

**THE COASTAL ECUADORIAN *TRAVESTÍ*: AN ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL
SPACE**

by

Eve E. Brooks

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
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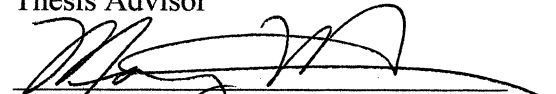
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SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:

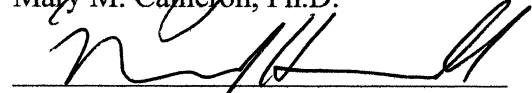


Michael S. Harris, Ph.D.

Thesis Advisor



Mary M. Cameron, Ph.D.




Michael J. Horswell, Ph.D.



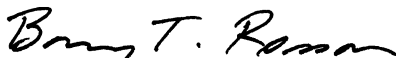
Michael S. Harris, Ph.D.

Chair, Department of Anthropology



Manjunath Pendakur, Ph.D.

Dean, The Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters



Barry T. Rosson, Ph.D.

Dean, Graduate College

Nov. 16, 2009

Date

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ABSTRACT

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This research is based on an ethnographic study conducted in 2008. The study took place in Ecuador's coastal province of Manabí and investigates the lives of a community of transvestite males, known locally as *travestís*. This research holds that the social space in which the *travestís* live and work, in Puerto Lopez, is negotiated and maintained through a complex interchange of three key factors: the experience of mother's love, the local economy, and sexual desire. The social space itself is defined as a "binary passage." Most of the *travestís* are employed as hairdressers, and they draw a wide range of clientele from Puerto Lopez and surrounding smaller villages. Yet, how is it that *travestís* can lead open and productive lives in a region that highly values *machismo*? This research focuses on both the origins of the *travestís*' social space and the means by which it is maintained through key discourses.

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CHAPTER 1: THE COASTAL ECUADORIAN *TRAVESTÍ*

Introduction

It is a mild winter night in the southern hemisphere, and the heavy humidity causes a fine mist called *garua* to be interspersed with a steady shower of actual rain drops. It is about 10 p.m. and my companions and I are venturing out into the elements; neighborhood festivities are rarely in full swing any earlier. As we make our way along the incredibly slick streets, flailing our arms in wide circles every few yards to avoid a “flip-flop” sandal induced disaster, the sound of pounding music and the smell of frying *papas* and grilling sausage soon leads us to our venue.

It is immediately obvious that the weather has put a damper on no one’s spirits here in the coastal fishing village of Salango, Ecuador. In fact, a large crowd is jamming its way through the entrance: an opening in a corrugated metal exterior leading into a patchwork structure with a dirt floor and giant bamboo posts lashed together to support a roof made of multi-colored panels of cloth hung over bamboo beams. Squeezing my way in, I find a strategic place from which to view all of tonight’s contestants in the much-ballyhooed annual beauty contest put on by the local high school.

Before long the air becomes replete with hooting, hollering, and whistling as each contestant makes her way around a wide circle on the floor in front of the stage, shimmying to the music as she passes in front of each of several judges. The girls are mostly wearing some combination of short skirt, tight black mini shorts, sparkling halter-

tops, and high heels. But it's not until after the winner is decided upon that something more unexpected and intriguing happens. A group of teenage boys come running out onto the floor dressed in makeshift drag. They have on short skirts and heels, just like their female counterparts in the contest, along with longhaired wigs and strategically placed balloons, both under the shirt and under the skirt. This spectacle of boys, mocking the girls' struts around the floor and dancing in a sexually suggestive manner with other boys not in drag, is the height of hilarity for the crowd, which is almost to a person roaring or doubled over in laughter.

At first, this spectacle appeared to lack any greater significance than suggesting a collective, "Hey, don't those boys look ridiculous?!" However, I would soon find out that this inversion of roles was mocking a much more salient and deeply rooted feature of the local culture: The *travestís*. And it is they who became the subjects of my research.

Setting

Along Ecuador's coast, northwest of its largest city, Guayaquil, lies the rural province of Manabí. Manabí province is, despite overwhelming Spanish colonial influence, home to a people whose indigenous ancestry can be traced back at least five thousand years. The coastal villages themselves are situated between the *montañas* and the *playa*. The former begin along the coast forming horseshoes around the villages and towns. Scrubby trees, interspersed among cliffs with golden and light brown scars of sandy landslides, cover the *montañas* closest to the shore. Moving inland, these soon give way to the lush green mountains where people in tiny villages engage in horticulture.

The sea's crashing waves send a perpetual hushed lull over the small coastal villages like Salango. From this village, a ten-minute bus ride to the north takes you over a low coastal mountain ridge and into the town of Puerto Lopez. Puerto Lopez is in many ways a world apart from Salango and would prove to be the focal point for my research. In addition to its resident population, about ten times the size of Salango's, Puerto Lopez is a hub of activity, its main thoroughfare clogged with buses, *camionetas*, water tank trucks, and *taximotos*. Puerto Lopez draws a mass of people from surrounding villages for shopping and entertainment. At its central, outdoor market one can purchase everything from fresh meat to clothes, to the essential flip-flops, to \$1 bootlegged movie DVDs. *Tiendas*, *farmacias*, telephone *cabinas* and internet cafes dot the road in and out of town and the routes heading west toward the *malecón*. The *malecón* is lined with establishments catering to tourists, including restaurants, bars, fresh squeezed juice stands, and street vendors selling locally made jewelry of *tagua* nut and *Spondylus* shell. One of the main tourist draws are whale watching tours that head out on two-hour journeys from Lopez's beach to the Isla de la Plata (marketed as a mini version of the Galapagos Islands) during the June through August months.

It is here, in Puerto Lopez, where some of the coast's more unique residents are carving out a seemingly happy existence. They are a group of homosexual transvestite males, known locally as *travestís*. Theirs is an open and productive existence, one in which a contribution to the local economy is made by the operation of hair salons. Their *peluquerías* are frequented not only by residents of Puerto Lopez but also by residents of smaller nearby villages. Their clientele consists mainly of younger men, school-aged

boys, and small children brought in by their parents and older siblings; female clients appear with much less frequency.

Maria's "Peluqueria Unisex" was where I was destined to spend most of my days. Maria's peluqueria is one of four in Puerto Lopez run by transvestites. Maria's salon takes up two-thirds of the first floor of a two-story cement building. When she is open for business, the two wooden, barn-like doors are swung wide open. The proper approach is to stand at the raised threshold and wait for Maria to acknowledge you with a "*pase*" that alternates between a slightly annoyed monotone and a bright conviviality, depending on her mood and the person who happens to be standing at the door. Upon entering, one steps down into a large open space, measuring approximately 25'x35'. The floor is of plain cement, which sometimes emits a musty smell probably attributable to a mixture of "Chui Javier" (resident rabbit), and "Celina" the dog.

Portions of the walls are randomly painted green, yellow, and blue, and are plastered many small posters of sample haircuts, one of which stars Leonardo DiCaprio; additionally, there is a shirtless Jean-Claude VanDamme in fighting pose and a male model lying seductively on a bed; Maria has also placed an 8X10 picture of the Virgin Mary above the door; she is robed in white and blue, light radiating from her open palms as she looks down on anyone passing through the doorway. A waiting area of green, plastic chairs line two walls. A case with shelves of hair care products, mostly tubs of "Gel Super Hair," is located to the right of the entrance, behind which is Maria's station. There she has a two-toned, hot pink and florescent green, barber chair and matching stool.

On the opposite side of the room is Rosario's station, which has the exact same set up with the exception of lacking a real barber's chair and instead having a rickety bamboo, swiveling chair. In the center of the room a well-used hammock hangs. To the right of the hammock is a long wooden dining room table, a plastic flowery tablecloth covering its entirety. Typically scattered about the table are various types of makeup, fingernail polish, a deck of cards, empty jello cups, and the ever present daily copy of the tabloid newspaper, "Extra." This is where Maria and Rosario eat their breakfast, preferring to go out to eat at the market for lunch and to one of several nearby family-owned restaurants for dinner.

Stereo speakers hang from the far corners of the room, and a television sits on a rolling stand along the back wall next to a wide floor length mirror. It is a very rare occasion when one of the two afore mentioned electronics is not blasting at high volume. Most often the stereo wins out, as Maria loves to either shuffle about in a sort of pseudo-dance as her work takes her from one side of the room to the other, or to sing along to the choruses of various ballads. While Rosario prefers hard, pounding, industrial techno, Maria will often switch the music to something "*un poco más tranquilo*" or even sentimental. She alternates between Spanish and English language CDs. Some of her favorite English songs that she attempts to sing along to are: "Honesty" by Billy Joel, "You've Got a Friend" by Carol King, and most of all a song "*tan bonita*": "A Total Eclipse of the Heart" by Bonnie Tyler.

Since the proper music is so important to her scene and even to her mood, Maria is forever swooping her way through the blue-flowered plastic shower curtain that separates the front from the back on a mission to change or replay a CD. The back has an

open space containing a propane powered stove, a stall for the non-flushing toilet, and next to it, a stall for showering with buckets of water. Also in the back, Rosario and Maria each have their own bedroom; parts of the walls separating them are made of black plastic. Rosario's room is plain and understated while Maria's is quite the opposite. Maria's room is bright and feminine. Her bed is pushed lengthwise against the back wall, making it the center of attention in the tiny room. What is most striking about it is the contrast between the pink, frilly, curtain style mosquito netting and the soft, baby blue blanket covering the bed itself. The netting is hung such that it covers the length of the wall behind her bed and the front curtain panels are rolled up to form a pointed archway. Something about the fanciful combination, especially when Maria sits there in the middle of her bed, gives the whole a sort of "*genie in a bottle*" feel.

Maria and Rosario do spend most of their time in their salon/home, as do the other travestís (many of whom who do not work in salons have jobs as cooks on fishing boats that spend long stretches of time at sea). Nevertheless, they do go out to eat and to do errands several times a day. And thus it is true that the travestís of Puerto Lopez live a life relatively free from harassment, able to carry out their daily business about the streets and marketplaces and to take part in large *fiestas* that happen every few months. Yet this region of South America is by no means exempt from rigidly defined roles for men and women, into which the travestís do not clearly fit.

Research Questions

This initial observation, that the travestís appear to inhabit a unique social space, became the impetus for my effort to investigate their lives. This thesis is intended to

address the following questions: 1) How does this particular group of transvestites negotiate the social space in which they live and work? 2) What is the nature of this social space? and 3) What are the cultural elements that provide for the relative acceptance of travestís? Addressing the first question requires the fleshing out of common patterns of performance among my research subjects. In order to examine the second question I focus on the travestís vis-à-vis the normative behavioral expectations for women and men. In addressing the third question, I have determined that the travestís' social space is experienced through and shaped by three key factors: the experience of mother's love, sexual desire, and the local economy.

I believe this research provides a valuable contribution because unlike research on transvestite males from other regions of Latin America, such as Mexico and Brazil, research from coastal Ecuador is sorely lacking in the anthropological literature. One exception is the significant body of work produced by Benavides (2002) (2004) on homosexuality in Guayaquil. His work deals mainly with contextualizing the contemporary lives of urban male homosexuals through an in-depth examination of the coastal region's colonial past. However, the lives investigated in my research are not a product of big city life, rather they are formulated out of the traditional discourses of rural life.

Methodology

This thesis relies on my own original research, the analysis of existing literature, and the employment of relevant theory. Ethnographic research was employed to investigate the lives of individuals in the coastal province of Manabí, Ecuador. The focus

for conducting ethnographic research was on contextualizing the lives of travestís living in this region. My research was conducted over two visits with IRB approval. The first took place over a four week period during the summer of 2008 and the second during a week of follow-up interviewing in the spring of 2009. All data were collected in field notes and were based on observations, participant observation, as well as formal and informal interviewing. By employing a method of snowball sampling (Schensul *et al.* 1999), I was able to gain access to a network of friends and contacts possessed by a few key individuals. In total, I spoke with nine travestís, eight of whom I conducted formal interviews with. Each of the eight relayed additional information about the lives of travestí friends whom I did not meet. Formal interviews were conducted with eighteen non-travestí residents of Manabí, men and women ranging in age from teenagers to elderly adults. The number of non-travestí individuals with whom I spoke in informal interviews is between thirty and forty. Ethnographic data gained by snowball sampling are examined with the aid of theoretical, cross-cultural, and historical literature in order to elucidate the complexity of relevant cultural discourses. Analysis of the relevant literature and ethnographic data situates the lives of coastal Ecuadorian travestís both within the history of the region as well as within the broader context of Latin American male transvestism.

In terms of theory, I apply Foucault's ideas on sexuality and discourses, relying heavily on the Foucauldian notion of "the subject as an agent and effect of systems of power / knowledge" (Sullivan 2003: 41). Turner's (1969) notions of liminality are used to elucidate travestís' lives vis-à-vis the normative. I also employ certain elements of queer theory, especially with regard to the travestís' alternative performance of gender (Butler

2004). As will be seen, despite the fact that Puerto Lopez is dominated by the gender binary, it has found a way to reconcile a third gendered space.

CHAPTER 2: THEORY AND HISTORY

The Binary

I call the social space in which the travestís live a “Binary Passage.” I define a binary passage as any social space created as a result of a binary separation of cultural elements. Through the implementation of a binary system of classification, elements are partitioned off from one another. The process of binary partitioning, by its very nature, imposes opposition between the separated elements, e.g., feminine elements are opposed to masculine elements. The space between the masculine, on the one hand, and the feminine, on the other, is a binary passage. A binary passage can be created out of indigenous or colonial discourses. The current Ecuadorian gender culture grew out of the imposition of colonial hegemonic discourses. The separation, or partitioning, of gender is an ongoing effort, buttressed by the historical continuity of discourses.

To borrow a phrase from biological anthropology, the passage, a particular, preexisting social space, is in effect “exapted” by travestís. I am applying this term in a strictly metaphorical sense. Exaptation refers to the exploitation of preexisting structural byproducts (spandrels) for new and essential applications (Gould 1997). Evolutionary biologists, Gould and Lewontin, proposed the theory of exapted spandrels as a means of problematizing natural selection (1979). They borrowed the term “spandrel” from architectural jargon and argued that in the same way that “a necessary triangular space [is formed] where a round dome meets two rounded arches at right angles” so too do

biological structures “arise non-adaptively as secondary consequences” (Gould 1997: 10751, 10750). These “secondary consequences” are often subsequently co-opted, or exapted, for essential functions: In the case of Gould’s architectural example, the triangular spandrels of dome architecture house works of art that are fully integrated into the overall design, and in his biological example, the cylindrical growth pattern of snails creates a left-over space, an umbilicus, which is co-opted as an egg brooding chamber by some species (Gould 1997).

In this case, the formation of the gender binary, as influenced by colonial hegemonic discourses, was the primary selective force, the architectural dome, if you will. The structural byproduct that I am calling the binary passage was a necessary consequence, a spandrel, of that binary’s formation that would be co-opted by the travestí as a means of remaining integrated.

