the centrality of capitalism that dominated the Marxist analyses of the Cold War academy. In his introduction to the book *Violencias (re)encubiertas en Bolivia* by Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2010), Sinclair Thomson considers this epistemological turn as a new form of interpreting Latin American history in terms of coexistent temporalities, questions of differing citizenship, and an internal colonialism present in the quotidian micropolitics of colonial inequalities and exclusions (14). In her interpretation of the effects of colonial rules in the Bolivian gender system, Rivera Cusicanqui underlines that the colonial process generated a crisis in Andean societies concerning normativity (191). Mestizaje, the race mixing that characterizes colonial demography, is not a solution to racial segregation; it only represents a space of condemnation and self-denying subjectivity. For Rivera Cusicanqui, the fact that most mestizos were born illegitimately, as the result of sexual abuses by Spaniards on indigenous women, allowed mothers the opportunity to establish rules within their own fatherless households. This new normativity within the illegitimate families of colonial domination constitutes a “third republic,” a bridge between the colonizers and the indigenous cultures, as it is the indigenous mother who educates the mestizo, but neither inside the orthodoxy of indigenous tradition nor in the environment of the ruling Spaniards (Rivera Cusicanqui 2010: 194). Still, within the liminal space of the mestizo, Rivera Cusicanqui observes a polarized society, rather than an organized “republic,” in which some mestizos live under different universes of reference given their multiple cultural heritages (195–196). This space should not be characterized as a conciliatory solution to colonial segregation, as official discourses have asserted, but as a space populated by many contradictions and conflicts described using such terms as “conflictive heterogeneity” (Cornejo Polar 2003), “internal colonialism” (González Casanova 1969), “masks” (Paz 2004), “mimicry” (Bhabha 1994), and “cultural transvestism” (Arroyo-Martínez 2003). The increasing population of mestizos in most Latin American societies suggests that this mix of cultural ambivalence and instability determines norms of conduct and meaning systems to be subsidiary to official rules and formal discourses. The coloniality of sex has its foundation in the contradiction between the repressive rule of the colonizer and the emerging “third republic,” which is a resistant reaction to the act of sexual violence that founded the mestizo society. I want to argue that this third republic can also be described as a process of queering the colonial rules over bodies (a decolonial transgression of the colonial system of oppression) and, at the same time, a process of altering the indigenous rules themselves: Miano Borrous’s (2003) ethnography on the *muñe* is quite illustrative of this double queering that the third republic model implies.

Cultural analysis shows how the colonized queer complicates our understanding of subaltern colonized culture. Gloria Anzaldúa (1999) proposes that queer culture might be best served by escaping the dominion of Mexican American patriarchy entirely. The condition of being marginal to an already marginal community places the queer in a very troubled zone of identity. Nevertheless, if a lack of unity characterizes subaltern communities, as Gramsci (1971: 52) suggests, being queer is not exceptional but a norm in the multicultural and conflictive Latin American society. The heteronormative ruling elite in migrant communities has been indoctrinated in a culture of Catholic colonial homophobia, has
created the instruments of punishment and condemnation of the queer body, and has imposed them over subaltern bodies. Queer politics would then be a decolonizing energy that emerges as a force of resistance to the colonial normative regime that established punitive politics regarding sexual dissidence; queer politics forms as a direct consequence of the body being in pain. This punitive culture remains in place in present-day Latin America even though antidiscriminatory laws have been approved in the majority of the countries in the region. This permanent social structure, which insistently excludes sexual diversity, is what is being referring to with the term “coloniality of sex.”

