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TROUBLING QUEER METRONORMATIVITY IN LATIN AMERICAN CONTEXTS: INTERSECTIONALITY IN *MADAME SATÃ*, *XXY*, AND *PELO MALO*

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I dedicate this study to all of us who defend our right to free access to education and information. Always share.

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Free education should be the right of all, but it is still the privilege of few. We will continue fighting to change that.

Abstract

This study develops an intersectional analysis of queer metronormativity in three Latin American films, namely *Madame Satã* (dir. Karim Ainouz), *XXY* (dir. Lucía Puenzo), and *Pelo Malo* (dir. Mariana Rondón). The study aims at translating the concept of metronormativity to the Latin American context through the analysis of the (re)production of what is understood as a metronormative narrative. For that, I tackle the relationship between queerness, developmentalism, the coloniality of power, and the rhetoric of Modernity towards the decolonization of metronormativity as a universalized discourse. The analyses performed indicate that metronormativity is (re)produced as the coloniality of power remains a sustaining element of contemporary power hierarchies and of the cultural differential ascribed to discursive spaces delineated by metronormative discourses. The analyses also show that metronormative queerness constructs legibility, closure, and salvation upon the gentrification of universalized models within the developmentalist paradigm.

Keywords: Metronormativity, Latin American Cinema, decoloniality, intersectionality.

Resumo

Este estudo desenvolve uma análise interseccional da metronormatividade *queer* em três filmes Latinoamericanos, sendo eles *Madame Satã*(dir. Karim Ainouz), *XXY* (dir. Lucía Puenzo), e *Pelo Malo* (dir. Mariana Rondón. O trabalho tem por objetivo traduzir o conceito de metronormatividade ao contexto Latinoamericano através da análise da (re) produção do que é compreendido como narrativa metronormativa. Este estudo aborda o relacionamento entre o ser queer e o desenvolvimentismo, a colonialidade do poder, e a retórica da Modernidade, tendo em vista a decolonização da metronormatividade como discurso universalizado. As análises realizadas indicam que a metronormatividade é (re)poroduzida à medida que a colonialidade do poder permanece sendo elemento de sustentação das hierarquias de poder contemporâneas e do diferencial cultural atribuído a espaços discursivos delineados pelos discursos metronormativos. As análises também mostram que a metronormatividade queer constrói legibilidade, fechamento narrativo, e salvação sobre a gentrificação de modelos universalizados dentro do paradigma desenvolvimentista.

Palavras-chave: metronormatividade, Cinema Latinoamericano, decolonialidade, interseccionalidade.

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Summary

Introduction

1 Queer

My first contact with the term "queer" happened in the early 2000s through mentions to a television program some friends watched, *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (which later changed its name to *Queer Eye*[1]). Having never actually watched the show, all I knew was that it had openly homosexual presenters who gave heterosexual men advice on fashion, appearance, and other matters related to culture and behavior. From what my friends commented, I understood that the show was based on common stereotypes linked to homosexual men, such as that gay men know how to dress well or decorate a home. The fact that I had never watched the show adds to the strength of the stereotype, since I did not even have to actually watch the show to grasp the image being projected silently by hegemonic prejudices. For years, in my mind *queer* has been a synonym to homosexuality; mostly, to white middle-class male homosexuality. Moreover, it was about those men in big cities.

My second contact with the term happened around 2009 or 2010, when during my research on Gus Van Sant for my master thesis[2] I came across the word *queer* as related to a bit broader array of meanings. These meanings, however, were once again directly related to sexuality, even though this time it included not only gay but also lesbians, transsexuals and transgender people. The word appeared in relation to films that depicted non-heterosexual characters, such as Van Sant's *My Own Private Idaho* (1991), *Birdcage* (dir. Mike Nichols 1996), and *But I'm a Cheerleader* (dir. Jamie Babbit)—all films produced in the United States and that have sexuality in the core of what is referred to as *queer*. At the time, I did not pursue this topic further, but knew of the existence of the New Queer Cinema of the early nineties, in the U.S., and of mainstream discussions around trans and homosexual rights. Again, *queer* was a term linked to a "metropolitan" feeling. The representation of New York, San Francisco, and other big cities like those in the films of Gregg Araki, Gus Van Sant, Todd Haynes (all men!) helped compose the imaginary of the metropolitan *queer* life.

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1 The show was on air from 2003 to 2007 on the Bravo channel (U.S.).

2 Claudia Mayer. "'Everything is Gonna Lead to the Same Place': Dogme 95 and Gus Van Sant's Death Trilogy". Master's thesis, Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina 2011).

The third time I came across the term, it appeared in a very different context. It was being used by Gloria Anzaldúa on *Borderlands/ La Frontera* (1987). In Anzaldúa's works, *queer* is used in the context of the frontier between Mexico and the United States. The field that the term *queer* encompasses in Anzaldúa involves many other categories of identification, a composite of tensions revolving around whiteness and non-whiteness, wealth and poverty, male and female, colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, and rebellion. Very different from the *queer* described in previous paragraphs, which seemed to reduce queerness to following a certain pattern of supposedly non-normative behavior for sexuality constrained by racial, financial, and gender norms.

The contrast between what I understood as queer before and the way I came to understand it later on, after having contact with many other authors from different locations where queer theory is in production, first brought to the foreground that there are different conceptualizations and uses of the term. Second, that some of these conceptualizations—more specifically, those with which I had most contact in mainstream culture—were in many ways connected to the U.S. context and showed, in some way or another, a relationship with economic development.

The trajectory of how I came across the idea of metronormativity—which is the concept that is going to be theorized in this work—walks hand in hand with how I, through mainstream media, came into contact with the idea of queerness. In the following paragraphs, I explain how I am going to use the term queer throughout this study. I would like to emphasize that the following paragraphs were only written *after* all the analyses were done and the closing chapter was concluded. This is important because the readings I have done while writing the analyses and the analyses themselves helped shape the context in which I would situate queerness and how I would define the way it is used here. Choosing not to begin with a working definition and instead working towards the definition during research was a way of keeping the concept open to changes.

Queer is a concept that needs to be kept undefined so it can be constantly questioned and rearticulated. This does not mean, however, that it is an empty category or concept. It means, instead, that queer is a category and/or a concept that changes according to the context that

produces it and that is produced by it. Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) provides a concise but quite open definition of queer as "a path of knowledge" (*Borderlands* 19). As a path of knowledge, queer can be interpreted as a way of understanding the world and of understanding oneself in that world that is not a given or taken for granted. Instead, it is a way of being in the world that is constituted as one travels within it. Threading this path, one becomes aware of her/hir/his own presence in this world that constitutes the individual and is constituted by her/hir/him performatively. Queer is a way of asserting not only one's own existence and how it comes to be, but also one's presence and how it acts upon the world around her/hir/him. Queer, therefore, is not about the parameters that "measure" how challenging to the *status quo* the individual is, but about how this subject becomes a threat of disruption to that status.

Another definition Anzaldúa provides is that "the queer as the mirror reflecting the heterosexual tribe's fear: being different, being other and therefore lesser, therefore subhuman, inhuman, non-human" (40). Anzaldúa's queer mirror does not return an inverted image of what she calls the heterosexual tribe. Instead, it returns what the heterosexual tribe *fears*, which means that those fears are a component of how the heterosexual tribe is constituted—or else those fears would not be part of the reflection in the mirror. At this point, it is important to remember that "the heterosexual tribe" as a fixed, homogeneous, and unquestionable entity does not exist. Heteronormativity, as discussed in the first chapter, is based on necessarily unattainable ideals. Therefore, those fears reflected by the queer mirror become ways to circumscribe what we can(not) be(come) without those fears.