Liminality

The fundamental problem of defining the travestís’ social space brings us inevitably toward considerations of liminality. If the travestís’ social space is indeed a passage located between the social spaces afforded to men and women, testing it against Turner’s theoretical findings should strengthen the viability of this notion. For, to be perpetually between two states of being is synonymous with perpetual liminality vis-à-vis the normative. Turner cites Monica Wilson (1954) in the first chapter of his book, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1969).

“Rituals reveal values at their deepest level...men express in ritual what moves them most, and since the form of expression is conventionalized and obligatory, it is the values of the group that are revealed. I see in the study of rituals the key to

an understanding of the essential constitution of human societies.” (Wilson quoted in Turner 1969: 6).

I believe the above quote is applicable to this study because it can be reasonably argued that Ecuadorian travestís constitute a “society,” one in which members must adhere to “conventionalized and obligatory” forms of expression. In this case, I take Wilson’s mention of “societies” to mean cohesive cultural groups more generally and therefore believe it is equally applicable to sub-cultures or communities. I have chosen Wilson’s quote because it serves as a jumping off point for my argument that the Ecuadorian travestís, especially those living in small coastal towns, do indeed form a socially cohesive group, a community or sub-culture. Their “society” is one that is held together through common experience and ritual performance. In this case, the “conventionalized and obligatory” ritual ingredients of social cohesion are female adornment and performance.

Shared, obligatory ritual serves to construct and maintain travestí culture. Their external positionality vis-à-vis the culturally constructed binary gender spheres, the social spaces of normative women and men, means that travestís have a unique social imaginary. Taylor defines *social imaginary* as

“...the ways in which people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met...the social imaginary is that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy.” (Taylor 2002: 106).

Travestís have a shared sense of identity, and consequently a shared social imaginary, that is attained through common experiences that constitute rites of passage.

As will be demonstrated, these common experiences are repeatedly articulated in the accounts of informants and in the life histories of my research subjects.

Turner cites Van Gennep's (1909) definition of "*rites de passage* as 'rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age' (Turner 1969: 94). Rites of passage from one stage into another begin with separation from one's society, followed immediately by a liminal phase in which one's existence is in limbo, and ending with a full reincorporation into one's original society but with a new status.

"The attributes of liminality or of liminal personae ("threshold people") are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space...they are betwixt and between...Thus, liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness..."(Turner 1969: 95).

The travestís of coastal Ecuador tend to follow the pattern of separation, liminality, and reincorporation: They separate from their families, have a period in which they seek out others like themselves, and then become part of a community. The common experience of young travestís being driven from their homes and ostracized from many of the tiniest coastal villages is in line with the following notion: "That which cannot be clearly classified in terms of traditional criteria of classification, or falls between classificatory boundaries, is almost everywhere regarded as 'polluting' and 'dangerous'" (Turner 1969: 109). However, they are ultimately reincorporated into a new sub-cultural group whose positionality and social imaginary remains liminal to the normative sphere of manhood from which they originally emerged. Thus, as a travestí she is a full-fledged member of a different cohesive group, living in a new social space, with an identity that is constructed and maintained through a shared imaginary and through common ritual

performances. Indeed, she is now in a third gendered space that, despite its relative integration as a cultural element, nevertheless exists “betwixt and between” the binary spheres. For, society at large views her as perpetually between manhood and womanhood.

Queer Theory

“Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence. ‘Queer’ demarcates then not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative...[it] describes a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogeneous scope cannot in principle be delineated in advance.” (Halperin 1995: 62 quoted in Sullivan 2003: 43).

Judith Butler’s queer theory is designed to analyze gender in ways that are not restricted to binary discourse. In the act of deconstructing the gender binary, queer theory has indeed been able to “queer” gender. The act of queering transforms gender from a noun, a static, categorical thing, into a verb, a never-ending process of “becoming” (Butler 2004). It is transgender people who are often used as empirical examples of gender’s fluidity.

“...the figure of the Chilean transvestite, which emerged from within the most tortuous shadows of the codes for regimenting meaning, unearthed this double ordering of masculinity and femininity, at once deeply regulatory and merely superficial. The convulsion of the transvestite’s asymmetrical madness burst into a wry expression of identity which signaled the failings of uniform(ed) and uniforming genders, dissolving their faces and facades into a doubly gendered caricature that shattered the mold of dichotomous appearances.” (Richard 2004:43).

So for queer theory, gender has a fundamental lack of concreteness that can be challenged or even “shattered;” it is transitive because one has:

“the ability to freely and knowingly become one or many of a limitless number of genders for any length of time, at any rate of change. Gender fluidity recognizes no borders or rules of gender. A fluid identity is one way to solve problems with boundaries.” (Bornstein 1994: 52 quoted in Ekins and King 1998: 102)

Trans identity is held up as proof gender’s fluidity. Accordingly, there are infinitely unique, individual ways of performing gender. This is evidenced in what Butler calls the “performative” nature of gender (2004):

“What this means is that through the practice of gender performativity, we not only see how the norms that govern reality are cited but grasp one of the mechanisms by which reality is reproduced and altered in the course of that reproduction.” (Butler 2004: 218).

Queer theory therefore lends itself to analyzing the ongoing process by which the travestís’ negotiate the binary passage as a spatial continuum for gender performance. In other words, it validates the fact that varied gender performances among travestís have a direct impact upon individuals’ positionalities vis-à-vis the normative spheres of manhood and womanhood.

Yet, despite the travestís’ queer performance of gender, the binary hegemony of the region remains strong. One way that this hegemony is maintained is through the local culture’s social imaginary which views the travestís as non-examples. In other words, if you want to be a “proper man,” then travestís demonstrate how *not* to behave. If you are a “proper woman,” then the travestís represent imperfect approximations of you.

The life histories of my subjects, and related accounts of their friends’ experiences, indicate that they are typically shunned by their small natal villages for not engaging in macho performances of gender. However, Puerto Lopez, as the economic and social hub of the immediate region has been better able to incorporate

them. They are still viewed as non-examples for young men, yet there is clearly economic and social room for them to maintain a more viable social space. The degree of tolerance in Puerto Lopez indicates that, there, they are able to reconcile the travestís' presence in such a way that does not threaten the binary. It seems likely that by relegating their queer performance of gender to a third space, the normative population helps to maintain its culturally fundamental and essentialized notions of what it means to be a man or a woman. The travestís are visible reference points for the boundaries of manhood and womanhood. They exist in the binary passage between the two camps and thereby serve as a buffer between the two, helping to keep them separate. Thus, by measuring their own performance against those of the travestís', women and men can better define and maintain the parameters of their own genders.

Appearance and Performance

“Libidinous delight in song and dance transfixes these effeminates. Braiding the hair, refining the voice till it is as caressing as a woman’s, competing in bodily softness with women, beautifying themselves... this is the pattern our youths set themselves... they stay like that throughout their lives; taking others’ chastity by storm, careless of their own” (Seneca the Elder, *Controversiae*, I, Preface, 8 *quoted in* Foucault 1986 [1985]: 19).

Travestís exhibit a consistent pattern of visual performance that aspires to and is judged on female standards of beauty. All of my research subjects consistently wear female clothing and display effeminate mannerisms and behaviors. Additionally, their occupational economies, working in hair salons or as cooks, cross into the feminine.

Clothing most often consists of jeans, short skirts or shorts; blouses, spaghetti strap-style tank tops, or halter-tops; and flip flops or high heels. All clothing tends to be tight fitting, and the combination of shirts and low cut pants often shows off the mid drift. They all wear female undergarments that are sometimes visible. For example, the lacy tops of brassieres may show at the chest above a low-cut shirt line. Likewise, string bikini or thong-style underwear may be pulled up above the side or back waistlines of pants. All appear to have relatively small breasts, achieved by stuffing their brassieres (although one subject did have silicone bra inserts).

Flashy earrings are common accessories. Hair is sometimes highlighted or dyed entirely blonde, although most maintain their natural dark brown color. Hair is consistently grown as long as possible and worn either up or down. This proves to be a challenge for some whose male hormones have caused thinning hair. Likewise, long fingernails are an aspired-to feminine aesthetic, which, like all the others, are evaluated competitively both among travestís and between themselves and women. On one occasion, Maria was sitting on the stoop in front of her salon with a female friend. Maria was bragging about her long, natural nails (about 1/2 inch longer than the nail beds). On this day they were unpainted, revealing a cloudy, slightly yellowish tinge. Her friend snapped back saying Maria's were "*sucio!*" Maria explained that it was from cutting hair and proceeded to make fun of her friend's short nails, which culminated in grabbing her friend's hand and pretending to chomp off a particularly short nail.

Likewise, make-up is universally applied, although frequency and style of application vary among individuals. For example, Maria usually applies make-up before leaving home, while Rosario often spends hours intermittently applying make-up

between customers. Facial hair and eyebrows are tweezed or, less-frequently, waxed. The frequency of tweezing and maintenance of other body hair varies among individuals.

Some practice silicone injections in buttock and thigh region to achieve a fuller, more rounded feminine appearance (this is a standard of female beauty that they focus on achieving more so than the breast region, as it is the focal point of their receptive sexual interactions with men). When I first met Maria, she expressed her desire for her body to more closely match her soul. For her that meant hormones, silicone or even surgery which she could afford at the time. Now, with additional capital, she and Rosario have been able to augment their physiques with silicone injections in their thighs and buttocks:

Q- "Do you sometimes use hormones or other types of injections?"

Rosario, 25- "Yes, silicone."

Q- "Where on your body?"

Rosario, 25- "Here and here (pointing to thigh and buttocks), that's it."

Q- "And is the silicon difficult to find?"

Rosario, 25- "No, it's easy, in Guayaquil."

Q- "How did you find out where to go?"

Rosario, 25- "My friends here and in Guayaquil have helped me."

Q- "In Guayaquil, do they sell it at the pharmacy?"

Rosario, 25- "No, in a different clinic."

Q- "Do you have to see a doctor before you can get it?"

Rosario, 25- "No."

Q- "Is it very expensive or not too bad?"

Rosario, 25- "It's in the middle; it costs fifteen dollars a liter."

While neither Rosario nor Maria seemed particularly worried about the safety of silicon injections, Cecelia's former protege was. Since Cecelia's departure from town due to illness, Cher has been able to open a very small salon of her own and to become an informal mentor to a younger partner, Jessica. Cher, having worked closely with Cecelia for over three years was understandably distressed by what had happened:

Q- "Do you or would you ever use silicone injections?"

Cher, 24- "No. Me? No."

Q- "But their are many around here who do, correct?"

Cher, 24- "That is true, but it is dangerous and bad things can happen to you. I want to stay how I am."

Sex reassignment surgery is another point of contention among the travestís. For those who dream of having surgery, Europe is that far away land where they believe such dreams can be realized:

Q- "If you had enough money to have surgery to make your body completely like that of a female, is that something you would like to do?"

Jessica, 20- "In other countries?"

Q- "Sure, in which other countries?"

Jessica, 20- "For me, I would like Europe. I would like to go to Spain because my family has told me that if someone can take you then don't worry about money; we will pay for all of it."

Unlike Maria and Jessica who expressed the transexual desire for surgery, Cher and Rosario were against it:

Q- "If money was not a problem and you could have the very best surgeon in the world transform your body into that of a woman's, would you?"

Rosario, 25- "No, because I already have a boyfriend, and I have learned from him that changing my body too much could make me worse."

Q- "Do you mean because he likes you how you are, with the body parts that you now have?"

Rosario, 25- "Yes."

Cher, 24- "To have surgery would be too difficult. If my husband doesn't like me there are other boys!"

The following descriptions of a number of my research subjects will serve as a more detailed illustration of general appearance:

Maria stands about 5'4 and especially when she wears her hair down, truly appears to be a woman at first glance, even without makeup. However, her thick, long, wavy hair with its orangish highlights on top of black is usually twisted up loosely at the back of her head. Her eyes are dark and piercing, her nose angular. She is neither

thin nor overweight and her small breasts are stuffed. Her makeup, consists of dark red or pink lipstick outlined to make “cupid’s bow” points on the top lip, shimmery metallic eye shadow, and a minimal amount of mascara. She wears dangly or large hoop earrings. Her fingernails are grown long and often painted in elaborate two-toned patterns. Maria’s eyebrows are plucked into a feminine arch, with the tweezing of other facial hair being an almost daily ritual. Her typical clothing consists of tight blue jeans, and tight tank top or t-shirt, and flip-flops.

Her salon partner, Rosario, is very thin; she has a bulb nose and her meek eyes are set far apart on her round face. Her black, strait hair is thinning such that the top cannot be grown as long as the back, sometimes prompting her to wear a clip of hair extensions. She wears much heavier makeup than Maria. Her style of dress is very similar to Maria’s, the only major difference being the fact that she wears much smaller shirts or tube tops to reveal more skin.

At a rival salon, I met Juana. She is a tall, svelte and imposing figure, made all the more so by her spiky high heeled shoes. She is by far the most risqué dresser of all the travestís I met, typically wearing a brightly colored bra with no shirt and tight jean shorts. Her wispy, blonde hair outlines a smooth, feminine face (accomplished by waxing rather than tweezing). On one occasion, a fellow ethnographer spotted her at a street *fiesta* thrown for the returning fishermen. She was the center of attention, wearing her silicone breast moulds, complete with nipples, on the outside of her shirt. Once, Juana was the only travestí to show up at a neighborhood fiesta organized by the family with whom I was staying. She came and went alone, wearing short white shorts, heels, heavy make-up and a black bra as a shirt.

When I first met Cher she was an apprentice to Cecelia at the second most popular salon (after Maria's). Cher is fairly short with a thick mane of black curly hair. Her flat face with wide, pointed nose and almond eyes is indicative of her native ancestors that inhabited this region. Her outfit on the first day was comparable to her usual style; she was wearing a short red skirt, tight blue t-shirt, and flip-flops. Her makeup was plastered on: a thick layer of bright red lipstick, bright blue eye shadow covering the entire area from her eyelashes to her eyebrows, and, along with her mascara, she had drawn her eyeliner on in an almost ancient Egyptian style.

Her mentor, Cecelia, is both the oldest and consistently the most conservatively dressed:

"I don't look for trouble the way that some people do." Cecelia, 44

Cecelia wears minimal makeup, usually a bit of blue eyeliner and light lipstick. Her style of dress consists of pants or jeans with relatively loose fitting, busily patterned blouses. Cecelia is about 5'8 with very square and masculine facial features. Despite this, her face projects a tranquil self-confidence and almost sage wisdom.

In addition to dress and adornment, they move through space in an effeminate manner. Walking through the streets, they tend to glide, hips swaying, shoulders back. Like anyone else, they may be gregarious or reserved in terms of expression; either way, they speak in a slightly elevated register and employ smooth overtones to soften any masculine undertones. In all, except Cecilia, I observed frequent flirtatious behavior toward heterosexual males.

Yet even among the travestís there are differing attitudes towards performance in general and physical augmentation in particular. These differences measure the

degree to which an individual has moved along the binary passage, their relative position vis-a-vis the spheres of manhood and womanhood. The point here is that negotiating, finding one's comfortable position along this fluid continuum is not easy; it is often a matter of weighing risks and benefits.

