Abstract

I explore how queer Mexicans from the towns of Poza Rica and Coatzintla in Veracruz, Mexico make queer-worlds possible for themselves. Based on two months of ethnographic fieldwork in these two towns, I focus on the ways in which queer Mexicans contest, negotiate and mediate gender/sexual policing, while also challenging and producing/reproducing traditional gender roles and heteronormativity. I track these queer practices in a context where institutions like family, marriage, motherhood, mass media, church, language, and other institutions, police alternative gender/sexual identifications and/or expressions. Gender and sexual policing are also mediated by intersectionalities of gender, race-ethnicity, class, sex and sexuality. After a brief historical overview of queer developments in Mexico, this thesis examines how machismo, as an ideology in constant transformation, regulates the lives of queer folks. As well, it addresses queer (in)visibility in public discourses and it reveals the ways in which queer Mexicans publicly display what it means to be queer in these two towns. The thesis also examines the discourses and practices associated with La putería, (whoring) as a simultaneous a tool of both gender/sexual policing and resistance for queer folks and as a potential mechanism to challenge gender roles and the gender order. My findings reveal gender and sexual fluidity as well as multiple emerging spaces that intersect with other practices for queer Mexicans. The data gathered also suggests terms of identification as a difficult terrain since they do not map neatly into the paradigms found in North America.
Acknowledgments

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I extend special thanks to all family members who supported me during my fieldwork in Mexico. This journey would not have been possible without all your help. I am especially indebted to research participants for sharing with me their experiences, views and insights and it is my sincere hope that I have honoured their contributions by writing about ‘self-expressions and/or identifications’ with the respect it deserves. To all of you, my most sincere thanks.

Thank you to my kids, Felix Rochon-Vicencio and Miranda Rochon-Vicencio, for all your patience. I know that this journey has been difficult, but I hope that this work inspires you both to become good citizens of the world and to follow your dreams fully. I love you both with all my heart and I wish you two can continue making this world a better place. En aras por un mundo mejor!

Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my father, Sr. Lucio Vicencio Franco.
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Included here are all Spanish Mexican words that appear more than once in the text and are not glossed within it each time.

**Activo**
Active and a word used to refer to masculine men who perform manly, virile roles during sex

**Chacal**
Friend and/or fag, faggot

**Cochon(es)**
Fag(s), faggot(s) and the only Nicaraguan term used in this thesis

**Declarado(a)**
Declared, a term applied to people who transgress gender and/or sexual norms and who have made such a transgression public

**Diversidad sexual**
Sexual diversity. A name assigned to LGBTQ individuals

**Gallina(s)**
Hen(s) and a local term to refer to masculine, straight looking men who prefer to act as *pasivos* during sexual encounters

**Hombre-Hombre**
The self-identified straight, heterosexual and macho looking man

**Homosexual**
Homosexual

**Loca**
Fag, faggot, crazy

**Machismo**
A gendered ideology which assumes that masculinity is superior to femininity. This term is particularly associated with the establishment of gendered relations and as a form of patriarchy

**Macho**
A terminology attributed to men who develop womanizing practices. As well, it relates to those masculine men who focus on living in the present while satisfying their own pleasures and desires

**Mandilón**
A gendered word with double, positive and negative, meaning. It particularly alludes to men who become dominated by women.

**Manflora**
A gendered term used to refer to butch and/or feminine looking lesbian women

**Maricón**
Fag, faggot and a synonym of *puto*

**Mayate**
A *hombre-hombre* or a self-identified straight, heterosexual and macho looking man who engages either in casual or long-lasting relationships with men who transgress gender norms

**No declarado(a)**
Non-declared, a term applied to people who despite of transgressing gender and/or sexual norms do not make such a transgression public

**Pasivo**
Passive. Word assigned to individuals who perform receptive roles during sexual encounters

**Preferencia(s) Sexual(es)**
Sexual Preference(s)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prostituta(o)</td>
<td>A male or female individual who exchanges sex for money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puta</td>
<td>Whore or a female individual who exchanges sex for money. A synonym of prostitute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Putería</td>
<td>Whoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puto</td>
<td>A colloquial gendered term to refer to fag, faggot. As well, it represents the popular term to refer to gay, transsexual, transgender and/or vestida individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi declarado(a)</td>
<td>Semi declared or partially declared, also referred to individuals who transgress gender and/or sexual norms, but only in specific social spheres</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transexual</td>
<td>Transsexual. A gendered terminology used by diverse male born individuals such as those who have experienced sex change surgeries. Particularly, in places like Poza Rica and Coatzintla, Veracruz, Mexico, this terminology is claimed by those who transgress the gender norms by acting in girly manners and by positioning themselves in binary forms of men/women while also choosing to cross dress frequently. In the same way, it is used by those who act as stereotypically masculine but cross-dress frequently or sporadically. Transexual, as well, falls under the category of puto.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgenero</td>
<td>Transgender and a term used by Mexican LGBT activists as an umbrella terminology to refer to both transgender (male to female and female to men) and transsexual (men to female) individuals. Nonetheless, in settings such as Poza Rica and Coatzintla transgenero alludes to a gendered term applied to those male-born individuals who do (or wish to) live their lives permanently according to the gender that does not correspond to their sexual organs at birth. In other words, the term refers to those who perform femininity permanently, since they wish to live their lives as women. Similarly, this terminology is commonly used by men who cross-dress as women and it also falls under the category of puto.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vestida</td>
<td>A term to refer to a man who cross-dresses as a woman and it could also substitute other terms such as transexual, transgenero, homosexual and/or puto</td>
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</table>
Note on terminology

In Mexico, terms of sexual and gender identifications and/or expressions are used differently than in North America. For instance, one can say that in North America instead of using ‘transsexual’ or ‘transgender’, the term ‘trans’ is used as an umbrella terminology (GLAAD Transgender Media Program, 2018), even though many people prefer to be referred to as men or women rather than ‘trans’ men or ‘trans’ women. On the contrary, in Mexico, and particularly in Poza Rica and Coatzintla, people distinguish between transexual and transgenero, and both terms are gendered. On the one hand, transexual refers to those male-born individuals who identify with the opposite sex and gender assigned at birth and some of them undergo a sex change surgery to modify their bodies and appearances through medical interventions, including but not limited to hormones and/or surgeries. At the same time, the term is used by those who do not undergo a sex change surgery but wish to emphasize the ways in which they transgress gender norms by acting in girly manners, or by positioning themselves in binary forms of men/women. The term is also claimed by those men who act as stereotypically masculine but cross-dress often or sporadically. On the other hand, transgenero is used to describe male-born individuals whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth, whereas some of them even modify their body appearances through hormonal treatments but are not interested to undergo to a sex change surgery (gob.mex, 2018). More precisely, and contrary to transsexuals who may cross-dress often or sporadically, the term transgenero refers to those who perform femininity permanently, since they wish to live their lives as women. Transgenero and transexuales prefer to be recognized by others according to their sexual/gender identities and/or expressions.
For the purpose of this thesis, the term queer will be used analytically as an umbrella term to refer to LGBT, LGBTQ folks.

As well, the terms LGBT, LGBTQ will be mentioned when the literature addresses it.

Additionally, the term queer and diversidad sexual will be used interchangeably, as I understand queer as the closest English term to diversidad sexual
Chapter I: Introduction

Spending summer holidays in Mexico

July 30, 2015

I am in Mexico visiting my mother. On a summer day, I enter her kitchen and I say to her: 
Mamá, de una vez por todas quiero que aceptes el hecho de que me siento atraída sexualmente a otras mujeres. (Mom, once and for all I want you to accept the fact that I am sexually attracted to other women).

My mother turns around, and now facing me, she starts moving her hands while also saying: 
Mira Verónica, dos carreras universitarias en dos países diferentes y todavía continuas hablando tonterías! En conclusión, esas carreras universitarias han sido un total fracaso, que manera de hacer perder el dinero! (Look at you Veronica, two university degrees from two different countries and you are still talking silliness! In the end, those university degrees have been a total failure, what a way to waste money!)

My mother’s comment is not new and by now I am well used to her homophobia. What a way to diminish my most sincere feelings; my own realization of the erotic and my most self-responsible source of power. During my early teenage years, she used to police my sexuality by invading my privacy. For instance, during my adolescence I used to write notes and poems for my female friends. One day, my mom found one of the poems and she read it. It was for Mónica, the girl I used to like. Since my mom did not like that, she began to police my sexuality by scrutinizing my clothing style, my actions and practices. In other words, she assumed the task of (hetero)sexualizing me, so I could fit into a heteronormative system.
My mother’s actions during my adolescence resemble what Carla Trujillo (1991) underlines as a Chicana mother’s job: “to actually whisper the warnings, raise the eyebrows, or covertly transmit to us the ‘taboo nature’ of same-sex relationships” (as cited in Herrera, 2009, p. 18). My mother’s actions did not stop me, since when I was about fourteen years old, my grandmother discovered me kissing my best friend. My grandmother called my mother and she blamed us, my friend and I for such unmoral behaviour.

In my adult years, I moved to Canada, married a Canadian man and years later, I divorced him. Once on my own, I decided to pursue another bachelor’s degree (BA). During my BA, I became exposed to authors like Audre Geraldine Lorde who, in one of her autobiographical works, mentions that during a difficult time, while she was waiting for a medical diagnosis, she decided to reorganize her entire life by recognizing and speaking about her silences (p. 40). As a lesbian of colour and a poet, Lorde (1984) admitted her own fears “of contempt, of censure, or some judgment, or recognition, of challenge, of annihilation” (p. 42). Lorde’s short essay impacted me because, although I have not had a similar medical experience, I have been through difficult times in my life that have pushed me to speak about my own silences. For example, as a transnational mother of two small children I, likewise, have had to face my own fears of failure, censure, judgment, inability, incompetence and challenge, particularly during the process of my own divorce.

Lorde’s words became more powerful to me when I needed to reorganize my own life after I became madly in love with another woman. During this time, I decided to share my experience with family members and close friends in Mexico. They all suggested I should think about the fact that I was a mother of two young children and focus on fulfilling this role above anything else. Their comments not only made me feel powerless, but it also reminded me about
the experiences of sexual policing that I faced during my teenage years. However, as an adult, I was able to reflect on how their comments implied that I should conform to heterosexuality. More specifically, I became aware of the ways in which this policing of sexuality is also tied into my role as a mother. As I realized the way my Mexican acquaintances policed my sexuality, I became interested in knowing more about how people, such as those who do not conform to the heterosexual system, find ways to live their sexuality and gender identities and/or expressions regardless of the social pressures to adapt to heteronormativity and the binary system. Thus, when I began my master thesis, I opted to pursue this question further by conducting an ethnographic study of queer people within the towns of Coatzintla and Poza Rica de Hidalgo, Veracruz, Mexico.

**Research aims**

In this thesis, my aim is to examine how, in places socially perceived as conservative, queer people challenge heteronormativity. I decided to focus on those individuals who seek to make spaces for themselves – in the small towns where I grew up and the places where relatives, friends, neighbours, and co-workers exert pressure to keep people in place. More precisely, my objective has been to examine how queer Mexicans challenge, negotiate, mediate, and, at times maybe, even reproduce and maintain both the traditional gender role system and heteronormativity. By observing the daily practices of queer individuals, I have intended to examine the ways in which queer people transform/re-inscribe Mexican patriarchal environments and *machismo*, the possibilities for their sexual agency as well as the spaces that these people use to socialize and feel safe. As part of situating the larger sociocultural context, I have tried to analyze the ideology of machismo and the ways in which such an ideology shapes people’s
material and discursive practices, something that affects both men and women as well as queer folks. At the same time, I have been interested in how queer individuals in turn, interact with it and, consequently, affect this ideology by possibly transforming it through their sexual agency. I draw on Judith Butler’s (2004, p. 3, 7) notion of agency distinct from the notion of a free individual making rational choice. I understand sexual agency as people’s own sense of sexuality constructed in society and enabled and supported by existing social structures of inequality and privilege while also driven by social critique and social transformation.

The experiences that I faced on the policing of my sexuality made me curious about how other people, who do not neatly fit into heteronormativity and the heterosexual system, find ways to craft spaces for themselves. I did not want to limit myself by concentrating only on lesbian women. Instead, I wanted to engage with those who do not conform to the established social order. One of the aims of this investigation was to understand the different ways in which queer folks negotiate heteronormativity depending on their gender, sexuality, race, class. In other words, as the heterogeneous group that they represent. Even though there are some common trends shared among them, mostly regarding the ways in which they take up distinct identities as well as the ways in which they contest gender/sexual policing, queer Mexicans are not a homogenous group but a heterogeneous one marked by male hierarchies, social class disparities and other differences. While people see themselves as different from others because of their sexual or gender expressions, they also perceive themselves as different because of their race and social status. In other words, the views that queer folks have about themselves are not exclusively based on sexual or gender preferences, but also shaped by the intersectionalities of race, ethnicity and class prevailing in their everyday lives. The experiences of queer individuals may also change depending on social spaces as well as diverse contexts and periods. While I
examine some of these differences in the thesis, I now realize that I cannot claim a full picture of queer experiences. Instead, my thesis is limited to some key practices that I observed. And while I address the policing of sexuality as I experienced during my teenage years along with the ways to craft queer spaces in spite of it, I recognize that my thesis cannot give the full picture of queer life in Mexico since it is a project far too ambitious for a Master or, even, a Doctoral degree. Instead, my thesis provides insights into local experiences and perceptions of queer life in two small towns in Veracruz, Mexico. Its analytical reach is limited, and it is not my intention to generalize queer life in Mexico as a whole.

In my analysis of the policing of gender and sexuality within these contexts, I have found relevant to understand how the connections between patriarchy, compulsory heterosexuality, machismo and queerness come to life in Veracruz, Mexico as well as how they materialize in queer people’s everyday performances and relationships as a constant changing process. For this project, patriarchy is understood as a system based on male dominance, as a contemporary structure originated in history, which means neither eternal nor inevitable, but adapting to change. It is a system developed and controlled by powerful men, in which women, children, and other men are dominated (Christ, 2016, p. 216). For its part, machismo refers to the ideology in which the masculine man represents the entity that delineates power relations between men and among men and women (Lancaster, 1992, p. 223, 236). It is a system that is maintained through everyday forms of power and that is diffused and enacted by both men and women. Moreover, compulsory heterosexuality alludes to the man-made political institution of heterosexuality and the heterosexual system as something to be imposed, managed, organized and maintained by force over women, children, and other men. Compulsory heterosexuality represents a powerful institution that affects motherhood, sex roles, relationships and societal perceptions for women,
children and men, particularly those who transgress normative gender/sexual expressions (Rich, 1980, p. 633, 648). I will return to this topic throughout the thesis, but for now, I want to note that my interest in machismo also comes from my experience of growing up in Mexico, since the effects of machismo in my life represents another way in which I felt policed and regulated.

Field sites, methodology and positionality

I conducted field research in two Mexican locations, Poza Rica de Hidalgo and Coatzintla, in the state of Veracruz, Mexico during the months of July and August 2017. According to El Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGE, 2010), the city of Poza Rica has 181,438 inhabitants and the municipality of Coatzintla 43,106 inhabitants (INEGE, 2010). There are 6.1 kilometres (fifteen minutes distance by car) between these two towns. Located in the northern zone of the State of Veracruz, they present a tropical climate and are surrounded by three popular beaches: Tuxpan, Tecolutla and Cazones. I concentrated in these two Mexican towns since they are the places that I navigated during my childhood and teenage years. While I always resided in Coatzintla and even though there were schools in the town, Poza Rica was the place where I went to school, from kindergarten to high school. As well, it is the setting where my extracurricular activities and social life took place. Due to its small size, Coatzintla lacks job opportunities and entertainment spaces; therefore, it is common for people residing in Coatzintla to work, attend school, do their shopping and engage socially in Poza Rica, while people from Poza Rica may visit family and/or friends living in Coatzintla.

These two places are so close to each other, so entangled that many residents may move from one place to another without even noticing it and doing so several times in one day. During fieldwork, I decided to stay in my home town, Coatzintla to conduct research both there and in
the neighbouring town of Poza Rica, given my familiarity with these places, their connections, and my existing queer network residing in, and moving between both contexts. To conduct this project, I drew on my existing circle of friends and acquaintances from Coatzintla as well as from Poza Rica. It is important to mention that even though I recognize the presence of Totonacas (members of an indigenous Mexican group residing in the area), this thesis focuses on Mexican mestizos (people of combined European and native American descent) since they represent my network. According to Matthew C. Gutmann (1996), mestizos have developed an active presence in the nation, a presence that shows the prevailing inequalities of race, ethnicity, gender, sex, sexuality and class in the country (p. 226).

One key method used for this project was participant-observation, which was done in everyday settings like public markets, restaurants and/or social gatherings at private houses. While hanging out with queer folks, I observed how queer individuals related to one another in informal situations. Hanging out allowed me to pay attention to the different ways in which queer people negotiate heteronormativity. Additionally, hanging out also gave me the opportunity to observe how queer folks contest gender and sexual policing while embracing gender/sexual diversity and fluidity in their everyday life. Overall, an immersion in daily practices gave me the opportunity to witness how queer Mexicans establish their own sense of social belonging, how these individuals move across the towns as well as how they use spaces and for what purposes.

I visited two different hair salons, one located in Poza Rica which I will name Madril, while the other one, Ondas, is located in Coatzintla. I showed up on a regular basis to both settings three times a week for about three to four hours. For example, I was at Madril, Mondays, Wednesdays and alternated Fridays/Saturdays, at Ondas on Tuesdays, Thursdays and alternated
Fridays/Saturdays. Hair salons were chosen as sites for research as I have been intrigued by how queer people in Mexico create spaces for themselves in their everyday lives. Since hair salons are places where queer folks, particularly those who identify as gay men and/or as *homosexuales, transgeneros, transexuales, putos* and/or *vestidas* (see glossary), feel comfortable to work, hang out and socialize, I chose to analyze how such spaces are used as settings for these individuals to perform and express their gender and sexuality in public spaces. Madril is run by Rafael, an individual who self-identifies as gay while the owner of Ondas, Cassio, self-identifies as puto. Since the owners of these salons tend to hire people who self-identify as gays or homosexuales, transexuales, transgeneros, putos and/or vestidas, the salon represents a queer space of its own. I was also looking for potential interview participants in the salons.

At the hair salons, I participated in their main activities, such as getting a haircut, straightening my hair (since it is curly), getting highlights on my hair as well as trying other hair styles. Once, I participated in a full-face facial and another time I brought three of my female relatives for a full-face facial as well. Most of the times, I was asking for makeup advice. My hair styling and makeup sessions were a way to hang out with other clients in the hair salons and with the hairdressers and salon owners. At the same time, my visits also allowed me to take part in the everydayness of the salon while observing the interactions that take place among hairdressers, salon owners and their clientele. Through my visits in both places, I was interested in people’s social interactions and gender/sexual expressions and, thus, I observed their behaviours, body movements, facial gestures, language, use of clothing and makeup (or lack of it), gossip and use of space. My observations included anyone visiting the hair salons, as I was interested in the kinds of interaction happening there. I also visited these places repeatedly to examine how social relations are maintained and reinforced among queer identifying folks.
Likewise, attending these settings provided me the opportunity to observe how business relations between queer identified hairdressers and queer or heterosexual clients are established to track social policing and power relations among salon owners, employees, and clients.

My easy participation in these two hair salons, as well as in other everyday activities of queer individuals, would not have been possible without the help from some of my Mexican close relatives, including my uncles. For example, one of my uncles allowed me to stay in one of his apartments in la Colonia Aztéca (also referred as la Azteca), one of Coatzintla's main suburbs. Such apartments have been built to create an extra income. In my case, I was not charged for my stay. The single bedroom apartment located in the corner of the Zacatecas and the Morelos’ streets is part of the land inherited from my grandparents. Such a site turned out to be a very convenient place since I was able to observe all the movements of the street. In other words, from the apartment I had the option to see the street (and the people who passed by) from two different angles. At the same time, because of its location, this place gave me the opportunity to be walking distance from grocery stores, the Coatzintla's fresh market, Coatzintla's churches and hair salon Ondas. As well, from this location I had easy access to city buses and collective taxis that take people to the next town, Poza Rica.

The most significant help I received came from the women in my family who made all sorts of arrangements before I was in Mexico. For instance, since the apartment was rented unfurnished, by the time I arrived in Coatzintla the place was equipped with all sorts of furniture. Thus, having the place ready for my arrival allowed me to begin fieldwork right away. Such a help facilitated my stay in the town and the process of conducting my research project.

Participant observation was used when interacting with family members and close friends to empirically examine informal and gossip conversations. More specifically, I paid attention to
chats related to queer folks because rumours and gossip represent useful venues for the policing of gender and sexuality. At the same time, it is through rumours and gossip that stories are told, and specific socio-cultural contexts revealed. Participant observation was, likewise, conducted while attending specific settings such as a queer night club called Palladium, a working-class club where I observed people's interactions in a queer friendly space. My observations focused on people’s social interactions, behaviours, body movements, use of clothing, makeup (or lack of it), facial gestures, language, gossip and use of space. At Palladium, I participated by socializing with others, dancing, purchasing drinks and snacks as well as observing live shows. I went to Palladium seven times during the summer of 2017 (roughly every two weeks) and each time I was there, I spent a minimum of four hours. The duration of my stays at Palladium depended mostly on my companions. In other words, while some queer people, with whom I went, wanted to leave the place as quickly as possible because they did not enjoy the space, other folks wanted to stay all night long. Once, I went to Palladium with a couple who self-identified as heterosexual and they also enjoyed the place.

In addition to participant-observation, I also conducted twenty-six open-ended and one-on-one interviews with queer individuals, (including a woman who declared herself straight and cisgender). All my participants in this thesis have been presented with pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. The age of participants varied greatly, as I interviewed people who were eighteen-year people in their sixties. Most interviews were approximately one hour long, even though in some cases it became difficult to keep participants on a time frame because of their interest to voice their own stories. Thus, there were interviews that lasted from three hours. The meetings took place in participants’ own chosen spaces or in mutually convenient, safe locations, such as in the restaurant of a North American hotel chain or North American
coffee places in downtown Poza Rica as well as loncherías (traditional Mexican restaurants) from both towns. Once, a participant insisted to be interviewed in her own hair salon hours before she opened the place, and since she used to make herself available for clients in the afternoons our meeting was setup in the morning. Before the interviews, I read an oral consent script to participants. The interviews covered a broad range of topics, including where the person was born and grew up, what their parents did or do for a living, when the person first found out about their sexual/gender expression or identity, how their families responded once they found out about their nonconforming sexual/gender expression or identification (in cases where these individuals have already come out, or have become declarados(as) particularly to their family members), if they have been exposed to gender and sexual policing through actions of teasing, harassing, or bullying as children and/or adolescents (or if they continue to be teased, harassed or bullied), if they have been in a stable relationship (or still are), as well as their social acceptance (or not acceptance) in society at large.

It is important to add a note here on the terms of identification that the people I interviewed used for themselves. These terms were complicated since people were constantly moving between different identities\(^1\). Therefore, the terms used in this thesis follow the local discourses around gender and sexuality within these specific towns of the state of Veracruz and do not map neatly into the categories of identification used in North America. For example, some men often use he/she pronouns interchangeably, at times identified as gay men, at others, as women while others reclaim the derogatory term puto as a positive term of self-identification. In this thesis, I will use the Spanish terms transexual and transgenero the same way people who

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\(^1\) In his investigation on Latin homosexuality and masculinities in Brazil, Gregory Mitchell (2006) also finds the terms of identification to be a complex ground because of the way in which people move between them (p. 93).
identified with these terms made use of them. And while the terms matter to them, they carry a
different connotation in Poza Rica and Coatzintla than in North America.