Miano Borruso’s (2003) ethnography of the *muñec* shows the tensions between their family-supported alternative sexuality and the Westernized Christian and macho homophobia of their mestizo neighbors: it is a moral entanglement that defines the subjectivities of the *muñec*. Rivera Cuscanqui (2010) and Miano Borruso (2003) coincide in presenting the mother as a source of support for queer sexualities, establishing a counterhegemonic family in which dominant normativity is necessarily adapted to the illegitimate condition, enabling alternative forms of gender and sexualities. For both authors, fathers are absent or at least they are not determiners in the gender education of their offspring. For Rivera Cuscanqui, the formation of the illegitimate mestizo provides a basis for a rebellious subjectivity that determines a rancorous sensibility and ultimately a revolutionary agency; for Miano Borruso, the *muñec* are Zapotec cultural advocates and themselves champions of counterhomophobic politics.

The liminal fields of Rivera Cuscanqui’s (2010) third republic and of Anzaldúa’s (1999) borderlands nurture a transcultured conception of gender, giving colonization and decolonization a bodily concreteness. To summarize, the postcolonial body can be conceived of as a subject that is not quite dominated nor quite liberated. In this in-between status, the efforts to control the subaltern body have entailed the formation of a complex institutional apparatus, or what Foucault (1980) calls a “dispositif,” which includes a number of strategies of discipline, censorship, co-option, indoctrination, criminalization, enslaving, and pathologization. All of these practices, norms, and discourses are components of what Latin Americanist academia has defined as coloniality.

Colonial dispositif informs and causes a discourse of resistance as a dialectical continuum of subjectivation and transgression in which sexuality—its normativity and its perversion—is the carnal signifier, the somatic sign expressed in desire and punishment. These disciplinary colonial institutions provide the conditions that precipitate the formation of a margin of dissolution, an underground practice of condemned sexual and gender expressions. Two paradigmatic characters frame Garza Carvajal’s (2003) historical analysis of sodomy in early modern Hispanic society: Catalina de Erauso, who became a second lieutenant of the Spanish Royal Army with the masculine name of Alonso or Antonio Díaz, and Juan de la Vega, a mulatto effeminate man from Mexico City who preferred being named “Cotita.” Both individuals, Garza Carvajal (2003) concludes, “might have contested gender roles in Spain–New Spain, but they nonetheless affirm the state’s discourses about maleness” (188). While Erauso embraced all the *vir* values that embodied the state’s and the church’s norms of maleness, de la Vega/Cotita” and others enacted the habits and style of the most celebrated women of colonial high class. These subaltern subjects, who transgress and imitate at the same time the very image of their oppressors, reveal many internal contradictions in the colonial regime; it becomes necessary to think about replacing the established set of sex/gender roles with a very fluid space in which bodily affairs depend deeply on the political unrest that characterizes multicultural, colonized, or postcolonized societies.

Gender, sex, and race intersect in the formation of subaltern identities, although their expression often mimics hegemonic gender ideals (the Spaniard warrior in the case of Catalina de Erauso, the
high-class woman in the case of Juan de la Vega, and TV divas in the case of the muse). The bastard mestizo (not to mention the Mexican Malinche) is a problematic and contradictory subject that may connote treason or rebelliousness, mendacity or heroism. Defined by its instability, this figure has become a frequent trope of the Latin American essayist tradition. For example, in El Perfil del hombre y la cultura en México, Samuel Ramos (1982) discusses the peladitas, a subaltern character who is a completely dispossessed individual who speaks a meaningless language and is only able to survive through his ability to deceive and trick (52–61). In Octavio Paz’s (2004) well-known depiction of the rancorous mestizo, the fact that he is a mixture of a lonely orphan and a resentful bastard provides sufficient explanation for his hermetic and eventually violent psyche (89–90). A similar morally troubled identity is depicted in the work of Chilean author Sonia Montecino (1995), who notes that Chilean families established since the colonial era are often polygamist and mother-centered (47). These works coincide with Rivera Cusicanqui’s (2010) ideas on gender formation in Bolivian society, where subaltern morality emerges in the mother-centered family and is marked by illegitimacy.