So in the end, the essential elements of the travestís' feminine performance are linked to broader, cross-cultural notions of female beauty. Their style of dress, adornment, and make-up are consistent with generalized Western notions of what it means to be feminine. And their employment of silicone is anything but unique when one considers its widespread use in the Americas and Europe. For example, Kulick has documented silicone's integral role in the female performance of travestís living in Brazil:

"A sorte da gente é que a gente tem silicone. Our good fortune is that we have silicone. I have heard travestís affirm this with one another time and again. For travestís throughout Brazil, silicone is a miraculous product – some of them refer to it as 'revolutionary' – that makes it possible for them to acquire feminine bodily attributes that in many cases are, they say, more beautiful than those possessed by most women" (Kulick 1998: 66).

Being able to claim one's feminine beauty through a performance that rivals or potentially surpasses the beauty of "most women" is a goal to which the travestís of coastal Ecuador aspire. Their success in this endeavor moves them away from manhood and ever closer to womanhood. Yet, as will be elaborated upon, the travestís are both culturally and self-defined as homosexual men; the local perspective is that all homosexual men desire to be women (and likewise that all lesbians have an internal desire to be men). As a result of this presumed shared desire, there is a conflation of travestís with gay men who do not cross dress. So the local culture employs biology as an

anchor which not only keeps the travestís in a third gendered space within the binary passage, barring them entrance into the sphere of womanhood, but also limits ways in which they express and conceptual their own gender identity.

Historical Implications

Colonial hegemony partitioned gender as we know it in South America (Horswell 2005) (Lavrin 1989). As the walls of a superimposed partition are slammed down some people are, as a secondary consequence, left outside of those walls. They do not fit into the newly defined parameters for behavior. As a consequence, they are labeled “deviants” and are left in a cultural no-man’s-land (Foucault 1995 [1977]). However, as will be demonstrated with my research subjects, it is possible that this no-man’s-land, this spandrel, can be successfully taken advantage of.

The creation of this spandrel was made possible by the Spaniards’ swift proliferation of a new form of “truth” that was forged by Christian discourses (Foucault 2007 [1997]). Spanish explorers who ventured to the Americas brought with them a deeply rooted European worldview that was in marked contrast to the cosmologies of South America (Staller 2008). The European worldview, like all worldviews, was constructed and maintained, according to the works of Foucault, through technologies of power. Technologies are the ways in which discourses produce and proliferate knowledge. Knowledge is used to cement the social order, to define the normative and place it in opposition to the abnormal. These technologies are exercised by institutions, in social interactions, and by the individual upon herself, and they hold sway over members of society from birth to death (Foucault 1995 [1977]).

The technology of sex conveys institutional power directly upon the individual. The individual, in turn, maintains the existing power structure by validating its supremacy in one of two ways: If one conforms to the existing sexual norms, said norms are reinforced. If, on the other hand, one rails against them, one is placed into the category of “deviant.” However, the actions of the deviant, like those of the conformist, only serve to better define and strengthen the sexual hegemony (Foucault 1990 [1978]). Thus, power flows through the sexual medium from the top down through the arterial lines of hegemonic institutions like religion, government, education, and family, and from the bottom up through the sexual thoughts and actions of individuals.

Power is the mechanism by which technologies operate. Fundamentally, power means control over individuals, which can be augmented into control over groups. Thoughts and beliefs and the actions to which they lead are those elements that technologies instill in the individual and, by extension, the group. These elements are controlled and manipulated by power (Foucault 1980). And the touchstone of power is truth. What is the truth about how one should behave? Again, norms of sex and sexuality are key technologies through which the discourse of truth is conveyed.

Foucault divides the sexual history of the world into “two great procedures for producing the truth of sex” (Foucault 1990 [1978]: 57).

“[They are] on the one hand, the societies...which endowed themselves with an ars erotica. In this erotic art, truth is drawn from pleasure itself, understood as a practice and accumulated as experience; pleasure is not considered in relation to an absolute law of the permitted and the forbidden...it is experienced as pleasure, evaluated in terms of its intensity...In this way, there is formed a knowledge that must remain secret...because of the need to hold it in the greatest reserve, since, according to tradition, it would lose its effectiveness and its virtue by being divulged.” (Foucault 1990 [1978]: 57).

Foucault holds that since the Middle Ages Western Europe has produced the truth of sex through manifestly different means than have cultures endowed with *ars erotica*. They have done so through a deep-seated reliance, not upon secrecy, but upon its opposite: confession (Foucault 1990 [1978]).

“The obligation to confess is now relayed through so many different points, is so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us; on the contrary, it seems to us that truth, lodged in our most secret nature, “demands” only to surface; that if it fails to do so, this is because a constraint holds it in place...Confession frees.” (Foucault 1990 [1978]: 60).

Implicit within confession is the understanding that whatever the questioner, the authority, asks about should be something held in base secrecy because of its evil nature, else why has it the need to be confessed? “Confession is a psychological technique of persuasion, a subtle means of subverting cultural values, of eliciting acceptance, and achieving acculturation;” confession was a means to “transfer Christian concepts such as sin...into the Indian mind” (Lavrín 1989: 9).

The indigenous people of coastal Ecuador were practicing a form of *ars erotica* when the Spanish first encountered them. In response, Spanish authority soon banished portions of sexuality to the deep caverns of the soul, out of which base, carnal urges were to be plucked. They were to be dredged up out of the abysmal muck of perversion and in their exposure, to be thusly incinerated by the bright, pure light of truth.

The banished portions of sexuality were those practices that did not fit within the newly sanctioned norms for male and female behavior. These deviant behaviors were used to define deviant members of society. A principle deviant behavior for the Spanish was sodomy:

“Sodomy became one of the rhetorical armaments that the Spanish employed to justify the invasion and colonization of the Andes; it was a moral instrument wielded in conversion of indigenous colonial subjects...for the history of sodomy, its theological ‘invention,’ was not confined to the scholastic seminaries or the inquisitional courts of Europe; this elusive trope crossed the ocean and was employed in the pacification and evangelization of the indigenous peoples of the Americas. These tropes characterized as queer figures those Andeans who threatened the moral order of the old world.” (Horswell 2005: 68).

The Spanish used the sodomy trope not only as a means for justifying violent colonization but also as an Old World rhetorical device for framing their observations. Accordingly, their encounters with indigenous populations were viewed and recorded through the lens of Christianity. Some of the following accounts will illustrate how rhetoric contributed to colonial transculturation.

“And in other regards for the devil to have them in his chains of sin, it is accurately maintained that in the oracles and temples where they were given answers to their questions, it was assumed that it was necessary for this service that some boys be at the temples from a young age, so that at certain times during the sacrifices and holy feasts, the lord and other principles could carry out the damned sin of sodomy. And so that you understand what you are reading, how some among them still maintain this diabolical ritual: I will narrate a story that was given to me in the city of Reyes by Friar Domingo de Santo Tomás, which I have in my power and goes like this:

... And that is that each temple or primary adoratorio has one or two men, or more, according to the idol. They have been dressed as women since they were little boys, and they speak as such; and in their treatment, clothes, and everything else they imitate women. These men engage in carnal union as a sign of sanctity and religion, during their feast and holy days, especially with the lords and other principles. I know of this because I have punished two. Ones which, when I told them of the evil they were committing and the ugliness of the sin they were doing, answered that they were not at fault, because since the moment of their birth they had been placed there by their caciques, to use them in this damned and horrendous (nefando) vice, and to be the priests and keepers of the temple.” (Cieza De León 1986[1553]: 199-200 quoted in Benavides 2002: 74).

The sentiments expressed in this ethnohistorical account, or *crónica*, are typical of those Spanish explorers who found themselves confronted with New World cultures

whose ars erotica fully accepted behavior that their own normative discourses shunned. In addition to the above description of institutionalized transvestites along the coast of northern Peru, the coastal region of Ecuador also had “homosexual harem(s) of young male religious/sexual servants” (Benevides 2002: 71): the *enchaquirados*.

Contact between northern coastal Peru and Manabí has been archaeologically established in terms of the Spondylus trade. Spondylus shells harvested along Ecuador’s coast, as well as on La Plata Island, were an integral part of the ceremonies led by Moche Moon priestesses in which “the ritual bleeding of bound males, captured in combat, and the drinking of their blood” took place (Cordy-Collins 2001: 35). Interestingly, evidence from the period of Moche transition into the Lambayeque tradition suggests a “hybridization” of feminine and masculine elements in which new Moche priests incorporated key components, borrowed from the earlier priestesses’, into their own ceremonial attire (2001: 47), demonstrating yet another third gendered performativity.

The degree to which gender subjectivities in coastal Peru and Ecuador may have influenced each other is beyond the scope of this thesis. The point is that third gender subjectivities existed in the broader region and tended to be associated with ritual and the elite. The *enchaquirados* were so named for the valuable shell beads, or *chaquiras*, with which they were heavily adorned (Benevides 2002).

“They had red shells like the ones they have in chaquiras id est sartales, like the ones in Canary Islands that are sold to the King of Portugal for the rescue of Guinea: and for this the Indians give all their gold and silver and clothes that they bring as ransom” (Fernández de Oviedo 1959[1535], IV: 122 *quoted in* Benevides 2002: 75).

These young men served at the pleasure of the powerful lords of the Monteño-Huancavilcas cultures.

“Very little is known about these young men, although they hardly seem to have been sexual transgressors and rather, seem to have been quite integrated to normative society. Similar religious structures of young boys serving in temples and engaging in ritualized homosexuality are also described in other parts of the Americas, both in Central Peru, and Mesoamerica” (Benevides 2002: 75).

It is likely that they were highly esteemed not only because of they were given *chaquiras*, but also because they were often buried with their lord and his wives (2002).

However, the sodomy trope made the enchaquirados’ same-sex erotic practices a target for Spanish debasement of coastal cultures. An account from Ruiz de Arce is a case in point. He describes the people of the Ecuadorian coast as having a ruler who was a woman. Believing feminine power to be a corrupting force upon masculinity, he looks with at it with distain and, through his narrative, links it to sodomy (Horswell 2005): “These ruinous people are all sodomites. There is not a chief among them who does not carry with him four or five gallant pages. He keeps them as concubines” (Ruiz de Arce 1545 *quoted in* Horswell 2005:70).

The pre-Colombian history of ritualized same-sex erotic practices in Manabí is bolstered by accounts of the “Giants of Manta.” “There are widely divergent traditions to the effect that the country was at one time occupied by a race of giants” (Holmes 1908: 123). It seems that the origin for this myth spring from two archaeological sources: the bones of extinct mastodons and ancient wells that had long since been abandoned at the time of European contact.

“It is recorded by the Spanish chroniclers that the lack of fresh water in the arid areas of Manabí was overcome by the ancient inhabitants by digging wells, which were sunk in the surface of the living rock to a surprising depth...The natives on the arrival of the Spanish attributed these wells to the mythical giants of former times.” (Holmes 1908: 124).

Such wells later fed into the local mythos of the giants; they were the footprints of the giants. The myth goes that giants arrived “from the south in large rafts, but since they had not brought women with them, they died out” (Cobo 1983[1653]: 95 *quoted in* Benavides 2002: 78). Before dying out due to lack of progeny, the giants did find an outlet for their sexual desire in what is described as a sort of situational homosexuality.

“Some years having passed and these giants still being in these parts: since they did not have women: and the Indian women did not fit them because of their size, or because it was a common vice among them by council and support of the devil himself, they used with one another the (nefando) sin of sodomy, so horrendous and of grave consequences; which they used and carried out publicly and in the open, without fear of God and very little shame of themselves. And all the Indians (naturals) stated that God our Lord, not being pleased to ignore such horrible sin, sent them a punishment in accordance with the ugliness of the sin.” (Cieza de León 1971[1553]: 206 *quoted in* Benevides 2004: 130).

Benavides, I believe quite accurately, characterizes the latter portion of the above quote, and others like it from the Spanish chronicles, as being couched in culture bound notions of divine biblical retribution (Benevides 2002). Horswell (2005), however, goes beyond acknowledging the evident point that the chroniclers’ accounts were culture bound; he points out the importance of attempting to understand what the myth meant for the locals of Puerto Viejo. In this effort, he cites Jonathan Goldberg’s close reading of the myth:

“Is this story about native tradition one that the natives tell about the Spaniards, whose concepts have forever altered the native understanding of their own myths and practices? Or is it a story that the Spaniards tell as if it were a native account, in order to produce ‘good’ Indians who ‘properly’ abominate sodomy? Or is it a story that the natives tell to the Spaniards as if it were traditional, accommodating their beliefs to Spanish ones, but keeping in reserve their own story under the cover of this acceptable one?” (Goldberg 1991: 50).

The documentation of the deep wells, along with a Pan-American trope of myths about giants, and many similar *crónicas* subsequent to that of Cieza de León all suggest that the origin of myth was indeed indigenous (Horswell).

“The statement that the giants came from the sea to the Andes could be a reference to giants from other parts of the Americas, perhaps the native’ strategy to displace on outsiders rather than on their own culture what, with the arrival of the Spaniards, had become a dangerous sexual practice due to the public punishments inflicted upon practitioners” (Horswell 2005: 96).

Yet, if the divine retribution aspect of the Spaniards’ accounts is removed, given that the natives openly practiced sodomy at the time of contact, then it becomes more likely that the myth grew out of pre-Columbian conquest politics (Horswell). “If the natives did tell a story of invading giants, their principal grievance was more likely the intruders’ consumption of resources than their sexual behavior...” (96). The chronicles of Gutiérrez de Santa Clara (1580) suggest that a rivalry between the locals of Puerto Viejo and the Inca empire may have produced the myth. His account holds that the locals sent for help from the Incas in fending off the giants. Being then banished to the Santa Elena peninsula, the giants could not find fresh water, and thus another accounting for the deep wells is established (Horswell).

“These wicked ones, who found themselves so long without women, and the devil, who tricked them and blinded them and distracted them from natural reason, had a huge drunken party in which they began to use the nefarious sin; and they were in this state of diabolical vice for so many years that they no longer were ashamed of it and they practiced it publicly. The natives, when they learned that these luciferous Indians used this evil sin, said that they were dogs and brutish animals or that they were demons who had come to this world in the figure of men” (Gutiérrez de Santa Clara 1963[1580]: 258-259 *quoted in* Horswell 2005: 99).

On the other side of the coin, because the Manta region successfully fought off Inca expansion, the giants could have been used by the Inca (who may have borrowed

from Spanish colonial discourse), as an excuse to “establish the Other as monstrous” (97). The point here is that the process of transculturation is so complete, especially along the coast, that attempting to disambiguate the pre-Columbian history of the region’s gender culture is an extremely complex task. Given this fact, it is no wonder that, as Benevides points out, modern day Guayaquilians have been cut off from their sexual past by the intrusion of Spanish hegemony (2002). Likewise, the travestís of Puerto Lopez are largely unaware of *enchaquirados* or the “Giants of Manta.” They have been cut off from the pre-Columbian past by colonial discourses based on Catholic tropes of sin that comes with deviating from the approved-of norms for behavior. The fact that my research subjects are mestizo also contributes to their historical discontinuity. Yet, their present culture and social structure is, nonetheless, a product of ongoing discourses that grew out of the transculturation of coastal indigenous and colonial cultures.