In a general, universalized way, it is not possible to answer the question of what queer is about, or who is queer and who is not. This depends on the context and on what is happening in that context. As Janet Jakobsen (1998) writes, "[q]ueer cannot be simply embodied. The critique of identity it carries means that under contemporary social and political conditions, it resists the normative inscriptions through which bodies are produced. In fact, *queer* is often defined precisely as resistance

to norms and normativity" (512). Those who embody the fears of the heterosexual tribe are the ones who trouble the heteronormative system and embody the rebellion that constitutes, by contrast, the compliance with a system that violates us by projecting onto us its most varied fears. Mignolo (2007) writes that,

> [u]nder the spell of neo-liberalism and the magic of the media promoting it, modernity and modernization, together with democracy, are being sold as a package trip to the promised land of happiness […]. Yet, when people do not buy the package willingly or have other ideas of how economy and society should be organized, they become subject to all kinds of direct and indirect violence. (450)

Although his elaboration is not directly related to the specific terminology of queer, his idea is definitely not far from the understanding of queerness that runs throughout this study.

Furthermore, for Anzaldúa being queer is a choice. Her claim that she "made the choice to be queer" (41) is based on the understanding of queerness as an individual's critical positioning in relation to the cultures that constitute and is constituted by hir, her, or him. In her words, "[queer] is a path of knowledge—one of knowing and learning the history of oppression of [the Mexican] raza" (41). Queer is a choice in this view because one chooses to align with and act based on this critical position. Seen in this way, queer is invested with agency and being queer is tied to action. Thus, queer is here understood not only as a possible identity constructed in opposition the Eurocentric racialized heteronormative system, but also as a verb that signifies the questioning of hegemonic normative structures, focusing therefore on the creative and productive power of queerness. By understanding *queer* as an analytical perspective, rather than an object of knowledge (as in the form of an identitary category), my objective is to access hegemonic normative structures from points of view that are aware of the constructedness of those structures and of the potential to explore different and often silenced ways of knowing. This way, *queering* is a process of building a different, troubled and troubling knowledge, formed by historical awareness, self-understanding, geopolitical location, and counter-normative possibilities of action.

In the following section, "The Metronormative Narrative", I present the concepts of metronormativity and describe what is understood as a metronormative narrative according to the discussion initiated by Jack Halberstam in *In a Queer Time and Place* (2005). I then discuss the hegemonic construction of the main character of the metronormative narrative in order to bring up questions concerning the production of this idealized individual. In the section "Sex, Gender, and Abjection", I present and discuss the critique of heteronormativity, which provides a basis for the analysis of gender within metronormativity. In the section "Intersectionality", I present this concept that provides means to access the tensions that are at play in the workings of metronormativity in the films selected for analysis. Within this framework, this study begins the translation of metronormativity to the Latin American filmmaking context, revealing the intimate connection between metronormative developmentalism, the (re)production of the structure of colonial power and of the hegemonic models of queerness, and the political complexities that are specific of the Latin American context. The analyses presented in the following chapters represent a necessary step towards theorizing Latin American metronormativity, a normative field of discursive power[3] that has not yet been addressed in Latin American film theorizations but represents a significant addition to the critiques of developmentalism that support decolonizing efforts.

3 Discourse is here understood in the Foucaultian sense, as a "system of representation" that consists in "the rules and practices that produc[e] meaningful statements and regulat[e] discourse in different historical periods" (Hall 1997, 72). In Stuart Hall's words, discourse "defines and produces the objects of our knowledge" (72)

2 The Metronormative Narrative

"When you're growing up in a small town
You know you'll grow down in a small town
There's only one good use for a small town
You hate it and you know you'll have to leave"
"Smalltown", Lou Reed and John Cale[4]

The first contact I had with the idea of metronormativity occurred when I heard the song "Smalltown", in which North American musician Lou Reed narrates a man's feelings towards what it is like to be queer in a small town. According to the story in the song, the small town where the man was born and raised is a repressive place, marked by homophobic glances added to cultural and economic stagnation. Contrasting to the small town he places the glamorized metropolis, into which the lyrics project possibilities for the future other than the lifestyle of that man's parents, who work in low wage, physically demanding jobs. The lyrics suggest that the best way for the character to live a satisfactory life is moving to the metropolis, supposedly the right place to be queer. In the context of this song, it can be inferred that being queer is being someone who does not fit the heterosexual model. The verse quoted in the epigraph to this section emphasizes how bad it is to grow up in a small town, to the point that one does not grow "up" but "down", which reinforces the characterization of the small town as a site opposite to development—even to the hegemonic understanding of "normal" physical development.

The idea that non-heterosexual individuals have more chance to thrive in the metropolis than in rural areas is problematized by Jack Halberstam in *In a Queer Time and Place* (2005), in which the author argues that many coming out narratives of queer people are connected to movements of migration from small towns or rural areas to more urbanized regions, especially metropolitan cities. In these narratives, the queer person "moves to a place of tolerance after enduring life in a place of suspicion, persecution, and secrecy" (36), like the "gay and fatty"

4 Reed, Lou and John Cale. *Songs for Drella*. Sire, 1990.

character of Reed's song does. The characterization of the metropolis carries meanings of liberation and offers, if not complete freedom from normalizing glances, at least the possibility of being stared at among equal others in a community of queers. Within the narratives of queer individuals who move to the metropolis in order to find freedom and happiness, the urban is produced as more developed both in economic terms and in regard to civil rights issues, whereas the rural is deemed as culturally primitive, uneducated, prejudiced, among other negative connotations. These narratives take part on a normative discourse Halberstam calls metronormativity.

According to Jakobsen, normativity "is a field of power, a set of relations that can be thought of as a network of norms […] that forms the possibilities for and limits of action" (517). These norms are structured around what is considered "normal" in a given historical and cultural context in processes of normalization which, at the same time, produce and reinforce the normal as the norm. Normativity, in other words, is constituted in the relationship between the norms and the normal that produce and control the possibilities for the materialization of bodies and actions. Thus, heteronormativity, for instance, can be understood as the process that produces, on the one hand, heterosexuality as the norm through its normalization, and, on the other hand, non-heterosexuality as abnormal in relation to those norms.

Metronormativity, therefore, can be understood as a normative discourse that produces the dichotomy urban/rural through the articulation of a hierarchical relationship between these poles along a particular temporal axis, deeply entangled with developmentalism. In Reed's song, the images of famous artists such as Picasso and Michelangelo are put together like symbols of success and glamour decorating the metropolis, although the two men are separated by a great geographic and chronological gap. The timeline in the metronormative narrative is not structured around the hegemonic and naturalized perception of the passing of linear, chronological time, according to which Picasso would live in a much more developed metropolis than Michelangelo on what concerns modernization, but around how the terms in the urban/rural binary are contrasted**.** The metropolis concentrates mainstream and elitist culture, be it in the twentieth century or in the Renaissance. Moreover, the metropolis not only holds what is considered progress in the present, but also

so-called cultural and economic advancements occurred in the past. This way, while the metropolis carries all the positive connotations of the passing of time and progress, the rural or non-urban location carries negative connotations of stagnation and belatedness.