As I mentioned before, these have been difficult terrains to explore due to the
complicated ways in which people make distinctions between the two terms. My interviewees
follow a common difference in local parlance between the terms transexual and transgenero
where these gendered terms are used only to refer to male-born individuals. On the one hand,
while some queer male-born individuals claim the term transexual to acknowledge their sex
change surgeries, other queer male-born individuals use the term to emphasize the ways in which
they transgress the gender norms by acting in girly manners, the ways they position themselves
in binary forms of men/women as well as the ways they choose to cross dress often or
sporadically. In the same way, the term is also claimed by those men who act as stereotypically
masculine but cross-dress frequently or sporadically. On the other hand, transgenero applies to
male-born folks who do (or wish to) live their lives as women.

Except for one interview conducted in English, all interviews were conducted in Spanish.
The first twelve interviews were recorded by hand while the last fourteen interviews were audio
recorded. My interviewees comprise eight gay-identifying men, one man self-identifying as
bisexual, one self-identifying as a vestida since her dressing style, actions and ways of being in
the world are the same as other women in the town, another person self-identifying as gay
although he is working on becoming transgenero or vestida (a transgender woman), one
participant self-identifying as transexual since she did her surgery long ago, while two other
participants also considered themselves as transexuales because they are considering surgery but
due to financial reasons they have not proceeded with the treatment and the surgery. Four women
self-identified as lesbians although one of them preferred the term gay. Three women reported to
be bisexual whereas one female individual preferred the term tomboy (during the summer this individual self-identified as he by using male clothing and a male name, Pedro). On December 16, 2017, Pedro, an eighteen-year-old individual, sent me a Facebook message saying: *Vero mira este video, ya se lo que soy, hermafrodita, (intersexo). Bueno mi caso no es igualito, pero sí un 80%* (Vero watch this video, now I know who I am, a hermaphrodite [intersex]. Well, my case is not exactly as the one in the video, but I would say that it is 80% the same). His identification was, thus, shifting to hermafrodita or intersexo.

The discourses that circulate on the web are taken by people whose main desires are to be recognized by others according to specific sexual/gender identities and expressions. And while this aspect may appear as key to how people want to be known to others, the fact of tracking these identities may reflect the perception of self-policing and self-fixing identities rigidly. By doing so, there is a risk to ignore people’s actions of moving through various non-conforming gender/sexual expressions and identifications. In the same vein, while trying to write about these people, the thesis may, as well, present the risk to appear as a work of fixing identities. Thus, I want to emphasize the fact that despite how these identities may sound, self-expressions should not be considered as fixed and stable, but as fluid throughout one’s lifetime.

As an example of what is presumed as normative while it may not be, I mentioned before that among my participants, I also interviewed Manuela, a straight, cisgender woman. I interviewed her because she was referred to me by one of my friends, Cassio, as a potential candidate for an interview. When I met her and read her the script and asked her if she wanted to participate in it, she said yes. We set a date and met for the interview. During our meeting, she self-identified as heterosexual and cisgender while she also looked typically feminine. At the beginning, I was annoyed by the fact that she wanted me to interview her when she did not
identify as queer in any way I could recognize. Later on, I went to see my friend Cassio and I asked him why he had suggested that I interviewed Manuela. My friend's answer was that it did not matter if she had only slept with men but what was important was the fact that she had been with them (Cassio and his group of friends) in every single moment of their lives. Besides, he told me that since she was bien puta (a total slut) she deserved to be included in the research project because anyway la putería es la putería (whoring is whoring) no matter who does it and with whom it is performed. I, then, realized how concepts vary from place to place and even though we speak the same language, sometimes when referring to something such as sexual and/or gender expression or identification, we, my Mexican friends, acquaintances and I, do not mean the same thing, but instead we see actions according to our own views, perceptions and experiences.

My role was also mediated by my privileged position in the towns because of my residence in a foreign country. Among my relatives, friends, and acquaintances, living in Canada provided me with a special social status because of the difficulty to obtain residence documents. Moreover, for my Mexican friends and relatives, Canada, as a country, is perceived as a place committed to gender equality, therefore, as a land able to provide a better life style to its residents than the life style that a nation like Mexico can offer to its population. Drawing from Chicana theorists, in this thesis, I develop a standpoint approach to analyze the ways in which queer Mexicans express the material reality of their lives and the diversity of their experiences (Hesse-Biber, 2014, p. 29). As a valuable methodology, a standpoint approach provides me with the opportunity to highlight knowledge as socially situated and as socially influenced by location (Harding, 1993, as cited in Archer Mann, 2012, p. 23). At the same time, I take an interpretive approach to underline how this thesis develops from my point of view as a translational mother
and queer individual with close family ties within both towns (Cerwonka & Malkki, 2007, p. 26). Thus, my position as a Mexican-Canadian educated woman shapes my understanding and frames my investigation.

As an example of how my position shaped the course of my investigation, I will address the way in which I approached religion, since even though some people were more devotees than others, overall all participants were influenced by Christianity and Christian views. Therefore, it is significant to mention that my intention was to attend mass at least at the Catholic church that corresponded to my suburb in Coatzintla. The Catholic Church was chosen as a site for research due to the high rate of Catholic devotees in the area. I envisioned to go every weekend as some queer followers do in the town. I ended up going only once, and while I engaged my participants on the topic of their religious beliefs, I did not conduct sustained participant-observation during Catholic mass since I only attended once. My only one attendance to the Catholic church was still a telling moment, as I explain below.

I decided to join the Catholic mass on Saturday, August 5th. I went for the mass service of 6:00 pm and I did not realize that during that day and time of the week it is common for wedding ceremonies to take place. I sat there, and I felt very much out of place. I may have felt that way because in the last twenty years I have been in mass services very sporadically. The Church was not crowded, approximately forty people attended the ceremony. Men wore their impeccable suits while women wore long or short cocktail dresses, high heeled shoes, long or short earrings and other jewelry accessories. Women’s makeup and hair style seemed as if they had been made by makeup artists and professional hairdressers. Both men and women were noticeable by the perfume they wore for the event. I just kept thinking about how much preparation these people, particularly women, invested for the occasion. For a moment I thought
that the feelings I had of being out of place had to do with the way I dressed and showed up for Church (denim shorts, a blue tank top and sandals). My children were also there with me wearing shorts, t-shirts and sandals. It was thirty-eight degrees, plus humidity, and the twelve fans that the church had were not enough. Then, the priest, Padre Anselmo, began his sermon. As I wrote in my fieldnotes, Padre Anselmo started his discourse by instructing the bride how to behave during marriage such as how to look pretty for her new-to-be husband. In other words, Padre Anselmo instructed the bride on how to behave and regulate herself during marriage. According to the priest, it was the bride’s responsibility to dress and look attractive for her new husband. At the same time, he underlined how it was women’s duty to make the home a peaceful place. Moreover, Padre Anselmo highlighted how it was women’s obligation not to bother their men with routine and trivial events. The responsibilities that the priest stated for the bride were endless while the groom’s duties were hardly even mentioned.

I wanted to leave the place as soon as possible, but my daughter started to demonstrate enthusiasm to participate in throwing rice at the bride and the groom, a ritual which is intended to give good luck to the new married couple. Since such a practice takes place while the bride and the groom are exiting the Church, I stayed until the end of the mass. Everybody seemed very happy at the end of the ceremony and they all acted enthusiastically while cheering for the bride and the groom. It was at this point I took my kids and I left the place. I did not go back again.

In the following days, I was asked by a female relative when I was thinking to attend another mass service. I firmly answered that I did not think to go back and that I did not know in what state of mind she was by continuing to go there. I told her that I perceived Catholic mass as a promotion of patriarchy and that it was an example of gender inequality in its splendor. I added that I had heard enough and that I had other priorities. I got carried away and I continued telling
her that I was not putting up with it, much less to allow my daughter to hear such absurdities, that the mass was an insult to ourselves, to all of us as women. I finished by saying that if that was what was spoken in Church, then I did not know why women in the town were not bothered by it. Given that she was a devotee, she was offended by what I said. The conversation with my female relative led us to one full day of silence, a day that ended when I needed a favour from her. Since child care is women’s work, I was usually put into a position of needing favours from the women around me, and I ended up talking to her again when I needed someone to care for my children.

While this gendered division of labour may be perceived and experienced as oppressive by my family relative, the fact that she was taking care of my children also gave her some power over me. For instance, every time that I went outside the neighbourhood she wanted to know where I was going, and with whom. Thus, I felt that by taking care of my kids, my female relative in turn expected to know my movements, and the people with whom I was hanging out, a form of policing. I will engage further with this kind of gender/sexual policing in Chapters II and III.

Even though I had been to a Catholic mass in Coatzintla sporadically, and mostly to fulfil a specific family commitment, I was unprepared for the blatant patriarchal stance I observed that day. While I did not return to the place, such a scenario and my interaction with this female relative, made me aware of the significance that the Church has as an institution that holds power and that perpetuates a gender ideology that posits women as unequal to men. The incident also made me reflect on the intimacies of power, in this case, the power relations between my female relative and myself.
Beside conducting interviews and participant-observation, local newspapers were collected daily with the intention of both recording local and national discourses on gender and sexual policing as well as noticing how queer folks identify their experiences with broader public discourses. Local newspapers were gathered through *el señor Guillermo*, a man who sells the local newspapers in *Macomsa* (one of Coatzintla's main intersections and the road that interconnects with la Colonia Azteca) and its surroundings. During the first week of my stay I contacted el señor Guillermo and, following the scripts of la Colonia Azteca, I started naming him *el señor del periódico*, the newspaper man, since every time I mentioned his name to others, no one knew who I was referring to. Only in front of him I called him by his name. Once I made arrangements with el señor del periódico, he began delivering the local newspaper every morning at my door.

While conducting fieldwork I faced some challenges. For example, a significant issue had to do with the topic of my research and the way in which it became perceived by my acquaintances and relatives, in the two settings, Poza Rica and Coatzintla, but particularly in the context of Coatzintla. As well, as a mother of two young children it was difficult to find the time for my investigation. Finding care for my children was a challenge since even though I was surrounded by family members who were eager to take care of my kids, such a help did not come without all sorts of complaints. The complaints mostly referred to the project itself, of why I was dedicating so much time to a university research project when the main concern should be concentrated on the attention, nurturing and care of my children. There was an emphasis on my children since they, as offspring of a divorced woman, are seen as not having experienced the stability of a family, also understood under the traditional meaning of a Mexican family as “a
unit involving a couple — usually a man and a woman — running a household while producing and raising children together” (Gavriel et. al., 2014, p. 993).

However, the biggest challenge has been my queerness. As previously mentioned, family members have revealed to me that in these contexts, and especially in Coatzintla, it is seen as highly irresponsible, selfish, insensitive, disreputable and unacceptable for a woman, and particularly a divorced mother, to be out as openly lesbian. During fieldwork, I constantly found myself thinking how powerful institutions like heterosexual marriage and motherhood manifest in the spaces where I grew up, and how they constitute a key aspect shaping sexual/gender expressions and identities. Henceforth, in this thesis I draw on these embodied, subjective experiences in the field to engage with the ways in which queer Mexicans relate to institutions in charge of policing gender and sexuality such as schools, government, church, mass media, family, marriage and motherhood, as well as to ideologies like machismo, compulsory heterosexuality, language and patriarchy. At the same time, I illustrate how queer Mexicans, despite the social constraints of heteronormativity, are able to make queer-world spaces possible.

While walking in Poza Rica's busy downtown area, I could not stop thinking about how much the city had changed since I lived there in the late 1990s. Nowadays, globalization can be perceived in the town through the presence, for example, of big North American hotel chains as well as North American coffeehouse brands. It is crucial to mention that even though these spaces are open to the public, it is outsiders (domestic and some international tourists) as well as Poza Rica’s middle and upper-class individuals who visit them. In other words, it is only a small sector of Mexican society who has access to such settings, leaving the majority of Poza Rica’s residents outside these spaces. Thus, I believe that, at times, my easy access to queer people from Poza Rica and Coatzintla had a lot to do with the fact that they viewed me as a reliable individual
to hang out with. In other words, as a person who could facilitate their access to middle-class social spaces. As a Mexican woman living in Canada, I am locally seen as having more social status, or as an individual who is able to navigate through the city in less restricted ways (even if being openly queer lessen my social status). Among queer folks, my easy access to them was in part influenced by the element of mobility. They praise mobility, or the act of traveling from one country to another. Quite often, participants were curious to know what I was doing in Canada, my ways of living and my short and long-term perspectives abroad. My easy access to queer folks made me reflect on interpretive ethnography as a venue to understand human agency in the context of social and dominant discourses (Cerwonka & Malkki, 2007, p. 14). More precisely, I envisioned my ethnographic investigation as a way to emphasize the relationship between the complexities of local specificities (like personal experiences and ways in which people perceive themselves) with dominant discourses (such as geography, education and transnationalism) (Cerwonka & Malkki, 2007, p. 14, 15).

As well, my acceptance among queer individuals from both towns had to do with the fact that all my Mexican relatives still reside in both places, so in many ways they perceived me as one more Mexican and as one of them. And even though my research project was not perceived as respectable for my relatives because of its focus on queer people, my acquaintances and friends praised my position as a student from a Canadian university. Thus, the fact that I hold a university degree from a Canadian institution and that I am continuing my university studies to get a master’s degree also in Canada, a place that they perceive as ‘better’ than Mexico, gave me a special status. Additionally, a standpoint position gave me the self-awareness to recognize how my research investigation may be impacted by my transnational status. In other words, the process of collecting knowledge in this thesis may be influenced by both my own position as a
transnational woman as well as by the locations in which this study takes place (Mann, 2012, p. 23).

As a Mexican woman living in Canada, I occupied a complex position; although queer people, at times, where able to identify with me because of my Mexican origins their comments often suggested that I was not one of them, because I no longer live in Mexico. I occupied an ambivalent insider/outsider position which complicated my interactions with my participants. For example, while some informants emphasized my kinship ties in Coatzintla as a sign of membership in the town, others highlighted my residence overseas by constantly introducing me to their friends and/or acquaintances as a friend from abroad. Kirin Narayan (1993) argues that at this historical moment shaped by global flows in trade, politics, migrations, ecology, and the mass media, anthropologists, particularly those who do research in their place of origin, should not be perceived as fixed identities but as complex individuals who have taken the challenging task of relating subjective knowledges with objective truths (p. 673, 682). Thus, as a queer Mexican mother and a woman who now lives in Canada, I do not claim that my experiences represent the “truth” and authentic knowledge for all queer participants and people with whom I interacted during fieldwork. Instead, my experiences shape my own positionality as a transnational, university-educated queer woman, and the kind of questions that guided my inquiry. Moreover, my experiences challenge the idea that I can act as a native anthropologist having insider knowledge. While, at times, my familiarity with spaces and people provided me with key insights of queer individuals, at other times, my experiences abroad gave me some distance to understand the unique ways in which terms of identification operated in these two towns of Veracruz, Mexico.
The fact that as researcher, I have known some of the participants for a long time made things easier in terms of immersing myself into their lives and getting access. Nevertheless, such a closeness between researcher and participants also brought inconveniences, since in certain cases, due to our familiarity some people had difficulties to see me as researcher and to take me seriously. In other cases, some of my acquaintances did not want to participate in the research project because they thought that I would want to know more about their private sexual life. Others continued referring to me as the little child that I once was. Thus, my familiarity made possible, and also complicated my interactions and the process of interviews, depending on the person and my relationship to them.

Furthermore, my friends from Coatzintla, particularly those who consider themselves as declarados, wanted to be close to me, so they could be near to my male relatives or, at least, hear news from them since my friends have felt, through the years, sexually and/or romantically attracted to some of my male relatives. I constantly told my declarado friends not to think about my male relatives because it was not worth it, that usually they have been raised under a patriarchal ideology. For example, I explained to my friends that my male relatives expect from women to do all the housework. My comments did not change my friends’ minds, instead they commented that they would be very happy to do all the cooking, the cleaning, the washing, the ironing, etc. as long they were able to have so and/or so person by their side. My friends’ responses often astonished me and every time I emphasized my incapacity to understand why they did not mind housework in their lives. My informants and I usually laughed at each other’s comments. The passage illustrates what Hans-Georg Gadamer (1999) refers to prejudices, historical situatedness and the viewpoint of the researcher as “inescapable and productive influence on interpretation and understanding” (as cited in Cerwonka & Malkki, 2007, p. 32).
Thus, my immersion and comments in this scenario reveal my relationship with my informants and the self-reflexivity approach that I take while dealing with people’s romantic/sexual attractions (Cerwonka & Malkki, 2007, p. 30). Moreover, my immersion and comments allude to what Gadamer refers to as the subjectivity of the researcher, such as my positionality and prejudgments, which can never be removed from the knowledge production process. Nonetheless, according to Gadamer, it is the fusion of subjectivities and knowledge production what enriches the dialogue between the two (Cerwonka & Malkki, 2007, p. 22). In light of these insights on the intersections between fusion subjectivities and knowledge production, this thesis is an attempt to grasp the complex ways in which queer people become engaged in dominant discourses.

**Overview of the thesis**

My thesis contributes to existing queer scholarship by situating gender/sexual transgressions as part of the local context. As well, the thesis points to the unique ways queer individuals craft spaces for themselves and for non-normative gender/sexual identities and expressions. As my findings suggest there are multiple emerging spaces and practices taken up by queer people and mediated by race-ethnicity, class, sex, sexuality and gender expectations and identities. One of my observations is that queer individuals enact heteronormative roles and ideas in their everyday life. In this thesis, I track how, in light of heteronormative environments, queer Mexicans negotiate, manage and create spaces for themselves. As well, I engage with a key practice, what people discuss as *la putería* (whoring). I dedicate a chapter to it since I consider la putería a significant space for queer-self making. I analyze la putería as a script represented through
humour and gossip practices in everyday life and as a discourse that acts at once as a form of sexual policing and resistance for individuals from la diversidad sexual.

In the second chapter, I map the terrain of queer scholarly and public discourse in Mexico. I first explore political and legal battles from LGBT people. Then, I examine key theoretical work engaging both the ideology of machismo as lived, changing, reproduced and challenged, and key queer scholarly works in the Mexican context. Consequently, I engage in a discussion of erasures and (in)visibility in public discourses. Chapter three addresses theoretical work on gender and studies on sexuality done in Latin America to demonstrate the ways in which gender and sexual performances are policed and disciplined. At the same time, the aim is to demonstrate how queer individuals challenge, while also perpetuate, heteronormativity in the contexts of Poza Rica and Coatzintla, Veracruz. And although I engage with manfloras at the end of the chapter, the focus resides mostly on putos due to their larger visibility in the towns. In chapter four, I focus on the studies on humour and gossip done in Latin America to address the discourse of la putería as a tool of both sexual policing and resistance. I end this section by mentioning la putería within public queer spaces. Since my objective has been to embrace the lives of queer Mexicans, particularly from the small towns of Poza Rica and Coatzintla, Veracruz, I now turn to the history of the queer movement in Mexico in order to provide an overview of the topic.
Chapter II: A look at gender and sexuality in Mexico

“We should envision ourselves as working to bring an end to all double standards based on sex, gender, and sexuality” (Serano, 2013, p. 137).

Overview

In this chapter, I examine the ways in which queer discourses have come to light in the Mexican context in order to address the practices that are currently taken up by queer people. I focus on both scholarly and popular/public discourses that intersect with queer experiences. I begin by tracking the history of the LGBT movement in Mexico, because of its significance in opening a space in favour of queer individuals and queer issues. Following Gutmann and Roger N. Lancaster’s work done in Mexico City and Managua, Nicaragua, I analyse the ideology of machismo as a mechanism used to police or regulate gender and/or sexual identifications or expressions. Moreover, I address machismo as a frame that participates in organizing expectations of what a man and a woman is or should be. As a system that is not frozen in place, but changing through different socio-historical contexts, machismo may be perceived as the set of beliefs that allow for the masculine man to become the entity that delineates power relations between men and among men and women. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how popular culture regulates, while also enacts, heteronormativity and the heterosexual system, drawing partly on machismo.

A brief history of the LGBT movement in Mexico

The queer movement in Mexico started in the 1970s responding to both the United States (US) gay liberation movement as well as public reactions to the massacre of Tlatelolco, an event that
occurred on October 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 1968 (weeks before the opening of the Olympic Games in the country) in \textit{la Plaza de las Tres Culturas}, in \textit{Noñoalco-Tlatelolco}, – the main square in the Tlatelolco neighbourhood of Mexico City – (Sorensen, 2002, p. 301). The organized activism in la Plaza de las Tres Culturas had as a main objective to address the hostilities that took place between students (a movement requesting social, political and economic reforms) and the police force across the country (Sorensen, 2002, p. 300). These demonstrations ended in a violent state of repression leaving hundreds of students killed, thousands wounded, detained and tortured (Sorensen, 2002, p. 301). According to Diana Sorensen (2002), the massacre of Tlatelolco challenged the legality of the Mexican government represented by the \textit{Partido Revolucionario Institucional} (PRI) and under the mandate of President Guztavo Díaz Ordaz (p. 298, 301).

Predominantly, the massacre of Tlatelolco opened a powerful discussion on the question of justice in the country (Sorensen, 2002, p. 298). The movement of the 1970s led to important changes in the nation, particularly regarding queer issues since youth started to question the Mexican system and its structure.

One of the changes caused by the movement of the 1970s was the fact that, in 1991, Mexico became the host of the International Gay and Lesbian Association event. According to Lucinda C. Grinnell (2016), Mexican activists relied on human rights discourses and citizenship to pursue “inclusion within and acceptance from the state” (n.p.). In 1999, Mexico City held the first meeting of lesbians and lesbian feminists. Among the significant themes addressed was parental rights, since the wishes of lesbians with children was to live without the fear that their offspring might be taken away because of their sexuality (Negroni, 2004, p. 209). In other words, lesbians with children wanted to affirm their parental rights in order to avoid the possibility of being penalized because of their sexuality. However, the subject of parental rights in this meeting
was the first one to be rejected, “as it was clear to almost everyone – even to some lesbians with children – that Mexico was not ready to accept LGBT parents” (Negroni, 2004, p. 211). Even though the conference did not fulfil the hopes of many participants, the event served as a mechanism for the lesbian and gay activism to expand in Mexico City as I explore in the following paragraph.

The conference of lesbians and lesbian feminists held in 1999, along with the development of international LGBTQ rights (Cerwonka & Malkki, 2007, p. 14), led to the creation of La Ley Federal Para Prevenir y Eliminar La Discriminación (Federal Law to Prevent and Eliminate Discrimination), and the national council called Consejo Nacional Para Prevenir La Discriminación (National Council to Prevent Discrimination), hereafter, – CONAPRED – in April 2003 (CONAPRED, 2017, October 24). Through this law, Mexico intended to improve the lives of its queer citizens. For example, as a form of inclusion, the law in Chapter I, article 1, fraction III defines discrimination as every distinction, exclusion or restriction based on, among other factors, “las preferencias sexuales” – sexual preferences – (Transgender Law Center and Cornell University Law School LGBT Clinic, 2016, p. 9). As well, in article 9 fraction XXVIII, the law declares as discriminatory behaviour, among other factors, “promoting or indulging in physical, sexual, psychological or economic abuse based on age, gender, disability, physical appearance or dress, talk, mannerisms or for openly acknowledging one’s sexual preferences, or for any other motive of discrimination” (Transgender Law Center and Cornell University Law School LGBT Clinic, 2016, p. 9).