CHAPTER 3: NEGOTIATION AND MAINTENANCE OF SOCIAL SPACE

Framework of the Social Space

In order to examine the nature of the binary passage, let us examine for a moment to the Andean concept of *tinkuy*. The term, *tinkuy*, has its origin in the Andean ritual processes of the pre-Columbian Quechua. *Tinkuy* is the “joining together of complementary opposites through a process of ritual mediation” (Horswell 2005: 17). Horswell uses this concept to “explain how the presence of third gender, which invoked the androgynous primordial whole, was ritually vital in order to bring gendered opposites into harmony and symmetry in different ceremonial contexts” (17). As ritual is a microcosmic expression of worldview, so was the role of *tinkuy* present in daily negotiations and cross-generational reproductions of Quechuan “gender culture” (Horswell 2005: 19). Though similarities in third gender performativity existed as a Pan-American phenomenon, cultural specificity must be taken into account. Thus, it must be noted that the *tinkuy* ritual is uniquely Quechuan. Nonetheless, it seems that an analogy can be drawn here: is it possible that the coastal Ecuadorian travestís also perform a similar function in the perpetuation of a cohesive gender culture? Their unique performance seems to illustrate primordial harmony between the genders while at the same time helping to maintain them as separate binary entities. The travestís are undoubtedly an integral part of the region’s gender culture.

I would like to use the image of this primordial whole to create a visualization of my theoretical framework as it relates to the travestís' lives, social space, and impact upon the culturally constructed gender binary. First, let us imagine the primordial gender whole as a single cell. Now that cell begins to divide, to create the gender binary. As the division takes place, let us imagine a gradual process, one in which manhood and womanhood pull apart and begin to become distinct spheres; as this takes place, the membrane surrounding them both becomes narrow and elongated at the point of separation. Manhood and womanhood are now two distinct spheres, joined by a membrane that has its origin in the primordial whole. To exist outside of womanhood or manhood is to exist somewhere along the passageway that the membrane has formed between the two. Here, in this binary passage, live the travestís, perhaps operating the tinkuy, allowing for harmony within and between manhood and womanhood.

Due to their biological sex at birth, my subjects all started life within the sphere of manhood, how is it that they traversed the threshold into the binary passage? What initiated and maintained their journey out of manhood and towards womanhood? This can be explained within the broad context of a theoretical framework built upon the commonalities in the life histories of my research subjects; their individual stories will be subsequently elaborated upon.

The boy who exercises his agency to accept his inner desires rather than attempting to hide or deny them, is forced with all haste away from manhood. This is broadly evidenced in most travestís' fathers' and often the brothers' immediate rejection of the boy. In this fashion, he is pushed away from manhood while, at the same time, he is pulled toward womanhood, reaffirming the culture's binary gender construction.

He has, by this time, begun dressing, to varying degrees, in female clothing and adornment, applying makeup, and growing fingernails and hair long (an act that pre-teen or teenage boys often use to expose “who they really are” to their families). He has already decided on a female name, and when he finds “friends like myself” with whom to live and work, he has, through his own agency, officially become a “she.” From that point on, all friends, associates, and general members of society refer to her using female pronouns and her female name. Of those people with whom they associate, it may be only their family members who continue to refer to a travestí with male pronouns and by their birth name. For example, Maria’s mother told me:

“I will always love him because he is my son.” Beatriz, 53

Thus, their actions pull them out of manhood and towards the other side of the binary: womanhood. This process is initiated as a function of their own agency, to be sure, as is demonstrated in their performance of gender. Yet, a strong tail wind from the sphere of manhood hurries them along. This discursive gale often starts with a shove of rejection from the father; the tail wind maintains its force through subsequent and continuous discourses of male desire. Teenage boys and men actively push them away from manhood by staking claim to the masculine penetrating role during intercourse. Likewise, the travestí often satisfies her desire by laying claim to the receptive role. Here again, in the intimacies of sexual desire, can we see how discursive action pushes the travestí away from manhood and pulls her down the binary passage toward womanhood. Here it must be acknowledged that male desire, like female desire, is complex. Which means that there are cases of men desiring penetration *from* travestís (Prieur 1998, Kulick

1998). As will be later elaborated upon, penetrating versus receptive roles are typically assigned corresponding sexuality labels.

We must now examine how travestís are able to live in the binary passage. Again, let us look toward a visual image. Imagine now being within the sphere of manhood and looking out into the binary passage. Once one passes the threshold of manhood and steps into the passage, what does it look like? What cultural elements buttress this space? Where does it lead? Again, for the sake of visualization, it is a long corridor or passageway heading toward the opposite sphere, ending at the threshold of womanhood (This model could feasibly apply to people traversing the passage in the opposite direction, from womanhood toward manhood, although that is beyond the scope of the current research). The passage is kept open through the buttressing spokes of various intertwined elements, all serving to maintain the passage for two mutually-dependant reasons: 1) To prevent the essential link between manhood and womanhood from being severed; and 2) to allow the binary gender spheres to maintain their integrity by providing a separate space for those elements that do not neatly fit into one or the other of the spheres. The effects of the buttressing, intertwined elements upon their position within the binary passage are as follows: The sexual desire of travestís' and men, along with the travestís performance, pushes them away from manhood and pulls them toward womanhood. Mother's love and economy play a mediating, neutral role, neither pushing nor pulling them along the passage toward womanhood, but rather legitimizing their choice of performed existence.

Travestís measure each other's success based on how far their performance has pulled them toward the sphere of womanhood. This is a source for much good-natured

rivalry and teasing amongst friends, and not-so-good-natured put-downs of non-friends (of both women and travestís).

“Look at her! Her hair looks like a man’s on one side and a woman’s on the other!” Maria, 35

“At least part of her looks like a woman!” Amy, 26

“(Laughing, jokingly) My hair is much better than yours; it doesn’t fall out so much!” Maria, 35

Yet this contest only gets them so far. Although their performance may have pulled them to the very threshold of womanhood, the travestí is ultimately denied entry. As they move along the passage, closer and closer to the sphere of womanhood, she is able to see her target more and more clearly, and is even, by virtue of peering directly into the sphere, better able to perform her desired gender. Yet, in this region of Ecuador, the threshold remains impermeable to her who was once “he.” Thus, even if she harbors the transsexual desire of becoming a woman, she must remain by default a third gender, which her culture defines as a homosexual male with the soul of a female.

By looking more closely at the imaginaries of male homosexuality and of womanhood, it becomes clear that the travestí remains linked to manhood via the tether of homosexuality no matter how expertly she performs the female gender, no matter how much progress along the passage she makes. In an interview I conducted with a resident of Salango, thirty-two year old Luis, he stated:

“Travestís are people just like anyone else...the only difference is that they have a certain inclination to be like women. The most important thing is that they start liking men.” Luis, 32

Luis was expressing a regionally ubiquitous opinion, steeped in the cultural hegemony of binary discourse, that once a person starts “liking men” feminine qualities must be attributed to them, e.g., they must have the soul of a woman, and therefore, to be true to

themselves they should engage in a feminine performance of gender. While there are undoubtedly homosexual men who don't consider themselves feminine, there was nevertheless a consistent conflation of homosexuality with effeminacy coming from men, women, and travestís alike in rural Manabí. Throughout the interview with Luis he made sure to emphasize the point that travestís are only "simulating" women. He insisted that no matter how hard they try they would never be anything more than a "travestí" or a "maricon," two terms that Luis used interchangeably. Maricon connotes both homosexuality and effeminacy (Carrier 1995). Another young man of the same village, Jorge, was a friend of one my subjects, Rosario, when she was a boy. While we talked, the grimace on his face and his body language made it obvious that he was repulsed by the idea of someone appearing to be a woman:

"...when deep down inside of myself I know that they are really a man."
Jorge, 20

Thus, by virtue of her performance, the travestí is given a long rope but one just short enough to deny her entry into womanhood. So, ethnographic evidence suggests that the travestís' gender-specific identity is, in the eyes of the hegemonic heterosexual community, relegated to a separate, third space.

Now let us look at the problem from the opposite side of the impermeable membrane of womanhood; here she is also denied. She is denied by the very essence of womanhood, which, in this region, at its most culturally essential, is: motherhood. The travestí is no one's mother; she cannot fulfill the sacred role of giving birth. Nor is it apparent that she has any desire to do so.

One day, Maria was holding an upstairs neighbor boy of about 2 years in her lap. Both she and Rosario were having a great time playing with him. At one point Maria was sitting next to me with him stretched across her lap on his back. She would rub her face in his belly to tickle him, she laughing as hard as the little boy each time, and never tiring of the little game, only stopping to look in his face and smile lovingly at him. This prompted me to ask her if she ever wished she could have children of her own, even to adopt them. She was clearly bemused by the question and gave me a laughing, wide-eyed “No!” Another travestí, Jessica, expressed similar amusement at the notion of motherhood, or parenthood in general:

*Q- “In the future, would you like to have children?”
Jessica, 20 “Children? Me? What I want is to have fun!”*

So, as it is with so many discourses, we are often unaware of our own contribution to them. In this case, Maria’s and Jessica’s lack of desire for children helped undermine their desire for womanhood, relegating their performance to the space within the passage. Maria had previously expressed her desire for her body to more closely match her “*alma feminino*.” In keeping with this line of reasoning, it is perhaps not surprising that Maria expressed to me a life-long dream to move to another country. At first she was hesitant to say where she wanted to go:

*Q- “But don’t you have some idea?”
Maria, 35- “Yes, to Florida. I have a friend in Orlando.”*

Her dream was motivated by a desire to escape the confines of her social space; she wanted to make more money, to have a bigger and better salon. Indeed Maria’s dream was linked to vague ideas of improving her life. But her personal notion of the grass being greener surely applied to more than the economics of her salon but to her life in

general. Thus, whether or not she fully realized it, Maria may have been dreaming about an alternate route to womanhood as well, one in which the traditional supports of her social space might be sacrificed for a chance to perhaps encounter a more permeable membrane into the realm of womanhood. For, their imaginary does include an understanding that bigger cities like Quito and, by extension, far away countries like America or those of Western Europe, afford a greater opportunity for them to realize their femininity, in terms of surgeries. Likewise, such a move would arguably afford them the chance of attaining a culturally recognized transsexual/transgender status, as opposed to being confined by local discourses of homosexuality.

CHAPTER 4: GENDER AND SEXUALITY

This thesis holds that the culturally constructed gender binary draws travestís toward femininity while ultimately excluding them from womanhood. What are at issue here are the expected roles of men and women of rural Manabí. And more precisely, what is it about their femininity and masculinity that is exclusive? Finding these elements of exclusivity will reveal why the males who emulate women can never (in the eyes of the women and in the eyes of the men) be them. They will provide the key to the travestís’ “otherness” and show that they are only allowed free reign over the trajectory of their lives within the narrow passage between the gender binary. Thus, we must first attempt to understand the predominant discourses of the binary before determining the nature of the social space between them.

Femininity and Women’s Roles

Women hold a special significance for the coastal Ecuadorian travestí. They are not only their models for beauty and performance, but they are something even more central to the travestís’ ability to live and function in society. Indeed, at the heart of their acceptance by society is the first key cultural element of support: their experience of mother’s love. This love functions as a conduit for other pillars of tolerance to emerge outside of the travestí community itself.

Indeed, the powerful networking potential of women has for many decades been called upon by no less than the Ecuadorian government. In fact, post WWII development efforts began to employ women's "traditional" roles as "community members, mothers, and citizens" (Lind 2005: 2). Here it must be recognized that the "traditional" roles of women in Ecuador reach far beyond the domestic sphere (Gauderman 2003). They are in fact active players in local economies, politics, and community organization (Hamilton 1998). So it is not surprising that a neoliberal economic restructuring policy, resulting from a financial crisis in the 1980s, was deployed at the grassroots level for which women's household and community work became the foundation (Lind 2005). Specifically, there are three roles women play in community development as defined by Moser (1989, 1993): "reproductive (child care, household management), productive (paid labor, in either the informal or the formal sector), and community management (participation in safety networks, community associations, local political or decision-making processes)" (Lind 2005: 56). "In essence, these women 'mothered' the Ecuadorian foreign debt crisis through their individual and collective survival strategies" (Lind 2005: 3).

In similar fashion, mothers have maintained the social space for their children through the creation of extended networks of tolerance that emanate through the family (if their travestí sons ever reconcile with their fathers and/or brothers, it is at the behest of their mothers) and often to friends of the family. Not unlike the potential for their grassroots economic and political activity, just a few of these imperfect and incomplete networks resonating from a few mothers can undoubtedly aid in the creation of a general atmosphere of tolerance for travestís. They offer their unconditional love and support,

and by letting travestís live as they please, their mothers also allow them to move toward the sphere of womanhood. Yet it should be noted that this acceptance factor is sometimes mediated by the mother's continued use of male terminology when referencing her child.

Take the example of Maria's mother. I first met her when she showed up at the salon one early afternoon. With Maria being busy with her usual haircuts, her mother introduced herself. She was in her fifties; heavy-set and missing all of her front teeth. Her brown hair was pulled back into a ponytail, and she was wearing a yellow skirt, large white t-shirt, and flat sandals. She lives in the nearby village of Rio Chico with Maria's father and youngest brother.

Her demeanor was warm and friendly as she sat down beside me with a smile and patted me on the knee. I asked her what she thought of Maria's life, and throughout her discussion with me, she only referred to Maria as a "him," never as a "her":

"He is my son, and he likes to work hard. What is most important is for him to progress in life; he likes his work now, and he is also a very good cook"
Beatriz, 53

Throughout the conversation, she maintained an air of melancholy approval toward her son. Accordingly, Maria's mom seemed hesitant to say anything negative or to talk about the past. But when I asked her specifically if it had been difficult for her when Maria was younger, her eyes became distant and sad, and she admitted that:

"It was difficult for me too because a mother always suffers for her children." *Beatriz, 53*

It was clear that it was Maria's father who had exacerbated the suffering. When recalling her husband's behavior, her tone became angry:

“We used to argue all the time about it; he was a bruto!” Beatriz, 53

Her mother ended on a positive note, saying that eventually they had stopped arguing:

“Now her dad loves him (Maria) very much.” Beatriz, 53

Q- “Does it sometimes bother you that your mother still talks about you using ‘he’?”

Maria, 35- “No.”

Q- “But if others do that, then you don’t like it?”

Maria, 35- “It depends on who they are; if it is my family then no, it doesn’t bother me.”

Q- “What name does your mother call you?”

Jessica, 20- “She calls me Rogelio.”

Q- “And do you wish her to call you Jessica?”

Jessica, 20- “I don’t know; it’s ok because she is my mother.”

Taking this into account, it could be argued that mothers, while offering indispensable support to the social space within the binary passage are nevertheless a neutral force when it comes to progression *along* passage since their typical use of male pronouns draws travestís back toward the sphere of manhood.