The kind of narrative such as the one underlying Reed's song, which will be henceforth referred to as *metronormative narrative*, tells the story of someone ideal and universalized for whom all possible good aspects of a life in the small towns are subdued by the greater benefits that would supposedly be found in the metropolis. Within the framework of metronormativity, urban development and therefore economic development are translated as cultural progress on what concerns social and cultural understandings of non-normative embodiments. The link between urban and economic development and mainstream hegemonic representations of non-heteronormative sexualities come to the foreground in the image of the "capitalist gay", whose conception is examined by John D'Emilio in "Capitalism and Gay Identity" (1983).

According to D'Emilio, the birth of the homosexual as a social identity is conditioned to the phenomenon of modernity due to the profound changes in the structure and functions of the heterosexual family brought by the expansion of global capitalism (102), which allowed for the emergence and growth of the big urban centers. In D'Emilio's argumentation, before the changes brought by modernity the family was a private production center based on procreation. In such familiar structure, the offspring represented additional work force and therefore should stay close to the family in order to maintain their means of survival. With the expansion of capital and free labor, argues D'Emilio, the possibility of surviving outside the nuclear family appeared in the form of wage labor, this way turning the family into a site of emotional self-satisfaction separated from "the public world of work and production" (103).

D'Emilio's characterization implies a separation of the public and the private in which the private is reinscribed as the realm of family relations from which the homosexual is excluded and sent into the public world of labor. In other words, the homosexual is removed from the private site of the family, a movement that reinforces the heteronormativity of the public/private divide. The opportunity to survive outside the heterosexual nuclear family meant, according to D'Emilio's argumentation, a separation of sexuality from procreation that allowed for individuals'

lives to be structured around their erotic and emotional attraction (104). In other words, once wage labor permitted one to survive independently from heterosexual reproduction, "the homosexual" achieved means for existing as a social category. As Ann Pelegrini (2002) puts it, D'Emilio "seem[s] to narrate capitalism as the very emplotment of homosexual identity" (134). Under this view, there would be no homosexuals, in the term's hegemonic definition, without the expansion of capitalism. This articulation of homosexuality sustains and is sustained by the exclusionary discourses of colonization that shape capitalism, which privilege gender difference, whiteness, wealth, and Eurocentric culture at the expense of colonized peoples and cultures.

The way the reorganization of the social structure is tied to homosexuality by D'Emilio works similarly to the hegemonic timeline devised by modernity and spread across the world by colonization. D'Emilio acknowledges this connection, even though the author does not make direct reference to the consequences of colonization when he states that white gay men have always enjoyed more visibility than lesbians. The greater visibility of male homosexuals is, for D'Emilio, a consequence of the public/private division of space, according to which women are traditionally tied to the home and men are the ones who go out to the streets for work. Moreover, the binary public/private (re)inscribes women as property of the families, with daughters representing marriage currency (Rubin 1975).

Indeed, the author links the greater visibility of white gay men to the easiness with which men can find jobs outside the home and "could more easily construct a personal life independent of attachments to the opposite sex, whereas women were more likely to remain economically dependent on men" (105-6). This way D'Emilio not only links the emergence of the homosexual to the expansion of capitalism but also reinscribes the construction of women as dependent on others to survive, resulting in the (re)inscription of homosexuality as male homosexuality because men would enjoy more freedom and independence. It is possible to notice that this construction of homosexuality links sexual freedom to financial power as if there are no factors other than sexuality at stake on what concerns someone's survivability.

D'Emilio considers that college education allowed for women to live lesbian lives, a statement that, although it might be considered true in the sense that college education actually allowed for women to leave the

realms of homemaking, hides an important class connotation because it conditions the possibility of living as a lesbian to having economic means to go to college. This (re)inscribes homosexuality as middle-class homosexuality once again through the link with financial power and social position. The lesbians that do attain sexual freedom through college education as D'Emilio suggests are an exception to the rules that constrain heterosexual women's access to formal education, to financial self-sufficiency, and to the public space, implicitly suggesting that lesbians are closer to men than to heterosexual women.

Moreover, racial issues are as absent from D'Emilio's argumentation as they are absent from Halberstam's theorization of metronormativity. In Latin America, race and survivability are intimately and undeniably connected, as will be discussed throughout the chapters that follow. Even though metronormative discourses brings to the foreground non-heteronormative embodiments of sexuality, as metronormative narratives reproduces race as white, sex as male, and gender as masculine it becomes productive of marginalizations that clash directly with the Latin American context due to the long lasting consequences of colonization.

When understood as a consequence of the advancement of capitalism, as D'Emilio affirms, the metronormative articulation of non-heteronormative sexualities is constrained by differentials in the distribution of access to the work market, to money, and to survivability. Those differentials are related to the model of power established with colonization and that enables capitalism in its current form, as argues Aníbal Quijano throughout "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America" (2000). Moreover, the model of power established in colonization is not only racialized but also heterosexualized, as María Lugones (2007) brings to the foreground. The colonial model of power is bound to the constitution of binary gender difference, relying on, among other things, heterosexual reproduction and biological dimorphism. The heteronormative aspect of colonial power constrains the hegemonic articulation of queerness to biological dimorphism and gender difference, thus creating a hegemonic homosexual identity that supports sex and gender binarism.

The colonial model of power, structured around the control of labor, the organization of a global market, the creation of the concept of race, and the enforcement of heteronormativity is in the roots of how metronormativity works because this normative field depends on the tension between

development and underdevelopment, advancement and belatedness, primitiveness and civilization that is characteristic of colonial discourse. This tension constitutes the temporal and spatial axes upon which the metronormative binary urban/rural is articulated. Moved by developmentalist discourses, metronormative narratives rely on projections of closure that bear intimate links with the timeline of modernity.

The structure of colonial power projects a timeline that invests in closure by the substitution of an earlier model of organization, presumed primitive or surpassed by a newer, more developed model. Heteronormativity and metronormativity can be read as narratives of development, which are at the basis of the notion of Modernity (Quijano 2001). Within coloniality, narratives of development invest in closure by the substitution of earlier models of organization in favor of the Eurocentric view. Hegemonic conceptions of sex and gender also invest in narratives of development, closure, substitution, and maturation, as the individual is supposed to go through well-defined phases of life in order to achieve the substitution of a primitive being for the completely developed, heteronormalized adult[5].

Within the hegemonic articulation of homosexuality as described by D'Emilio, the earlier and presumed homophobic model of social life organized around the nuclear family is to be substituted by one organized around wage labor and the capitalist mode of (re)production. This oversimplification of the process of materialization of non-normative sexualities understands sexuality as a category that can be analyzed separately from other normative discourses that constrain the materialization of bodies. For this reason, the critique of metronormativity developed in this study calls for an intersectional framework of analysis. The homosexuality described by D'Emilio projects the capitalist narrativization of queerness on which the metronormative narrative relies. His examples of Lisa Ben, Donald Vining, or Pat Bond (107) all tell metronormative stories: all these people moved to big cities and there found welcoming gay communities into which they got absorbed. But, as Halberstam also asks implicitly throughout *In a Queer*, what about those who chose to stay in the

5 Lee Edelman, in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004) and José Esteban Muñoz, in *Cruising Utopia: the Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009) provide groundbreaking critiques of the hegemonic heteronormative understanding of the passing of time.

small towns or the ones who chose to move from the big cities to the small towns, such as the example of Brandon Teena (15)? Beyond that, what about the lives of intersex or transsexual people, who do not appear in this narrativization of non-heterosexual embodiments as tied to capitalism? In order to address these issues, I first turn towards a more in-depth analysis of how sex and gender is discursively constructed in the next section, entitled "Sex, gender, and abjection". Then, I move towards the concept of intersectionality because it provides a consistent framework to access what is left out of the articulation of queerness as white male middle-class homosexuality.