The legal recognition of transgender individuals took effect in 2004 through an amendment in the Mexico City Civil Code that allowed individuals to modify the name and gender assigned in their original birth certificate (and by 2014, the Mexico City Civil Code was,
once again, reformed to allow people to officially change their gender without a court order {Transgender Law Center and Cornell University Law School LGBT Clinic, 2016, p. 12}). After this amendment, other reforms have been taking place, especially in Mexico City, such as the legalization of same-sex civil unions that occurred on November 9th, 2006, and while the State of Coahuila followed such a decision in 2007, by 2010 the same-sex marriage law took effect in the capital city (De la Dehesa, 2011, p. 2). Such changes allowed other states such as Campeche, Coahuila, Colima, Michoacán, Morelos, Puebla, Chiapas, Quintana Roo, Jalisco, Nayarit, Chihuahua, Sonora and certain municipalities of Querétaro and Tamaulipas to adopt the same-sex marriage law (Castañeda, 2017). Unfortunately, the rest of the Mexican States continue to be against the performance of same-sex marriages; nonetheless, despite the opposition that exists through the nation in relation to same-sex marriages, same-sex marriages are recognized across the country. And although the position of the state of Veracruz has been to oppose the same-sex marriage law, on August 5th, 2017, the local newspaper of Poza Rica called La Opinion announced the first lesbian marriage that took place in the town of Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz. Armando Ramos, the newspaper journalist, mentions that the civil union between Marisela Acosta and Luisa María Salomón, thirty-two and twenty-seven years old respectively, was only possible because these women won un juicio de amparo (a protection lawsuit). Likewise, on August 14th another juicio de amparo was granted to two gay men, whose names were not revealed, in the city of Xalapa, Veracruz (Arellano, 2017).

Following the changes done in the Mexican Republic in favour of LGBTQ people, an important step of inclusion has been the amendment done in June 10, 2011 to article 1 on the Constitución de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos (Constitution of the Mexican United States)
which prohibits people’s discrimination on diverse issues, among them, on the matter of
preferencias sexuales (sexual preferences).

On August 24, 2009 in First Title, Chapter 1, “Of individual Guarantees”, article 1 the
Constitution of Mexico used to mention the following:

En los Estados Unidos Mexicanos todo individuo gozará de las garantías que otorga esta
Constitución, las cuales no podrán restringirse ni suspenderse, sino en los casos y con
las condiciones que ella misma establece.
Está prohibida la esclavitud en los Estados Unidos Mexicanos. Los esclavos del
extranjero que entren al territorio nacional alcanzarán, por este solo hecho, su libertad y
la protección de las leyes.
(Adicionado mediante decreto publicado en el diario oficial de la federación, del 14 de
Agosto del 2001)
Queda prohibida toda discriminación motivada por origen étnico o nacional, el género,
la edad, las discapacidades, la condición social, las condiciones de salud, la religión, las
opiniones, las preferencias, el estado civil o cualquier otra que atente contra la dignidad
humana y tenga por objeto anular o menoscabar los derechos y libertades de las
personas.
(Reformado mediante decreto publicado en el diario oficial de la federación, el 04 de
Diciembre del 2006). (Constitución política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, Diciembre
04, 2006). (In the United Mexican States, every individual will enjoy the guarantees that
this Constitution grants, which shall not be restricted or suspended except in the cases
and with the conditions under which the same is established.
Slavery is prohibited in the United Mexican States. Foreign slaves who enter national
territory by any means will obtain their liberty and the protection of the laws.
(Added by decree published in the official newspaper of the federation of August 14,
2001)
All discrimination motivated by ethnic or national origin, gender, age, differing abilities,
social conditions, health conditions, religion, opinions, preferences, marital status, or
anything else that may be against human dignity and have as its object to restrict or
reduce the rights and liberties of persons, remains prohibited.
(Reformed by decree published in the official newspaper of the federation on December
04, 2006).
(Pamachena, 2017, October 23).

By June 10, 2011 article 1 was modified through an amendment which now includes the
importance for people to be protected as human rights guarantees instead of individual
guarantees. As well, the document prohibits people’s discrimination on diverse issues
particularly preferencias sexuales.
However, and despite having won some important battles in the last four decades, queer Mexicans continue to face systemic policing and abuses because of their gender and sexual identifications and/or expressions. For example, the report by the Transgender Law Center and Cornell University Law School LGBT Clinic (2016) has found that Mexico still offers limited protections, particularly to transgenero (see glossary) folks. The report addresses the fact that Mexico, as a country, does not fully protect transgenero individuals since it does not offer specific federal laws to guard transgender folks from discrimination based on their gender identity (or transgender status) as opposed to sexual expression and/or identity (p. 10).

According to the report, although some protections such as name changes, legal recognition of gender changes, and specialized healthcare for transgender people exist exclusively in Mexico City, the policing of gender and sexuality continues to prevail in the capital city through actions of homophobia and transphobia. For instance, as stated in the report the number of homicides of transgender individuals in the capital is the highest in the country (Transgender Law Center and Cornell University Law School LGBT Clinic, 2016, p. 11, 12). The report suggests that, in most cases, transgender people do not even report abuse due to fears of disclosing their sexual and/or gender identity. They fear further abuses and discrimination once their sexual and/or gender identity is revealed. At the same time, these individuals lack confidence in Mexican agencies, since there has been a long trajectory of corruption in national investigative agencies and doubts about the agencies’ capability and willingness to examine the violations against transgender folks (Transgender Law Center and Cornell University Law School LGBT Clinic, 2016, p. 11). Often, transgender people avoid reporting acts of violence due to fears that they have of the police force, because it has acted as the perpetrator of violence particularly against transgender folks (Transgender Law Center and Cornell University Law School LGBT Clinic, 2016, p. 11). As
well, transgender people commonly do not report crimes because they do not trust the police to take their cases seriously, to accurately investigate their complaints and to punish those complicit in abuses (Transgender Law Center and Cornell University Law School LGBT Clinic, 2016, p. 11, 12).

In the state of Veracruz, thirteen hate crimes against personas de la diversidad sexual (people of sexual diversity) were recorded during the first six months of 2017 (Arellano 2017). Moreover, Jazz Bustamante Hernández, a Mexican activist, mentions that Veracruz demonstrates so much homophobia and transphobia that it rates as the second place, at the national level, for hate crimes (Arellano, 2017). Bustamante Hernández adds that hate crimes are higher in the towns of Veracruz such as Coatzacoalcos, Acayucan, Minatitlán, Xalapa, Córdoba, Orizaba, Papantla, Poza Rica, the Port of Veracruz and Boca del Río (Arellano, 2017). As well, the adviser of the Public Electoral Organization, Juan Manuel Vázquez Barajas, states that between 2014 and 2016, twenty-two cases of hate crimes were recorded (Arellano, 2017). Vázquez Barajas states that besides hate crime cases, personas de la diversidad sexual, particularly transgenero and transexuales, struggle with work discrimination, bullying, sexual harassment and de-humanization (Arellano, 2017).

To improve the lives of queer Mexicans and following queer discourses at the international level (Cerwonka & Malkki, 2007, p. 14), in May 17th, 2016, Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto reopened the debate on same-sex marriages when he declared his intentions to legalize same-sex marriage across the country. Such a news created so much controversy in the country that on November 10th, 2016 Mexican political representatives rejected Enrique Peña Nieto’s proposal to authorize same-sex marriage nationally (Cullinan Hoffman, 2016). Such a decision was highly influenced by El Frente Nacional por la Familia (The National Front for the
Family – hereafter, NFF –), an association formed of multiple civil organizations from across the country. The NFF emerged to oppose *la agenda homosexual* (the homosexual agenda) of President Peña Nieto, which included the legalization of same-sex marriage, the promotion of an educational campaign about homosexuality in schools, and the publication of a homosexual proposal at the mainstream level (Cullinan Hoffman, 2016). If enacted, this agenda would have improved the lives of queer people in the country. However, the NFF proposes that: “the homosexual agenda is a severe blow against Mexican families” (Cullinan Hoffman, 2016). Nevertheless, more than fearing the destabilization of the family per se, organizations like the NFF fear the destabilization of patriarchy, compulsory heterosexuality and heterosexual narratives that prevail in society, even if in different forms, since colonial times.

While President Peña Nieto’s homosexual agenda was rejected in certain circles of society, it was celebrated by others particularly queer Mexicans who saw it as a step towards the end of discrimination and stigmatization and as a step towards the end to control and regulate gender and sexual identifications and/or expressions. Queer Mexicans perceived Peña Nieto’s agenda as a tool to promote queer visibility and social change in the country. J. Lester Feder (2016), a US reporter, mentions that despite the proposal’s rejection and the fact that Mexico has never had a strong national queer rights movement, the nation, in the last years, has demonstrated a new level of mobilisation. For instance, Peña Nieto’s proposal on marriage equality motivated queer activists from across the country to gather in Cuernavaca, Morelos to address the principles of the movement. This meeting was crucial since it became the first time that the queer movement gathered to put forth national principles and to promote them across the nation.

The principles addressed at the meeting in Cuernavaca, Morelos focus on the right for same sex couples to marry nationwide, while also obtaining the financial privileges – like
pension benefits, inheritance, etc. – that marriage provides, the preferences of civil unions over Church ceremonies, the right to fight homophobia, the creation of queer institutions across all Mexican states with the purpose of encouraging gender equality (Alianza Ciudadana LGBTI, 2016). At the same time, the document alludes to the prevention of discrimination against queer people, the protection of queer folks according to the International Human Rights Law, the introduction of subjects like homophobia, lesbophobia, transphobia and bullying in the educational system as well as the implementation of workshops and training for the Procuraduría General de la República (the police force) along with the federal and local justice system (Alianza Ciudadana LGBTI, 2016).

Given that human agency is made meaningful in the context of social and institutional discourses (Cerwonka & Malkki, 2007, p. 14), during fieldwork I paid attention to how queer people engage with the LGBTQ movement in Mexico. While discussions about LGBTQ rights in the Mexican public sphere represent an interest for some individuals who participated in this research, for others it is not a crucial matter since most of them, as working-class individuals, perceive these issues as concerns that belong to the middle-upper class queer sector. Thus, Feder’s comment on the fact that Mexico has never had a strong national queer rights movement resonates with my findings as some of my informants do not identify with the LGBTQ movement in Mexico but instead see themselves as excluded from it. Furthermore, during conversations with some queer individuals they mentioned how disappointing it was that the LGBTQ movement concentrated so much on same-sex marriage and financial rights when they were not interested in these issues. Since some of my informants are not interested in monogamous marriage, but in casual relationships, to obtain rights in same-sex-marriage is not relevant to them. In the same way, my informants revealed their indifference for financial rights
since far from demonstrating an economic concern in the long-term future, some participants showed more interest in financial short-term matters, possibly due to their more precarious economic situation. Others, and particularly my queer male-born informants, expressed the fact that they were not seeking to be financially supported by their partners. I will address this subject in more detail through puto-mayate practices. The common trend that my participants revealed to me was that instead of focusing on same-sex marriage and economic rights, the LGBTQ movement should instead concentrate on eliminating the violence and the abuses taking place against las personas de la diversidad sexual.

The views that some of my informants have about LGBTQ issues on same-sex marriage and financial issues allude to what Kate Moore LeFranc (2018) has addressed as the implementation of homonormativity in queer discourses. According to Moore LeFranc, homonormativity, a term borrowed from heteronormativity, has served as a tool to soothe and regulate non-normative bodies and sexualities by bringing them into ‘decent’ and ‘culturally acceptable behaviours’ (p. 241, 245). In other words, since heteronormativity is associated with ‘decency’ and ‘acceptable practices’, by relating queer discourses to it, it is intended to shift queerness into ‘decent’ and respectable practices. For example, Moore LeFranc states that since queer discourses have changed, now same-sex couples, as monogamous partners, are perceived as socially respectable and their practices as acceptable sexual behaviours. Moreover, Moore LeFranc mentions that by conforming to homonormativity, queer individuals reproduce the same normativity that has served to exclude them (p. 246). Some of my informants resisted homonormativity; they did not seek to make their queerness acceptable or respectable. Nonetheless, a key discursive field used by queer folks to reproduce normativity is machismo, an ideology with which queer Mexicans engage in crafting spaces for themselves. Machismo
represents an ideology which queer Mexicans have taken up in complex and various ways. Therefore, in the following segment, I will turn to the topic of machismo as I aim to locate the larger discursive field with which queer Mexicans from Poza Rica and Coatzintla identify.

**Machismo**

One key ideology shaping queer experiences is machismo (Lancaster 1992); therefore, here I engage with machismo as a lived, changing, challenged system of power that operates at the intersection of other forms of power like Catholicism, an important ideology in how people think about heterosexuality in Mexico. In this thesis, I draw on anthropological queer studies in Latin America by taking inspiration from the works of Gutmann and Lancaster, since these scholars have produced landmark work on sexualities as understood, lived, enacted, and contested in everyday life. As stated by Gutmann (1996), even though machismo shapes Mexican society, men’s behaviours should not be labeled under machismo’s rigid categories such as “wife beating, alcoholism, infidelity, gambling, the abandonment of children, and bullying behaviours” (p. 15). At the same time, machismo should not be taken as “frozen in place, either for individuals or for groups” (p. 27), but as changing through different socio-historical contexts. Men’s behaviours should be addressed as actions in constant transformation, a view that I also take in this thesis.

For instance, Gutmann (1996) suggests that women’s entrance into the workforce has changed the way men behave around the house and the chores these men perform in a daily basis (p. 149). And while machismo is still prevalent in Mexican society, according to Gutmann, younger generations are currently sharing with their wives the domestic division of labour, chores that older generations of Mexican men did not perform (p. 149). Thus, women’s entrance into the workforce has caused rearrangements in the household, particularly regarding household
chores, since now men are more involved in these tasks. Men’s participation in domestic activities has caused the construction of another term, mandilón, a word that has worked in opposition to macho. Like Gutmann, while conducting fieldwork I came across to the term macho “as the womanizer individual and the man who only focuses on living in the present by trying to satisfy his own pleasures and desires” (p. 221). I too became exposed to situations where the term mandilón was used in positive and negative ways – as a positive term to acknowledge those men who help around the house with the domestic chores and as a negative term to underline male subjugation to women and women’s power (p. 233). Unlike Gutmann, however, I did not only encounter the term ‘macho(s)’ and its accompanying ideology and practices through fieldwork; instead, I lived through it, and as a queer woman, I had to deal with it all my life. And if I had to describe myself, I would say that machismo, in many ways, shaped me.

Gutmann (1996) states that machismo is not simply about sexism; instead it is a complex set of productive relations shifting in different historical circumstances whereas also producing particular relations, subjectivities and identities. Gutmann (1996) alludes to the work of Américo Paredes (1971) to explain how machismo and the term macho have been rooted in Mexican nationalism. According to Paredes, these terms have been used in specific times and circumstances. For example, in Paredes’ analysis on the US-Mexican relations, the author mentions that in the nineteenth century many Mexican men became in charge of protecting the border between Mexico and the US in order to stop the US expansion to the South. During this expansion, the US took possession of two-fifths of what used to be the northern part of the Mexican territory. Hence, to secure the nation, the portrayals of Mexican men with pistols were used as positive images along with the representations of “the supreme macho symbol” (p. 227).
And while these Mexican men were trying to protect the borders between the US and Mexico, other Mexican men were exported to the US under the representations of *vaquero-cowboys* (p. 227). In the twentieth century, machismo and the term macho were used by the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) to promote Mexican presidential candidate, Manuel “Avila Ca…MACHO!”, a person who served as the President of the Mexican Republic from 1940 to 1946. According to Paredes, in a way, the references to the Mexican macho represents “simply a joke that outsiders (foreigners) do not get” (p. 227).

Despite how in Mexico these terms have been used historically, Gutmann (1996) suggests that the term macho has served in the United States as a racist term assigned to Mexican, Mexican-American and Latin American men (p. 227). And, according to the author, the term continues to be used to make diminishing simplifications about Mexican men’s cultural behaviours (p. 227). While machismo continues to be used in the US to undermine Mexican as well as other Latin American men, in Mexico the ideology shapes the life of Mexicans as a system that delineates power relations among men as well as among men, women and children (p. 226, 229). To illustrate the ways in which Mexican men perceive machismo, in his investigation done in *la Colonia Santo Domingo in Mexico City*, Gutmann (1996) recalls Raul’s words, a man from Mexico City who self-identifies as bisexual. In Raul’s words, he states: “This is a *machista* society of total machos. If you’re not macho, if you don’t have children with five or six women, you’re not a macho” (p. 116). In the same vein, Gutmann mentions how men who have sex with other men are policed in Mexican society. For example, in one of his encounters with Don Timoteo, one of the residents from la Colonia Santo Domingo, Gutmann asks Don Timoteo: “what do you find has changed between men and women in your lifetime?”. Don Timoteo’s answer is: “*Hay mucho maricón que deja de ser hombre!* [There’s a lot of queers
who’ve stopped being men!” (p. 4). So, for Don Timoteo, individuals who are perceived as outside of the expected Mexican masculine ideal are not considered men. Instead, these individuals are categorized as effeminate men, henceforth, less than men. Furthermore, under the Mexican machismo binaries of masculinity and femininity, men who transgress gender norms are assumed to perform passive sexual roles. And at the time of this writing, Gutmann observed that under the ideology of machismo in Mexico men could be seen as machos even if they were having sex with other men. In other words, men who took the active role in sex did not jeopardize their masculine role in society but preserved their status as machos.

In their investigations on men’s sexualities in Latin America, Gutmann (1996) and Lancaster argue that while the structure of machismo stigmatizes men who transgress gender norms, such a structure does not stigmatize the hombre masculino (masculine men), even though, in some relationships, it is the hombre masculino with whom men who transgress gender norms engage in sexual encounters. In other words, the hombre masculino can have sex with other men and remain an hombre-hombre as long as performing masculinity and engaging in “active” sex, that is in penetrative sex. And while machismo embraces masculine performances (activity) by placing the hombre masculino at the highest level of the gender hierarchy, it situates and regulates men who transgress gender norms at the lowest level of the hierarchal domain.

Gutmann (1996) and Lancaster (1992), as some of the scholars who have focused on men’s sexualities in Latin America, have addressed the activo/pasivo rigid performance as the main framework for Latin American sexuality. In this thesis, I challenge this rigid model as the only existing one, and I suggest that since the time Gutmann and Lancaster have done his research, this model now coexists with others. What I found in my field sites resembles the fluidity suggested in Gregory Michell’s (2006) work in Brazil. Even though in a different
context, in his investigation on the performances of garotos (Brazilian men sex workers), Mitchell proposes that the Latin American model of sexuality identified by scholars has now become a popular idea among tourists. According to Mitchell, many gay tourists choose Brazil as their tourist destination in search for the ‘Latin macho’. In other words, the garoto as the presumed straight, heterosexual man who engages in active sex with other men. Nonetheless, in his study Mitchell argues that the idea of one’s sexual identity determined by one’s role in sex as either activo or pasivo has become nearly a matter of assumption (p. 108). Thus, drawing on queer theorist Eve Sedgwick (1985), Mitchell suggests that conflicting models of sexual identity coexist or overlap, and subjects often move between them (p. 93). For instance, at times garotos challenged the Latin model of homosexuality by acting as pasivos during sexual encounters, an aspect that reflects how sexuality continues to expand and take on new forms. In my investigation in Poza Rica and Coatzintla, Veracruz, I also found that activo/pasivo performances, along with people’s identifications, were not as rigid as the popular idea of the Latin model of homosexuality would have it, but they varied depending on the situations.

Even though some of the findings in Gutmann and Lancaster’s work are contested in this thesis, the investigations of both authors on men and men’s sexualities are relevant for my thesis because, in many ways, their discoveries resemble my own childhood experiences and inform queer experiences of machismo. For instance, centering his study in Erasmus Jimenez, a working-class sector located in Managua, Nicaragua, Lancaster offers an overview of how machismo shapes the lives not only of men, but also of women and queer individuals. Like Gutmann (1996), Lancaster indicates that in the Nicaraguan context while male children are taught to be independent as well as to demonstrate toughness and to develop personal autonomy, female children are encouraged to stay at home, to help with house chores and to take care of
other relatives – either children or the elderly (p. 42). According to Lancaster, during adolescence, it is accepted for boys to use profane language, to arrive home with the smell of alcohol and, while dating, to be unfaithful to their girlfriends (p. 42, 49). However, such behaviours are not only unacceptable for girls, but highly punishable (p. 42). In most cases, by the time that boys reach adulthood they are already immersed into what Lancaster calls “the political economy of machismo”. In other words, the political economy in which a man is evaluated by the performance of specific transactions seen as masculine, among them, drinking and womanizing (p. 223). Under such an economy, the masculine man becomes the entity that delineates power relations between men and among men and women (p. 223, 236).

Gutmann’s (1996) views resemble Lancaster’s insights in Nicaragua, since they both perceived, for example, the act of drinking as masculine and encouraged in young men. In the same vein, both authors agree on the performances, such as infidelity, use of profane language and a sense of independency as gendered in ways that continue to suggest dominant distinctions between boys and girls. Thus, by accepting actions of infidelity, use of profane language and by encouraging a sense of independency, boys can have more freedom than girls. As well, such actions allow boys/men to occupy outside, public spaces like streets, while girls/women remain in the private sphere like the home.

As one may expect, and following the trend of Gutmann (1996) who perceives behaviours associated with masculinity or femininity as not fixed, but in constant transformation, nowadays the actions associated with machismo are not the same but vary depending on the context in which they are located and the intersectionalities that such actions face. As a case in point, in Veracruz and more largely in Mexico, the act of drinking is not restricted to men. At the time of my fieldwork in 2017 drinking habits seem to have changed. Currently, such a practice is
perceived as acceptable among girls since they drink as much as their male friends and boyfriends, while women drink with men in the home in the early evenings, on weekends, and at fiestas. Yet, other behaviours, such as infidelity, use of profane language, a sense of independence and the use of public and private spaces continue to be gendered in ways that suggest dominant distinctions between boys and girls, and men and women. In this thesis, I will discuss how machismo impacts my use of private and public spaces since as a woman, while conducting research on queer people, I became aware of the ways in which I challenged some existing perceptions on gender. It is such perceptions on gender that limit women’s access to certain spaces such as the use of the street and, particularly, the use of street corners.

Moreover, Lancaster (1992) indicates that while men enjoy more social privileges, it does not mean that they have an easier and more relaxed life-style (p. 42). In other words, men also must conform to the particular gender and sexual norms available to them under specific sociocultural contexts. In this way, men’s masculinities are constantly policed and corrected either by close relatives, neighbours and/or society at large. Then, when men demonstrate a lack in achieving the masculine ideal (such as not being assertive enough, not showing enough strength or not being aggressive enough), they are publicly and/or privately “humiliated with a phrase No sea cochón! (Don’t be a faggot)” (p. 43). Lancaster mentions that during his research in Nicaragua, he even became subjected to this kind of humiliation (p. 82). As an illustration, he recalls an incident that takes place at the hospital he attends when he gets ill from a known disease (p. 82). While in the hospital, one of the nurses enters the room where he is and when she injects him, and he screams as a reaction to the injection, the nurse shouts “Todos los gringos son cochones (All gringos are faggots)” (p. 82). Hence, the comments are used to discipline the ethnographer and the ethnographer’s masculine manners.
In the same way as in Mexico, in Nicaragua another way to discipline masculinities is through people’s conversations since it is through gossip that people discover what is taking place in their surroundings. As stated by Lancaster (1992), word of mouth’s practices (or the act of gossiping) may be used in less positive ways. More precisely, it is through gossip that individuals may interfere on other’s personal businesses. For example, through gossip people may find out who is dating who, who is participating in a long-lasting extramarital relationship with whom and/or who is having casual affairs with whom (p. 71). Thus, such an approach may be diminishing for certain groups of society who are already placed at the margins of the machismo ideology. Lancaster argues that “for cochones gossip is indeed the prison-house of language” (p. 72). Gossip, then, serves as the tool capable of policing specific nonnormative gender and sexual practices, since “its power is real and never entirely innocent of the relations in which it is embedded and which it in turn structures” (p. 72).