Thus, we find two distinct roles for women in relation to travestís: mother and model. The two roles act as different and sometimes opposing forces within the culture’s binary framework. On the one hand, aspiring to the female form and engaging in feminine performance draws the travestís closer to the sphere of womanhood. Models for this performative discourse come in many forms, including female friends and relations, the most feminine and “passable” of their fellow travestís, and of course the popular images of mass media:

“I want to get liposuction so that I can look like Barbie.” Rosario, 24

On the other hand, essentialized notions of motherhood have the opposite effect. This is because from the travestís’ perspective, the role of mother is not a viable model for

personal womanhood. While they certainly love, respect, and help their mothers as much as they are able, they do not model their lives after them in the same fashion that most daughters do. It is in no way apparent that they live their lives with aspirations of motherhood. And their culture sees this as inherently non-woman. In other words, either their lack of ability or perhaps their lack of desire to be mothers is a strong tether pulling them back toward the sphere of manhood from whence they originally emerged.

Masculinity and Machismo

While the exclusivity of the normative woman is motherhood and its related social functions, the exclusivity of the normative man is machismo and its related social functions. Masculinity in coastal Ecuador is expressed with a palpable air of *machismo*. Men are expected to be fishermen, farmers, perhaps to be employed in the tourism trade, or some combination thereof. Many a teenage boy in Puerto Lopez, with all the laid back entrepreneurship that the crashing sea waves can inspire, has taken to the taximoto business. The streets are packed with teenagers and young men tearing along and kicking up dust on myriad multi-colored motorcycles, whose back ends have been converted into covered passenger benches. The vehicles are christened with names like “*Rapido y Furioso*.” What is important here in relation to *machista* discourse is that it is exclusionary to the travestí; being macho is exclusive to “real men.”

Roger Lancaster (1992: 19), in his study of Nicaragua, tells us that “machismo is resilient because it constitutes not simply a form of ‘consciousness’, not ‘ideology’ in the classical understanding of the concept, but a field of productive relations” (*quoted in* Gutmann 1996: 222). This field of productive relations among men serves as a

reaffirming echo chamber of desire. While notions of what constitute machismo are based on regional, historic, and even personal interpretations, it can nevertheless be determined that machismo is created and recreated through performance, grounded in the public, “homosocial” relations of men. Guayaquil, Ecuador’s largest city, is located four hours south of Puerto Lopez.

“Homosociality in that city is constituted by a well-defined set of practices, including cross-naming (the deployment of nicknames with female connotations), the impromptu performance of humorous routines involving the inversion of heterosexual positions, and, finally a grandiloquent manner in referring to body parts laden with sexual meanings.” (Andrade 2003: 289).

It is particularly pertinent to this study that the physical body is the

“central, recurring theme in many if not most meanings of machismo...This theme manifests itself in beatings, sexual episodes, alcohol consumption, daredevil antics, and the not-so-simple problem of defining the categories of ‘men’ and ‘women.’ Regardless of how confusing gender identities may seem, they usually share relations of mutual dependence with these somatic realms.” (Gutmann 1996: 222-223).

The “mutual dependence” of gender identities with “somatic realms” hints at the biologically deterministic viewpoint of the Manabí region that leads to travestís being categorized as homosexual men. What are most important with regard to the somatic realms in terms of masculinity are their associated actions, the performance of which determines the boundaries of sexuality more so than do the objects upon which the acts are performed. In other words, labels of heterosexual versus homosexual are not applied based wholly on the genitalia of one’s partner, but rather on the action one performs, whether one is penetrated or is the penetrator (Carrier 1995) (Irwin 2003).

Thus, the male penetrator is considered to be heterosexual even when the object of his action is a male travestí (Whitman and Mathy 1986). In keeping with this line of

reasoning, American notions of homosexual/heterosexual quickly break down. In fact, in her study of transvestites in Mexico City, Annick Prieur explains that even *bisexuales* are not necessarily men who have sex with both men and women, but can be men who perform the alternating roles of both penetrator and the penetrated (1998). Likewise, the term “*la prostitucion heterosexual* [can be] used to designate the prostitution of young boys who stick to the active role with their male customers” (Prieur 1998: 26). Thus, sexuality must be recognized as culturally variant and individually complex. Given the Latin American tendency to determine sexuality based upon one’s role in the sex act being performed, rather than upon the biological sex of one’s partner, the sexuality of travestís and their partners becomes complicated. Within this framework, in theory, it is possible that a travestí engaging in intercourse with the same partner could be heterosexual one day and homosexual the next, making her and her partner, overall, bisexuals. Nevertheless, my subjects generally identify as homosexuals and identify their partners as heterosexuals who usually go on to marry women.

Q- “What do you prefer to be called? A woman, a travestí?”

Cecelia, 44- “I am gay, a homosexual.”

Q- “What happened to Ernesto?”

Rosario, 25- “He is married.”

Q- “Oh, but there are a lot of other chicos, right?”

Rosario, 25- “(laughing) Yes, there are a lot!”

Q- “Have other boyfriends of yours gotten married to women?”

Rosario, 25- “Yes, most of them have.”

Q- “So you don’t think that they are gay?”

Rosario, 25- “Definitely (por supuesto) no!”

Maria, 35 - “(laughing from across the room) To me it seems their wives don’t think that!”

In fact, by engaging in sexual activity with a travestí, a Latin American man may very well be reaffirming *machista* hegemony. For, by doing so, the man is ensuring that

the object of his desire, the homosexual, is not a “real” man; the homosexual is positioned outside of the sphere of manhood in order to maintain its integrity. Here we can perhaps see the source of travestís, as a third gender, being conflated with gay men in general. In Nicaragua, “Boasting of having penetrated a gay man frequently features in male talk, and indeed, can even enhance men’s manliness” (Lancaster 1992 *quoted in* Chant and Craske 2003). However, this notion is perhaps best qualified with the following quote:

“For an hombre to boast of fucking men, he must be perceived as having a substantial surplus balance in the Banco (Hembra) del Macho before he can publicly invest in this kind of Banco de Inversiones...at no time must the two accounts be equal, and he must loudly proclaim that her prefers women.” (V. Cervantes 1987, personal communication *quoted in* Murray 1995: 54-55).

Thus, “in everyday Latino conversation, claims to phallic supremacy over women coincide with ‘a constant attempt to force masculine rivals into the feminine role, in a never-ending quest to avoid adopting the role themselves’” (Murray 1995: 58). Here we see precisely how male sexual desire toward travestís is employed by the local culture as a way to reaffirm the binary by associating the travestís with a prescribed feminine role. For certainly, *machismo* is a powerful discourse helping to ensure that the travestís live their lives within the binary passage rather than within the sphere of manhood.

Travestís as a Third Gender

It is generally accepted that biology determines sex and that culture creates gender. However, it is true that a child’s biological sex can be ambiguous, hence the cross-cultural existence of intersexed individuals who, in the case of Western cultures,

are often surgically assigned a “proper” sex to fit into the culturally conceived gender binary (although I did not confirm any intersex travestís in Puerto Lopez, it is certainly possible that they may exist in the region).

“...intersex genital mutilation. IGM refers to cosmetic genital cutting that is performed solely to make intersex infants resemble normal males and females...it was not until the 1950s that IGM became a common pediatric practice. Prior to that, unless infants were born with genital deformities that caused ongoing pain or endangered their health, they were left alone. Today, according to Fausto-Sterling, about 1,000 infants are surgically altered for cosmetic reasons each year in the U.S.” (Wilchins 2004: 74).

However, queer theory holds that because culture is responsible for gender, it should not have to be restricted to just two categories. The process of queering therefore removes gender from its linear association with the body’s biological sex. “This is perhaps most apparent in Butler’s queering of the heteronormative model of identity in which gender follows from sex...” (Sullivan 2003: 86). It is certainly true that culture can be transcendental, its creation of gender can and often does strain the tethers of biology. In addition to the travestís of Manabí, this also applies to many cultures across time and space. This section illustrates three that are representative of cultural variation among alternative genders: the *hijras* of India, the Native American “two-spirit” (Bolin 1996), and the *fa’afafine* of Samoa .

Unlike the travestís, many institutionalized third genders are legitimized through some type of spiritual sanction. This is true in the case of the hijras and their spiritual connection to Hindu deities:

“The central feature of their culture is their devotion to Bahuchara Mata, one of the many Mother Goddesses worshipped all over India, for whom emasculation is carried out. This identification with the Mother Goddess is the source both of the hijras’ claim for their special place in Indian society and the traditional belief in their power to confer blessings on male infants” (Nanda 1999: 226).

With regard to castration, “Hijras call this emasculation operation *nirvan*, defined in Hinduism as liberation from finite human consciousness and the dawn of higher consciousness” (Nanda 1994: 384). Intersexed infants are traditionally believed to be destined to become hijra. However, many hijras were not born with ambiguous genitalia, but rather feel that they are unable to fulfill the masculine gender role of becoming a father and therefore become hijra (Nanda 1994).

Although the travestís lack a spiritually founded gender role such as the hijras’, they do have much in common with them.

“Individual hijras also speak of themselves as being ‘separate’, being ‘neither man nor woman’ ...in their claimed inability and lack of desire to engage in the sexual act as men with women, a consequence of their claimed biological intersexuality and their subsequent castration. Thus hijras are unable to reproduce children, especially sons, an essential element in the Hindu concept of the normal, masculine role for males”(Nanda 1999:227).

Both travestís and hijras are betwixt and between, neither man nor woman. Likewise, many travestís across Latin America and in Ecuador’s larger cities engage in prostitution, as do hijras (Nanda 1999). (Though a couple of vague comments from non-travestí informants conveyed that a few in Puerto Lopez might engage in prostitution, I was unable to get any of my subjects to admit to this.) Though they are both third genders, the hijras’ positionality vis-à-vis the spheres of manhood and womanhood is arguably more static; in other words, once they attain hijra status, most are not attempting to actually become women. As Nanda suggests, “few make any real attempt to imitate or to ‘pass’ as women...it is not at all uncommon to see hijras in female clothing sporting several days’ growth of beard, or exposing hairy, muscular arms” (1999: 228). This is certainly not the case with the travestís whose performance is predicated on competition for who can be

the most “passable.” The fact that travestís do, in large part, attempt to visually conform with normative women may partially account for the relative level of integration of their sub-group within the community, which seems to surpass that of the hijras’ who tend to be publicly ridiculed for their appearance and behavior and even feared for their perceived spiritual power to curse individuals (Nanda 1999). The extent to which they were historically marginalized by mockery and fear was only exacerbated by the proliferation of colonially inspired discourses in which British disgust at the practice of emasculation in particular and the hijra institution in general was masked behind laws dedicated to their eradication (Nanda 1994). However, despite the incorporation of colonial discourses, the Indian cosmology has succeeded in maintaining a ritual, and by extension, a social space, for the hijras.

Many North American Indian tribes likewise had cosmologies that provided for third, and sometimes fourth, genders. Of the approximately 150 tribes in which male two-spirits were present, close to half provided a complimentary role for females (Roscoe 1994). While some tribes applied the same word to both the male and female version, others had distinctive names for each. This was the case for the Mohave tribe who called female initiates into berdache status, *hwame*, and their male counterparts, *alyha* (Martin and Voorhies 1975). In both cases, their style of dress tended towards a unique style different from the traditional clothes of either men or women (Roscoe 1994).

Evidence suggests that two-spirits’ gender was not liminal to the spheres of manhood and womanhood, but was held equal or, in tribes that employed a prestige system, even higher social status. Unlike the ridicule experienced by hijras as a group, and the exile of many travestís from their natal villages, Roscoe indicates that “if

berdaches were scorned, hated, or ridiculed by their tribespeople...it was likely for individual reasons and not a function of their status as berdaches” (1994: 336). Like travestis and hijras, the occupational economies of the two-spirits often crossed into the traditionally feminine, as they were well known for their engagement in domestic work and for the specialized production of crafts.

In an alternative to the long histories of both the two-spirit and the hijra, and the long, though perhaps discontinuous, presence of third genders along Ecuador’s coast, are the *fa’afafine* of Samoa. According to Mageo (1992) the *fa’afafine* represent a relatively recently constructed third gender role. They are transvested males who take on, usually English, female names and often provide entertainment at clubs and parties (Mageo 1992). Yet, there is no mention of anyone even approximating a *fa’afafine* in 19th century missionary writings. By the 1970s it is estimated that there were one or two per rural village (Schoeffel 1979). However, in recent years, owing to a combination of the forces of Christianity and increasing urbanization, the numbers of *fa’afafine* have proliferated (Mageo 1992). Mageo contends that rapid culture change created a new social space for *fa’afafines*. Specifically, this is a social space that was once held by virginal girls. A brief bit of history will suffice to explicate this notion.

Traditionally, a delegation of girls, or *aualuma*, hosted a delegation of boys, or *‘aumāga*, from a neighboring village. Entertainment ensued through an exchange of flirtatious teasing, or *ula*. Consummation of these flirtatious episodes was equivalent to marriage. However, with the imposition of Christian moral discourses a fundamental distinction was created between sexual intercourse and marriage, redefining girls’ flirtatiousness as debauchery.

Urbanization has further complicated the traditional role of unmarried girls. The historical rules of exogamy, which required all boys and girls from one's own village to be treated as "brothers" and "sisters," still permeates the lives of urban youth. For young urban males, then, just to be on the safe side, all strange girls are publicly treated as "sisters" (Mageo 1992).

Now it becomes possible to envision how the fa'afafine created a new third gender identity by reinventing the colonially marginalized remnants of a traditional role:

The desexualization of the role of the girl has left Samoans at a loss in circumstances calling for entertainment. Because girls must now be mamalu, not just in the presence of categorical brothers but in the presence of boys in general, they cannot take the lead in ula between the sexes. Fa'afafine fill this gap in modern Samoan social structure and appropriate girls' former responsibilities, thus defining themselves as stand-ins for bygone aualuma girls...Fa'afafine are thus tagged as a species of girl... (one who has) just been deflowered...However, in Samoan social theory, women desist from these extremes of behavior after the first experience. Fa'afafine do not (Mageo 1992: 454, 453, emphasis added).

Like the travestís, the fa'afafines' third gender status is not spiritually sanctioned. And, also like fa'afafines, travestís are commonly the objects of sexual desire for pre-marital young men. Their flirtatiousness is open and often exaggerated in comparison to that of pre-marital young women. This sexual desire is undoubtedly another key element in explaining why the travestís' third gender status is tolerated and even valued by some in the community. While the travestí meets the standard for a third gender, ethnographically, it remains unclear whether all are satisfied with their current gender-specific identity as travestís (evidenced in the transsexual desire of those who would like to travel to Europe to attain the status of woman). Additionally, in light of the local discourse on homosexuality, it should be noted that the travesties' tether to biological sex

still exists. Admittedly, this is also the case to varying degrees with other third genders. For example, even the historically ensconced, spiritually sanctioned hijras sometimes refer to themselves as “homosexuals” (Nanda 1999). An interesting parallel to the travestís are the *mak nyahs* of Malaysia, who in recent years took on the hegemony of confining homosexual discourse in an effort to define themselves as a unique group:

“The term ‘mak nyah’, which derives from mak (mother), was coined in 1987 by Malaysia’s male transsexuals in an attempt to define ourselves. Our attempt at self-definition emerged from two streams: first, a desire to differentiate ourselves from gay men, transvestites, cross-dressers, drag queens, and other ‘sexual minorities’, with whom all those who are not heterosexual are automatically lumped; and, second, because we also wanted to define ourselves from a vantage point of dignity rather than from the position of derogation in which Malaysian society had located us, with names such as bapok, darai, pondan and bantut, all of which mean ‘men who are effeminate’ ...most mak nyahs who live in conditions of economic marginalization cannot afford to have sex change operations. Our mak nyah identity is fluid enough to encompass the diversities of gender and sexuality...About 70 percent of mak nyahs are Malay, and the majority of us are Muslim...our lives are circumscribed by religion, law and society, all of which uphold the male/female binaries of gender” (Slamah 2005: 99-100).