3 Sex, gender, and abjection

Sex and gender in Eurocentric discourse, as mentioned above, are organized in a system that has its basis on the binaries male/female in reference to the sex of a body, man/woman in reference to one's gender, and on heterosexual desire. That is, such system is based on heteronormativity. Heteronormativity presupposes that sex is a material characteristic of a body, biological and unquestionable, constructing sex as a natural and unambiguous characteristic. Sex is, therefore, rendered as being localized outside language, as something that exists prior and independent from the discourses that supposedly describe it. Medical and scientific discourses are fashioned as universally valid descriptions devoid of ideology which represent the Truth about all human beings. The linking of a certain gender to a certain sex gives the former its cultural meaning in a deterministic logic: if the sex of a body is identified as male, the gender linked to it is masculine; if the sex of a body is identified as female, the gender linked to it is feminine (Butler, 1993 xiv-xv). This means that, in the heteronormative logic, the genitals with which someone is born define how this person will be gendered and inserted in society. The possible manifestations of sexuality follow that same kind of deterministic logic: male-man bodies desire female-women bodies, and the other way around. This way, bodies are neatly arranged in a heterosexual regime.

The organizing logic just described presupposes that there is an untroubled process of reading people's bodies and their social roles, with clearly defined stages intrinsically connected to each other in a linear manner, leaving no space for possibilities other than heterosexuality. This

structure also presupposes that there is the sex of a body before there is the gender of that body, meaning that sex comes before its cultural manifestation. This means that first one has her/his genitals categorized and then gender is assigned. Heteronormativity produces sex, gender, and sexuality in a way that guarantees the reproduction and naturalization of the binaries mentioned before, considering everything that deviates from that linearity wrong, unnatural, and unhealthy.

Judith Butler (1993) examines the heterosexual logic in detail, taking issue with the terms involved in such system and expanding her critique to an examination of what heteronormative logics produce. Butler points out that the biologic category of sex is taken for granted, and a questioning of this category can reveal the way its naturalness is constructed. For her, sex is not a fixed category of a body, "but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize 'sex' and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms" (xii). Butler argues that sex comes to materiality by the repetition and citation of a set of norms at work to guarantee the (re)production of heterosexuality.

Gender, according to Butler, is not a consequence of biological sex. It is not the given attribute of a certain bodily configuration that follows the naturalized order of male-man/female-woman. Going back to Simone de Beauvoir's "one is not a woman, but rather becomes one", Butler questions what meanings the word "woman" can assume. For Beauvoir, the connection between sex-female and gender-woman is taken for granted; even if the gender "woman" is theorized as a social construction, the sex-female connection to the gender-woman is taken as the natural consequence of a physical/biologic reality (Butler 1990 11-13). Butler questions such relationship of cause-consequence, reading that the one who is not born a woman but rather becomes one by the cultural constructions does not necessarily have a certain genital configuration that is read as "female". Female or male genitals do not necessarily mean that a body will become the body of a man or the body of a woman: a body with female genitals can become a man (Butler 1990 141-46).

The relationship of cause-consequence on what concerns the sex/gender binary is, then, a cultural construction. The same is valid on what concerns the reading of what is male and what is female. It is the way the body is constructed discursively that leads to the apparent interdependence

of sex and gender. Butler also points out that desire plays a role in the performance of gender: "[a]lthough being a certain gender does not imply that one will desire a certain way, there is nevertheless a desire that is constitutive of gender itself and, as a result, no quick or easy way to separate the life of gender from the life of desire" (Butler 2004 2).

Moreover, the author also points out that the heterosexual matrix is exclusionary, as the subjects that are produced through it are produced simultaneously to those who do not achieve the status of subject. The excluded are those who do not comply with the heterosexist, heterosexual norms. Those individuals determine which are the limits of subjecthood: "[t]he abject designates here precisely those 'unlivable' and 'unhabitable' zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the 'unlivable' is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject" (Butler 1993 xii). This means that those rejected by the system are those on whom that very system depends, serving to feed the subject the image against which the subject is constructed.

For Butler, gender is an everyday practice, "an incessant activity performed" (Butler 2004 2). This does not mean, however, that one performs a gender as if it were a role chosen consciously. Such understanding of performance presupposes the existence of a subject before gender, one who can take on a role and perform it knowing that there is a separation between who or what one is and the gender one performs, which is misleading. The attribution of a sex to a body is the process through which an individual comes to be a person, that is, how one individual becomes recognizable in the social system. Because individual bodies become persons through the heterosexual matrix, the undoing of gender restrictions will affect the ways through which personhood is achieved. In the introduction to *Undoing Gender* (2004) Butler examines what could emerge from challenges to normative gender restrictions. On the one hand, normative gender restrictions can prevent an individual from gaining the status of a person in the heteronormative system. On the other hand, the author points out that the changing of normative gender restrictions opens up a wider range of possibilities for achieving personhood.

If the heterosexual matrix is a system that produces the subjects it regulates through a set of norms, when such norms change the product of the matrix will be different from the product of the previous set of norms. That is, what is produced as being the subject in relation to the binary conception of sex and gender will be different from what is produced as being the subject in relation to some other conception. Butler defines gender as "a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint" (Butler 2004 1). The performance of gender has the effect of producing personhood within the scene of constraint determined by normative gender restrictions. In such scheme, personhood is tied to the gender categories: one only achieves personhood by doing gender—this gender being done in accordance with the norms. However, the normative restrictions that constitute gender can be challenged and changed. Such challenges open up space for new gender doings that will result in different possibilities of personhood.

Improvisation in the practice of gender is tied to the possibility of agency, even though it may appear that there is no way out of the normative regulations of gender. Actually, Butler suggests that it is because of the norms that one has agency. In her words, "[i]f I have any agency, it is opened up by the fact that I am constituted by a social world I never chose" (Butler 2004 3). Producing changes in the regulations that constitute the subjects is not a matter of fully refusing the rules of gender and creating a whole new world for and by oneself. It is, instead, a matter of "being able to do something with what is done with me" (Butler 2004 3) by taking a critical distance from the norms that allow one to come into being in order to articulate productive alternatives. The people who challenge normative restrictions of gender are constructed as beings at constant risk, as intertwined in the foundation of those restrictions is the threat of death that surrounds and constitutes the subjects who do not fit into the models envisioned under the norms.

These individuals are denied access to the system and forced into the margins of subjecthood: the abject zone discussed before; too often their lives are not considered worth of continuation. By means of systematic and institutionalized phobic violences, such individuals are brutally denied life. Butler calls "livability" the differential way by which human recognition is conferred, depending on how a body is read in relation

to race, ethnicity, sex, and geographical position. In the author's words: "Certain humans are recognized as less than human, and that form of qualified recognition does not lead to a viable life" (Butler 2004 2). This system that confers or denies recognition is mobilized and constituted by practices that many times have their relationship with sex and gender regulations concealed by effectively constructed discourses.