Regarding lesbianism, and in the same way as in Mexico, Lancaster (1992) indicates how in the Nicaraguan context physical intimacy is only perceived as a heterosexual act and even well-grounded relationships between women arouse no suspicion at all. Instead, women’s connections are blended into the system and become categorized as signs of good and strong friendships. Under machismo beliefs, lesbianism is not only invisible, but indirectly approached as an unsuitable practice among women. In the world of machismo, love and desire among women is not only ignored, but unthinkable. More specifically, under a machismo framework, physical intimacy is only perceived as a heterosexual act. According to Lancaster, even well-grounded relationships between women arouse no suspicion at all. Instead, such connections are blended into the system and become categorized as signs of clean and strong friendships among women.
Overall, Gutmann and Lancaster’s work demonstrates both the ways in which machismo regulates and controls the lives of men and women as well as the ways in which the ideology is lived and negotiated by people. My own experience with my family suggests how queer people are regulated into what is socially acceptable, through images of the good heterosexual mother. In other words, as a caring, nurturing and devoted to her kid(s). The good heterosexual mother participates in the reproduction of the Mexican heteronormative framework, an aspect that I will examine further through the thesis as I notice ways in which lesbian women try to make themselves more visible by using perceptions of female friendship to their own advantages. In this manner, while machismo intersects in complex ways with the policing of people’s gender and sexuality, it also crafts the way in which queer folks make spaces and identities for themselves. Whereas at times queer folks resist machismo, at other times they adopt it by engaging in dominant heteronormative discourses. Among diverse dominant heteronormative discourses circulating daily, pop culture serves as a tool for the policing of sexuality since its dominant heterosexual approach obscures other gender and sexual expressions and/or identifications. Nonetheless, despite absences and invisibilities in pop culture, queer individuals find their ways to resist larger heteronormative discourses. Therefore, in the following segment, I will address the ways in which popular culture has regulated, while also enacted, heteronormativity and the heterosexual system.

**Popular culture and challenges to heteronormativity**

In popular culture, representations of gender and sexuality also serve to indirectly police and regulate those who do not conform to normative genders and sexualities. For example, the illustrations of Frida Khalo are a case in point due to her fascinating representations of
complicated sexuality. I focus on Frida Kahlo since she is very admired by Mexicans. Frida represents a key figure in the world of arts, particularly in painting. As well, she is an inspiration for movies. Frida has become a significant figure for national heterosexual discourses. The love relationship between the two famous painters, Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, has been constructed to captivate Mexican ideas. More precisely, the heterosexual system (as enacted in mass media, public settings, the academy etc.) has orchestrated the painters’ love affair, particularly their public lives. Nonetheless, by emphasizing the marital relationship that Frida had with Diego, the heterosexual system has de-emphasized Frida’s sexuality. In other words, her bisexuality, and with it, her ways to challenge heterosexuality. For instance, an emphasis on the love relationship between Frida and Diego may be perceived through the promotion of spaces like the Frida Khalo museum in Coyoacán, Mexico City. Frida Khalo’s museum in Coyoacán is designed with the love/hate letters that Frida wrote to Diego. Thus, by emphasizing these letters, the museum defines Frida’s personality and life-style as heterosexual.

However, other narratives have challenged the dominant views on Frida’s sexuality. For example, in *A Biography of Frida Kahlo*, Hayden Herrera (2002) mentions Frida’s feelings of contentment towards her own sexuality (p. 198). As well, other sources like the North American film called *Frida*, exposes the painter’s bisexuality, since it displays Frida’s same-sex desires and affairs with other women. At the same time, newspapers have revealed the feelings that Frida had for a close female friend, Isabel Vargas (better known as Chavela Vargas). Nazly Siadate (2012, August 20) mentions, in the newspaper *Los Angeles Times*, the findings of Frida’s diaries in which the painter expresses the unique attraction and brief affair that she has with Chavela Vargas. The diaries disclose Frida’s feelings for Chavela in the following way: “I live only for you and Diego” (Moser, 2012, August 17, p. 1). In a short sentence, Frida expresses her
own bisexuality. Thus, the idea of bisexuality and love for another woman, as an unthinkable expression among Mexican women, becomes challenged through Frida’s life, life-style and actions. In other words, Frida’s life demonstrates that love and desire between women is a thinkable, and a likeable, matter.

Despite Herrera’s more nuanced representations of Frida, mainstream representations in Mexico (including the representations of Frida in popular culture) continue to associate her to heterosexuality. Moreover, when mainstream representations (like music and television shows) address diversidad sexual, for example in television programs like soap operas, diversidad sexual is associated with homonormativity by displaying the representations of good and respectable people, such as the good and respectable gay (male) couples. Thus, by emphasizing these representations, mass media de-emphasizes other forms of gender and sexual identity and/or expressions, such as the lives of bisexual men and women as well as lesbian women, transgeneros and transexuales. By obscuring the lives of transexuales, mass media positions them, mainly those who make the decision to go through a sex change, at the margins of the Mexican society because of the way in which these individuals challenge the common, entrenched idea that one’s sex (male or female) leads to one’s gender (men or women). Transexuales are relatively absent from popular representations, although this is in part changing, due to the practices of transexuales from wealthier strata. In Mexico, people who have sex change surgeries are, for the most part, from middle-upper class backgrounds since the Mexican health care system is slowly abandoning health care protectionist programs while adopting more privatized agendas, leaving those seeking surgery to pay for it (Whyte, 2009, May 4 p. 1).

As a way to observe how specific laws impact the lives of individuals (Cerwonka & Malkki, 2007, p. 14), Felicia Gil, a seventy-five-year-old Mexican singer, represents a significant
example of middle-upper class privilege and the connection of such a privilege with a sex change surgery that became public. Born as a male and under the name of Felipe Gil, Felicia, in a television interview done in 2014, talks about her sex change process despite the hostility that she receives from relatives. Although she enjoys the privileges of her social class, Felicia’s transition has affected her life in many ways. For instance, as much as Felicia tries to continue her professional career as a singer, after the surgery, her popularity as a vocalist performer has decreased because she is now known as a woman in her public life (Chapoy, 2014). In a world shaped by bias against transgenero and transexuales (Aulette, & Wittner, 2012, p. 116), Felicia faces a public that categorizes her as a ‘deviant and strange being’ (Serano, 2013, p. 119). As suggested by Serano (2013), such actions result from “patriarchy, compulsory heterosexuality, the heterosexual matrix, the gender binary and so on” (p. 119). In other words, the policing of gender and sexual identity that the public applies to Felicia is caused by the “gender system” (Serano, 2013, p. 119).

Nonetheless, while mass media has acted as a tool to police gender and sexual identifications and/or expressions, social media and television programs have also revolutionised the way people live and interact with each other. As a representation of global processes in contemporary Mexico (Cerwonka & Malkki, 2007, p. 14), the use of cell phones and the internet, as well, have transformed the way people make connections and stay informed. Through the internet and social media individuals in Mexico find out information about gay pride events which take place in most big cities across the nation such as Mexico City, Guadalajara, Monterrey, Baja California Norte and Baja California Sur, Yucatan, Oaxaca, Chiapas, Guanajuato, Guerrero, Colima, Morelia, Nayarit, Querétaro, Mazatlán, Culiacán, Coahuila, San Luis Potosí, Campeche, Tabasco, Veracruz and other states of Mexico (Gay Mexico Map, 2017).
Thus, the internet appears as an important source for queer self-making as scholars elsewhere have also noted (Gray, 2009), and as revealed by Pedro, who found information on intersex people on the web.

Furthermore, television programs, particularly Mexican *telenovelas*, have served as didactic tools to educate viewers in a variety of matters, such as the theme of homophobia (Tate, 2014, p. 51). In an exploratory study, Julee Tate (2014) underlines that in recent years, Mexican telenovelas have been transforming from melodramatic genre to comedy while also including didactic messages to promote positive attitudes toward homosexuals (Tate, 2014, p. 51). *Televisa* and *TV Azteca*, as the two companies that hold the power of Mexican television, dedicate as many as six hours a day to transmit Mexican telenovelas (Tate, 2014, p. 51). And it is those telenovelas that have been used as a core space to shape the public opinion about nonnormative sexuality (Tate, 2014, p. 55). For example, Mexican sociologist Hector Carrillo (2002 in Tate, 2014) and Alejandro Huizar (2011 in Tate, 2014) state that Mexican telenovelas like *La vida en el espejo* (Life in the mirror), addressed the subject of homosexuality and the ways in which a gay character came to terms with his sexual expression/identity while also gaining the support of his relatives (p. 55).

As well, other telenovelas, like *La fea mas bella* (the Mexican version of the Colombian telenovela, *Yo soy Beti la fea* – I Am Ugly Betty –) have followed the path of *La vida en el espejo* by promoting an attitude of tolerance toward homosexuals (Tate, 2014, p. 56). In *La fea mas bella* the performance of Luigi Lombardi, characterized by Mexican actor Sergio Mayer, demonstrates how an out of the closet character, who must deal with a macho father and a homophobic mother (Tate, 2014, p. 57, 58), finds love and happiness with a chosen partner (Tate, 2014, p. 57, 58).
As tools of engagement onto various legal, institutional, spatial, ideological and discursive fields, telenovelas raise significant socio-cultural, economic and political assumptions and perspectives. Even under patriarchal frameworks, the recognition to end the policing and regulation of gender and sexual identifications and/or expressions in contemporary telenovelas has brought up questions of authority, individualism, social mobility as well as self-agency and decision making. At the same time, as one of my participants, Bladimir, mentioned in this investigation, telenovelas have also acted as mechanisms to re-inscribe heteronormativity. In other words, as scenarios to demonstrate relationships between gay men (as male-born individuals who transgress gender norms) and straight and macho looking men. More precisely, whereas at times telenovelas have served as vehicles to make gender and sexual expressions visible, at other times they have acted as venues to erase alternative gender and sexual expressions and/or identifications by concentrating on self-identifying gay men while excluding other forms of sexuality such as bisexuality and lesbianism. Among recent topics, telenovelas have addressed the lives of gay men and shown the ways in which these individuals challenge, while also adopt and perpetuate, heteronormative roles into their everyday lives. For example, telenovelas have displayed the ways in which gay men have managed gender and sexual agency as well as the forms to create, navigate and maintain transient and public places to feel safe. However, while telenovelas have included gay men in their scripts, they have excluded other forms of sexual expressions and/or identifications.

This chapter has emphasized the steps that the country has taken towards gender and/or sexual inclusion. The rapid politicization of Mexican LGBTQ groups, as the issues that such organizations prioritize, has served as a mechanism for the inclusion of some individuals, such as middle-upper-class queers, while leaving others, like some of my working-class participants,
outside the movement. Overall, this section has sought to underline the gender system, (also referred to as a structure grounded on all double standards based on sex, gender and sexuality), as the instrument used to police gender and/or sexual identifications and/or expressions. At the same time, the gender system is addressed as the mechanism influenced by patriarchy, compulsory heterosexuality, the heterosexual matrix and the gender binary and so on and as the tool used to perpetuate discrimination and stigmatization towards queer folks through actions of homophobia and transphobia. In the same vein, it functions as an ideology able to regulate popular culture and public discourses, in turn informing and shaping queer experiences. To better understand how the binary system shapes the lives of my participants, in the following chapter, I examine the ways in which gender and sexuality is regulated and structured, while also contested, in Poza Rica and Coatzintla. At the same time, in this section, I reveal what it means to be part of *la diversidad sexual* in these two towns of Veracruz, Mexico.
“But what is the link between gender and sexuality that I sought to underscore? Certainly, I do not mean to claim that forms of sexual practice produce certain genders, but only that under conditions of normative heterosexuality, policing gender is sometimes used as a way of securing heterosexuality”.
(Butler, 1999, p. xii).

Overview

In the present chapter, I use the theoretical framework of Butler (1999) on gender performance to explore the ways in which individuals from la diversidad sexual (sexual diversity), such as those who self-identify as putos and manfloras (lesbian women), are policed and regulated in the contexts of Poza Rica and Coatzintla, Veracruz, Mexico. I will begin with an incident that took place during fieldwork to demonstrate the ways in which individuals from la diversidad sexual are controlled and regulated through the use of spaces. The aim here is to highlight how some people who identify as putos perform heteronormative scripts by adopting regional and cultural gender patterns, particularly while playing the role of vestidas (cross-dress individuals). At the same time, drawing on Mitchell (2006), I will also show how some of these individuals challenge heteronormative scripts. And although the focus is mainly on putos because of their larger visibility in both towns, I do also engage with manfloras to contrast their role with putos. Regarding manfloras, the interest too lies in engaging with the ways in which they challenge, while also perpetuate, the Mexican heterosexual system. Thus, in this chapter I engage with putos and manfloras’ sexual agency while I also address how putos and manfloras manage their self-expressions according to their own interests. In other words, by publicly acting as declarados(as) or by partially concealing their own self-identifications.
Gender performances and the use of spaces: The street

Butler’s (1990) work on bodies, as intrinsically attached to a gender category, and therefore, as a socially constructed idea, represent significant contributions in this thesis. Butler’s work is relevant here since she argues that gender, as an identity, is “always a doing” act (p. 33). According to Butler, gender entails an act grounded in cultural significations, an act which is not done in isolation, but achieved publicly and within temporal and collective dimensions (p. 525, 526). For Butler, gender, as a socially constructed idea, is shaped by its own social temporality (1988, p. 520). It is a set of repeated performances where the countless repetitions of gender create the idea of gender (p. 522). Following Simone de Beauvoir’s arguments, Butler draws on the idea that to be a woman is to have become a woman, which for her means that it is to make the body to adapt “to a historical idea of ‘woman’, or to induce the body to become a cultural sign” (p. 522). Moreover, to be a woman is to position the body “in obedience to an historically delimited possibility and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project” (p. 522).

At the same time, Butler’s work is crucial in this thesis because of her claims on gender as an unstable category (p. viii). According to the author, even though gender is an unstable category, one still requires “to live in a world where gender is stabilized, polarized, rendered discrete and intractable” (p. 528). Butler furthers her position by proposing that “gender is made to comply with a model of truth and falsity which not only contradicts its own performative fluidity but serves a social policy of gender regulation and control” (1988, p. 528). Thus, Butler does not perceive the performance of gender as free, but rather more akin to writing a script with a regulatory frame; a written script which has been repeated and rehearsed over and over even before one came on the scene. Butler adds that while contradicted, gender is a performance with social disciplinary consequences. In other words, “performing one’s gender wrong initiates a set
of punishments both obvious and indirect” (p. 528). Butler’s insights on gender as scripted, on doing proper gender, and on gender policing are particularly relevant for my thesis. In this chapter, I draw on her approach to gender as both self-regulated and regulated by others in my examination of gender policing.

Butler’s work allows engaging with gender policing (but not as much with sexual policing, the subject of the next chapter). It is also limited to the doing of gender but does not engage with the social context in which this doing occurs. In this chapter, I draw on Butler and apply her ideas to social contexts of Poza Rica and Coatzintla. Despite the limitations in Butler’s work, I consider her claims on gender as scripted according to regulatory frame to be a relevant contribution for this thesis, since in the following segment, through one of the incidents that occurred to me I will examine local expectations of ‘doing woman’ in a town like Coatzintla, Veracruz. Using Butler’s arguments on woman as a cultural sign and as a repeated corporeal project, I will explore the ways in which doing woman becomes a means to control and discipline women through the access (and/or exclusion) to specific spaces.

On Tuesday July 4, 2017 I was introduced to Joanne, a nineteen-year-old girl who lives and works in Coatzintla and who self-identifies as a bisexual woman. A friend of mine, Emilia, talked to Joanne about me and the research that I was conducting and since Joanne was interested to participate, Emilia introduced her to me. Once I met her, I explained my research project and she agreed to participate. We chose to meet two days later, July 6 at eleven o’clock and since we could not think of a special place for our interview, we decided to meet outside of Su bodega, a grocery store located far enough from her house. Once there, we were supposed to decide where to go for an interview. Since I did not want to look too formal to a nineteen-year-old-girl, I carefully selected the clothes that I would wear. The weather was approximately thirty-four
degrees (plus humidity), so I decided to wear a denim mini skirt, a blue tank top and black-open sandals. I put on my sunglasses and I fixed my hair in a loose way, so my curls would cover most of my face. I took my backpack and I left the apartment early because I wanted to arrive before Joanne.

As planned, I arrived a few minutes earlier, so I waited for Joanne. At eight minutes past eleven, I started thinking about the possibility of her not showing up, so I decided to go to the farther corner on my right side to possibly see her from a distance. I walked, and I arrived at the corner of the street where there were some men working in a construction building. I did not pay much attention to them since I was worried that I may have gone all the way there for nothing. Joanne was not there yet, and it was already twenty minutes past eleven. Then, unexpectedly, I heard one of the construction workers saying to his co-worker: *Pinche puto, seguro está esperando a su mayate!* (fucking faggot, for sure he is waiting for his man!). My first reaction was to look around to see the person who the construction worker was referring to, but there was no one else around except myself. Suddenly, I understood what the construction worker meant: that I was a man trying to pass for a woman waiting for *su mayate*, also understood as an *hombre-hombre* or a self-identified straight and macho looking man who engages in either casual or long-lasting relationships with putos. More precisely, I trespassed the gender norms by standing up in a corner while also acting as if I was waiting for someone. For the construction worker, I behaved in ways that are considered by the social order of Coatzintla as outside the norm.

The reaction of the construction worker responds to the practices and discourses prevailing in the contexts of Coatzintla and Poza Rica, settings vastly influenced by Christianity, particularly by Catholicism and where the performances of women are highly structured and
regulated. And while women’s movements are regulated in these contexts, men use street corners, and all other places across the towns, as settings to interact with others without restrictions or the risk of being subjected to any kind of labels. Women, on the other hand, do not stand at street corners and if they do so during the day or night, then they become labelled as \textit{prostitutas}.

Furthermore, in these two towns it is well-understood that \textit{el papel del puto} (the faggot’s role) is to financially support a \textit{sus mayates} (their partners), a subject that I will address in more detail in this chapter. For now, I would like to also note that the local use of language puto is a masculine term used in a derogatory manner, in this case, by the construction worker. Overall, the term puto is used by Mexicans to insult men who do not conform to gender norms and appear effeminate or identify as gay. And even though most transsexual and/or transgender women as well as gay men find the word puto offensive when someone else uses it to refer to them, when transexuales, transgenero, vestidas and/or gay individuals use the term among themselves, they find it quite amusing. In other words, they use it as a suitable way to reclaim their non-normative sexuality.

This incident made me reflect on Cerwonka & Malkki’s (2007) work on the body as the tool that contributes to the understanding of specific practices during fieldwork (p. 33). At the same time, the episode reminded me about the ways in which spaces are used in these two towns. For instance, in the setting of Coatzintla, the construction worker saw me as out of place because, according to him, I was not positioned in the proper place assigned for women such as either the home doing house work or at any well-structured sort of employment. Instead, I was standing up at the corner of a street in an, apparently, loose way. For the construction worker, I guess I could not be a prostitute. Instead, for him I acted as if I were a puto since putos, at times,
may choose not to reveal their identity to protect the identity of sus mayates. So, the fact that I decided to hide my face with my hair made me look suspicious because by placing my hair purposely on my face, it seemed as if I wanted to keep my identity to myself. Nonetheless, to him, that action was not only suspicious, it was offensive.

The comment of the construction worker also made me reflect on the gender performances of women from both towns which are closely attached to changing practices of the gendered division of labour. While young women participate in the public work-force of either town, older Coatzintecas and Pozarisenses (names given to females from Coatzintla and Poza Rica, respectively) concentrate in the domestic sphere. Besides doing the everyday house chores, it is older women’s responsibilities to care for children, the disabled and the ill family members. More precisely, this incident refers to the way in which women are controlled and regulated in these towns through the use of spaces. In this way, this incident alludes to the space in which women are expected to be found in their daily life. And although each woman in Coatzintla has her own daily routine, the settings that most women use are regularly the same: the open-air-markets, the grocery stores, the shopping centers, the school system, the Church, the workplace, since they represent the proper places in which women should participate. Thus, since I placed myself in a different set of routines and within spaces associated outside of domesticity or formal work like being in a street corner and waiting, I was seen as out of place. Because I did not follow the normative scripts of gender performances of the town, I challenged the expectations.

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2 Female Totonacas (as mentioned before, a group of individuals belonging to the indigenous Mexican group residing in the area) have developed a form of femininity different from Mexican mestizo women by selling and working in the outside areas. In the same way, men Totonacos have attained a form of masculinity different from Mexican mestizo men by exercising roles as peasants and farmers. In other words, by exercising roles considered as passive in the present life of the nation (Gutmann, 1996, p. 226). Hence, female and male Totonaca(o)s develop forms of femininity and masculinity that continue to be shaped by unequal dominant discourses of race, ethnicity, gender, sex, sexuality and class in the country.
of where a woman ought to be and I came to be seen as a puto, in this case, by the construction worker. This situation made me realize how my body, as the researcher’s body, represented a site for analytical understanding about diverse aspects of fieldwork like the relationship between gender and the use of spaces (Cerwonka & Malkki, 2007, p. 34).

In a sense, the policing of gender becomes a key factor in the making of one’s gender and this is apparent in the incident related above, since by wrongly performing my gender (Butler, 1990), I was perceived as a vestida by the construction worker. My wrong performance also points to the significance of space for gender-making, as the construction worker could not think of me as a woman standing on a corner of the street. Instead, by standing on a corner of the street, the construction worker assumed that I was a puto.

Beside spaces, the performances of being a woman in both towns also involve woman’s body gestures, appearances and particular ways of being in the world. The performances associated with womanhood can be distinguished from the performances of men by the clothing, hair, use of makeup and the accessories they wear as well as by the body movements they perform. Women’s clothing is usually colourful. Women either wear dresses, skirts or pants and their body movements must be performed in a gracious, girly way. The hair is also significant since women often must wear it long and, preferably, with highlights on it (as sign of middle-upper class position). I remember the day when I was interviewing one of my participants, Margarita, she came close to me and asked me: Te puedo hacer una pregunta? Por qué no te arreglas? (Can I ask you a question? Why don’t you take care of yourself?). And while she was speaking, she kept looking at my hair. I immediately understood her comments implying how it was possible that a woman who was living in Canada, a country perceived as wealthier, more stylish and fashionable than Mexico, did not do anything with her hair. According to her, the fact
that I did not have anything done on my hair represented a sign of careless feminine behaviour. The very next day, I got my highlights done, an action that reveals the sensitivity of gender policing that I continue to carry on. Moreover, women rewrite every morning in the mirror their personal appearance with the help of makeup brands like Avon, Maybelline, Cover Girl and others. As part of their makeup, most women also use eyeliners (liquid or solid) and lipstick. Nonetheless, in Poza Rica and Coatzintla the most noteworthy marker of womanhood is the use of earrings which were not visible that day because I had my hair on my face.

My wrong performance of womanhood also opens up questions about the gender performance associated with puto, – which is both ascribed to people in a derogatory way and taken up as a term of self-identification by some individuals from la diversidad sexual. Thus, in the following section, I discuss how puto exists as an ‘in-between’ gender category, and as a category where both masculinity and femininity co-exist.

**Performing puto in Poza Rica and Coatzintla, Veracruz**

The performance of many who self-identify as putos is achieved through female body gestures and appearances like clothing, hair, makeup and accessories such as the performances of Vanessa, an interviewee who self-identifies as a transgenero, vestida, puto and a woman, depending on the context. As a hairdresser in her late forties, Vanessa has been living as a woman since her mid twenties. The day that I interviewed Vanessa she wore black dressy pants, a blouse with flower designs, high heel shoes and a dark brown wig. Her makeup looked beautifully done. Vanessa’s body posture and movements resembled those associated with traditional Mexican femininity of delicacy, gentleness, empathy, sensitivity and European-like
prettiness. Vanessa stylized movements even resembled those of her favourite artist, *Maria Felix* (a famous Mexican movie actress from the 1940s and 1950s).