The continued hegemony of homosexual discourse in the lives of the travestís’ is elaborated upon in the next section. Even though the terms “gay” or “homosexual” connote a connection to her biological maleness, it is the travestí’s “female soul” that, nevertheless, allows her to transcend the typical gender associated with males and to exist in a different gendered space.

Homosexuality and the Binary

The Latin American concept of homosexual versus heterosexual identities was a source of some frustration for the first weeks of my initial research. The confusion began as I attempted to determine how the travestís categorized themselves. I found that the

travestís of Puerto Lopez shy away from any sort of label and that they did not understand my questions when I asked them what they preferred to be called as a group. I would return to the field with follow up questions that I believed conveyed the question in as simple and clear a manner as possible but would continually get answers to questions I did not ask or confused looks. This all culminated into what (if not for my own cultural bias) should have been an obvious realization. This realization was punctuated by my encounter with *Torta*.

The encounter happened during one of many days of observation at Maria's salon. Maria, Rosario, and I had just returned from lunch and a shopping trip for new mirrors for the salon, when in slunk a thin, wide-eyed man. He appeared to be in his late thirties and had the effeminate mannerisms that Americans would associate with an openly gay man. Maria introduced *Torta* to me as a good friend of hers. He gave me a dark, wide-eyed, but not unfriendly glare, slung himself into a lounging position in the hammock with one arm behind his head and gently offered me his other hand. *Torta* was wearing men's khaki pants, matching sweatshirt, had a thick goatee, and his thinning hair was cut short. Maria began telling me about him, how long they had known each other, and that he has sung in the church choir for ten years. I began to ask a question and used the pronoun "*el*" in referring to *Torta*. Maria, suddenly taking on a professorial tone, corrected me by saying that he is in fact "*como yo*," that he is not in reality a "he" but a "she" and should be referred to as "*ella*." I was surprised and more than a little confused as one of my own cultural constructs had just been shattered. He was clearly an effeminate homosexual male who did not cross dress. Yet he and Maria insisted that they were "the same." Again, I was confronted with the lack of distinction between what I had

assumed to be relatively distinct groups: non-cross-dressing gay men and transgendered transvestites. Thus, the unexpected encounter with Torta revealed the piece of the puzzle that I had been missing. I later found out that the reason Torta does not dress in women's clothes is because of his heavy involvement with the church. This encounter was further evidence for the underlying cultural assumption that gay men have a desire to be women (Torta's station in life was simply preventing its full expression).

If you ask travestís about themselves, they will say that they are a "homosexual" or "gay," and if you ask any man or woman about travestís, they will say that they are "homosexuals." The consensus across the board is that they cannot ever be transformed into straight women. Thus, if you ask a woman, man, or travestí if there is a difference between a homosexual who dresses as a man and a travestí, they will not even understand the question. It is tantamount to asking about the difference between a blue sky and an overcast, grey sky; either way it is still the sky; sure, its outward appearance is different, that is blatantly obvious, but it goes without saying that what one is talking about is still the sky. Thus, the pervasive viewpoint is that the travestí is still a homosexual regardless of his outward appearance or sense of internal identity, because he was born with a male body. So, while all of my research subjects insist that they have an "*alma femenino*," a female soul, their culture's biological discourse, nevertheless, hinders their ability to clearly define their own third gender identity for themselves. They seem hindered by the fact that local discourse insists that they share the binary passage with homosexual men who do not cross-dress. In spite of this fact, it is undeniable travestís perform a gender in a unique way.

The classification of travestís with all other homosexuals is a byproduct of the culture's attempt to maintain the integrity of the binary spheres. This discourse of exclusion ensures that a third gendered space is maintained for the sole purpose of keeping those with "deviant" behavior out of the binary spheres. A few examples will better articulate this point. First, one of many encounters I had with Cecelia:

One day I was asking Cecelia about her notions of "community" in terms of the broader make-up of the travesti community both regionally and nationally. When she began describing this community, she continually used the English word "gay." So our conversation soon veered to what she meant by the term "gay:"

"The main difference is that some homosexuals actually go through the transformation of becoming like women." Cecelia, 44

It was clear that she was defining the difference between gays and travestís only in terms of dress. At first I thought I must have misunderstood her, so I tried to clarify just what she meant:

*Q- "Is it more difficult for a person in your culture to live as a gay man who dresses as a man than to live as a travesti?"
Cecelia, 44- "It depends on how you are raised. The younger you start to dress as a female, the easier it will be. For example, if I started at 40, it would be a lot harder, but if you start young it will be normal for you."*

In effect, she was saying that a gay man who hadn't yet outwardly transformed into a woman was still in a liminal phase with respect to the travesti community, that to be gay is synonymous with the desire to become a woman. Needless to say, for a *gringa* with ingrained notions of categorical gender differences among gays, transvestites, transgenders, and transsexuals, I came away from the conversation exceedingly frustrated, thinking that I had to come back another day with more clearly articulated

questions. Obviously I was not getting my point across; the meaning of my questions was somehow being lost in translation. What took me a week to realize was that culture, not language, was the medium through which my meaning was being lost. Indeed, the regional perception on the relationship between sexuality and gender was complicating my preconceived ideas. My understanding of the issue was more in line with Judith Shapiro's analysis:

"The way in which transsexualism is seen as being related, or not related, to homosexuality is a particularly interesting question, since it leads into general issues concerning the relationship between gender and sexual orientation, and how each enters into the construction of personal and social identity. The literature indicates that most transsexuals consider themselves to be heterosexual. A male to female transsexual who feels herself to be a woman wants to be able to have sex with a man as a woman, not as a male homosexual" (Shapiro 1991: 251).

In fact, an encounter in the small fishing village of Salango with a sixty-year-old evangelical Christian named, Rosa, laid out the stark difference between local perceptions of homosexuality and my own.

Rosa had no idea what a "travesti" was; she had never heard of the term. The only way I could help her understand the group of people I was talking about was to say, "A person who was born a male and grew up to dress and live as a woman." Finally, a light flashed across her eyes, and she said:

"Ahh-ya, un homosexual." Rosa, 60

In general she found the whole topic "confusing":

"Because I have known boys who help out with women's chores around the house but who nevertheless grow up to be normal." Rosa, 60

While on the one hand Rosa believed that homosexuals should have a right to live and work in society, on the other, she hoped that God would prevent them from ever working

in Salango. Rosa then reached for a tattered blue Bible, covered with a plastic dust jacket, that was sitting on the coffee table in front of us. Thus began the prelude to a familiar cross-cultural evangelical testimony: Rosa knows a man who was once a homosexual but with the “*palabra de Dios*” he was completely transformed back to “normal.” He now is happily married to a woman, they have several children together, and he travels around preaching his story:

“God changed him so that he might spread His word. There is an almighty God who changes everything; nothing is impossible for God. If I had a child who became that way I would pray for him and put him in God’s hands so that He might work His will to change him, but I could never kick him out of my own house because he is my blood, although I know that many parents shun their children when they turn into homosexuals. Still it would hurt me very much; it would be like God’s sadness when someone breaks away from the church and leads a life in vain.” Rosa, 60

A conversation I had with a young lady, named Juanita, followed the same two-step discursive pattern of maintaining the gender binary that was first articulated to me by Cecelia (and later consistently verified by many others): first, the classification of travestís as homosexual men, followed by the conscription of all homosexual men into a group whose desire is to be women. Throughout the course of our conversation, it became clear that she too made no distinction between homosexual men and travestís:

“They are all good, normal people who are born with more female than male hormones.” Juanita, 19
Q- “Do homosexual men who live and dress as men have the same internal desire to be women as travestís do?”

She gave me a look as if I were asking her whether there was water in the ocean:

“Yes, of course.” Juanita, 19

Her rationale was that since biological women are attracted to men then it must be that all biological males who are attracted to men are internally female. Likewise, she left no

room for the gay man whose attraction to men does not include an internal desire to become a woman. This perspective ensures that the sphere of manhood maintains its macho integrity. Thus, their culture's binary discourses both include and exclude; these opposing forces simultaneously push and pull the travestí along the binary passage. On the one hand, homosexual desire is likened to female desire while, on the other hand, travestís themselves are excluded from womanhood. They are relegated to a third gender that shares its social space, the binary passage, with homosexual men who do not cross dress.

CHAPTER 5: ECONOMY

The travestís are engaged in a complex economy with the normative males of the region. It is an economy of both money and desire, both of which are key elements providing for their relative acceptance and thereby helping to maintain their social space. The desire between men and travestís is evident in reciprocal displays of flirtation, and the money flows simultaneously in two directions. First, money flows from the overwhelming predominance of male clients to the travestís as payment for service rendered in the form of haircuts. Then it flows from the travestís to their *novios* or *maridos*, most of whom are teenagers or are in their early twenties.

Flirtation is largely confined to their hair salons. In the streets there are the occasional hoots and hollers from passing taximoto drivers and the like, yet one would be hard pressed to observe any public displays of physical affection between the two camps. This is because the gender binary holds sway in the streets. Again, this binary is continually maintained from two directions: from the bottom up and from the top down, the former through the behavior of individuals and the latter by hegemonic technologies of power. As a day-to-day rule the order is maintained by both sets of actors.

One of the most influential sources of power can be found in the center of town; it is Puerto Lopez's tallest structure: the Catholic Church. It is the standard bearer of colonial discourses. Its historical stream of power radiates "truth and

goodness” with respect to all aspects of life, not the least of which are sexuality and gender and their sanctioned binary expressions.

An indelible image stands out in my mind in relation to the church as a technology of power. It involves Maria’s most recent *marido* who lives in Guayaquil. Upon my last visit they had been together for three weeks. On his weekend trips to Puerto Lopez, he stays with Maria, sleeping and napping in her room in the back of the salon. The first time I saw both of them together they were standing on the corner of the main thoroughfare just across the street from the church. He was standing a few feet behind Maria, leaning nonchalantly against a post, head down, shoulders slightly hunched over; she was nearer the road looking around as if waiting for someone. It was only later, in the context of the salon, that I realized they were even together; every time I had seen him in the streets his body language and the distance he kept from Maria gave me no obvious indication that they were a couple.

But the hair salons are another story, they are the travestís’ domain; they are the physical space in which they are able to fully exercise the dimensions of their social space. Within the confines of the salon, flirtation is open and easy among the travestís and males ranging from teenagers to old men. Common reciprocal behavior includes the smacking of behinds, quick groping grabs, and the laughter born of verbal innuendo. Indeed, the first time I saw a rather macho-looking man come in for a shave (a frequent occurrence), I was a bit taken aback by the display. Both Rosario and Maria use a similar technique for their more familiar customers that goes something like this:

The man takes his shirt off and slides down so that his head is resting on the back of the barber chair. Then he will usually stretch his legs out straight and plant his feet on the wall under the mirror. Meanwhile, Maria or Rosario will have placed themselves between his legs and proceed to shave him with a straight razor, all the while leaning in close so that her chest is close to his face and often keeping her balance by placing her hand on his upper thigh. The men obviously enjoy themselves, often taking the opportunity to touch the travestís on the back of their thighs or buttocks. Alternative postures for this procedure include the men keeping their legs down and closed with the travestís essentially straddling them.

Yet there are certainly many men who are uncomfortable with entering the travestís' domain and who chose the socially conservative option: barber shops located behind the Puerto Lopez central market. As one may imagine, the barbershops are in stark contrast to the peluquerías. To begin with, they are not located within permanent structures, but are small freestanding wooden shack-like structures with corrugated metal roofs. They are painted bright blue, inside and out, and are haphazardly decorated with tourist posters, pictures of Jesus, and the occasional small pictures of nude women. Their proprietors are both old and young men who wear white barber's smocks and who have learned their trade from their fathers and grandfathers. Needless to say, the aura of the barbershops is much more subdued.

But for those men who are interested and for the travestís themselves, the peluquería offers a safe haven to express their desires in ways that are defined less by the polar opposition of normative man versus normative woman. At the salons, men's desire need not traverse the entire length of the binary passage, it need not reach the

opposite gender; indeed there is a closer, and arguably more convenient target. The following informant was Rosario's *marido* for three years:

“Rosario is a very understanding and likeable person, and we know each other very well. We started out as friends and we became more than that.” Ernesto, 25

Q- “What was it that attracted you to her?”

Ernesto, 25- “I liked her shape (forma) and her personality; we had a lot of fun together.”

The following account demonstrates the variability of interactions between men and travestís and describes a typical slow weekday, in the mid morning hours, before the afternoon rush of school-aged boys.

During the morning, Maria and Rosario only had one customer: a boy of about 4 brought in by his father, accompanied by slightly older sister. Before starting the haircut, Maria hands me the daily tabloid newspaper that she was reading when I first came in (its pages replete with macabre headlines and gory photos of accidents, shootings, and beatings). The boy's haircut takes less than ten minutes. Maria sings along to a love ballad as she cuts his hair, first using a large plastic comb and electric buzz cutter, then cutting the top with barber scissors and fading the edges in with a straight razor. The boy's sister stands behind Maria and watches her brother's haircut quietly and intently while his father stands on the opposite side of the glass counter and does not speak to Maria at all. He only spoke to her when he initially came to the door to ask for his son's haircut; on entering he shook her hand and mine. The father pays Maria one dollar. Upon receiving the dollar, she crosses herself with it in the typical Catholic manner, kisses the thumb of her hand with the money in it and then

places it in a box on top of her small bureau. Maria repeats this ritual daily with her first profit, a show of thanks to a god that she loves very much:

“To me Dios is something precious, something beautiful. He protects me demasiado (so much). Every morning when I get up I pray to God that he will help me with my work, protect me, and that nothing will happen to my family.”
Maria, 35

Maria goes to mass only occasionally:

Q- “When you do go to church, how do the people there treat you?”
Maria, 35- *“Some are very nice and other are not.”*
Q- “Many people think God has a negative judgment of people like you; what do you think of this?”
Maria, 35- *“These are people who do not understand God. He has a don (gift) for all of us; he is the father of us all.”*

Turning back to the man who brought his young son in for a haircut, his behavior toward Maria was demonstrative of the clear contrast in behavior between men who come to the salon with their families and those who don't. The former, again, exemplified in the exchange described above, are quiet and businesslike. While the latter are much more relaxed, making themselves quite at home. For many of them, the salon is not only a place for the business of getting one's hair cut, but it is also a neighborhood hangout. Men, teenagers, and young boys often sit at the large dining room-style table to read the newspaper, or swing in the hammock while they wait to get their hair cut or simply to pass the time. Many come by to watch television, often taking the liberty of changing *telenovelas* to sports (much to Rosario's dismay). Others pop in for a cold drink or homemade plastic cup of red jello from the refrigerator. The grown men and teenagers typically chat and joke with Maria and Rosario. Their behavior varies from mild to overt flirtatiousness.