I adopt the conflictive, uncomfortable notion of the mestizo instead of the harmonious one the political elites and official intellectuals have propagated. The liminal character of mestiza consciousness in Gloria Anzaldúa’s seminal Borderland/La Frontera (1999) reflects on how the mestiza is problematically related to the nation, the hegemonic gender system, and even language itself as she is always located between meaning systems, at the uncomfortable moment of the translation. In Borderland/La Frontera, Anzaldúa finds that exacerbating differences is a path to neutralizing the segregating network of identities. Whereas segregation consists of excluding and contrasting identities, the radical difference we can find in Anzaldúa is a sum of many differences. The crossroads of queerness takes gender and racial differences into a broader inclusiveness: “As lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races” (Anzaldúa 1999: 102). Racial difference for Anzaldúa is overcome by the queerness present in all races; queerness shows an intersubjective inside where differences are redefined as a desirable feature rather than a mark of segregation. Queerness calls hegemonic notions of race and gender into question by transforming the significance of difference. In her preface to This Bridge We Call Home (2015), Anzaldúa proposes building bridges that cross racial and gender classifications (2–3). In Borderland/La Frontera, she introduces a political statement that breaks down the barriers of identity: “[t]he new mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity” (1999: 101). Analouise Keating (1998) observes that Anzaldúa “transforms essentialized conceptions of identity into transcultural, transgendersed models of subjectivity. By positing the non-duality of self and other, they construct multilayered discourses recognizing both the diversities and commonalities between and among apparently dissimilar people” (31). In other words, developing this tolerance for contradictions and ambiguity enables Anzaldúa not only to redefine oppositional differences but also to state that contradictions and ambiguities can become the liberating conditions of humanism and sources of creativity.

The notion of queer as an ethnic and gender multiplicity implies a politics of difference that subverts the segregating order. Antihomophobic interventions, as Eve K. Sedgwick (1990: 9–10) proposes, need to target a binary system of exclusion (heterosexual vs. homosexual, masculine vs. feminine, white vs. nonwhite or people of color), demonstrating that such a binary distribution is asymmetrical. In fact, most of our social categorizations are based on uneven relationships. Starting from Anzaldúa’s propositions, it is possible to suggest that queer decolonization focuses on that system of differences, making visible the obsolescence of a binary asymmetrical
order and emphasizing the importance of building bridges in order to neutralize exclusionary practices. According to this perspective, there is an enveloping community that overcomes interethnic and international segregation. The queer perspective represents a way to blur oppositional categorization, precisely confronting "the traits and habits distorting how you see reality and inhibiting the full use of your faculties" (Anzaldúa 2002b: 541).

Coming out of US queer-of-color academia, the decolonizing queer perspective’s utopian horizon envisioned an inclusive notion of identity and citizenship, replacing an oppositional logic to allow for what Anzaldúa (2002b) calls a "new tribalism," in which oppressed subjects, the others of a repressive coloniality, build bridges between one another (3). The intersection of sex and ethnicity and the construction of bridges between the oppressed and the excluded constitute an epistemic and political program that more or less defines today’s transnational intellectual agenda, which can be summarized as follows:

a) Deconstructing heterosexual hegemony involves the critique of a system of exclusion and prejudices that constitutes the modern state. When oppositional categorizations do not make sense any more, heterosexuality will not be the a priori criterion to hold citizenship and law and society will function according to the logic of multiplicity.

b) A transnational web of queer bridges overcomes national boundaries, enabling the creation of a global politics in diversity. The idea of *nepantla*, "a liminal zone" or "a constant state of displacement" (Anzaldúa 2002b: 1) transforms the function of bridges: they are no longer just crossing ways; they are determinant in the incessant process of forging bonds across race, gender, and alternative identity lines (Anzaldúa 2002a: 574). This proposal of perpetual crossing offers an alternative view of globalization.

c) Since segregating practices occur as a result of gender and ethnic asymmetry (i.e., heterosexual vs. homosexual, white vs. Amerindian, etc.), the study of such oppression must question ethnic and gender assumptions. This is the point of departure for a project that goes beyond these categories. Rather than treating ethnicity or gender as a grounding upon which to understand subjectivity, Anzaldúa’s view teaches us to depart from the body when reflecting on the experiences that define the self, and, from there, to reconnect with various people in order to build a commonality based on diversity called "el mundo zurdo" (Anzaldúa 2015: 209). One of Anzaldúa’s dearest causes is the need to resignify differences as a starting point for constructing inclusive communities.