Through the interview, Vanessa recalled how at the early age of eleven she began to adopt the behaviours of her own mother, for example, by making supper for all her siblings during the times when her mother needed to be at the hospital caring for an ill family member. Vanessa expanded by stating how she has been taking the role that her mother has in the family, of guardianship. Vanessa also explained how her own role in the family resembles her mother’s role, of bringing her adult siblings (two brothers and three sisters) together either daily and/or weekly. And while during the interview she said that she identifies more with her sisters, she also mentioned having a good and respectful relationship with her brothers since now she is for them, in the same way as her mother still is, the ‘pillar’ of the family. Additionally, Vanessa’s female performances represent labour for her relatives, since she explained the expectations that her widowed mother and five siblings have of her as the presumed responsible person for the maintenance of their mother’s household as well as the person in charge of the domestic activities attached to this home. Besides, relatives expect Vanessa to care for the most vulnerable such as children, the sick and the elderly in the family. Most importantly, her siblings assumed that Vanessa, as perceived by them as someone who transgresses the gender norms, will stay home and care for her own mother, since it is not expected from her to leave the mother’s household to get married. In other words, family members perceive Vanessa’s gender transgression as an element that makes her unsuitable for marriage and, therefore, a likely caregiver for her mother.

While many vestidas, like Vanessa, prefer to use women’s clothing, makeup and jewelry accessories daily, other vestidas may choose to cross-dress only for special occasions. In other
words, the term vestida is also claimed by male-born individuals who live their lives as men but cross-dress as women often or sporadically. Thus, the term vestida is also claimed by those who may even follow more masculine scripts (through clothing, body postures and behaviours) daily and cross-dress frequently or sporadically, as well as by those who adopt daily gracious and girly body movements – such as constantly bending their hands when talking, waving their hands and head when greeting and moving their hips when walking.

In order to address this fusion between gender and sexuality, I would refer to a brief historical context on Michel’s (2006) work in Latin America. Even though Michel’s study focuses on male sex workers in Rio de Janeiro’s saunas (bathhouses), his insights are relevant for this thesis since he refers to the presence of putos, as the often-effeminate men, sometimes wearing women’s clothing while also serving as passive partners for masculine men, in mid-nineteenth-century Brazil (p. 41). Drawing on the investigation of James Green (1999), Mitchell indicates that by the late nineteenth century, when the medical system began to divide men who have sex with other men into the categories of activos and pasivos, other categories emerged such as the figure of tías (aunties also referred to effeminate older gay men), a classification that became established by the mid-twentieth century. Particularly, some of those tías, who were wealthy enough, were able to financially support their men (p. 41). Putos and tías’ roles in Brazil resemble el papel del puto (the faggot’s role) in the contexts of Poza Rica and Coatzintla, Veracruz. For instance, Yasmin, a thirty-two-year-old male-born individual who self-identifies as transexual refers to this subject during her interview.

Yasmin, who was born and raised in Coatzintla and who during her teenage years moved to Poza Rica, mentions in her costeño (coastal) accent:

_Si tu naciste, homosexual, gay, tienes que pagar porque tu naturaleza es de hombre; para que nació el hombre? para mantener a la mujer, el hombre nació para dar, si me_
As his/her statement demonstrates, Yasmin, who also goes by the masculine name of Walter among close and extended family and friends, identifies, as well, as a woman. He/she moves between various identifications since he/she thinks of himself/herself as male by nature and homosexual as well as a woman because of his/her relationships with men and his/her cross-dressing performances. And because of these multiples sites of identifications, he/she, also, ascribes to the idea that he/she must pay his/her lover, “because you were born to pay”. Yasmin’s ability to move between various identifications places him/her into the masculine role of provider. Yasmin’s gender role playing demonstrates the localized ways of perceiving fluidity between genders, a fluidity that contests the binary between woman and man’s identity as well as the binary between woman’s identity and man’s role as main provider, while also drawing on them.

Moreover, during the interview Yasmin indicates that as homosexual, he/she enjoys taking the role of pasivo(a), however Poza Rica and Coatzintla, according to him/her, is full of gallinas (hens) a local term for coward men. As stated by Yasmin, he/she dislikes gallinas. In other words, men who perform masculinist acts – through clothing, bodily movements and manly behaviours – in public, but prefer the roles of pasivos instead of activos in private. In such scenarios, Yasmin has been requested to take the role of activo(a), a role he/she does not enjoy.

Mitchell (2006) states that even though variations in the Latin model of homosexuality are a common affair among the Brazilian lower classes, such a model in Brazil continues to have a hold with the widespread idea that bichas (homosexuals) are horrified at the thought of having
sex with other *bichas* while preferring having sex with normal (meaning the self-identified straight, heterosexual) men (p. 108). Nonetheless, Mitchell refers to Paulo Longo, an activist and founder of a now-outdated NGO (non-governmental organization) and his comments about some *garotos* (male sex workers who self-identify as straight, heterosexual men) who eventually participate in noncommercial sex with each other (p. 108). Thus, the performances of these *garotos* demonstrate some fluidity in male sexual performances. Like Mitchell, my findings hint at some flexibility, given the proposal received by Yasmin, even if Yasmin is not interested to participate. Thus, in the same way as *bichas* in Mitchell’s research, Yasmin’s responses display the horrified idea of having sex with other homosexuals (in his/her own words also called *gallinas*, a category that he/she gives to individuals who prefer to take the role of *pasivos* in sexual encounters) while only accepting those who will follow the Latin model of homosexuality, the active men. Hence, Yasmin’s position reveals how the Latin model of homosexuality remains key on how *putos* define themselves. In this way, while Yasmin conforms to the Latin model of homosexuality (which is based on a binary of *activo/pasivo* paradigm), he/she also challenges the binary system with her complex gender identifications.

The sexual proposals that Yasmin has encountered with *gallinas* challenge Lancaster and Gutmann’s models of same-sex practices among Latin American men as uniquely associated to the Latin model of homosexuality. More precisely, the proposals of *gallinas* contest Lancaster and Gutmann’s models of same-sex practices among men as uniquely related to one’s role in sex. In Poza Rica and Coatzintla, same-sex practices among men are not uniquely related to one’s role in sex performances (even though in some cases they are). While the roles of *activos/pasivos* matter (as participants like Yasmin expresses), *putos* challenge the conflation between their passive role and their feminization as a result of it. As suggested by Yasmin, he/she played a role
commonly associated with masculine men in Mexico, as provider. Most significant, this context demonstrates how gender and sexuality are intertwined to one another.

Contrary to Yasmin, Cassio, a friend of mine in his late forties who self-identifies as puto and who goes by the he pronoun, mentions his enjoyment when challenging the Latin American model of sexuality addressed by Gutmann and Lancaster. Cassio proudly declares his participation in sexual performances of activo and pasivo with his straight, macho looking partners. Furthermore, and in opposition to Yasmin who is not interested to participate in activo performances, Cassio’s sexual performances do not only challenge Gutmann and Lancaster’s work, but he pushes the boundaries of sexual identity by being interested in participating in activo/pasivo intimate relationships.

Even though Yasmin and Cassio do not share the same views regarding gallinas, they do share a common understanding about them having to pay for the time and the attention that their partners give to them. According to Cassio, it is the responsibility of mayates (as many of them, but not all, are married men) to financially support their wives, whereas it is el puto’s responsibility to financially support their lovers, or at least help them as much as possible. In this way, through this money exchange hombres-hombres can act as male providers in their households, while Cassio and Yasmin assume the role of provider with mayates or hombres-hombres. The term mayate is mostly attached to the practices of hombres-hombres – either single or married men – as the activos in the relationship, although in some cases hombres-hombres request to take the role of pasivos by asking putos to act as activos. Most importantly, mayate practices take place as largely clandestine sexual relationships that must be managed under the discretion of the declarado(a) individual. In Poza Rica and Coatzintla, Veracruz such a performance is used by putos as the key approach to conceal the identity of mayates as well as
the tool that mayates apply to evade sexual revelations while presuming performances of straight, heterosexual men.

One fine afternoon during the month of August, I arrived at Cassio’s hair salon holding the candle of his favourite saint, San Martín Caballero since he had asked me to buy it for him previously. After greeting me and thanking me, Cassio grabbed the candle and put it on the altar that has a medium size photo of San Martín Caballero and that is placed behind the area where the customers sit. When I arrived at the hair salon, Cassio and one of his male friends and client were listening to the last album of Alejandra Guzman (a Mexican Rock en Español singer). While I was sitting down to enjoy the music in the background, Cassio’s cell phone rang, and he mentioned, also in his costeño accent, as most participants did, to his friend-client and I: De seguro es un mayatito que quiere dinero por hacerme el amor (for sure it is a mayatito who wants money for making love to me). So, Cassio answered the phone and said: Bueno, sí, que onda, como te va chacalito? Entonces vente y verás que te vas bien desestresado, con eso te curas (Hello, what’s up? How are you doing chacalito – friend? well, come on and you will be de-stressed in no time, that is all you need to cure yourself). Cassio, who was cutting his male friend-client’s hair, told us that the person who called him, was coming to see him. Cassio’s behaviour demonstrates both his contentment to see his friend-partner as well as his contentment to offer him some kind of financial reward.

Often, the gender performances of putos are closely related to mayates as Cassio’s phone call incident reveals. And even though I had access to putos, as a woman and a person with close family ties in the two towns, I did not have access to mayates and mayate practices because of their secrecy. My own familiarity in the towns did not allow me to establish conversations about mayate practices, as these remain very hidden. Thus, the fact that I did not have access to mayate
practices made me reflect on the role of gender as a powerful tool of inclusion/exclusion. Drawing on Sandra Harding (1993), Mann (2012) states that “the starting point of standpoint theory is the recognition that in societies stratified by race, class, gender, and sexuality, one’s social situation enables and sets limits on what one can know” (p. 23). For instance, during fieldwork I became aware that my gender prevented me from finding out more about mayate practices as income strategies used by men to make ends meet while performing their public role of men as providers. And while I became aware through conversations with putos, that financial issues play a big role in the relationships of puto-mayates, I am unaware if this strategy is only used by mayates to fulfil economic means or as a approach that combines financial motives with same-sex desires. In the same way, I was not able to understand whether mayate practices represent a tactic only used by poor mestizo men or whether it is also an approach used by middle-class individuals to maintain their middle-class status. Nevertheless, despite the fact that my knowledge about mayates and mayate practices is quite limited, during fieldwork I became aware of the fact that if mayates were exposed publicly, they may be subject to social stigma and shame while possibly turning themselves, as well, into putos.

I was able to access aspects of the relationship between puto-mayates through men like Cassio, aspects that raise issues on gender and gender expectations. For example, instead of hombres-hombres acting as the leaders and providers in front of putos, it is putos who assume the role of main providers in front of mayates. More precisely, instead of hombres-hombres acting as independent leaders and the ones who are in control of the situation, (as in a typical patriarchal, and as could be assumed under machismo), hombres-hombres act as dependents of putos’s money. Thus, what has been revealed to me is that by acting as the providers of mayates, the relationship puto-mayates intersects with other practices and ideologies like machismo and
patriarchy, but in unpredictable ways. It seems as if it is the puto who assumes a more dominant masculinity with the money they provide to mayates. Yet given that my findings are limited on the puto-mayate relationship, much is left to wonder about how these relationships unfold.

In his/her conversation, Yasmin addresses the theme of homosexuality, since he/she self-identifies as such because of his/her sexual encounters with other men. Yasmin understands his/her sexual desire from a biological deterministic perspective. In other words, as something given by nature. For instance, during the interview Yasmin explains: *Yo nací así y aunque en el pasado mi familia no me apoyó, ahora todos me apoyan, particularmente mi madre, ya que para ella siempre seré su hijo* (I was born this way, and although in the past my family did not support me, now everyone accepts me, particularly my mother, since for her I will always be her son).

Yasmin goes further by saying:

*Yo como homosexual, yo se que la sociedad es fea, la sociedad es cruel, por lo tanto yo cuando veo que algun niño hijo de una clienta o amiga, tiene detallitos como afeminados, yo le digo a mi clienta y/o amiga, mira mana yo entiendo que aceptes a tu hijo, pero si todavía estas a tiempo, (porque se supone que es hasta la edad de los once años cuando todavía puedes cambiar la mentalidad de un niño), trata de cambiar la mentalidad de tu hijo y si sientes que ya no puedes pues ni modo ya aceptalo como es, pero si puedes cambiararlo, hazlo. (As a homosexual myself, I know that society is awful, that society is cruel, so every time that I see a child acting in effeminate ways, and if that child happens to be the kid of one of my clients and/or friends, I tell her, listen to me friend I understand that you accept your child the way he is, but if you still have time, [since it is known that you can change a child’s mentality until the age of eleven], then try to change your child’s mentality and if you feel that you cannot change his mentality, then, well, accept him the way he is, but if you can change his mentality, do it).*

As one can see, the advice that Yasmin gives to her female friend alludes to the gender and sexual policing that takes place in these towns. Henceforth, by recommending her female friend to police and regulate her child’s behaviours from an early age, Yasmin perpetuates the notion to conform with heteronormativity and the heterosexual system. At the same time, Yasmin’s comment is significant because of his/her approach to gender as a masculine process.
For example, when he/she mentions “every time that I see a child acting in effeminate ways”, he/she is separating gender from sexuality since he/she is not focusing on this individual’s (in this case, a child) sexual preferences but on the individual’s ways to perform masculinity. In order to address this topic, I draw on Pascoe (2007), since she analyzes gender performance and gender policing. Pascoe builds on Butler’s (1999) approaches to gender as something people reach through “a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal overtime to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (p. 14). In line with Butler, Pascoe addresses gender not just as natural, or as something people are, but rather as something people produce through their actions (p. 14). In this manner, Yasmin’s comment suggests his/her perceptions on how this child fails to perform proper masculinity. Thus, in a Butlerian model of repeated invocation or repudiation, by acting in an effeminate way according to Yasmin, this child becomes the “abject identity”; an identity created to serve as a mechanism of gender policing (p. 14). As abject identity, this child must be in a constant process of social repudiation, so others can continually affirm their identities as ‘normal’ and socially ‘intelligent’ (p. 14). Hence, as this case suggests, failure to perform proper gender causes punishments.

When referring to the term gay, Yasmin states: Aquí el ambiente gay es muy competitivo, y aunque habemos gays o transexuales buena onda, hay otras que son muy envidiosas (Here in Poza Rica the gay environment is very competitive and while there are gays or transsexual folks who are nice, other girls are very envious). As can be noticed, Yasmin uses the terms gay, homosexual, transsexual and girl interchangeably pointing to a fluidity that contrasts with his biological deterministic view.

As well, Yasmin’s conversation reveals a fluidity that can also be perceived when using adjectives and pronouns. For example, while interviewing him/her I was able to notice the way
in which she used adjectives in a masculine and feminine form interchangeably when referring to himself/herself. For instance, when self-describing himself/herself Yasmin indicates: \textit{Soy muy hermético} (I am very hermetic, while using the term hermético in a masculine way). And many other times, when alluding to his/her own persona, Yasmin uses terms in a feminine form. I also observed that whereas he/she uses both forms to refer to himself/herself, she too uses the pronoun \textit{el/la} (the) interchangeably when referring to himself/herself. In the same vein, when mentioning vestida’s friends, he/she usually applies \textit{la}, for example: \textit{la loca de mi amiga} (My girlfriend, the fag, queer). As a Mexican and a native Spanish speaking person, my perception of such a preference for the feminine pronoun towards vestidas and/or putos refers to the level of familiarity and closeness that exists between Yasmin and that specific friend of him/her. The use of \textit{la} followed by using feminine terms, provides Yasmin the opportunity to reassure publicly the close relationship that he/she has with his/her friend. Thus, it is this sense of closeness and familiarity that allows Yasmin to refer to his/her friend as she in public.

But Yasmin was not the only individual who used \textit{el/la} interchangeably, since various times, while listening to friends and acquaintances who self-identified as gays, putos, transgenero and/or transexuales, I heard them using the masculine form \textit{el} followed by masculine adjectives, while other times the same individuals used the feminine form \textit{la} followed by feminine adjectives. This awareness of the interchangeable use of \textit{el/la} motivated me to ask individuals if they preferred in pronouns and if they preferred to be acknowledged by others under a specific form either \textit{el} or \textit{la} and the answer was that that aspect did not matter, because they knew who they were and that was \textit{suficiente} (enough).

Except for Bladimir, a Poza Rica resident and the only individual who self-identified as a bisexual male in my study and who used the masculine form to refer to himself during the whole
interview, other participants who self-identified as gays (including those who may have appeared as masculine), putos, transgenero, transexuales and/or vestidas used masculine and feminine forms interchangeably. Such practices express a more fluid way to think about gender and sexuality and their connections as well as a particular way in which being gay can be addressed as being girlie. More specifically, in Yasmin’s case, when referring to his/her friend as la loca (the fag), he/she is not prioritizing so much a friend’s preference but stating the close relationship that he/she has with that particular friend. Additionally, another aspect that I considered relevant during the process of my investigation was the distinctions that people made on the terms gay and puto. During fieldwork, I was able to notice how most individuals from la diversidad sexual addressed their preferences for the term gay over the Mexican term puto. Hence, in the following section I will mention the difference between these two terms.

Terms of identification: Distinctions between gay and puto

While conducting fieldwork, I noticed that my participants used the term gay as an umbrella term to refer to themselves as people with alternative gender/sexual identities and/or expressions. And while many did not express discontent for the term gay, instead using this term along with others interchangeably, other people indicated their dissatisfaction for the term puto like Bladimir.

Bladimir associates himself with the term gay in the following way: *Me gustan los matrimonios gays, si las parejas heterosexuales tienen ese derecho, por qué nosotros no* (I like gay marriages, if heterosexual couples have that right, why don’t we). Nonetheless, during the interview Bladimir also expressed his discontent with the term gay, as for him it is restrictive and rigid, and excludes the possibility for sexual fluidity. According to Bladimir, the use of the term gay in Mexico reflects an emphasis on rigid models of sexual/gender identities (like gay versus straight,
heterosexual men), which in turn regulates gender and sexual identifications and/or expressions. In Bladimir’s words, this approach leaves out other forms of sexuality, including sexual desires that are more fluid. During the interview Bladimir states: *En una telenovela Mexicana llamada Que pobres tan ricos, esa telenovela si trató el tema gay pero no bisexual, solo gay y no fluidez* (In a Mexican soap opera called How the poor is so rich, that soap opera did talk about the gay theme, but it did not talk about bisexuality, only gay but not fluidity).

Bladimir expands his comments by explaining the following:

*Una vez, entre mi borrachera en Palladium agarré un taxi para que me llevara a mi domicilio y cuando menos cuenta me di, yo tenía el cuchillo en el cuello y el taxista me dijo – pinche puto dame las cosas que traes. Cuando me dejó bajarme, yo corrí, a mi casa. Una vez que llegué a casa pensé, que entre mi desmadre piensan que soy puto. Me sentí muy mal y me culpé a mí mismo. (One time, when leaving Palladium, I was drunk, so I took a taxi to take me home and without even noticing, suddenly, I had a knife on my neck. The taxi driver, who was holding the knife, told me – fucking faggot give me your possessions. Thus, when he allowed me to get out of the taxi, I ran home. Once I arrived home, I began to think that others perceived me as puto because of my wild behaviour. I felt very bad and I blamed myself).*

Whereas at one point in the interview, Bladimir applies the term gay to himself, he distances himself from the term for not being inclusive enough. Moreover, Bladimir expresses sadness towards the term puto because he perceives the local derogatory way in which the term was used, in this case, by the taxi driver and the person who stole his possessions. As a person who performs masculinity, Bladimir, in this scene, was labelled as puto by the taxi driver as a way to police him for attending Palladium, a space that is well known for attracting people from la diversidad sexual.

Contrary to Bladimir, Cassio, as a declarado, likes the term puto and, as mentioned before, he self-identifies as such. On July 3rd, the first day that I visited Cassio during the summer, he was wearing white shorts, a green shirt, with the logo of the gym where he trains, and black running shoes. In a sense, he had the appearance of a confident, youthful and sexy
person. Cassio has lived in Coatzintla almost all his life except for some years that he was absent from the town trying to make a living in other parts of the Mexican republic. With a sign on the door saying *Abierto* or *Cerrado* (Open or Closed), Cassio’s small and cozy hair salon remains locked for security purposes. When Cassio opened the door for me, he received me with a warm hug and, then, he continued to cut his male client’s hair. Sitting on the only sofa, was a female’s client waiting for her turn to get her hair done. Cassio introduced me to them by saying:

_Miren, ella es Verónica, una amiguita que viene de Canadá, ella viene a hacer un trabajo de investigación en Antropología, solo que a diferencia de los otros antropólogos que vienen aquí a estudiar las ruinas del Tajín y a los indígenas Totonacas, ella viene a estudiarnos a nosotros, los putos. Ven, ella sí es de las mías porque ella viene a estudiar la putería._ (Look, this is Veronica, a friend from Canada. She is here to conduct a research in Anthropology, only that unlike the other anthropologists who come here to study the archaeological site of Tajín and the Totonac culture, she is here to study us, the faggots. You see, she is one of mine because she is here to study whoring).

While the subject of _la putería_ will be analyzed in the following chapter, Cassio’s references to the term puto reflects his comfort and identification with the word. As such, preferences for the use of putos vary. For example, Camilo (a man who transgresses the gender norms) mentions that if others refer to him with the term puto in a rude and repressive tone or as a way to police and discipline his sexuality, he gets mad but if he is called puto in a nice and friendly tone, he is fine with it. Nonetheless, he prefers the terms homosexual or gay. I suggest that people’s preferences for the term gay are related to the fact that gay, as an English term in circulation in Mexico, represents an American, therefore, a modern, progressive and European-like term of identification.

The preferences that queer people have for the term gay are shared by many in these two towns of Veracruz, Mexico, since gay and puto represent terms of identification attached to race and class issues. Contrary to the Mexican word puto, which refers to a darker-skinned, backward and uncivilized individual, the English word gay, as used in Veracruz, alludes to the lighter-
skinned, modern and more educated, refined person. More precisely, puto is associated to ugly and naco, a Mexican Spanish slang term known as a contraction that originates from totonaco – and which is associated to the members of the indigenous group Totonaco – to relate to bad taste and lower social classes. In other words, it is used towards people perceived as unsophisticated, bad mannered or poorly educated. In this sense, puto is used to offend, undermine and punish those who transgress gender and/or sexual norms. Thus, it is because of the connotations of the term puto that participants like Bladimir, when hearing that someone referred to him as puto, expressed discontent by feeling policed and regulated, to the point that he blamed himself for his behaviour. Nonetheless, despite its connotations, the term puto is reclaimed by other participants such as Camilo who indicates the acceptance for the term if it is used in a nice and friendly tone. As well, Cassio proudly reclaims the term puto. As a native of Coatzintla, a setting not only inhabited by Mexican mestizos but also by Mexican Totonac people as mentioned before, Cassio, as a mestizo male-born individual, reclaims the term puto to exalt his indigenous side and the qualities attributed to it such as honesty, authenticity, openness, loyalty and self-respect.

As Butler (1997) notes, language acts as a system with consequences (p. 7). In Butler’s words, individuals “exist not only by virtue of being recognized, but, in a prior sense, by being recognizable” (p. 5). In this way, Butler argues that if language can sustain the body, it can also undermine its existence through a series of speeches and their injurious effects (p. 15). Moreover, she suggests that the repetition of these injurious speeches also demonstrate that while particular words are not perceived as direct acts of violence, their repetition only gain power through a history of endless citations. But it is also the repetition of these injurious speeches, the mechanism that opens a space for agency and for appropriation and radical resignification (p. 15). In this case one can say that it is the constant repetition of puto that allows for another
gender and/or sexual expression to become possible, and for the reclaiming of puto as a term of self-identification.