The heterosexual matrix is based on a fixed timeline of development that lines up sex, gender, and desire and constructs heterosexuality as the final goal that can only be achieved by establishing contrasts with whatever is not heterosexual, constructing those as lesser, incomplete, malformed, in need of intervention for proper development. Similarly, the logics of coloniality construct the colonized as primitive, underdeveloped, in need of intervention for proper development. On the one hand, the narrative of proper/improper development performs a process of disabling non-normative sexualities, constructing queerness as the abject of what constitutes proper maturation—heterosexuality. On the other hand, the colonial narrative of proper/improper development performs a process of disabling colonized peoples, constructing them as the abject of what constitutes humanhood.

4 Intersectionality

Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) demonstrates how the experiences of race, class, and gender cannot be analyzed separately, because the intersections of those categories constitute specific structures of marginalization. Crenshaw demonstrates how concerns of both feminist and antiracist struggles obliterate the specificities of Black women's experiences, this way contributing to the mechanisms that marginalize the group. By assuming the generalization of "women" as "white women" as "race" as "Black males", these discourses silence Black women in both of these struggles and foreclose "potential coalitions" ("Mapping the Margins" 1299) that could be formed among differently marginalized groups. The same way, the generalization of homosexuality as white hides the implications of race and class in the construction of homosexuality. Moreover, the generalization of queerness as homosexuality performs similar foreclosures in respect to other possible ways of experiencing sexuality and of experiencing marginalization.

Intersectional analysis, according to Crenshaw, is concerned with looking at what is left untheorized at the intersection of multiple categories of oppression and overseen by universalizing critiques of social categories ("Demarginalizing the Intersection" 39-40). Sumi Cho, Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall (2013) point out that "[intersectionality] is far from being only an academic project" (786): the investigation of intersectional dynamics, the debates around the scope and contents of the field, and political interventions change one another, continually mutating the field as it develops and the dynamics of society change. Moreover, the discussions brought forward by academic intersectional critique may serve to fuel necessary social changes, not only in relation to gender, race, and class. As Crenshaw hints at the end of "Mapping the Margins" (1991), "[i]ntersectionality may provide the means for dealing with other marginalizations as well" (1299), such as the intersection of race, class, gender, sexuality, and geopolitical location, among others. The current debates around queer rights, for instance, must be seen from an intersectional point of view that puts together the discussion of sexual rights and the dynamics of race, ability, class, among others, as they intersect.

Devon Carbado (2013) expands the uses of intersectionality working with the concept of colorblind intersectionality and genderblind sexuality. Following the arguments that show how Black women are prohibited to represent women in general and Blacks in general, on the one hand, the author points to the many times in which whiteness is not theorized as race—although blackness always is (817). This makes whiteness an unmarked realm of power allowed to represent every subject within a historically identified group as if no racial issue is involved. This is often the case in metronormative narratives, which focus on sexuality alone disregarding other categories of marginalization. On the other hand, Carbado points to instances in which what remains untheorized is gender (817). In these examples, maleness is taken as neutral, the place where gender is not considered an issue to be discussed.

Vrushali Patil (2013) argues that "applications of intersectionality […] continue to be shaped by the geographies of colonial modernity" (853). According to Patil, those applications can be called "domestic intersectionality" (854), because they fail to address transnational connections and help strengthen the centrality of the Global North within much

feminist criticism of patriarchy. Among the author's main criticism of how intersectionality has been deployed is the way intersectional criticism is centered in the Global North and a product subject to exportation. Together with that, according to Patil, when that criticism is located within geopolitics, the specification of the geopolitical location happens when the criticism comes from the Global South, whereas when such criticism comes from the Global North, location is not considered as an issue to be addressed. In other words, intersectional critique produces the North as a neutral location, one that does not need to be theorized, contributing to the marginalization of the South and transnational scenarios. Moreover, the author calls attention to the reification of nation-state borders through the focus on intranational and local patriarchal structures, leaving aside how intersectional dynamics take place in the shaping of international and global scenarios. For Patil, the prevalence of representations of the Global North within feminist theory "points to the ongoing myopia of hegemonic concepts of gender dynamics, and the continued power of the geographies of colonial modernity" (848).

The frameworks of gender performativity and intersectionality allow us to approach the metronormative narrative through the homogenizing fictions that suggest that packing and moving is enough for someone to achieve sexual freedom. Gender, race, class, physical configuration, desire, geographical location, and many other factors play a great part on how sexuality is constructed and embodied. At the intersections of the metronormative narrative are those whose survival does not happen as smoothly as the narrative suggests; mostly, because of the way colonial power is constituted.

Modernity, as Walter Mignolo explains (2007), functions around two myths: the "rational" and the "irrational" myths of modernity. The rational myth is the one that promises salvation at the end; the second is the myth created to justify the violence of colonization. Various discourses intersect and support each other to establish those two myths as universal and natural truths, hiding, at the same time, their constructedness and their performative character. This means that, although fictional, those discourses have a very powerful and long lasting effect on reality. They sustain the division of the world in a structure of power that relies on the obliteration of peoples and cultures in order to sustain

Eurocentric hegemony over the globe. The idea of salvation sustained by the discourses of modernity takes various expressions throughout history: Christian theology, civilizatory enterprises, processes of modernization and development, the institution of market democracy, and, more recently, neoimperialist projects (463), hegemonic economic and cultural politics continue to function within the paradigm devised by modernity and, consequently, its two myths, even as the poles of the dichotomy colonizer/colonized are geopolitically reconfigured. The metronormative narrativization of queerness enters this arena as it is productive of intersections that are shaped by the dynamics of colonial discourse and the logics of modernity.

5 Metronormativity and Intersectionality

5.1 Context of Investigation

The context of this study comprises the portrayal of Latin American contexts in cinema; more specifically, three Latin American productions: the Brazilian *Madame Satã*, directed by Karim Aïnouz and released in 2002; the Argentine *XXY*, directed by Lucía Puenzo and released in 2007; and the Venezuelan *Pelo Malo*, directed by Mariana Rondón and released in 2013. The first is set in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in the 1930s; the second, in a coastal town in Uruguay; and the third in Caracas, Venezuela. Far from representing a homogeneous context, the location of those three films under the broader definition of "Latin American cinema" allows us to think the homogenization of Latin America in hegemonic discourses and to counter it, producing analyses that bring to the foreground the differences between the various Latin American countries and, raising awareness of the geopolitical implications of the geopolitical locations of the productions analyzed.

5.2 Significance of the Research, Objectives, and Research Questions

As representations of queer individuals in the mainstream media may build visibility and legitimacy, fueling significant and necessary social changes, they often reproduce exclusionary discourses structurally tied to economic and cultural politics established by colonial power. In these representations there is a tendency to universalize difference under normative identity markers, such as when categories such as "heterosexual" or "homosexual" are constructed as homogenized identities that favor a general, usually gentrified, model. As representations of queer subjects in the mainstream media borrow that visibility and legitimacy from normativity, those representations often reproduce the obliteration of proliferating markers, such as race, gender, class, sexuality, location, among others.