The principle of queering consists of opening up an antithegemonic space for the excluded, oppressed, and disenfranchised individuals; their exclusion is multiple, as they are excluded from colonial institutions as well as from subaltern communities. Latin American subalternist and decolonial scholars have not paid much attention to sexual diversity, except for a few mentions in their listings of the groups excluded by hegemonic society. Anzaldúa’s nonhegemonic sexualities and Rivera Cusicanqui’s (2010) subaltern queer of the third republic share a similar cultural location—in the liminal and illegitimate zone reserved for those excluded and lacking of full citizenship. In some cases they might have a relative cultural legitimization, such as in the Zapotec example, but, even though they enjoy a form of tolerance, sexual difference remains invisible in the dominant mestizo discourse. The Chilean writer Pedro Lemebel (2000) also pointed out the characteristic double exclusion of the queer in his celebrated poem "Hablo por mi diferencia," in which he noted the marginalization of sexual difference even in the community of dissident activists in postdictatorial Chile, revealing a reproduction of oppression among
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the various ranks of sex–gender categories within social groups (93–97).

**Conclusion**

To conclude this chapter, I would like to make three observations. First, queerness does not predate the colonial order; instead, it should be seen as an unexpected result of colonial oppression. This does not mean that nonheterosexual practices were absent in pre-Columbian cultures but rather that they were not condemned or deemed to be deviant. Colonialism's internal contradictions are made manifest within queerness itself, and, as a result, queer subjects are able to develop visceral forms of resistance to power, a type of bodily rejection of colonial law. In this sense, the visceral archive as conceived of by Tortorici (2014) is a catalog of transgressive reactions to colonial biopolitics. Pre-Columbian sexual practices should not be seen as transgression to any sex–gender norms within specific pre-Columbian societies; rather, the sexual practices of pre-Columbian societies were only deemed nefarious and grave violations of God's law by colonial powers, and at this point became causes for prosecution.

Second, decolonizing is not a question of re-establishing a pre-Columbian sex–gender system; rather, it should be conceived as a restructuring of the forms of citizenship produced inside coloniality. Recovering the ancestral is a utopian desire that functions as an imaginary resource sometimes helpful in narrating decolonizing struggles. The ways that Garza Carvajal (2003), Horswell (2005), Sigal (2007), and Tortorici (2014) revisit and reconceive the colonial archive are illustrative of a type of archeological search for textual fragments dealing with the politics of the body and the uses and meanings of sexuality. This method of historicizing sexuality uncovers the processes of the criminalization, discipline, and punishment of sexual diversity. The search for an ancestral sexuality within the archive may give us some fragmentary pieces of valuable information about dismantled systems of belief and worldviews, but these bits will always be read or translated through the distorting filter of ideologies and discourses. The process of decolonizing sexuality in a colonial text requires a type of deep reflection on the nature of translation, liberating the text from Western misreadings.