When school is out for the day, a rush of young boys in uniform initiate themselves into the travestis' world. Entering a social space with pounding music or blaring television and shirtless older men getting haircuts, a cluster of chattering boys will preen themselves in the mirrors, dip large, colorful plastic combs into huge tubs of equally florescent hair gels, get themselves good and slicked up, then run out into the streets in a whirlwind to rival the *polvo* itself.

In this way, many young boys become familiar and, consequently, comfortable with travestís, and as teenagers many will extend this familiarity to something more intimate. Here it should be noted that some of the travestís' money makes its way back into the hands of their "boyfriends" or "husbands." There is absolutely no hint that they are coerced into doing so; in other words, it is of the travestís' own volition that they give to their novios or maridos. Instead, money or gifts are sometimes given by the travestís to teenage boys as a sort of down payment on the prospect of a future sexual relationship:

Q- "Do you have a boyfriend or a husband right now?"

Jessica, 20- "No. But he is going to be my boyfriend (pointing to a boy of 16 who was hanging out near the entrance of the salon). I got him that bicycle."

Boy, 16- "No! No, that's not true!" (He becomes red and embarrassed, his denials nearly drowned out by everyone in the salon, including a man, laughing at his predicament.)

Jessica, 20- "And I'm going to cook for him! I'm a good cook. He needs someone to cook for him!"

Q- "Who started the relationship, you or Rosario?"

Ernesto, 25- "She did."

Q- "Did she used to give you money and gifts?"

Ernesto, 25- "Yes, sometimes, especially in the beginning."

Q- "Who was the one in control of the relationship?"

Ernesto, 25- "No one and both of us. No one had control; we were equals."

Q- "Why did your relationship end?"

Ernesto, 25- "Because now, finally, I have found someone, a girl that I love and now she is my wife."

According to many sources, the pattern of Ernesto's relationship with Rosario is typical both typical and common:

Q- "Are there many of your friends who have relationships with travestís?"

Ernesto, 25- "Yes, many, many."

Q- "Is this a normal pattern for your friends, to end their relationship with a travestí after marrying a woman?"

Ernesto, 25- "Yes."

Q- "Are there any who continue relationships with travestís after they are married?"

Ernesto, 25- "A few but not many."

Q- "And do their wives know about it?"

Ernesto, 25- "Their wives know they go out, but no I don't think they know what is really going on."

"There are a lot of chicos who have sex with travestís. Not me, but there are many who do." Jonny, 28

"He knows because he drives his taximoto everywhere, and he knows about everything." Fernando, 34

Q- "And do they end their relationships with travestís when they get married?"

Jonny, 28- "Yes."

Q- "Why do you think travestís like it here in Puerto Lopez?"

Roberto, 45- "Because they have the attention of chicos."

Q- "So it is common for chicos to have sex with travestís before they are married to women?"

Roberto, 45- "Yes, it's common, not everybody, but a lot."

Q- "Why do you think this is the case?"

Roberto- "Really, I don't know. I never did that; maybe they think it's fun."

Q- "So you know boys who are having relationships with travestís, do you think this makes them less of a man?"

Roberto- "No."

Q- "And usually the relationship ends when they get married?"

Roberto, 45- "Usually, yes."

Through the economy of desire men and travestís engage in a key discourse that helps maintain the social space within the binary passage. Since their economies

are mutually beneficial, they are perpetuated, and along with them, the social space necessary to effectuate the flow of desire and money.

Economy and Family

All of the travestís I met made regular economic contributions to their family, regardless of the fact that most had been initially rejected by at least their fathers. This economic contribution seems to be a moderating force, one that often shows family members that their son or brother can be a productive person despite or perhaps because of the fact that they are a travestí:

“When business is good, I send half of my money and also some food to my family. I am able to do this because I have never wasted money on drinking or the other vices of the streets. When business is too slow, I cannot help my family, and I only have enough money for food and rent.” Maria, 35

Thus, through the exaption of an economic niche, the travestís have arguably made their peluquerías the strongest pillar of support for their social space. Though they have a good number of female clients, the obvious need for males to get haircuts on a more frequent basis means that they sustain themselves with money paid to them predominantly from men. Standard haircuts for males and females cost one and two dollars, respectively (since the year 2000 Ecuador’s currency has been the American dollar). Occasionally, teenage boys will request blondish highlights and even permanents for just the tops of their heads, which can run up to seven dollars. The average number of customers per week for the four peluquerías ranges from 20 to 100. When there are *fiestas* held, and consequently many tourists in town (about every four months), daily client averages may rise to match weekly averages.

Maria's biggest competition was Cecelia's salon, but since its closure, Maria has benefited from picking up some of:

"...my very good portfolio of clients." Cecelia, 44

In the season following the closure of Cecelia's salon due to severe personal illness (reportedly resulting from serious reactions to silicone injections), Maria has slowly and consistently reinvested her newfound profits in the renovation of her salon. She and Rosario have purchased furniture, large mirrors, fresh paint, and constructed a plywood wall to divide the salon from the back living area, not to mention the silicon injections that they are now both able to afford.

Just as their engagement in the economy of desire with men and boys supports their social space, it can also be reasonably concluded that the travestís' economic success contributes to familial acceptance and to enhanced feminine performance.

CHAPTER 6: LIFE HISTORIES

The life histories of eight of my research subjects are recorded below in an effort to demonstrate both commonalities and differences among the travestís' lives. In so doing, patterns are fleshed out with regard to how the travestís became who they are and what events shaped them into people who inhabit a shared social space.

Maria

When recalling her life, Maria spoke of a happy childhood in Salango where she enjoyed school because of the many friends she had:

“I was a bit of a mischievous child but never one to get into serious trouble.” Maria, 35

However, by the time Maria, then still “Juan,” reached the age of ten she had to leave school and move with the family to JipiJapa to help her father work in the *campo* (the first time she told me her full given name, Juan Roberto Caldaron Quinido, she burst out in a boisterous laugh at the very sound of it). Together she and her father worked at the labor-intensive job of harvesting of coffee beans, working eleven-hour days that began in the predawn hours:

“We would pick all of the different beans, the ripe ones and also the green ones. Then we would have to clean and process them. It was very hard work, day after day: up at four in the morning, working to five or six in the evening with a lunch break at one, then coming home in time to eat and go to bed.” Maria, 35.

After 4 years passed thusly, Maria's father moved the family to a tiny village closer to the sea so that he could get into the fishing business:

Q- "If the typical jobs for men and women were reversed. For example, if it was the women who worked in the fields, fished, and hunted, do you think you still would have identified as a woman?"

Maria, 35- "Yes, it would not matter if that was the case because it all depends on one's emotions."

It was around the time of this last move that the 14-year old "Juan" came out as Maria:

"I started dressing more and more like a woman; I would fix my eyebrows and put on make-up." Maria, 35

Q- "Do you believe that you have a female soul? That it existed before your birth?"

Maria, 35- "Yes."

She insists that she did not have any problems with her other eight siblings and especially not with her mother, who remained supportive the entire time. It was Maria's father who had the hardest time dealing with the change. According to Maria, her father's rejection of her was immediate and complete, soon forcing her out of the house:

"I was begging in the streets for a week before I was able to find friends who were like me." Maria, 35

Maria's first contact with the community that she was to become a part of was through a restaurant job in Libertad:

"In Libertad I taught myself how to cook and began working really hard." Maria, 35

Despite her father's utter rejection, Maria sent as much of her earnings back home to her family as she could afford, a practice she continues to this day. After four years at this job, Maria bounced from town to town and had a variety of jobs, including a waitress in Salinas and a manager of a bar in Santa Elena, before settling in Puerto Lopez.

Now at the age of 35, Maria has lived in Puerto Lopez for six years and has had her salon for nearly as long. It is a job, both by her own accounts and by my observations, which she truly enjoys. Although she may be relatively happy, Maria is not yet satisfied. The first thing Maria said about her future was that she wants a “better location” for a salon. Her dreams for the future perhaps echoing her mother’s hopes:

“He is my son, and he likes to work hard; what is important is that he continues to progress in life.” Angelica, 53

Maria has been reconciled with her father for several years now:

Q- “How does your father treat you now?”

Maria, 35- “Everything is good; he treats me very well. The last boyfriend I had, he worked in the mountains with my father, and they got along very well.”

Q- “Why do you think he changed?”

Maria, 35- “I think it’s because he is used to me now and recognizes that I am a good person.”

Rosario

Rosario was born and raised in Salango:

“My childhood was very happy. I liked going to school, and I had many friends.” Rosario, 25

In fact, many of the younger generation of Salango, those in their early twenties, remember her very clearly. Those who knew her as “Carlos” said that she was always a very effeminate boy and they were ultimately not surprised by “Carlos’s” transformation.

Rosario started dressing as a female at the age of 16:

Q- “Did you start dressing as a female because you believe that you were born with a female soul?”

Rosario, 25- “Yes, I was born like this.”

Q- “What happened when your friends found out that you were different than most of the other boys?”

Rosario, 25- “There was really no problem with most of them. I had a lot of friends who were girls, and I liked the things they liked.”

*Q- "But the boys who were your friends in school, how were they?"
Rosario, 25- "Fine. Most of them were fine."*

She has a much shier personality than Maria, and it was therefore extremely difficult to get her to talk about her life in general, and her family's reaction to her transformation in particular. Of her parents she said:

"When it happened they really did not say anything to me about it, but I decided to leave home anyway. I don't think they were happy about it, but with time they respected my decision. They realized I wanted to work for myself and not be supported by them." Rosario, 25

Before becoming a hairdresser, she had various cooking jobs in restaurants and hostels in Puerto Lopez. Rosario has been working with Maria for the entirety of the time that the peluqueria has been in business.

*Q- "How is your relationship with your family now?"
Rosario, 25- "We are close, and I visit them often."*

Q- "Even though you have a good relationship with your family were there others in Salango who made you want to leave? Why did you want to come specifically to Puerto Lopez?"

Rosario, 25- "Puerto Lopez is better for me because I knew there were people like me here. Really, in Salango, I could not work; it is easier to work here in Puerto Lopez."

As for the future, Rosario is content to remain living in Puerto Lopez cutting hair.

Juana

Juana is originally from Buena Fe:

"When I was young I got along well with my friends and my family until they found out that I was a homosexual. My father and my brothers did not accept me. My mother was the only one who supported me." Juana, 30

She exclaimed with empathy in her voice:

“The news was a fatal blow for my father, and in reality I understood his reaction because he had wanted me to be just like him. I was such a disappointment as a son.” Juana, 30

After it was discovered that Juana was a homosexual, when she was 16, she was forced out of her home:

Q- “How did your family find out?”

Juana, 30- “I think they had an idea. I had a boyfriend, and they found out.”

Q- “What happened when you left home?”

Juana, 30- “At first I went to live with friends in Pichincha and then here in Puerto Lopez.”

Q- “Did you know any travestís when you first left home?”

Juana, 30- “I didn’t know anyone, but I had heard about people like that.”

Q- “How did your new friends help you?”

Juana, 30- “They taught me how to cut hair.”

Although she began using a female name soon after being forced out of her home, it was not until the relatively late age of 21 that Juana became a travestí:

“It was hard for me because I tried to be what my father wanted, but the truth is I always liked the things that women like; always I have been this way.” Juana, 30

She also sends money home on a regular basis and says that after many years her father and brothers have come to terms with the person she is. She is now the proprietor of a very small peluqueria a bit off the beaten path and has one other 19 year-old travestí, Ana, who works with her:

“I am grateful for my small salon.” Juana, 30

Q- “What are your hopes for the future?”

Juana, 30- “I will remain here cutting hair.”

Cher

Cher has lived all of her life in Puerto Lopez. She has five sisters and six brothers, most of whom, including Cher, still live at home. Cher did not work as a child

and went to school through the age of eighteen. Right after graduating from school she began working in Cecelia's peluquería. She worked with Cecelia, learning her trade, for close to five years before Cecelia became ill and had to close her salon. Subsequently, Cher was able to open her own salon on an adjacent street and take in a younger protégé of her own called Jessica. Cher's new salon is a small space of approximately 10' X 10': it is comparable in size to Juana's, about half that of Cecelia's, and a third the size of Maria's.

Among those I interviewed, Cher started dressing in girls' clothes at the youngest age, when she was only 5 years old. Only a few years later, at age 8, the child born "Andres" chose the name Cher:

"In reality, I never felt like a boy. For some reason God made me this way with more female hormones." Cher, 24

Cher's relationship with her mother was consistent with all of the others I interviewed:

"I never had any problems with my mother, only with my father." Cher, 24

Like Juana, she conveyed sympathy for her father's disappointment at her not turning out the way he had planned. Likewise, she described something of a palpable tension that hung in the air between them:

"He never forced me out of my house like many fathers do, but he didn't like me; it was difficult living with him." Cher, 24

*Q- "And has your relationship with your father become any better?"
Cher, 24- "No; never. He died five years ago."*

Like the other travestís, Cher currently has "bastante" friends, both male and female, in Puerto Lopez and in other towns and cities. When I asked her about her future,

she looked a bit puzzled and had nothing to say, having not really spent much time considering it. I prompted her by asking where she sees herself in five or even ten years, to which she answered simply:

“I’ll still be cutting hair.” Cher, 24

Cecelia

Cecelia is also a native of Puerto Lopez. Like everyone else I spoke with, she described her childhood as happy, the significant exception being that her level of happiness and contentment lasted through her adolescence as well. This was attributable to her parents’ unique level of continuous support:

“Because education is not born at schools or universities but at home. You’ll end up in life however your parents guide you, and my parents always let me be me own person.” Cecelia, 44

“Always” indeed, for Cecelia’s self-realization, that feeling that she was quite different from other boys, came at the early age of 5 or 6:

“I began reasoning that I was different. I would think about how I liked to play with dolls instead of playing sports, and then I began to realize that I had a certain inclination.” Cecelia, 44

Q- “Where do you think this inclination came from? Do you believe that it is because of hormones, or were you born with a female soul?”

Cecelia, 44- “Yes, I have a female soul, but it is possible that it is because of both reasons.”

By the age of 7 Cecelia was already dressing in girls clothes. Yet what was so surprising in her case, given the deeply ingrained binary gender expectations, was her family’s outright acceptance of Cecelia’s true personhood. She was the only one I spoke to who did not have to deal with any semblance of a rift, not even with her father:

“When it became clear to my parents that I was a homosexual, they never tried to marginalize me. I never had any inconvenience from my parents, two brothers, or other family members. My father said to me, ‘You are my son, whatever you are, you have my blood and you are my son.’ For me, my father’s words were a blessing from God; they gave me confidence to do anything.” Cecelia, 44.