Another one of my participants, Margarita, a transexual woman, expresses her own way of perceiving herself as different by mentioning the following: *Yo sé que el día que me muera me voy a ir con el nombre que me pusieron cuando yo nací* (I know that the day that I die I am going to leave with the name that I got when I was born). Margarita’s references also relate to her belief based in biological determinism, since she constantly related her identity to the fact that God made her that way: *Dios me hizo así*. Thus, even though Margarita made the decision to go through a sex change (despite her religious and biological determinist beliefs), she continues to refer to herself as different, as outside the norm. In other words, as someone whose sex and gender have been fabricated. In a sense, the fixity of her sex allows Margarita to perceive herself as different and to live her life, as well, differently.

Institutions, such as the health care system, also have led Margarita to perceive herself as outside the norm. For example, “in order to understand how larger social processes function in specific local settings” (Cerwonka & Malkki, 2007, p. 17), the health care system, through hospitals’ rules and regulations, work as a way to undermine, police and regulate people’s gender and/or sexual expressions and/or identifications like, in this case, Margarita’s identity. During our meeting Margarita recalled one incident that occurred when she got very sick and needed to be in the hospital in Mexico City. Even though she did a sex transition in her twenties while living in Los Angeles, California, when this incident occurred and she got admitted into the hospital in Mexico City, she still had not legally changed the male name and gender assigned at birth (although by then Mexico City had already amended the Civil Code to allow individuals to modify the name and gender assigned in the original birth certificate). Thus, she did not get
admitted into the women’s section, instead got admitted into the men’s section. Such a situation made Margarita feel very uncomfortable as one can understand given that she identifies as a woman and has done so for decades now, despite in her words, “how God made her”. In Poza Rica and Coatzintla, places highly shaped by Christianity and Christian beliefs, Margarita’s biological deterministic arguments are partly validated through religious principles.

Along with race and class-based distinctions between gay and puto, during fieldwork I observed that while many individuals from la diversidad sexual may act as declarados(as) (out of the closet individuals), others may prefer to act as no declarados(as) (in the closet), whereas others may choose to perform in semi-declarados(as) (semi-closet) ways. In a sense, people from la diversidad sexual use any of these classifications to police and regulate their own actions and their own movements within these two towns of Veracruz, Mexico. Declarados(as) refer to people who publicly state themselves as folks with gender/sexual identities and/or preferences considered by society as outside the norm, that is as part of la diversidad sexual. No declarados(as) are those who only share their gender/sexual identities and/or preferences to some, but not to all, of their close friends. They do not share it with close or extended family members, among their neighbours, at their workplace or in any other circles where they navigate regularly. Instead, they would only disclose their sexual/gender identities and/or preferences among individuals with whom they would sleep with or be very close to. Some men, who are no declarados(as), would marry and have kids. Some, while married, would even sleep with other married and no declarado(a) individuals. In a sense, they would live double lives. They would act as heterosexual people in front of society, while they would reveal their sexual/gender identities and/or preferences to only a few. Moreover, folks performing in semi-declarados(as) ways are those who tend to divide their lives between family and friends. Whereas they would perform as
heterosexual people in front of close and extended family members as well as in any other conventional settings where they navigate regularly, they would act as declarados(as) in front of friends.

In the same way that gay men and/or putos use semi-declarados ways to divide their lives between family and friends, lesbian women, also known as manfloras, also use semi-declaradas ways to separate their own lives by performing as heterosexual women in front of close and extended family members and in any other conventional settings where they navigate frequently, but act as declaradas in front of friends. Thus, I will now focus on the topic of manfloras to explore the ways in which these individuals make spaces where diversidad sexual becomes possible for themselves.

**Performing manflora in Poza Rica and Coatzintla, Veracruz**

Another marginalized and discriminated sexual identity is manflora. In the towns of Poza Rica and Coatzintla the term manflora, an identity also created through its constant repetition (Butler 1997), is applied to lesbian women regardless of their physical appearance. Hence, while some manfloras have a butch-looking appearance, others try to dissociate from the masculine look due to its oppressiveness. Whereas butch-looking women may wear their hair short and adopt male clothing styles such as jeans, male T-shirts or shirts and runners, many others may choose more stereotypical performances of femininity as a way to blend in with mainstream discourses while also avoiding gender disciplining and policing from society. Besides expressing femininity through clothing, hair style, makeup and accessories, some lesbian women may emphasize the way they move their bodies – by curving their heads, tossing their hair, waving with their hands
and moving the hips and legs in flirtatious manners – to avoid suspicious thoughts of sexual transgression.

Maritza, a nineteen-year-old girl from Coatzintla who self-identifies as bisexual and as one who performs stereotypical femininity, explains her practices as a semi-declarada person:

No todos en mi familia saben que soy bisexual, bueno mi mamá y mi hermano sí saben pero no lo aceptan. Mi papá, con quien no he vivido por muchos años ya que se separó de mi mamá cuando yo era muy niña, también lo sabe pero él dice que es solo una etapa y que ya se me pasará. Mis tíos, tías y el resto de mis familiares cercanos no lo saben, tampoco en la Iglesia donde asistimos lo saben o en mi trabajo. En cambio, entre mi círculo de amistades sí, gente de mi edad, ellos sí, todos ellos sí saben que soy bisexual. (Not everyone in my family knows that I am bisexual, well my mom and my brother know about it, but they do not accept it. My father, with whom I have not lived for many years since he separated from my mother when I was very young, he also knows, although he says that what I have is only a stage and that it will pass. My aunts and uncles and the rest of my extended family do not know about it, neither in the Church where we attend or at my workplace. On the other hand, among my circle of friends, people of my age, yes, they know about it, they all know that I am bisexual).

Since my research project focuses on people who are publicly known as declarados(as), among my informants there were also those who participated in semi-declarado(a) performances. For example, Amanda, a twenty-five-year-old self-identifying lesbian, indicates her semi-declarada position by mentioning that although all her friends know that she has been living with another woman for the last three and a half years, her close and extended relatives do not know about it. Amanda’s circumstances allow her to hide her sexual identity from her family, since all her relatives (close and extended family members) live in a small town four hours away by bus from Poza Rica.

Amanda, who also has a feminine appearance, moved to Poza Rica six and a half years ago and she lived there for three years until she moved to Coatzintla to live with her girlfriend, Emilia (a butch-looking and a declarada lesbian woman) at Emilia’s parent’s house. On diverse occasions, Amanda mentioned to me her concerns as to whether to reveal to her parents her
sexual identity, since she fears that her parents may stop talking to her and they may not allow her to see her son. Amanda’s worries relate to the fact that her parents have been raising her five-year-old son, Raúl, a child that she had a year and a half after she moved to Poza Rica. Shortly after her arrival in the area, Amanda met a boy and she started dating him. Months later, Amanda became pregnant and when she told her boyfriend about it, he left her. Amanda had a son, Raúl who has been living with his grandparents since he was born. According to Amanda, she believes that if her parents find out that she is engaged in a lesbian relationship they may try to legally obtain custody of Raúl. Even though Raúl lives with his grandparents, Amanda has full custody of her son. During our conversation, the possibility of asking for legal advice with a lawyer was raised, however Amanda mentioned that, at this point, she does not have the financial resources to pay for a lawyer. Besides legal issues, Amanda is afraid of the emotional influence that her parents, siblings and extended relatives may have on Raúl, since they could use Amanda’s sexual identity to discredit her role as a mother in front of Raúl. Amanda’s case demonstrates the complexities that Mexican lesbian women, and mothers, continue to face in Mexico.

Although Amanda and Emilia work for the same company, Amanda has ‘better’ working hours than Emilia. For instance, Amanda’s position at work allows her to enjoy a fixed schedule of four days a week from Tuesday to Friday from seven o’clock in the morning to seven o’clock in the afternoon, while Emilia’s hours vary from mornings, evenings to even night shifts. Thus, while Amanda has a weekly long-weekend, Emilia struggles to be home during Amanda’s days off. Once or twice a month, Amanda would travel to her town to see her son and parents whereas, despite work schedule inconveniences, Emilia sometimes would accompany her. For Amanda’s parents, brothers and sisters as well as all extended family members, Emilia is not
Amanda’s lover, her partner. Instead, for Amanda’s family Emilia is a friend, and just a good friend.

Besides, the fact that Amanda has a son from a previous union with a man legitimizes her as a heterosexual woman in front of her parents and relatives. Therefore, Amanda’s relationship with Emilia does not raise many questions. The prevailing approach of perceiving close intimacy between women as friendship allows Amanda and Emilia to live together, not because people recognize their sexuality, but because their lesbianism is unsuitable in a heterosexual system, and therefore, living together as women does not arise suspicions. So, while Amanda may not act as a declarada lesbian, she may still live her everyday life as such by manipulating existing gender scripts that allow her to be emotionally close and intimate with Emilia publicly. Thus, by strategically playing on existing gender scripts to live together as a couple while passing for close friends, Amanda and Emilia demonstrate one way in which women are making spaces possible for their own diversidad sexual. And while Amanda and Emilia are able to use this way to live their lives as lesbians, others like gay men as well as some bisexual men, putos and/or vestidas are not able to live together with their partners without raising suspicions. Nevertheless, as mentioned before, while some lesbian women practice traditional femininity to avoid being policed in the street, others prefer to challenge gender expectations despite the oppressive responses in both towns. This scenario demonstrates that even though gender and sexuality are intertwined, the oppressive responses that butch-looking lesbian women receive from mainstream society are caused by the fact that these women are viewed as individuals who fail to perform proper gender (Pascoe, 2007, p. 14). Thus, by failing to perform femininity, butch-looking lesbian women become ‘the abject other’ by facing more public oppressiveness than those lesbian women who adopt more stereotypical performances of femininity (Pascoe, 2007, p.
In such cases, then, one can say that instead of policing only the sexuality of these women, it is the policing of both, gender and sexuality, the factors that affect and oppress butch-looking lesbian women.

Furthermore, while, in most cases, society regulates and undermines individuals from la diversidad sexual, in other cases, there are these individuals themselves who police and undermine their peers such as the case of Arianna, a participant from Poza Rica. Arianna, a thirty-year-old woman from Poza Rica also self-identifies as a semi-declarada lesbian woman. And although Arianna identifies as a lesbian woman, she prefers the term gay. Whereas other female participants did not self-identify as gay but as bisexual and lesbian women, Arianna was the only lesbian woman who reclaimed the term gay as hers. I met Arianna through some friends, Pepe, Juan and Antonio, individuals who also identify themselves as part of la diversidad sexual. Like Juan and Antonio, Arianna has a business in 20 de Noviembre avenue, one of the most upscale suburbs in Poza Rica.

Marking herself as different from other people who are dedicated to the corn business by daily setting their steamer pot on a table at a specific street corner, Ariana has an enclosed establishment for her corn business, which means that it is more upmarket than the street businesses. As well, Arianna distinguishes herself from the rest of the participants who are working class individuals, since her personality reveals her privileged class position in society and her status of niña fresa (strawberry girl: A Mexican Spanish slang term for a young person from an urban and a middle-class background and someone who mainly belongs to a European-Indigenous-descent elite [Mendoza-Denton, 2008, p. 11]). Despite having lived through her childhood and much of her adolescence in Poza Rica, Arianna does not have the costeño accent like the rest of the participants in the study. Instead, Arianna has the tone of voice and accent like
people from the northern region of Mexico (a region perceived as wealthier, more urbanized and more modern), since she lived for five years as a university student in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, a place located in the north part of the Mexican republic.

Immediately after we met, Arianna told me that she wanted to be interviewed in English. Since I was introduced to her as Verónica, la chica que viene de Canadá (Veronica, the girl who comes from Canada), Arianna’s preference for using English was based on both her desire to demonstrate to me her English fluency and to assess my own. In settings like Poza Rica and Coatzintla, learning another language means having the financial resources, and the time required, to invest in private lessons outside of the mandatory school curriculum. In other words, it means to have access to extracurricular activities, an access that not everyone from these towns enjoys. Thus, knowing a foreign language provides people with a more elevated social status, because it reveals people’s access to economic means. In this sense, I also think that by selecting to be interviewed in English, Arianna wanted to demonstrate to me her social status and privilege position in society.

During the interview Arianna, who was wearing what could be considered a conservative outfit like blue jeans slightly cut by the knee and a green T-shirt, emphasized her social status by mentioning the university where she graduated from, El Tecnológico de Monterrey (Monterrey Institute of Technology and Higher Education) a private university considered to be among the most prestigious universities in the Mexican republic. After she completed her undergraduate degree in accounting, Arianna worked at a PEMEX office in Mexico City for five years as an accountant. When I asked her about the places where she socializes, Arianna mentioned that she socializes either in Mexico City with her Chilango (name given to people who reside in Mexico City) friends or in Monterrey with her Mexican Norteño friends. She explained her preferences
to socialize outside of Poza Rica, since according to her: “there are no good gay bars in the town”. When I mentioned to her Palladium as a place in favour of la diversidad sexual in Poza Rica, she replied: “Palladium is for transgender, transsexual and gay men and it is a low-profile place for me”. Through this comment Arianna addresses spaces as indicators of class status to differentiate herself from others (Pascoe, 2007, p. 73). She also referred to her trips to Las Vegas, Nevada and Los Angeles, in the United States (US) as favourite places to visit gringo nightclubs – something that marked her apart as more cosmopolitan than the other Mexican people from la diversidad sexual who I talked to. Similarly, she indicated her preferences for listening to English music. Although she enjoys the Rock en Español that is usually played in Palladium, Arianna looks down on Palladium in the same way that she looks down on most spaces perceived as traditional in Poza Rica merely because, in her own view, such settings are rural and un-modern.

As mentioned before, I met Arianna through common friends – Pepe, Juan and Antonio – and as white and middle-upper class, Juan and Antonio, entrepreneurs and loving partners, identify with Arianna because of their white skin and middle-class position. Juan and Antonio aspire to Arianna’s life outside Poza Rica, especially her trips to the US. Antonio admires her, since one of his biggest dreams is to sign a contract with a record company in Mexico City and become a famous singer. As a member of a wealthy family, Arianna’s responses demonstrate both her own pride to belong to the Poza Rica’s social elite as well as her wishes to dis-identify from everything outside her middle-upper class context. Arianna’s movements – similar to the movements of Juan and Antonio who also live in Arianna’s district – demonstrate her wishes to express belonging to the Poza Rica’s elite since the spaces that she frequents correspond to the upscale neighbourhood of 20 de Noviembre – the same area where she lives and has her corn
business. At the same time, she uses the local bars and restaurants located in her neighbourhood to socialize and meet with her middle-upper class people. As a woman who could pass as white and feminine, Arianna’s responses show the ways in which processes of class distinction intersect with queer self-making. In the same vein, Arianna’s answers demonstrate ways to recognize how larger social processes of national identity function in specific local settings (Cerwonka & Malkki, 2007, p. 17).

After examining Arianna’s responses in light of what other, less privileged queer people have told me, I suggest that Arianna’s preferences for the term gay relate to the fact that gay as a race and class-based term represents for her the American, modern, progressive and European-like term of identification. Hence, the term gay suits her perceptions and her way of policing herself as belonging to the Poza Rica’s elite, a group that, in her own views, embodies modern, progressive and Mexican mestizo style. Nonetheless, since the Poza Rica’s elite is limited, the rest of the participants in this thesis mostly refer to the working-class individuals and the popular discourses in which they are entangled like la putería, a script which acts as a tool of policing and resistance for individuals from la diversidad sexual and the subject that I will address shortly.

The aim in this chapter has been to highlight how gender is performed, while also policed, in the towns of Poza Rica and Coatzintla, Veracruz. To secure compulsory heterosexuality and the heterosexual system, queer male-born individuals are policed and disciplined under the term puto, a term constantly used in derogatory ways by mainstream society. Nonetheless, as a form of resistance some putos have self-reclaimed such a term to embrace their own gender and/or sexual identifications and/or expressions. While queer male-born individuals challenge heteronormative scripts, some also perpetuate the binary system
addressed in the Latin model of homosexuality through puto-mayate relationships. In this section, I have suggested that the relationship puto-mayates intersects with other practices and ideologies like machismo and patriarchy in unpredictable ways. Additionally, the “mayate”, as the partner of puto, invite reflections on what constitutes la diversidad sexual and has the potential to expand what is commonly understood by the term queer. Mayates are not usually considered queer; they are seen as hombres-hombres.

Additionally, lesbian women are policed and regulated through the term manflora. And even though lesbianism is perceived as unsuitable in a heterosexual system, lesbian women may still live their everyday lives as such by manipulating existing gender scripts of heterosexuality that allows them to be emotionally close and intimate with each other. Thus, by strategically playing on existing heterosexual scripts, lesbian women are able to make queer-world spaces possible for themselves. This chapter has also underlined the fact that even though gender and sexuality are intertwined, sometimes it becomes visible to perceive them apart from each other. More precisely, while putos are stigmatized for transgressing gender norms, men who perform masculinities can get away from stigmatization despite acting as pasivos during sexual encounters. In the same way, butch-looking lesbian women face more gender policing than those who act more stereotypically feminine. Thus, one could say that it is not so much the policing of sexuality as the policing of gender that oppresses most. Yet sexuality is also policed in Poza Rica and Coatzintla, as apparent through popular Mexican discourses like la putería, – a script which acts as both a tool of policing and resistance for individuals from la diversidad sexual –, the subject that I now turn to in the following chapter.
Chapter IV: *La Putería*

“Next to one of their principal temples they had a walled-around large house of very decorous construction solely for the habitation of acquiescents, into which entered all of those who wished to have their sodomitic copulations, especially those who are very young, so that they could learn there, these are ministers of the Demon wearing women's skirts.”


Overview

Chapter four focuses on discourses of *la putería*, a slang and a derogatory term originally associated with prostitution, but now expanding to working class individuals, particularly to those who perform transgressive gender/sexual identifications and/or expressions. As a form of humour and gossip practices, *la putería*, in Poza Rica and Coatzintla acts as a tool of policing and resistance at the same time. *La putería*, as used by people in these two towns could refer to different things, for instance, it could mean to engage in casual relationships or to be in a stable one, – but without any intentions to get married. It could also mean to party with the intention of having sex. In this way, *la putería*, may indicate practices perceived as leisurely, and for women, seen as detached from everyday domestic responsibilities. In short, *la putería* commonly refers to practices considered by Mexican society as outside the norm. In what follows, I will begin by engaging with *la putería* as one of the discursive tools people used to police my queer identity and the tool that I used to resist such policing. In this segment, I draw on both Goldstein’s (2003) work on humour and laughter in Brazil and Lancaster’s (1992) work on gossip in Nicaragua. I take Goldstein’s focus on laughter as weapon of the weak, a term she borrows from James Scott and E. P. Thompson (p. 7) and which I applied to understand how people craft alternative queer self-making practices through humour, as well as how they use it as a tool to resist gender/sexual policing. Then, I turn to some of the challenges I faced as a transnational researcher and woman
from la diversidad sexual who also is a mother. I discuss how my performance as a researcher, like hanging out in hair salons, nightclubs, or interviewing people, were interpreted as time spent doing puterías by relatives, friends and neighbours. I suggest that la putería is used as a way to police women into being good, dutiful housewives, good mothers and respectable women. My visits to the two hair salons demonstrate how la putería was also a key feature of queer-world making. I end my analysis by examining Palladium as a place highly associated with la putería and while analysing this space, I retake the concept of laughter as the weapon of the weak addressed by Goldstein.

My experiences with la putería

In an ethnographic study done in Brazil, Goldstein (2003) suggests that despite the adversities of poverty in the mist of late capitalism, the lives of people in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro are surrounded by laughter (p. 2). People use humour and laughter to unravel the complexities of their lives and circumstances (p. 3). According to the author, humour provides people openness and a window “onto the complicated consciousness of lives” (p. 3). Humour represents an effective way to express the hierarchal complexities of race, class, gender, sex and sexuality in which people, and particularly women, feel that their lives are embedded (p. 4). Goldstein focuses on impoverished individuals such as the largely illiterate, urban and historically oppressed population living in shantytowns, known as favelas in Brazil (p. 4). Humour and laughter represent the way in which people express the power relations that they experience daily (p. 5). At the same time, humour is one of the ways that these individuals “express sentiments that are difficult to communicate publicly or that point to areas of discontent in social life” (p. 5).
Even though favelas represent different settings, they resemble some of the areas in Poza Rica and Coatzintla, Veracruz such as places like la Colonia Azteca. La Colonia Azteca, along with the area of Coatzintla and Poza Rica, is a middle-low-income informal area inhabited by Mexican mestizos – dark and light-skinned individuals – and indigenous Totonacs. Particularly, Coatzintla is a residential region consisting mostly of decrepit housing units in a situation of deteriorated or incomplete infrastructure and inhabited primarily by impoverished people. Comparable to favelas, Coatzintla lacks reliable sanitation services, supply of clean water, law enforcement and other basic services. Houses in Coatzintla and Poza Rica may vary from shacks to professionally built houses and while some look well-maintained, others, because of poor-quality construction or provision of basic maintenance, look deteriorated. Like favelas, Poza Rica and Coatzintla have been affected by the war on drugs since these places have become favourite settings for the competition of two cartels: El cartel del Golfo y el cartel de los Zetas (The Golfo’s cartel and the Zetas’ cartel).

La Colonia Azteca in Coatzintla, Veracruz, Mexico presents a comparable scenario as the one addressed by Goldstein (2003) in the favela of Felicidade Eterna in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Like Felicidade Eterna, residents of la Colonia Azteca use humour and laughter to express the hierarchal complexities of race, class, gender, sex and sexuality that inform their social world. For the residents of la Colonia Azteca, humour and laughter provide them the open way to express the weakness that the Mexican system holds. More specifically, in the same way as the women from Felicidade Eterna, for these Mexican individuals humour provides the open space in which it becomes possible to voice matters that are otherwise naturalized, unquestioned or silenced. I, as well, take humour as weapon of the weak and apply it to discourses of la putería as
one of the tools used by queer individuals to resist the social policing actions against their transgressive gender/sexual identifications and/or expressions.

Additionally, la Colonia Azteca also resembles Lancaster’s findings about the impoverished neighbourhood of Erasmus Jimenez in Managua, Nicaragua. Like Lancaster, I joined many informal, everyday gatherings, since one of my main activities during fieldwork was to act as a participant-observer among family members and close friends. Through this research strategy, I expected to understand how rumours and gossip, especially the ones related to individuals from la diversidad sexual, became produced and reproduced. Acting as a participant-observer in gossip gathering was crucial, since it is through rumours and gossip that specific stories are expressed, and explicit socio-cultural frameworks are revealed. Lancaster (1992) states that if anthropologists were sincere about their source of information, most people in the discipline would have to acknowledge gossip as an important medium to gather relevant material (p. 72). Mainly, when it comes to people from la diversidad sexual, gossip, as mentioned by Lancaster, is certainly “the prison-house of language”, since it is used as a tool to police and discipline gender and sexual identifications and/or expressions. Thus, in the same way that gossip is used as a tool to discipline gender, – in Lancaster’s case masculinities –, gossip is also used as a mechanism to police and discipline sexuality, such as women’s sexuality as I will address in the following segment.