Third, not simply a nostalgic celebration of the archeology of queerness, the history of Latin American sexuality reveals the process of colonization to be based on a politics of the body. As colonialism is understood, its webs of control can begin to be untangled. It can be said that the use of the native in political and academic discourses is another form of translating the colonized, in this case for the express purpose of making the bodies of the colonized readable to Western epistemologies (i.e., the formation of a coloniality of knowledge). The study of the coloniality of sex would be a project of knowing how bodies are used as part of a colonial program of domination. A decolonization of sex would be, then, a process of redefining the norms of the bodies in question; such a process would require the liberation of sexual practices from the limits of colonial law, which has heretofore restricted sexuality and gender to a binary configuration reflecting Western misogynistic and homophobic biases. Then, we need to conceive of decolonization as a dismantling of colonial norms. Although these norms may be articulated in the doctrine of the colonizing church (as well as in other places), they cannot be derogated just by deleting the text of the law but by a systematic dismantling of the ideology introjected into the lives of the colonized subject. Subject formation according to the strict guidelines of colonial rule is the basic method of colonial domination.
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the route that queer studies and interventions seem to follow in Latin America. This development means that two of the main agendas the queer perspective has to address are the invention of a subjectivity free from ready-made social categories (like the politics of drag queens proposes) and the decolonization of bodies expropriated for the sex market in the contemporary neoliberal system.

Conclusion

Latin American discussions on queer issues disseminated in academic works, films, artistic interventions, and body politics constitute a rampant field of knowledge and action that is reconfiguring and increasing its presence in social life. This book is just an invitation to continue this conversation. The review I proposed is the route of a personal itinerary in Latin American sexuality studies; it is part of an intellectual adventure consisting of crossing restlessly between north and south, bringing every time a different set of questions to be considered. Here I summarize how these themes—the main issues found in the conversations of this academic field since the 1990s—have been addressed in this book.

First, colonial queerness opens the way to understanding coloniality as a form of reduction of the multiplicity to a binary heterosexual gender. In this sense, translating Western culture into the native cultures of South America consists of erasing and proscribing diverse sexual practices. The history of pre-Columbian and colonial sexualities scrutinizes the criminal archive, confessionary manuals, rituals, and magic texts to find traces of proscribed queerness, creating an archeology of the untold history of forbidden sexualities.

Second, modernity installed the notion of the secular nation and the concept of the science of medicine and criminology by
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which bodies are controlled, punished, secluded, and expelled from communities. Homophobic nationalistic discourses use queer representations such as transvestism to attack political enemies and criticize antinational attitudes, disqualifying queerness in terms of pro-colonialism, imperialism, and betrayal. Despite this nationalistic hostility toward sexual difference in most of modern Latin American history, in literature and the arts the basis of a queer politics has emerged as an antihomophobic response to conservative intolerance. Queerness can be seen as the disturbing side of modernity. Inside the closet, several members of the lettered city, the intellectual elite, started a process of queering the nation in their aesthetic and critical projects. This queering can also be understood as a form of depatriarchalizing the state, but it still does not embody an explicitly political proposal.

Third, LGBT politics is closely related to Marxist–Leninist political discourses and has articulated a revolutionary queer program, despite the reluctance of leftist groups to incorporate a dissident sexual agenda. The AIDS pandemic restructured the movement with a new discourse of rights instead of the liberation agenda of the 1970s. The LGBT movement has since then been a political force that has achieved several demands in the major countries in the region. Gay culture, on the other hand, has established a divide between the middle-class, cosmopolitan gay culture and the traditional oppressive and homophobic sexualities, revealing economic and political intersections with sex, race, and class.

Fourth, trans politics emerged from the victimizing, eradicating transphobia in Latin America. From the difficulties of their struggles, in several instances trans activists came to be community leaders. In this transformation, the trans construction evolved from being a diva-melodramatic imitation to a nonimitative invention of herself that articulates a queer utopia.

Fifth, one of the biggest challenges in the field of sexuality is the issue of coercive and forced sexuality. The development of a sex

market based on slavery and prostitution entered into for survival raises several questions about consumption and disposability in the sexual economy of the neoliberal system. Ethical and political reflections on sex abuse and sex crimes are pushing gender, sexuality, and queer studies to the side so that this emergency can be addressed.

A still wider number of works on body difference politics need to be considered. Disability studies, body transformation technologies, posthuman perspectives on sexuality, and fat studies are topics on the body that are finding their way into contemporary conversations and that deserve scholars’ attention in future projects.
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