Therefore, the objective of this study is to analyze the representations of queer characters in fiction films, focusing on how the selected corpus responds to the master narrative of development that runs side by side with metronormativity in an attempt to exceed the utopian and normative narrativization of queerness in the media, moving towards the theorization of metronormativity in the context of Latin American cinema.

Beginning with the hypothesis that metronormativity is a field of power that is reproduced within the selected films, the questions that guide the analyses performed in the following chapters are devised as follows: 1. How does the metronormative narrative get (re)produced and/or (re)articulated in the specific Latin American contexts which constitute the selected films? 2. How do the selected films respond to the construction of metronormative closure? 3. How can the analysis of the films contribute to an intersectional critique of the hegemonic narrativization of queerness?

5.3 Theoretical Framework

Below are working definitions of the concepts that will inform and deepen my elaboration on the research questions expressed above:

1. Queer(ness) is here understood in a twofold manner: first, as a critical political position towards hegemonic heteronormative and colonial knowledge; second, as the possibilities of embodiment that counter hegemonic normative logics, not only in terms of sexuality but in relation to the many normative discourses that constitute personhood.

2. Normativity is here understood as "a field of power, a set of relations that can be thought of as a network of norms that forms the possibilities for and limits of action" (Jakobsen 517). In other words, normativity at the same time constructs and constrains what is subjected to that field of power.

3. Metronormativity is here understood as a field of power that reduces queerness to the hegemonic notion of development established by colonial power thus establishing a relationship of dependency between queerness and developmentalism (Halberstam 36).

4. Metronormative narratives are here understood as performative discourses that narrate queerness according to the norms devised within metronormativity. The metronormative narrativization of queerness is constructed around the promise of a salvation in the metropolis that is articulated through concepts of urban development in economic, cultural, and political terms. That is, in the metronormative narrative, the metropolitan queer would find happiness and some sort of sexual freedom due to the supposed greater "advancements" of the metropolis, advancements

that are closely connected to the expansion of capitalism, thus making queerness dependent on the latter. Taking into account that colonialism established the basis of what we now experience as neoliberal capitalism, it is paramount to consider the intersections that emerge from the metronormative narrativization of queerness in relation to the presence of the colonial power structure within contemporary society.

5. Intersectionality is here understood as the focus on what is left aside at the overlap of only the dominant within different categories of marginalization. According to Crenshaw (1989), the classification of groups of people into categories such as "gender" or "race" often leaves aside what is at the intersections of those categories. Women of color, for example, are obliterated at the intersection of "race" (which is dominantly represented by black men) and "gender" (dominantly represented by white women). Metronormativity is productive of intersections as it homogenizes non-normative embodiments and effaces the specificities of the political agendas of queerness produced within the context of coloniality.

6. Coloniality of power is here understood as the self-perpetuating legacy of colonial power within the contemporary hegemonic model that enables and sustains global capitalism. This legacy is intrinsically related to the production of the concept of race, to the racialized distribution of labor (Quijano 2000 533-4), and to the enforcement of a heteronormative sex/gender system constituted differently for white colonizers and racialized colonized peoples (Lugones 186).

5.4 Corpus and Contents

The contents of this study are organized as follows:

Chapter two, entitled "*Madame Satã*: The Metronormative Narrative at the Intersections of Race, Gender, and Sex", develops an analytical reading of the aforementioned intersections in the Brazilian-French production *Madame Satã*, directed by Karim Aïnouz and released in 2001. In this chapter, I analyze the implications of the representation of the country's developmentalist agenda on its politics of race, gender and sexuality in relation to the concept of metronormativity.

Chapter three, "*XXY*: Metronormativity and Sex/Gender (In)Decisions", develops an analytical reading of the Argentine film *XXY*, directed by Lucia Puenzo and released in 2007. In this chapter, I connect the metronormative implications of the developmentalist understanding of (hetero)sexual body maturation.

Chapter four, "Metronormativity in *Pelo Malo*'s Portrayal of the Bolivarian State" develops an analytical reading of the Venezuelan film *Pelo Malo*, directed by Mariana Rondón and released in 2013. In this chapter, I analyze the film's investment on metronormative closure as a developmentalist fiction that reinscribes the social context as belated in terms of race, sex, gender, sexuality, and economy.

Chapter Five discusses the analytical findings, articulating a comparative reading of the three films. The findings of the analyses performed in the previous chapters are then discussed in broader terms in relation to the specificities of metronormative narratives within Latin American cinema.

Madame Satã – Queering the Intersections of Sex, Gender and Race

1 Introduction

In the present chapter, the analysis of the film *Madame Satã* (dir. Karim Aïnouz 2002) focuses on the articulation of the metronormative narrative in the film's portrayal of a *transformista*[6] in Rio de Janeiro during the *Estado Novo* period in Brazil. The film is a fictionalized account of the life of Brazilian *transformista* João Francisco dos Santos, mostly known by his stage name Madame Satã. Set in 1932, the film recreates the period of João Francisco's life right before he conceives the stage character who would immortalize him in the *carnaval* of 1942. João Francisco (played by Lázaro Ramos) resides in the neighborhood of Lapa, in Rio de Janeiro. Living of tricks and low paying jobs, João also exploits the prostitution of his two companions, the prostitute Laurita (played by Marcelia Cartaxo) and the *travesti* Tabu (played by Flavio Bauraqui). The three of them, plus Laurita's baby daughter, form an alternative family group whose dynamics gives us access to the intersections of gender, sex, sexuality, and race within the progressive politics of the time. The film offers the viewer an intimate view of the main character's life, his aspirations, the complexities of his relationships, and the marginalization he and those around him go through, building a manifold representation of the real-life João Francisco.

The main character, João Francisco, begins the story as a submissive assistant to a white singer and stage performer called Vitória (played by Renata Sorrah) who abuses and humiliates him. He then goes through a journey that takes him from a disempowered social position to a more empowered one, which depends on his success as a performer—exactly the dream of success and closure the character nurtures. In the section

6 A *transformista* is a male artist who assumes, often exaggeratedly, feminine traits, clothing, and other traditional markers of femininity for stage performances. The *transformista* differs from the *travesti* (represented in the film by the character Tabu) because the former's performances of femininity are restricted to the stage and they do not engage in permanent bodily modifications, whilst the *travesti* lives her femininity in her everyday life and may often resort to bodily modifications to enhance and/or create feminine physical markers (Benedetti 2005, qtd. In Bortolozzi 126).

"Framing Metronormativity," I analyze the film's portrayal of the government's plans of urban development in relation to the gentrification of Rio, homophobia, criminalization of homosexuality, and the sustenance of gender difference in the construction of the film's metronormative narrative. In the section "Colonial Intersections in the Construction of Metronormative Closure," I analyze the relationship between João's empowered queer embodiments of sex, gender, race, and cultures in his performances on the stage and queer embodiments that happen off the stage, pointing to the reproduction of oppressive patterns of sex and gender oppression at work in the constitution of the character's narrative closure.

The writings of Gilberto Freyre in the 30s and 40s, writes Christophe Brochier (2014), refer to Brazil as a "social democracy", or an "ethnic democracy": "a nation with social relations that are fluid enough to evade the construction of racial castes" (my translation, 125). According to Brochier, however, the thought of Brazil as a racial democracy is a myth that hides the systematic exclusion of Blacks and Afro-Brazilians from hegemonic culture and society. In *Madame Satã*, a black homosexual male character gains the foreground among a social context that, as will be discussed further on, privileges whiteness and is surrounded by discourses of hygienist racial agendas. The context represented in the film counters Freyre's myth, showing how blacks and Afro-Brazilians were violently segregated in the developing city of Rio.