Cecelia graduated from high school in Guayaquil and there spent a good portion of her young adulthood. She described her life in Guayaquil as “beautiful” because it allowed her to focus on a singular purpose: education:

“I worked hard during the day and studied at night because that is the life of one who wants to get ahead; you have to sacrifice time to achieve what you want.” Cecelia, 44

Her years in Guayaquil were interspersed with regular visits back to Manabí. One of which turned into an unexpectedly long stay when Cecelia discovered that it would be relatively easy to open a peluquería in Puerto Lopez. She started her business from scratch, having very meager resources, but over the past 15 years built it up little by little into an establishment that she was manifestly proud of when I first met her.

Yet despite the success of her salon, Cecelia was not resting on her laurels but rather had maintained an intensity of focus that persistently oriented her toward self-improvement. This outlook was exemplified by her continuing studies at *Universidad Estatal del sur de Manabí*. In less than two years she was planning to have a professional degree in “*ingenieria forestal*.” Cecelia’s intense love of nature drew her to this field, and she soon realized:

“I could benefit the future because of the current destruction of the rainforests; all the flora and fauna is being destroyed indiscriminately. As people we have a responsibility to save nature, and the sad thing is that we ourselves are destroying it.” Cecelia, 44

Upon completion of her studies, Cecelia had planned to get out of the hair cutting business and travel to rural communities in order to educate people about conservation. When my subsequent visit to Puerto Lopez found Cecelia's salon abandoned, I had at first hoped that she had moved on to her dream of being a forestry engineer, and it was with a heavy heart that I learned her absence was the result of a different desire: illness caused by her endeavor to feminize her square masculine facial features with silicone.

Jessica

Jessica was born in *La Provincia de los Ríos*, just to the east of Manabí. By the age of ten, Jessica, known as Rogelio, was working in the *campo* with her father and six brothers:

Q- "How old were you when you began to realize you were different than other boys?"

Jessica, 20- "I started to feel it when I was almost thirteen."

Q- "How were you different?"

Jessica, 20- "When I was in high school, I walked totally like a woman and talked completely like a woman."

Q- "Do you think this difference is something you had since you were born?"

Jessica, 20- "Yes. It is the same with my older sister. The hormones in her are more or less masculine; she is like a man, a lesbian."

Q- "What happened with your family when they found out you were a homosexual?"

Jessica, 20- "They told me that they had an idea. They knew also about my sister, and it did not bother them. But when it was me it bothered my father very much. He said, 'You do not have the form of a woman; you cannot be a woman.' After no more than fifteen days passed, I got a cellular phone so that I could talk to my mom, and I left."

Q- "Did your relationship with your father ever improve?"

Jessica, 20- "No. For the moment I don't communicate with him, and he is separated from my mother."

With her job at the salon, Jessica sends as much money to her mother as she can:

Q- “Did you make friends who helped you with your transition to living on your own and living as a woman?”

Jessica, 20- “Yes, really I learned a lot, like how to cut hair. They helped me with things and did things for me that helped me to continue to move forward and more forward until I was able to see a future for myself, and now I am here.”

Q- “Why did you decide to come to Puerto Lopez?”

Jessica, 20- “Because there are people in other locations who make fun of travestís, who laugh at us sometimes and don’t like us. But here the people are different; they tell us that we look good, and they treat us better.”

Amy

Amy was born in the small village of Rio Chico. Her father does horticulture work in the mountains and her mother travels to Manta as a shrimp vendor:

“There are five boys in my family. (Laughing) Really, there are four and a half! And my sister. My given name is Tomás.” Amy, 26

Amy began to come out at a young age, a process that was aided by her mother:

“When I was eight, my mom noticed that I did not like men’s things; I liked women’s things. I played with my mom’s things, and I always wanted to do everything with her. At nine years old I left off with trying to be a boy and became open (declaradamente).”

She described her mother as being continuously supportive and not having any real problems with her siblings or friends. Amy’s father, again, was another story:

“As I got older, my dad began to get worse. He started being a violent person (un bravo) towards me. Sometimes he would get drunk and when he would come home he would get violent and hit me because he didn’t like me the way I was.”

By the time Amy was thirteen, she could no longer stand the abuse and moved into her uncle’s house. At seventeen she moved to Machillia to open a bar with her cousin, Angelica, who is also a travestí. She and Angelica still own the bar Machillia, which is also a popular tourist destination:

“I also work as a cook on a fishing boat. I am out at sea for twenty-five days at a time, then I come back to land and work in my bar.”

Q- “Do many of your friends who work as cooks on the fishing boats also have their own bars?”

Amy, 26- “There are some who do and some who cook in restaurants.”

Q- “How is business at your bar?”

Amy, 26- “Good because we sell everything: beer, wine, cocktails.”

Maria, 35- “When it is busy season people drink, dance, play cards and win money, sometimes her dad even comes, but sometimes there is no one.”

Q- “So things are not the same with your father now?”

Amy, 26- “No. Now he is much more affectionate and loving (cariñoso).”

Angelica

Like her cousin, Amy, Angelica grew up in Rio Chico. She is one of ten children, having two brothers. Angelica’s childhood was happy, and she still has many of the same friends that she did as a child. Likewise, she and Amy had each other, being the only two homosexuals they knew of in their village:

Q- “How old were you when you realized you were different from other boys?”

Angelica, 25- “Since I was an infant.”

Q- “Why do you think that was the case?”

Angelica, 25- “It must be that I have been given a punishment. My family doesn’t know why, but I am like a person who has been punished.

Q- “What do you think you are being punished for?”

Angelica, 25- “I don’t know; only God knows.”

Despite Angelica’s very early self-awareness, she did not begin dressing as a woman until she was eighteen:

Q- “Why did you not start dressing as a woman at an earlier age?”

Angelica, 25- “Because, for me it was a process; I was forming myself.”

Q- “Did you move out of your house when you started dressing as a female?”

Angelica, 25- “Yes, but there was never a time when my dad did not like me; the opposite was true. I left because I wanted to go.”

Maria, 35- “Her dad always loved her very much. She only left when she found a boy that she wanted to leave with!”

Q- “Do you think your parents’ reaction was normal when you think of other travestís that you know?”

Angelica 25- “No. What is more normal, many of my friends have problems with their fathers. Most are forced out of the house, even though I left because I wanted to.”

Commonalities and Differences

While the age at which my research subjects began dressing as women varies widely, from very small children to young adulthood, they all felt that in order to realize their true identity the transition into female performance had to be made. Likewise, all espoused the notion that they were “born this way,” and for them that meant being internally female. Some the earliest self-realizations came with the recognition that they preferred to play with things and do activities that only girls are supposed to like. Even though some attempted to conform to masculine expectations, none were able to keep up appearances past their teenage years.

The reactions of their fathers and sometimes their brothers ranged from complete acceptance to utter violent rejection. Although two of my subjects experienced the former, all of my informants, both travestí and normative men and women, made clear that Angelica and Cecelia were exceptions, that initial rejection was by far the most common reaction. Whether forced or voluntary, all with the exception of Cher (possibly due to the death of her father) left their families specifically to find others who were like themselves.

The transition into being a travestí is usually aided by a mentor-protégé relationship in which the younger travestí learns her trade from one who is a bit older and more established. Once they are able to be productive and earn money, like all good sons

should do, they contribute money to their families, regardless of the state of their relationship with them.

All, with the exception of Cecelia, were content with their line of work and sought for the future to improve the size and location of their businesses:

“Gays no longer have to work only in kitchens and hair salons. They are preparing themselves to be lawyers, engineers, architects, so that we won’t be left behind anymore; our level of preparation is getting better.” Cecelia, 44

Always striving to be better, to improve one’s lot in life is not unique to travestís, yet the challenges they face from society are. To meet these challenges they need the help of friends and family. Friends, who are like themselves, aid in their transition, and family keeps them connected to society at large. With regard to the latter, the importance of a sustaining mother cannot be overestimated. For it is she who, whenever possible, holds open the door to the natal home.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

“If I could have one right it would be a simple change in people’s perspectives of us, that we aren’t from another planet, we are just people. We need to have our own voice. We all have the same capabilities as humans, no more no less, it is an obligation of ours to both listen to what is going on and to be heard.” Cecilia, 44

My examination of the travestís’ lives led me to construct a theoretical framework that offers a means of conceptualizing their social space. The basis of this analysis of social space was the travestís’ queer gender performance. Beginning with the manifest observation that the travestís do not clearly fit into the expected roles for either men or women, I set out to answer how and where their performance did fit into society. I found that the answers lay in complex intertwined elements: the experience of their mothers’ love, sexual desire, and economy. Through my research, I also discovered the complexities and complications of gender identity in Manabí.

By examining the history of the region, I found that the origin of Puerto Lopez’s gender structure took place in the region’s colonial past. It was the overwhelming power of Spanish colonial discourses that created the strict gender binary that exists today by leaving the “deviants,” the “sodomites,” outside of the new normative. I have defined the social space for this “deviant” existence as the “Binary Passage.” The binary passage is a social spandrel necessarily created out of efforts to construct a binary separation of cultural elements. In this case, the binary passage was created by a colonial superimposition of binary borders upon a preexisting culture that fully accepted and even

revered third gender performances. Through individual agency, the travestís have exapted this spandrel as their own social space. Common experiences in life history and similarities in performance help to create a shared social imaginary for the travestí community. Within this community, variation in style of feminine performance gives individuals agency to negotiate their position along the continuum of the passage vis-à-vis the normative spheres of manhood and womanhood.

It is through their individual agency, their queer performance of gender, that the travestís engage in a complex discourse with the normative culture. Though they exist in a third gendered space, it often seems that the travestís' ability to define their own unique identity remains hampered by the binary hegemony's attempts to maintain its strength.

This maintenance of strength is achieved in several ways. To begin with, the travestís are allowed to move out of the sphere of manhood once they and others determine that their performance is not that of a "proper man." More often than not they are forced out by other men, usually their fathers. Meanwhile, their culture at large maintains this expulsion through the approved discourses of both manhood and womanhood. Their exclusion from the sphere of manhood maintains that sphere's integrity by casting out anyone who may pollute the "truth" about what it means to be a man. The exclusive behaviors of normative men, most notably those related to machismo, are thereby essentialized. Next, they are excluded from the sphere of womanhood in at least two ways, both of which are inherently linked to their biological sex: First, they are unable to fulfill the role of mother. Second, they and others equate travestí identity with that of homosexual males. Thus, in both ways, at the expense of the travestí (who in some

cases may have transsexual desires), the culturally essential nature of womanhood remains exclusive and strong.

So it must be that the travestí, liminal though her positionality may be in terms of gender, is afforded some other means of acceptance in Puerto Lopez. It is primarily their mothers who spread a degree of tolerance through community networks of family and friends. They support their sons regardless of whether they become a travestí. Likewise, the persistence of this love often aids in the reconciliation of travestís with their fathers. Because a small community of travestís has gathered in Puerto Lopez, it is reasonably certain that this effect of mothers' support networks is multiplied.

Likewise, tolerance is spread through the discourse of sexual desire. The desire of teenagers and men often results in mutually beneficial relationships with travestís and consequently aids in travestís' acceptance by networks of normative males. Pre-marital young men regularly engage in sexual relationships with them, a fact that is universally known and that does not detract from young men's legitimacy as macho heterosexuals once they are married to women.

Economy is an invaluable conduit for maintaining tolerance as well. Puerto Lopez, as a hub of social and economic activity for the surrounding area of smaller coastal and inland villages, provides plenty of clientele for travestís' hair salons. They have successfully taken advantage of this economic niche which functions to bolster their legitimacy in several ways. With respect to sexual desire, the peluquerías are sanctuaries for free and open flirtatious, teasing, and affectionate interaction with normative men and teenagers. They are physical spaces where travestís have freer reign over their position within the binary passage; there they are less subject to the quotidian conservative

behavior that is expected in the streets. Further, their salons (as well as jobs in bars, restaurants, and as cooks on fishing boats) provide the capital that allows them to contribute money and gifts to both their boyfriends/husbands and to their own families. By contributing money to their families, they are more likely to be accepted as productive members.

While it is true that the travestís are at minimum tolerated by the majority of people in Puerto Lopez, they do experience some verbal harassment:

“ignorant people talk badly about us, laugh at us, these people do not have the capacity to understand that it (having a travestí/homosexual child) could happen to them when they have children. Then there are those who are friendly and do not treat us badly.” Maria, 35

However, I was unable to confirm any instances of physical assault taking place in Puerto Lopez. By travestís’ own accounts and those of others, the level of tolerance in Puerto Lopez is much greater when compared to the smaller villages of Manabí. Again, it seems Puerto Lopez’s status as a magnet for social and economic activity for the surrounding area has allowed the travestís to better establish themselves there.

Pablo, a resident of the nearby small fishing village of Salango, was a schoolmate and friend of Rosario’s. He insisted that even though his boyhood friend went through this transformation:

“I am still nice to Rosario whenever I see her. I know a few travestís, and one time I tried to encourage Juana to open a salon in Salango.” Pablo, 24

Yet he was careful to point out that most people in Salango are not so open-minded:

*Q- “What do most of your friends think of travestís?”
Pablo, 24- “They call them names. Some people say things like: ‘Maricon, get out of Salango, there is no place for you here.’ ‘Get down the road to Puerto Lopez.’ ‘Ugly.’ The discrimination against them is mostly verbal. They sometimes even say that they should die. I think that is wrong; there are a lot of people who*

are not homosexual that cause serious problems for society and no one is calling for them to die.”

Ernesto, also of Salango, expressed the typical intolerant sentiments of the small villages:

Q- “Do you believe travestís are legitimate members of society?”

Ernesto, 80- “No. They go and look for their own troubles and they do not want to be a part of society anyway.”

Q- “Would it be alright for a travestí to open a salon here in Salango?”

Ernesto, 80- “They should never do that; they should go somewhere else and that is why they are in Puerto Lopez.”

It seems Puerto Lopez is just large enough to provide a social and economic haven where the travestís have been able to cultivate a relatively tolerant environment. With the help of mother’s love, sexual desire, and economy the travestís are able to exercise their performative agency as they negotiate their positions within the binary passage.

Thus, while biases against travestís certainly do exist in the machista culture, in the end, they have carved out meaningful lives for themselves in spite of this fact. They are men living openly without machismo, engaging in a feminine performance of gender that has brought them economic success, psychological well-being, and a small community of supporting friends. Their shared experiences and desires have brought the travestís of the rural coast of Ecuador to the regional hub of Puerto Lopez in search of happier and more sustainable lives than many of their natal villages could provide. And by all accounts they have found just that, while in some cases also managing to repair links to their natal homes. For here they are able to live a life not separated from the surrounding culture but as part of it. Some of their businesses even serve as social gathering places for young men, while people of all statuses visit their *peluquerías*, including parents with their children. So it seems that in perhaps one of the unlikeliest of

places, Puerto Lopez, Ecuador, the travestís have found a way to live successfully within the social space the gender binary provides them. Though for most it has been a difficult journey from the lives of their early youth, they have, nonetheless, achieved a degree of social integration that speaks volumes for their strength of spirit and determination.

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