At around six o’clock in the afternoon my relatives from la Colonia Azteca come outside their houses since it is the time of the day when they begin to relax. By this hour, women have taken off the outfits that they have wore to do house chores. They have taken their daily shower and now their clothing selection is a bit more elaborate, as if they have carefully selected more presentable garments than the ones wore during the morning hours. At around this time, for
example, some women leave their houses to meet with others regularly outside of someone’s house. The point of reunion is usually the same one every day, outside of a specific house which has been chosen because of its location, at the end of a closed-end street. During this time, the owners of the house, uncle Abelardo and aunt Andrea, start placing rocking chairs as well as plastic stools and chairs outside their house. They accommodate the seats in a circular way, more towards the street than towards the house. The act of accommodating the seats represents a social stage, a performance space and an invitation for others to join in to spend the rest of the afternoon in the company of relatives, neighbours and friends. Thus, it is within this context where women and men socialize, interact and gossip on a daily basis.

One fine and hot afternoon in July, at around thirty minutes past six, I arrived at La Colonia Azteca. I had left the place early in the morning and I had not seen my relatives for the whole day. As soon as I arrived, I saw that everyone was seated in the chairs already accommodated in the usual circular way. I went there and told them that I would change my clothes and that I would come back. I went to my place, and while I left my black-open sandals on, I changed my dressy pants and my dressy blouse for some denim shorts and an aqua-colour-tank-top and I went outside to join the circle. Soon after my arrival in the group, people started making arrangement to buy homemade fruit popsicles which were sold a few houses away from where we were located. A teenage boy, Danilo, volunteered to go to buy the popsicles and while everybody else decided for a favourite popsicle flavour, I chose a chamoyada (mango nectar in a plastic cup frozen with a popsicle stick in it and decorated at the top with chamoy sauce, – a paste consistency made of salty, sweet, sour, and spiced chili flavour). Among all adults, we collected the money for the popsicles and we gave it to Danilo who memorized everybody’s flavours. Ten
minutes later, he came back holding a plastic bag full of popsicles in one hand and my chamoyada in the other.

Shortly after everyone grabbed their own popsicle, aunty Andrea asked me: *Cómo te fue hoy?* (how was your day?). I answered by saying that my day went great since I had the pleasure to meet some people from la diversidad sexual. Uncle Abelardo, intervened in the conversation by saying in a jokingly tone: *escuchen, aquí en la familia tenemos a una prostituta-dash-manflora* (Listen everyone, here in this family we have a prostitute-slash-lesbian woman). Uncle Abelardo made this comment even though lesbianism, as a topic, is a taboo matter in Coatzintla. Immediately after uncle Abelardo’s comment, I stopped sipping my chamoyada and I carefully placed it inside the disposable plastic cup where it originally came. I put the cup on the floor and I got up from my chair. Once I was standing up, I put my hands on top of my head and I clapped once. Right after, I separated my arms and while making a V sign with the middle fingers on each hand, I began dancing by moving my hips side to side whereas also shouting a big *yuuuwwhuuuuu*. When I finished my performance, I went back into my seat and I continued sipping on my chamoyada. Everyone in the circle laughed, including myself. This incident represents an illustration of improvisation in fieldwork. Cerwonka & Malkki (2007), suggest that since ethnographic work relies on improvisation, “each ethnographer must improvise techniques and tactics in light of what he or she is trying to know through fieldwork” (p. 20). In this case, my shouting represented the best improvised answer that I could provide according to the given moment and circumstances.

To uncle Abelardo, my outside-the-norm sexual identity automatically categorizes me as a prostituta. Moreover, uncle Abelardo’s objectifying comments towards my own persona are understandable only when we recognize the individual and social reasons behind the
contemporary forms of gender, class, sex and sexuality relations in Mexico. While I instantly comprehended the patriarchal context in which the comment was made, I also understood the moment, the surroundings and the open-ended possibilities in front of me. In other words, the opportunities for creativity. Thus, what can be perceived as the mundane ways of ‘normal’ or ‘real’ life, such as a getting together to have popsicles, turned out to be a useful way to understand processes of knowledge production (Cerwonka & Malkki, 2007, p. 6). In this way, uncle Abelardo’s comment was made to police my sexuality and my response became a way to undo the policing that I was facing. More specifically, I perceived the chance to demonstrate my own power and my own sense of agency. Henceforth, I decided to play along recognizing the humour that can only be understood in its place. In other words, as a form of humour that may originates among the oppressed as our only source within a space of limited options. I knew that in a context like this it would be easier to transform such a comment into a celebratory performance. Likewise, I became aware that a cheerful answer would not only sound as an ‘in place’ reply, but also a liberatory act. Drawing on Edward Palmer Thompson (1963), James C. Scott (1985) and Peter Gay (1993), Goldstein (2003) proposes that while the powerful may used laughter and humour as a window to exercise – and control – aggression, the powerless may also acquire such techniques to resist and critique forms of power (p. 7). In other words, as an expression and arrangement of (class) power, humour and laughter may act as both conservative and liberatory methods (p. 7).

But this incident was not the only one where I felt policed through gossip practices, since during fieldwork, I was constantly subjected to challenges that mostly referred to the research project. In his investigation, Lancaster (1992) mentions that gossip is an enduring conversation, at once intimate and practical and led “among people who have long-standing relationships” (p.
At the same time, gossip is done among those who share particular interests and who intent to pool resources and information (p. 71). Like Lancaster’s experiences in Eramus Jimenez, I became aware that, in a space like la Colonia, I was a highly fertile entity for the production and reproduction of gossip’s comments (p. 72). For example, instead of going around and trying to meet up with friends and acquaintances from la diversidad sexual, my female relatives thought that I should have been entirely focused on the attention, nurturing and care of my children. Hence, my queerness was heavily criticized by relatives. In this way, the policing of my sexuality became, once again like during my teenage years, a crucial issue between myself and family members. One example of policing actions that I faced from family members was the constant requests that I received from them to stop hanging out with lesbian women since, according to them, to hang out with lesbian women was an inappropriate behaviour for a mother. Thus, what family relatives revealed to me was that hanging out with lesbian woman, and particularly for a divorced mother, is perceived as highly irresponsible, selfish and unacceptable.

My status as a researcher and an ex-pat of the town emphasized my position of an insider/outside individual, particularly among family members. For instance, during this period I became subjected to endless contradictions such as the way in which people perceived my work. In a sense, my work as a researcher was viewed as a party time thing, or a leisure activity, therefore as unimportant, trivial and extremely irrelevant. Even though I perceived the privilege position that I had as a transnational woman living in the Global North, in some occasions, my membership in the town impeded people to see me as a researcher and to take me seriously.

Recording the daily performances of female relatives, for example, was challenging since they perceived such an action as trivial and insignificant. As an illustration, while performing participant-observation with Carmina, she, at times, became short-tempered and asked me to stop
writing *estupideses* (stupidities). She suggested that, instead of writing, I should start using my time ‘in more productive ways’ such as helping her with the house chores. More precisely, Carmina’s responses reflected forms of gender policing against women who defy conventional gender roles such as me, particularly due to the unfair feelings that she experienced by doing house work while I was not exposed to the same working tasks. But Carmina’s responses reveal other aspects like education and transnationalism which establish inequalities among women since, as an educated and transnational woman, I had the opportunity to enjoy some privileges that other women did not have such as being more mobile – in/out of the house and less confined to household chores – than most women in Coatzintla. Furthermore, her upset feelings revealed her perceptions on the fact that while she was doing house chores, I was doing stupid things, which was another way to talk about la putería. In other words, my puterías put into question the unfairness of her traditional gender role. In this way, one can say that while la putería serves as a tool to police and regulate women, it also has the potential to open up and challenge gender roles and the gender order.

As a form of humour and gossip, the discourse around la putería in Poza Rica and Coatzintla could refer to different things and could be used for different purposes. For instance, it could allude to girls’ night out or social reunions with family and/or friends at a pub. It could also suggest bedroom gatherings where girls may try different makeup styles. And in other cases, it could be used to police women’s gender and sexuality. For instance, my research project in and of itself became labelled by my family members as la putería, since for them it does not represent a type of work appropriate for women, but a good excuse to talk about whoring. According to my relatives, by interviewing queer people, I used my investigation as an excuse to engage in conversations about whoring. People perceived my time away from my children or from other
domestic duties such as cleaning or cooking as a way to avoid my duties as a mother and as 
woman. Thus, as mentioned before, the activities in which I engaged during my research – like 
hanging out in hair salons, nightclubs, or interviewing people – were interpreted by others as 
time spent doing puterías. It is significant to note that while la putería serves as a tool to police 
all women (since all of them are subjected to potential derogatory comments depending on the 
context), it particularly polices those who transgress gender norms such as single women who do 
not have stable partners as well as divorcee and/or lesbian women. In order to explain how la 
putería polices divorcee, lesbian women, I now turn to one of the incidents that occurred to me 
during fieldwork.

On August 23, at around four in the afternoon, I left my kids on the street playing with 
two of their cousins while three female relatives were taking care of them. That afternoon, I had 
made plans to meet one of my female queer friends to say goodbye, since I was leaving the 
country in the next couple of days. Four hours later, when I came back, there were two more 
adult relatives outside on the street, four women (including my mother) and one man. As soon as 
I got there, I was able to sense that the adults were upset with me. They approached me to 
explain that my son had his legs covered with mosquito bites. Since my son had been scratching 
for a while, by the time that I came back from my meeting with my friend, his legs were already 
looking red and irritated. My mother began telling me on the street: *ya ves, todo por andar en tus 
puterías mira tu hijo como anda, pareciera que no tiene pinche madre. Porque lo único que a tí 
te interesa es la putería.* (You see, just because of your whoring, look at your son and see how he 
is doing, he looks like he has no fucking mother. Because the only thing that you are interested in 
is whoring).
I tried to defend myself by mentioning that the mosquito repellent was there for him to use it and so was the cream. I added that he was not a baby, instead he was an eleven-year-old boy. I got carried away and words went back and forth between my mother and I. I tried to make the point that I am raising my kids, especially my son, to be independent people. However, my words did not work because by then my mother, and the rest of my relatives, were mad at me. This incident is significant because it reveals how la putería is seen in opposition to good mothering and respectable femininity. Beverly Skeggs (1997) indicates that women constantly deal with implicit scripts where their sexuality, femininity and respectability are judged in terms of value usually established by others (p.12). In my experience, my sexuality, respectability and, particularly, my role as a mother became measured in relation to the women around me. In this scenario, my female relatives stood in contrast to la putería, seen as dutiful, respectable women. Thus, la putería is constituted in tension to what being a good woman, housewife and mother is and, as used by my female relatives in this incident, a tool to police women, in this case, to police me and my movement.

The day after my son’s mosquito bite’s incident, at a family gathering, my relatives decided to play lotería (Mexican bingo) during the afternoon on the same spot, at the end of a closed-end street in la Azteca. I went there with my kids and we all helped uncle Abelardo and aunt Andrea to put up the tables and the chairs. Once we brought out the lotería cards, the rest of the family members, as well as some of the neighbours, came out to play. While playing, one of my male cousins arrived from work and when he saw me, he asked me: Qué onda, por qué andas tan arreglada, a dónde vas? (What’s up, why are you so dress up? Where are you going?). I answered to him that I was going nowhere, and if I was wearing those clothes was because I wanted to look good for myself and my children. My mother intervened by mentioning, in her
honesto (honest) Coatzinteco tone: *Ella no va a ningún lado, lo que pasa es que ella siempre está lista para la putería, pues ya ves que allá en Cánada la gente ya no se preocupa por los Totonacos. Ahora lo que les interesa es la putería, quien lo diría!* (She is going nowhere, however she is always ready for whoring, since, as you know, people in Canada do not care anymore about the Indigenous Totonacs. Instead, now what they care about is whoring, who would guess!”). People playing lotería laughed, including myself. I laughed because of my mother’s sarcastic way to refer to Canada. I found amusing the way in which she imagines other contexts, and how for her it is unthinkable to take seriously queer sexuality. In this incident, one can see that humour about my non-conventional research project acts as a tool to demarcate respectable from disreputable womanhood. My clothing, my sexuality and my association with whoring because of my research project, thus, served as venues to police me, including my mothering practices.

This incident reveals the way in which my research brought up aspects that are seen as suitable for men but out of bound for women. For example, even though nowadays younger generations are encouraged to go out to work, the jobs where women are hired are related to enclosed businesses such as private retail companies, government bureaucratic positions, doctors’ offices, schools, the market, etc. Furthermore, while female youth are motivated to participate in the work force of either town of Poza Rica or Coatzintla, the older generation of women concentrate in the domestic sphere. And whereas these women are able to go outside of the domestic sphere, when they do so their movements continue to be attached to domesticity since they use these outings either to purchase items related to the household or to engage in family gatherings. In my case, since I did not have a specific place to go to work, but I was ‘loosely’ choosing the spaces for interviewing people, my work became locally seen as work
more associated with men’s work instead of women’s work. As mentioned before, in these towns men are free to move, and for different purposes, without any sorts of social policing.

Thus, since my movements reflected more free ways of moving around, I became constantly perceived in these towns as an individual outside of the domestic sphere fulfilling chores unrelated to childcare and child-raising. Additionally, since people around me understood my research project as exclusively associated with whoring, the topic of the research project, along with the ways I moved in the towns, made me appear as a woman detached from the responsibilities of a mother. People’s perceptions made me reflect on la putería as a tool to police women into good mothers, wives, daughters, aunts, etc. And whereas la putería polices women in particular ways, it does also police queer male-born individuals, not so much through their mobility but through their sexuality and their masculinity (for instance, through the term puto when used in derogatory ways to insult folks from la diversidad sexual). Gossip and rumours around la putería police queer male-born individuals through their sexuality and their masculinity, since by being labelled as puto one is policed into who one may sleep with or how one may display one’s body. In the following section, I will address the way in which self-identifying putos engage with the discourses of la putería.

La putería at the hair salons

Through humour and gossip actions, la putería is appropriated by gay and bisexual men and transgenero, transexual, putos and/or vestidas to resist gender and/or sexual policing. La putería offers them the opportunity to embrace their gender and/or sexual identifications and/or expressions in specific places such as the hair salons. The two hair salons that I visited during fieldwork were not equally invested in la putería even though the owners of both places are
known in the towns as declarados(as). On the one hand, the owner of Madril, Rafael a self-identified gay man who uses he/she pronouns interchangeably, promotes his/her hair salon as a more conservative place by associating it with mainstream discourses to attract both individuals from la diversidad sexual and heterosexual clients. On the other hand, the owner of Ondas, Cassio, engages in more humorous and relaxed ways. And because of Cassio’s joking manners, some people perceive his establishment as a non-professional and a questionable space. In other words, as a location more associated with la putería. Thus, Rafael and Cassio use different approaches to run their businesses and these approaches have implications as to how they are both perceived socially by others, particularly clients.

As publicly out individuals, Rafael and his/her working team, Landys and Leonardo also self-identified gay men who use male and female pronouns interchangeably, arrive at Madril wearing makeup, jewelry, accessories – such as necklaces, earrings and bracelets – and either wearing runners or men’s dress shoes. Rafael, an individual in his late fifties, usually wears fashionable pants accompanied by colourful/girly blouses. Rafael’s curly hair is dyed blond and regularly fixed in a loose way. On the other hand, Landys and Leonardo, people in their late forties, usually wear men’s dress pants and T-shirts. And while Landys wear his/her hair short and dyes it in a brunet tone, Leonardo usually fixes his/her long hair in a ponytail. All three individuals enjoy shaping their eyebrows in a curvy way. Although Rafael and his/her queer working team use Madril as a social space to connect with friends and existing and/or potential lovers, the performances in which they engage are done in a reserved fashion, which means that when it comes to meeting their lovers, they do not kiss, hug and/or touch them publicly. Nonetheless, while working, they constantly associate themselves with la putería through
humorous comments in order to acknowledge their own gender and/or sexual identifications and/or expressions.

By having a hair salon in a busy corner in downtown Poza Rica, Rafael and his/her team strategically place themselves in a position to see and be seen by others. During working hours, and particularly when the clientele is low, they spend their time in la putería by looking at men passing by through the window. During one of my visits to Madril, while Landys, Leonardo and Andy (a queer friend of theirs who used to stop at the hair salon quite often) were looking at men passing by through the window, Rafael shouted: *Ustedes déjense de tanta putería y concentrense aca que allá viene la Señora María por su tinte de pelo.* (All of you stop all your whoring and concentrate here that I can see Miss Maria coming, she is over there, and she is coming to have her hair dyed). As an area where other businesses are located, Rafael, Landys, Leonardo and Andy not only know the lives of other business owners around them, but also the lives of most people passing by. They know at what specific time men pass by, where they work, who their relatives are and, while they calculate the age of these people, they also wonder if these individuals act as *mayates* (hombres-hombres as self-identified straight, heterosexual and macho looking men who engage in either casual or long-lasting relationships with putos). At the same time, they also know if these individuals are – or are not – declarados(as). And while they see masculine men passing by as superior and highly valued, they scrutinize the movements of declarados(as). More precisely, for Rafael, Landys, Leonardo and Andy, men who engage in mayate practices are considered either current or potential lovers whereas declarados(as) are considered either current or potential rivals. Even though there is a sense of closeness at the hair salons, they also develop a sense of animosity among themselves, an animosity caused by the fact of perceiving other gay, transgenero, transexual, puto and/or vestidas as adversaries. And
whereas they see these individuals as enemies, they do not perceive women in the same way, in the other words, as current or potential adversaries for adopting the roles of girlfriends or wives of mayates.

Cassio’s persistence on the topic of la putería is important because, through such comments, he emphasizes how he, and many others, perceive the context in which they all live. For Cassio his establishment, Ondas, is the place where he socializes with friends and lovers. As a forty-nine-year old individual who lives with his widowed mother, Cassio finds his hair salon a more suitable place to hang out with friends and lovers, even though he has been declarado since his teenage years. While Cassio enjoys playing the role of puto who transgress gender roles – mainly through body mannerisms – other times he likes to act as a masculine man. In other words, as a stereotypical macho man with whom no one can mess around. During important life events, like the kindergarten graduation of his niece, Cassio wore a white guayabera – a men’s T-shirt made of cotton and designed with two vertical rows of closely stitched pleats that run the length of the front and back of the shirt – embroidered with colourful flowers on the front. His guayabera was combined with brown men dress shoes. Other times, usually on Sundays, he wore jeans, vaquero (cowboy) shirts, vaquero boots and a sombrero. According to him, his outfit had a lot to do with the fact that he was dating a vaquero (a cowboy guy). One time, he told me that years before he used to wear sporty clothing because he was dating a soccer player, but since during the summer of 2017 he was dating a vaquero, he needed to dress accordingly.

Cassio does not use makeup or jewelry and contrary to Rafael, Cassio usually works alone except for some busy periods in the year (graduation ceremonies and Christmas) when he hires a helper, regularly a woman. People frequent Cassio’s hair salon for different reasons. I observed that while some went there to get their hair done and pay for the service, others went
there to offer Cassio lotions in exchange for a hair-cut. One day, when Cassio finished cutting the hair of one of his male clients, the client made a sign referring to me and Cassio responded by moving his right hand as a sign to state that my presence there was fine, so the client got closer to Cassio and kissed him on the lips. Other times, some men went there to use Cassio’s shaving machine for free whereas others attended to chat and to cool down in a place with an air conditioner. One afternoon, Don Nicolas, a man in his late sixties who sells homemade bread door to door, entered the hair salon to say hi to Cassio and he sat on a broken chair. Five minutes later, when I turned around to see Don Nicolas, he had fallen asleep in the chair. When Cassio saw him, he mentioned that it was fine for Don Nicolas to sleep there because his hair salon was designed for multiple purposes. Hence, Cassio and I decided not to make too much noise, so Don Nicolas would not wake up. Cassio used the Don Nicolas’ incident as an excuse to joke about a bed as the only item missing in his hair salon.

Although some women visited Cassio’s place, the crowd usually involved men who also stopped there to eat – either because they bought food on their way to the hair salon or because they expected to search through Cassio’s small refrigerator – while others arrived to eat, drink, make-out and have fun among themselves. Even though there was a sofa for three, when men arrived they preferred to use informal ways like throwing themselves on the floor and usually doing it in a circular way, so they could all see each other. My undefined status at the hair salon placed me in the position of acting as the person who went to buy the beer and the snacks after people collected the money for me.
One time, in one of these reunions Cassio, in a joking and gossipy tone, mentioned the case of la Paca (one of his queer male-born friends) to the crowd. As Cassio told us, la Paca’s father, Don Vicente, had a difficult time accepting his gay son due to Don Vicente’s homophobia. Thus, in order to hide the gender and sexual identification of his son, Don Vicente used to tell others, – family, neighbours and friends – that Paco’s delicate and girly bodily manners were caused by the fact that Paco was enrolled in El Colegio Tepeyac, an expensive private school. According to Don Vicente, one of the main characteristics of El Colegio Tepeyac was to teach students European ways and ideas to create distinct and sophisticated citizens.

Mary, the only other woman there, was carefully listening to Cassio, and she asked him: y la Paca si era sofisticado por qué iba a ese lugar? (was la Paca really sophisticated due to his/her attendance to that place?), Que va a ser, (Come on), responded Cassio, while adding in a joking and gossip manner: ese no era puto sino putisisisisimo y declarado y hasta la fecha ahí anda con sus puterías (he was not only puto but highly puto and out of the closet and even now he goes around engaging in puterías). Everyone found the comment funny and laughed even though la Paca was not there. During this moment, I decided to observe. So, by deciding to observe others I was able to notice that people around did not take this comment in a derogatory way against la Paca. Instead, I perceived that they took the remark in a gracious way probably because mostly, in contexts like Poza Rica and Coatzintla, talking about people in their absence is a common affair. Thus, whereas Cassio’s gossipy comment about his/her friend la Paca was done to expose, as a way to police, la Paca’s puterías, the comment also was made to exalt the agency of la Paca

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3 ‘la Paca’ alludes to Paco, a diminutive name for Francisco; as well, the alteration of a masculine name for a feminine form is a common practice among queer people to denote themselves and others as queer or, in other cases, it is used by others to refer to queer people.
who, despite the struggles that he/she faced while dealing with his/her father’s homophobia, he/she continues to express himself/herself according to his/her own desires.

The performances of queer individuals at the hair salons demonstrate the ways in which these people are able to create queer spaces for themselves. At the same time, through the discourse of la putería, queer individuals are able to resist the gender and sexual policing that prevail in the towns. But hair salons do not represent the only space in which queer individuals can make queer-world possible, since there are other places, like the night club, *Palladium*, a space where queer individuals are able to make space for their own gender and/or sexual identities and/or expressions. Thus, I will now turn to Palladium to address the ways in which people in this location engage with discourses and practices of la putería.

**La putería at Palladium**

Palladium is a space where la putería is celebrated through the performances of gay and some bisexual men, transgenero, transexual, putos and/or vestidas. One day during the month of July, aunt Andrea mentioned that she would like to go to Palladium with her husband, uncle Abelardo, and I because she had never been there before. Since I usually made plans with my friends to go out on Saturday nights, my uncle, aunt and I decided, instead, to go the following Friday July 7th. That night, uncle Abelardo drove from Coatzintla to Poza Rica in his 2015 Nissan Juke red car. When we arrived at Poza Rica, uncle Abelardo decided to park his car at the PEMEX’s hospital parking lot because, according to him, such a space represented a safe location for the car. At the same time, he suggested that the three of us should take a taxi from there to Palladium because taxis, as public modes of transportation, during the night may become safer than private cars. On the contrary, private cars may reflect financial means, social status and class issues, aspects with
which residents do not want to be associated at night due to the insecurity of the region. Private cars, mostly at night, are targeted for armed robberies by drug cartels and members of the police services. Also, since Palladium does not have parking services (meaning that if people bring their car they would have to park on the street and that could mean an unsafe place for the vehicle) it is usually better to arrive and to leave the place by using a taxi.