Aïnouz's film has enjoyed great critical acclaim, mostly for its complex portrayal of the main character and for its striking aesthetics. For Geisa Rodrigues (2014), the aesthetic choices of the film make up room for different political perspectives on Madame Satã's so-called "deviant profile" (176, my translation). Because the film favors close-ups, sharp focus on details, plays of light and shadow, and giving screen time to moments of intimacy between the character and his family and friends, she sees the film as departing from previous representations of Satã that relied on traditional stereotypes of the *malandro* and the bohemian lifestyle that characterizes the stereotype. The difference between previous portrayals of João Francisco and the one performed in Aïnouz's film is that *Madame Satã* gives the character more depth and complexity, characteristics that differ much from the portrayal of the historical figure in "an allegorical carnavalesque mood" (181, my translation) of previous representations.

Rodrigues reads the editing of Aïnouz's film as productive of a fluid space in which the alternation between the different social spheres through which the character transits creates a "smooth and inscrutable space" where the ambiguities of the character come and go avoiding dichotomous oppositions (182, my translation). Such fluidity however, as it will be argued further on, depends on the othering of the bodies marked by femininity that share the screen space with João. This way, there are dichotomous oppositions coming to the foreground throughout all the film if one is to focus critical attention and intersectional sensibility towards the supporting characters, Laurita (played by Marcelia Cartaxo) and Tabu (played by Flavio Bauraqui).

For Rodrigues, *Madame Satã*'s aesthetic choices allows for more complex readings of Madame Satã's historical persona, avoiding emptying the character of his political potential. Indeed, the film adds to João Francisco's representation racial, class, gender, and sexuality dimensions that create space for the critique of the socio-cultural context in which he lives and of the stereotype attached to him. Rodrigues' reading of João as a complex character, however, fails to take notice of how the extraordinariness of his persona is constructed—an issue that presents itself as much more complex than the representation of João's mood swings or bohemia in terms of critical potential. The strict focus on João Francisco and the silence about the other (and othered) characters around him creates an intersection that effaces the objectification and disempowerment of those who are not him but also occupy disempowered positions in the social structure, as Laurita and Tabu do. Looking at the intersections inhabited by João's companions allows us to expand the critique of the film towards a broader, intersectional focus that takes issue with the film's representation of (trans)gender and (trans)sexual difference.

There is an intimate connection between the enforcement of racist and heteronormative standards and the constitution of a national identity. In his book *Devassos no Paraíso* (2007), João Silvério Trevisan recuperates the history of homosexuality in Brazil, beginning with an overview of the history of its criminalization in the Colonial period, which lasted approximately from 1530 to 1815. From the beginning of colonization the hegemonic sex/gender system being established followed heteronormative parameters—one of the axes of the coloniality of power as Lugones emphasizes. Heteronormativity, racial segregation, and the enforcement

of an exploitative market system organize the idealization of the Brazilian national identity at the period. These colonial parameters are indeed queered by João, who questions with his body, performances and discourses on the stage those problematic and exclusionary conceptions of identity, sexuality and race. At the same time, however, as it will be demonstrated in the following analysis, the reproduction of some colonial parameters of sex, gender, and family relations are co-responsible for João's performative production as a queer and defying character.

In her analysis of the film, Lorraine Leu (2010) argues that the main character at the same time invokes and contests hegemonic stereotypes of race and gender in his (re)appropriations of femininity, "playing with the assigned social meanings of black bodies in the interplay of race and gender relations" (73). The author highlights three moments in which João impersonates white, black, and *mulata* femininities. The first, when João mimics Vitória's performance backstage; the second, when João and Tabu play a trick on a white man who went to João for a sexual encounter; and the third when João performs the *Mulata do Balacochê* in his own shows. These three moments constitute, in Leu's view, a queering of gender and race relations through the impersonation of femininity on a male body. For Leu, the film engages these stereotypical performances critically, queering conceptions of race and gender as the character builds alternative possibilities of legitimacy for the black body.

In their analyses, Leu and Rodrigues think the queering of heteronormative and racist standards through the main character's appropriations of femininity and whiteness, and the recuperation of African, Indigenous, and Latin American cultures in his performances. In Rodrigues' reading of such interplay, the film creates a space in which "non-Cartesian and non-Western ways of thinking" (13, my translation) can take place. Indeed, the film brings to the foreground cultural stereotypes such as the *mulata*, and the *malandro* and points at their racist and sexist constructions of blackness and femininity. João breaks the linearity of developmentalist thought, invades spaces that are not allocated for him, he lets his creations be invaded by influences from various sources, and defies authority and hierarchies, performing a queering of the context in which he lives. This queering comes to the screen in the character's performances and also in his construction as a defiant, flexible, strong, and unique individual.

Cultural stereotypes, such as the *mulata*, the *malandro*, and the *vadio*, on the one hand brought into visibility the presence of (male and female) black bodies and cultures in the hegemonic cultural sphere and physical space of the developing city. On the other hand, these stereotypes were tools of social control that removed the political impact of those framed under them. By foregrounding the multiplicity of identities that constitute the main character, the film recuperates the political potential of queer bodies. The film's challenge to heteronormative and racist identity constructions, which occurs through João Francisco's embodiment of *mulata* femininity in a male body, breaks the limits designed by the government's efforts to constitute the image of the Man of the New State.

At the same time, however, once the focus changes from João exclusively and turns to the whole around him, the limits of the political potential of queer bodies and multiple identities recuperated in the film's portrayal of João bring to the foreground the reproduction of the marginalization of social categories that are also excluded from the ideal of the Brazilian Man in the period. The dynamics of the relationship between João, Laurita, and Tabu play a great part in his self-(re)creation as an artist, but often go unnoticed in the literature. Rodrigues' and Leu's readings of *Madame Satã* appropriations and resignifications emphasize the queering of racist and sexist social practices trough the character of João, whose performances are read exclusively as the empowerment of a black, homosexual *malandro* because they counter most of the idealizations of the Man of the New State. But with the change of analytical focus from the empowered image of João to that of the "supporting characters"—"supporting" both in the cinematic sense of being secondary characters that accompany the main character and in the sense that they give him support in his path to success—who are both connected to the models of femininity at the center of João's performances, it is possible to address how femininity becomes a tool for the empowerment of a black male without being questioned for its own sake. That is, the previous readings of the character do not take into account the narrative need for the character to reiterate oppressive racial, sexual, and class patterns in order for him to achieve the film's projected celebratory closure.

2 Framing Metronormativity

In the Rio of the 1930s, the racial tensions ignited by the abolition of slavery proliferated as the city was being modernized. Hygienist and racist agendas, added to incentives to white immigration, were an important part of the urbanizing project of the time, which relied on police persecution and "relocation"[7] policies that removed the non-white population from the city center. These groups were framed as "economically passive and therefore potentially dangerous to the social order", writes Leu (77), and threatened the image of the hard working, white(ned) Brazilian Man imagined to represent the country's national identity. Excluded from the streets and avenues in the city center, poorer and mostly black populations were removed to the margins, either outside it such as when rebels in the Vaccine Revolt[8] were sent away in exile, or inside the city limits, as Leu points out (75). This aimed at whitening the metropolis to be made of Rio de Janeiro, even though hegemonic discourses addressed the issues of race in terms of the fictional "ethnic democracy" mentioned above. In a context as such, Blackness is a marker of queerness that is excluded from the developmentalist agenda planned for the metropolis. Moreover, the government's emphasis on the heterosexual nuclear family as the entity responsible for the well-functioning of the system marks non-normative sexualities as forms of queerness that are also excluded from that developmentalist agenda.