Palladium is a two-story place with a dance floor and a stage with a pool dance tube. The stage in Palladium is used for singing shows (usually performed by transgender, transexual, putos and/or vestidas) and pole dancing displays (typically done by individuals presumed to be hombres-hombres or activos). The night at Palladium usually starts with masculine men solo acts. They begin dancing with fast speed songs. While such dances take place, the men performing wear special costumes like *policías federales* (police officers), *soldiers* (policemen), militaries, nurses, or casual representations of men dressed in jeans and T-shirts. Stereotypical Arab men’s clothing are queer male-born individuals’ favourite and consists of an ankle-length and long sleeve Arab garment like a robe or tunic, and a *Kaffiyeh*, or a large square white head cloth held with a band or circlet of twisted black cord made of silk or cotton thread. The popularity of the outfit refers to the fact that such a clothing is perceived as highly exotic, particularly due to its association with specific forms of masculinity like courage, independence, strength, assertiveness, violence and machismo (power). After those men have danced with fast speed songs for a while, the music changes to slow melodies and it is at that moment that the men performing begin to undress until they are in their underwear. It is at this moment when some actors perform more erotic dance movements such as pole dancing, while others use objects, like candles, to display sadomasochistic acts by dripping wax on their bodies.
The night that I went with my uncle and aunt, when the male dancers’ show ended, the host of the place, Arturo, a gay individual, started to promote the private rooms for whoever wished to pay for a private male lap dance. Arturo concluded his speech by yelling: *arriba la putería!* (on with whoring!). After that, Arturo was shouting: *arriba la putería!* every half hour during the rest of the night. At one point, in one of my trips to the bathroom, I ran into Arturo and when he saw me, he grabbed my hand and, with a sexy and dominant move, he pushed my body towards him. With a lambada tune in the background, he put his right leg in between my legs whereas he also placed his right hand on my back and we began to dance. When the lambada piece ended, he released me. It took me a few seconds before I could recover myself and remember my original intention to go to the bathroom.

Since uncle Abelardo did not miss any of the events that took place during the night at Palladium, from the next day onwards, every time that he saw me, he started to scream: *arriba la putería!* and I replied by raising my arms and moving my hips while also shouting a big *yuuuuwhuuuuu*. Although he only explained to some people about our night experience in Palladium, soon the news spread in la Azteca and beyond as habitually happens in a setting like Coatztinta. As Lancaster (1992) mentions, gossip moves quietly but quickly on the streets of the neighbourhoods (p. 76). Moreover, while the shout of *arriba la putería!* could be perceived as a mode of objectification in other contexts, in this setting such an action is considered acceptable. Therefore, every time that uncle Abelardo saw me passing by, he yelled: *arriba la putería!* while I replied with my dancing performance. Far from thinking on the body as something that could be labelled or objectified, people perceived uncle Abelardo’s comment as a shout for joy and my response as a smart answer. People around heard it and found it funny, including children who usually were playing outside. As days went by, we started to notice that particularly Nadia, a
five-year-old girl, was even imitating my putería dance. Nadia copied my arms and body movements as well as my shouting, however, she got punished by her dad, Andrés. Considering humour as shaped by culture (Goldstein, 2003), Nadia’s mockery practices reveal her understanding for the comedy of la putería act. Nonetheless, Andrés’ reaction alludes to both the gender inequalities in which girls and women are situated in Mexico as well as his traditional role of a Mexican father who tries to police, control and protect the body of his daughter to which his honour and reputation is tied. At the same time, Andrés’ reaction relates to what Carole Vance (1993) refers to as the pleasures and dangers of female sexuality. Vance addresses female sexual pleasure as a complicated matter (p. 289). According to Vance, women’s relationship to sexuality is constantly working in tension between sexuality as empowerment and as danger as in fear of women’s rape, lack of safety, sexism, hypersexualization, pornography, and particularly in Andrés’ case, teen sex and teen pregnancy as well as lesbianism and other sex panics (p. 290, 295).

During fieldwork, when attending Palladium with my lesbian friends, we used the male dance shows to talk about our private lives. One night, through these intervals and while drinking our bucket of Indio beer, the beer of preference for many that I know due to its darker and stronger flavour, I asked my friends if they have noticed how masculine and male oriented Palladium was. Emilia replied by mentioning that it had to be that way otherwise we, women, run into trouble. According to Emilia, long time ago Palladium had female dancers on the stage until one of them was found murdered. No one got charged for her murder and the case soon became forgotten.

Despite the absences of women on the stage, bisexual and lesbian women engage in la putería – through making out activities like kissing, hugging, touching, etc. – with their long-
time partners or casual lovers. For the most part, such encounters occur on their seats or on the
dance floor and in between shows when popular Mexican and Latin music are played. Moreover,
my access to the women’s bathroom allowed me to observe how lesbian women used this place
to engage in making out activities by using the corners and/or the walls of the room as spaces to
demonstrate each others’ love and/or desires. Thus, as settings in which people engage in
puterías, the bathrooms in Palladium represent an important site in which queer individuals can
express themselves. Thus, even though Palladium does not stage performances by lesbian and
bisexual women, it still offers a space where women are able to engage in la putería. In a sense,
for queer women, Palladium represents one of the few lesbian-friendly spaces in town since it
functions as a safe place where women can meet other women.

During male dance shows, many spectators (either heterosexual women and/or
declarados-as-) were excited to see such performances. People usually revealed their enthusiasm
by shouting at male dancers, particularly when they perceived some movements as highly sexy
or erotic. Some vestidas (cross-dressed individuals), even walked to the stage to put money
inside the dancers’ underwear. After male dance programs, it was quite common to see the
dancers sitting at the tables of gay men, putos and/or vestidas. At the same time, vestidas also
used the dance floor of Palladium as a space to dance with friends and/or participate in making
out activities with Palladium dancers or casual lovers.

Regularly after the male dance presentations, the singing show at Palladium began. As
the only place in Poza Rica and Coatzintla that embraces vestidas’ shows, Palladium allows
queer male-born clients the possibility for queer self-making. Among the most popular imitations
that trangenero, transexual, putos and/or vestidas performed during the summer of 2017 was
Gloria Trevi, a Mexican heterosexual singer and songwriter who became famous during the
1990s. Gloria Trevi’s most acclaimed song at Palladium was *Doctor Psiquiatra* (Doctor psychiatrist). As soon as the tune was heard, everybody started clapping and screaming. I saw so many imitations of Gloria Trevi during that summer that by the end of the summer I already had picked my favourite imitator, Annabel, a vestida with whom I took a picture and chatted for a while. Annabel seemed to me to be the greatest performer, since her clothes resembled the ones that Gloria Trevi wore during the best time of her singing career. Moreover, Annabel’s acts were very similar to Gloria Trevi’s performances, since she even threw herself on the floor at the most appropriate moments of the song in the same way that Gloria Trevi has thrown herself on the floor when singing the song. Doctor Psiquiatra refers to the experiences that individuals have when visiting the psychiatrist. The song goes like this:

*Creo que ya es tiempo de ir con el psiquiatra,* (I think it's time to go with the psychiatrist,)  
*Lo dijeron en mi casa y me trajeron casi a rastras,* (They said it in my house and they brought me almost dragged,)  
*Pues cuando llego de noche,* (Since when I arrive at night,)  
*Y me quieren hacer un repreche,* (And they want to accuse me,)  
*No oigo nada, no oigo nada y corro a la ventana,* (I do not hear anything, I do not hear anything, and I run to the window,)  
*Pero del quinto piso el que salta se mata,* (But from the fifth floor whoever jumps is killed,)  
*Me pongo violenta a viento adornos de casa* (I get violent I throw house ornaments,)  
*No estoy loca, no estoy loca, no estoy loca,* (I'm not crazy, I'm not crazy, I'm not crazy,)  
*Solo estoy desesperada.* (I'm just desperate.)

Chorus:  
*Dr. psiquiatra, ya no me diga tonterías,* (Dr. psychiatrist, do not tell me nonsense anymore,)  
*Dr. psiquiatra, quiero vivir mi propia vida,* (Dr. psychiatrist, I want to live my own life,)  
*Dr. psiquiatra, yo no le pagaré la cuenta,* (Dr. psychiatrist, I will not pay the bill,)  
*Dr. psiquiatra, ya no me mire, ya no me mire,* (Dr. psychiatrist, do not look at me anymore, do not look at me anymore,)  
*Ya no mire más las piernas,* (Do not look at my legs anymore,)  
*No, no, no, no, no, no, no estoy loca.* (No, no, no, no, no, no, I'm not crazy,)  
*Creo que ya es tiempo de ir con el psiquiatra,* (I think it's time to go with the psychiatrist,)  
*Eso dijo el profesor y me corrió del salón,* (That's what the professor said and he dismissed me from the classroom,)
Y cuando no llego a clases, (And when I do not get to class,)
Mandan a buscarme por todas partes, (They look for me everywhere.)
Yo me escondo, yo me escondo no entiendo lo que le pasa, (I hide, I hide, I do not understand what is happening.)
Primero que me vaya y después que no salga, (First they ask me to leave and then they ask me to stay inside)
Cuatro paredes tristes prisión de enamoradas, (Four walls, sad prison for people in love)
No estoy loca, no estoy loca, no estoy loca, (I'm not crazy, I'm not crazy, I'm not crazy,)
Solo estoy desesperada. (I'm just desperate.)

Chorus:
Yo soy Julieta, y en luna llena, (I am Juliet, and on a full moon,)  
Me vuelvo loba, y busco a Romeo, (I'm a wolf, and I'm looking for Romeo,)  
No estoy loca, no estoy loca, no estoy loca (I'm not crazy, I'm not crazy, I'm not crazy,)  
Solo estoy desesperada. (I'm just desperate.)
Chorus:

Since the singing shows are done by individuals who transgress the gender and/or sexual norms, other folks with same gender and/or sexual identifications and/or expressions can identify with the live shows. Thus, by identifying themselves with the imitator and the lyrics of the song, people from la diversidad sexual use the song as a humorous weapon of the weak to dissociate themselves with larger discourses that undermine their gender and/or sexual identities and/or expressions. Moreover, people who attend Palladium identify with Gloria Trevi because her eccentric personality makes her seem as outside the norm. Even though Gloria Trevi was associated in the past with controversial issues such as corruption of minors, sexual abuse, and kidnapping, people at Palladium praise her desires to pursue a career in the entertainment industry. They admire Gloria Trevi’s fame and perceive her rebellion to wear the clothes she wants as a way to stage her own putería act.

Mainly, Doctor Psiquiatra humorously represents the weapon that the weak uses to undo the gender and sexual policing experienced in their daily life. The song is acclaimed by many at Palladium because it embodies a young and rebellious individual who is trying to find his/her own ways and his/her own individuality while dealing with institutions such as family, education
and health care. For these people, Doctor Psiquiatra represents a protest and a critique of social rules and social institutions. It is an objection to the system for placing their gender and/or sexual identifications and/or expressions as outside the norm, and something that was made apparent during my fieldwork.

While conducting interviews, participants who have made their gender and/or sexual expression public in front of parents, mentioned how these close relatives saw psychologists and/or psychiatrists as a viable solution ‘to solve the problem’. This meant that their sexual/gender identities were pathologized and imagined as curable. In our meetings, interviewees expressed the inconformity and discontent that they experienced while visiting psychologists and/or psychiatrists because they were treated as sick. In the same vein, many explained the bias that school teachers and social workers played during their intermediate and high school years. And although the song echoes a claim for individuality, it also reflects the binary sex/gender system in which the population from these two towns, and the entire country per se, is constrained. In this way, Palladium represents a space in which queer-world making is possible.

This chapter has emphasized how discourses of la putería have acted as tools to police my own actions and sexuality. At the same time, this section has revealed how I have used these same discourses to undo such policing actions. I have also expanded from these personal experiences to examine how gossip intersects with la putería serving as a tool to police and discipline individuals from la diversidad sexual. People in Poza Rica and Coatzintla use la putería as one important way to police women into being good, dutiful housewives, good mothers and respectable women. This aspect demonstrates the ways in which being a queer woman carries a particular set of challenges and everyday forms of oppression, regulation and
policing within these two towns of Veracruz, Mexico. Since the subject of my thesis was perceived as la putería by others, the activities in which I engaged during my research were interpreted as time spent doing puterías. In the same vein, as a researcher and an ex-pat, my insider/outsider position put into question the unfairness of traditional gender roles. My visits to the hair salons demonstrate how these places, especially for queer male-born individuals, become suitable locations to engage in putería’s acts. Lastly, Palladium represents one of the few places in Poza Rica where personas de la diversidad sexual are able to make queer-world possible for themselves.
Conclusion

Even though las personas de la diversidad sexual in Mexico have won some important battles, they continue to face gender and sexual policing through limited protections such as the cases of transgenero and transexuales who, as mentioned above, live in precarious conditions either in the capital city as well as in the towns of the Mexican republic like Poza Rica and Coatzintla, Veracruz, Mexico. In the same vein, lesbian women, particularly those with children, continue to fear social stigmatization because of their sexuality. And while some government proposals, like la agenda homosexual, have been suggested with the purpose to improve the lives of Mexican queers, civil organizations such as the NFF have come to light to resist what is perceived as an attempt to destabilize the heterosexual family.

While the rapid politicization of Mexican LGBTQ groups has served as a tool for the inclusion of some individuals, such as middle-upper-class queers, these organizations have functioned as mechanisms for the exclusion of others, like some of my working-class participants who feel outside the movement due to their resistance to homonormativity. Moreover, public discourses based on compulsory heterosexuality and the heterosexual system obscure the fluidity of people’s gender and/or sexual identifications and/or expressions. And whereas television programs, such as telenovelas, have acted as didactic tools to educate viewers in matters of gender and/or sexual identities and/or expressions, these approaches, at the same time, have perpetuated heteronormativity. In other words, they have displayed scenarios about relationships between gay men (as male-born individuals who transgress the gender norms) and straight and macho looking men while ignoring other forms of gender and/or sexual identifications and/or expressions.
Additionally, as a system that is not frozen in place, but as an ideology in constant transformation, machismo represents a structure which shapes the experiences of Mexican queers. Machismo in Poza Rica and Coatzintla, in many ways, follows Gutmann and Lancaster’s discoveries in Mexico City and in the Nicaraguan context. And while I recognize similarities in these examinations with my own findings, I also notice differences between my findings and Gutmann and Lancaster’s studies done in Mexico and Nicaragua like the same-sex model among men as uniquely related to one’s role in sex.

I have challenged the rigid same-sex model presented by Gutmann and Lancaster as the only existing one by demonstrating that the rigid same-sex model coincides with others. More precisely, I contest Lancaster and Gutmann’s findings on private performances of activo/pasivo as the actions that define who is a man and who is el puto. While same-sex practices among men are sometimes related to activo/pasivo performances, particularly through puto/mayate relationships, in these two towns relationships among men also vary. In other words, my findings reveal that same-sex practices among men are not uniquely related to one’s role in sex performances, but also to one’s gender performance of masculinity, especially the role of provider. In the mayate-puto relationship, we can see that the gender role is not fixed but rather contextual; while mayates act as hombres-hombres, providing for their wives, they are the ones, at the same time, provided for by putos and, in this way, they reverse the expected role of mayate as provider. These performances demonstrate localized fluid practices between genders in Poza Rica and Coatzintla, a fluidity that challenges the binary system. Gender fluidity can also be perceived through putos’ use of adjectives and pronouns such as the way in which they use el/la interchangeably followed by masculine/feminine adjectives. Thus, as an ‘in-between’ gender category where both masculinity and femininity co-exist, putos’ performance of sole providers in
front of mayates represent another idea that operates at the intersection of other forms of power like machismo and the patriarchal paradigm. At the same time, my findings also show the identity of mayate as the next queer man. Even though mayates are not considered as part of la diversidad sexual in Poza Rica and Coatzintla, their performances in same-sex practices and monetary dependence on putos position them as individuals transgressing gender and sexual norms.

As well, language acts as a useful way to police and regulate gender and/or sexual identities and/or expressions. For instance, the local and masculine term puto has become the derogatory way in which people in Poza Rica and Coatzintla police individuals who transgress gender norms. Even though most transgenero, transexuales and/or vestidas find the word puto offensive when someone else uses it to refer to them, such a term is used by many of them as a suitable way to reclaim their non-normative gender/sexual identity and/or expressions. As terms of identification attached to race and class issues, the term puto is associated to ugly and naco and, therefore, to the darker-skinned, backward and uncivilized individual, where gay, as an English term, is linked to the lighter-skinned, modern, progressive individual as revealed by Arianna who associates herself with the term gay.

Whereas the term puto is used as a derogatory way to undermine queer male-born folks, the word manflora is used as a derogatory way to undermine lesbian women for contesting heterosexuality and the heterosexual system. Under machismo frameworks, lesbianism is considered unsuitable for women since physical intimacy is perceived as a heterosexual act. Nonetheless, Mexican lesbians have demonstrated that physical intimacy among women is possible. Moreover, in the same way that queer male-born individuals find their ways to challenge the system by conforming to heteronormativity, lesbian women are also able to
manipulate existing gender scripts of heterosexuality in order to live their lives as lesbians. And while some lesbian women practice traditional femininity to avoid being policed in the street or among relatives, others prefer to challenge gender expectations despite the oppressive responses in both towns. Thus, these findings demonstrate that even though gender and sexuality are intertwined, when queer folks, putos and manfloras, fail to perform proper gender, they become more policed that those who conform to stereotypical masculinity or femininity. Failing to perform proper gender adds another layer of social policing towards individuals who transgress sexual norms. In a sense, people in Poza Rica and Coatzintla police individuals from la diversidad sexual for failing to perform proper gender (Pascoe, 2007). As this thesis demonstrates, there is a close relationship between gender and sexuality, a relationship sometimes so entangled that it is difficult to perceive its separation.

My own experience with la putería reveals the ways in which I became policed because of both my gender (as a woman) and my sexuality (as a lesbian). My own experience demonstrates how gender and sexuality become intertwined. Hence, in Poza Rica and Coatzintla to be at once a lesbian and a mother does not represent a good match, since to be lesbian is, by default, to be a bad mother, or incompatible with motherhood. This represents another instance where we can see the complex entanglement of gender and sexuality which points to the importance of analyzing both together.

In this thesis, I have drawn on the work of Butler to examine the “doing” of gender in Poza Rica and Coatzintla. I have found Butler’s work helpful to analyze gender policing, such as those I experienced whether through my “wrong performance” of womanhood in the street, or through the everyday policing I experienced with my relatives. Butler’s theoretical contributions also allowed me to examine how mayates do not challenge gender norms but perform what is
perceived by society as proper masculinity or as hombres-hombres. Nonetheless, mayates secretly transgress sexuality by engaging in same-sex with putos. Such secrecy represents an action that allows mayates to keep their public faces as hombres-hombres. And at the same time, this action does not only allow mayates to preserve their public power, but also to play their role of providers in their particular households. But the focus on gender ‘as a doing’ is not the only approach that I have taken in this thesis. I have also tried to situate gender and sexual transgression as part of local contexts, following the work of anthropologists like Gutmann and Lancaster. And it is this focus on contextualization that allows us to see how the expectations of men as macho-providers become intertwined in unexpected forms with *el papel del puto*.

I have also examined the discourses and practices associated with la putería. I have shown that, as a popular discourse through humour and gossip, la putería is used by people in Poza Rica and Coatzintla to police gender and sexual performances and/or environments. As a tool standing in contrast to what is perceived as dutiful and respectable for women, la putería works in tension to what being a good woman, housewife and mother is. Then, women, and particularly mothers, who participate in what is locally defined as puterías (like going out at night, hanging with lesbian women, doing “research” instead of cleaning the house, etc.) are seen as irresponsible, selfish and disrespectful women and mothers. In my case, my associations with la putería put into question the unfairness of traditional gender roles as my interactions with Carmina showed that the gender policing that I was facing was caused by her discomfort to see me detached from housework chores. Factors like education and transnationalism allowed me to be more mobile than other women and since I used this mobility to access spaces that are not usually associated with proper womanhood, I became associated with la putería. Nonetheless,
while the discourse of la putería serves as a tool to police and regulate women, it also has the potential to open up and challenge gender roles and the gender order.

Additionally, hair salons, as settings associated with la putería, represent important locations particularly for queer male-born individuals. As my investigation illustrates, the two hair salons that I visited were run differently by their owners, an aspect that impacted the way in which such establishments were perceived by others within both towns. At the hair salons while the discourse of la putería, through humour and gossip, allowed queer male-born individuals to come together and create a sense of closeness, these individuals also reveal a sense of animosity among them. In the same vein, as a night-club, Palladium represents a setting where personas de la diversidad sexual are able to express their resistance, while also to conform, to the dominant binary system. In this way, Palladium acts as a space where personas de la diversidad sexual are able to make queer-world spaces possible for themselves.

Even though all names have been changed, I decided to reveal some close family ties in order to demonstrate how powerful the institution of family is within these settings. While family ties are powerful kinship connections, they also represent a constant negotiation for individuality and self-agency. By mentioning family members, I did not intent to develop a romantic subjectivism. Instead, as Cerwonka & Malkki (2007) suggest, “subjectivity’s many forms – embodiment, affect, and so on – should complement and enrich, rather than replace, critical reason as a mode of analysis” (p. 36). Thus, by mentioning close family ties I revealed how such kinship connections are constantly negotiated and contested by its members.

As well, the presence of my uncle, aunt and myself in Palladium is part of the social fabric now in the same way as it had been part of the social fabric in the past. Among my teenage memories, there are my visits with my parents, and their friends, to what back then was the
version of Palladium (a place called ‘El hoyo 19’ – The nineteenth hole –). Thus, even if visiting Palladium was not entirely acceptable back then, in the same way that it is not entirely acceptable now, the practices, nonetheless, persists by acting as ongoing processes. However, what has changed is the way in which the LGBTQ subject has been approached in the last twenty or thirty years. Technology, forms of globalization, migration, transnationalism, etc. have allowed for non-normative gender and sexual identities and/or expressions to become more open and visible. And in the same way that Palladium has existed, even if in different forms, so are the hair salons run by queer folks. Thus, through spaces as well as through personal relationships, people have been able to craft space for themselves for several decades now. What these scenarios reveal is that non-normative identities and expressions are unstable. At the same time, what becomes apparent is the fact that queer Mexicans form a heterogeneous group since, for example, putos and lesbian women are policed in different ways. In the same vein, social classes establish differences among individuals and while this thesis reveals the localized ways in which people express their diversidad sexual, such localized forms are becoming increasingly influenced by globalized processes.

Further investigations may deepen into subjects of queer parenthood in order to address the ways in which queer individuals manage, navigate, create, negotiate and challenge their gender/sexual expressions and/or identifications while also embracing their roles as parents within the small towns of Mexico. Additionally, since previous studies on male sexualities and masculinities in Latin America have not addressed the subject of mayates, as the straight, heterosexual and macho looking men, more research needs to be done among mayates as queer. The subject of mayates raises other questions such as: Are there any other identities taken-up by people? What other ideas and/or sexualities circulate on the internet and/or social media that are
taken-up by queer folks? In what ways is the internet an/or social media used as spaces for queer self-making? How long have mayate-puto relationships exist, and what forms have these relationships taken over time?

My own position as a Mexican/Canadian, researcher, ex-pat and a woman, did not allow me to immerse into the practices of mayates. As a woman who was born and grew up in the towns of Poza Rica and Coatzintla, my own familiarity with the places and the people residing in it, placed me in a challenging position of complicating my interactions with mayates as masculine men. At the same time, my own family ties within both towns prevented me from accessing particular spaces, such as cantinas – working-class-male-dominated bars –, Poza Rica’s red-light district as well as male dominated private gatherings. Henceforth, future research may concentrate on the practices of mayates from the small towns of Poza Rica and Coatzintla, Veracruz, Mexico to highlight the ways in which these individuals use social scripts to navigate, create, produce and reproduce, while also challenge, heteronormative environments.