The process of Independence that went on from 1821 to 1825[9] was guided by ideas delineated on the Napoleonic Code, which was, in its turn, based on Enlightment thought. Taking on Enlightment's emphasis

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7 The word "relocation" is a euphemism for the racist and exclusionary aims of these policies. It appears in other contexts, such as the "relocation" of Jews to the ghettos and the "relocation" of Japanese Americans to internment camps during World War II.

8 *Revolta da Vacina* refers to the 1904 popular insurgency against the mandatory smallpox vaccination promoted by the federal government. According to Ministério da Saúde, the revolt counted 30 deaths, 110 wounded, and 945 arrests, from which 461 were deported to the state of Acre (approximately 2,988 km away from the state of Rio de Janeiro). (Ministério da Saúde. "Cronologia da Revolta da Vacina". *Revista da Vacina* . < http://www.ccms.saude.gov.br/revolta/revolta2.html>

9 The official date of the Proclamation of Independence of Brazil is September 7th 1822.

on reason over religious beliefs, the penal codes created in this period removed sodomy from the list of crimes that had been at work since colonial times. A new category of social offense was created to take its place, keeping the target on those once accused of such crime in previous, more religion-centered, times: the crimes "*por ofensa à moral e aos bons costumes*"/"outrages to public morality and good customs" (Trevisan 166, my translation). In the Republican Penal Code, instituted 60 years later, the moral offense category appears as "*crime contra a segurança da honra e honestidade das famílias*"/"crimes against the safety and honor of families" or "*ultraje público ao pudor*"/"public offense to decency" (Trevisan 167, my translation). These new criminal categories reflected the concerns to establish a Brazilian national identity during a time of profound social changes. The shift from religious beliefs to Enlightment ideas changed the wording of the laws, but not its intentions and effects.

The changes in the understanding of homosexuality pointed out above in terms of its criminalization reveal an intimate relationship between heteronormativity, citizenship, and economic development. In the Colonial Period, moral codes based on religious beliefs made queers an enemy of the Crown and, therefore, removed their possibility of being members of society; likewise, in Republican times the queer became an enemy of the State and was removed from the possibility of citizenship. Both systems of government relied on the enforcement of heteronormative standards in order to maintain control over the population, control that was exerted through violence with no hesitation. *Madame Satã* challenges the structure of the metronormative narrative as it emphasizes that the metropolis of Rio de Janeiro is dangerous and unwelcoming for queers. This way, the film brings to the foreground how the perdurable effects of colonization reveal the limits of metronormativity within the context portrayed.

2.1 Gentrification of the Metropolis

Figure 1: The mugshot.

The rigidity of the system's social structure comes to the foreground in the mugshot scene that follows the film's opening, in which João is framed by the police and by the camera (Figure 1). For Leu, in this scene "the camera appears to restrain [João] within the space of the frame as the object of a disciplinary gaze" (82), the disciplinary gaze that aimed at the gentrification of Rio. In this scene, a male voice outside the frame reads a criminal record that enumerates the crimes of which João is accused. These crimes, beyond justifying his stay in prison, detail the reasons why he is barred from society for the supposed danger he represents to it. The "danger" represented by his inadequacy to heteronormative sex and gender norms expose the marginalization of non-normative forms of embodiment that stem from the country's developmentalist politics, which put the heterosexual nuclear family and morals at the core of the country's developmentalist project.

The criminalization of his lack of formal education and formal employment is another element of a politics that emphasizes the importance of formal education so one can have a better job and take part on the project for advancing the nation at the same time that it creates hindrances that prevent the non-white population from having access to education or work in order to sustain the dichotomous structure of capitalist society. In the beginning of the film, João works as an assistant to Vitória, who runs a cabaret with her partner Gregório (played by Floriano Peixoto). The cabaret owners are both white and, although certainly not among the richest in the city, they certainly are wealthier than João. The two exploit and abuse their assistant, whose insistence in continuing on the job despite the unfavorable conditions is an indication of how hard it was for a black man to get a stable job such as the one at the cabaret. João eventually leaves the job and, after that, tells his companion Laurita he will from that moment on live a life of *malandragem*—that is, he will lead a bohemian lifestyle that has become an important stereotype within hegemonic culture, as it will be further explored in the next section.

In the period, the city of Rio de Janeiro assumed the role of an international metropolis, one of the biggest cities in Brazil and an important port city, representing a link between Brazil and the rest of the world. At the same time that the country faced a severe economic crisis as a result of what has become known as the Great Depression that followed the 1929 stock market crash in the United States, Brazil was going through a period in which the economic development of the nation was at the center of the government's agenda. João's work at Vitória and Gregório's cabaret is not a formal job, as we get to know when João asks for his dismissal and Gregório refuses to pay him. It is only by threatening Gregório with a knife that João gets his payment. This indicates that government policies that organized the work journey, promoted unionization, enforced minimal wage laws, and created the *Ministério do Trabalho* (Work Ministry) during Vargas' government did not reach out to the sector of the population of which João is part.

Although the image projected for the near future of the country held images of progress and wealth, after the *coup d'état* that put the dictator Getúlio Vargas in the presidential chair, Brazil entered an era of unemployment and violent social control. The success of Vitória's cabaret

depends on the exploitation of João, as the developmentalist agenda of the Vargas government depended on the sanitization of portions of the city in order to create a successful image of development. Development, in its turn, depends on the work of that very population that was cleared off the city center, the "urban sites of progress" mentioned above.

The influence of European positivism in the country's racial politics put ideas of racial degeneration, purity, and pollution at the center of the government's ideals. Either by defending that miscegenation is a threat to racial purity or that it would result in racial purification, the exclusionary politics exemplified by the emergence of vagrancy laws that aimed at removing Afro-descendants and homosexuals from the city center or immigration policies that favored white immigrants over Afro-descendants in the work market promoted the whitening of the idealized Brazilian citizen and, therefore, the whitening of the government's ideal of progress. Such politics, in Leu's words, "aimed at social control of Afro-descendants that sought to eliminate them from urban sites of progress" (75). This kind of policy inscribes cultural and economic belatedness to blackness, in terms that are different from the ones used during colonization (as "primitiveness" or "barbarism"), but that aim at the same social groups and hold the same meanings of control, subjection, and exploitation.

The urbanizing project of the time whitened the population also through efforts to attract white European immigrants, who would find in Rio a city modeled after Paris (Leu 75, Tourinho 2007). At the time, Rio came to be considered by some "the tropical materialization of the *Belle Époque*" (Kushnir 174). At a time when French culture was, in Adriana de Oliveira Tourinho's words (2007), "more than an influence, an aim to be achieved" (8, my translation), the sophisticated, modern seduction of France, got entangled with the construction of the tropics under the mark of the exotic, excessively sexual, seductive, and contagious. Vitória, João's employer in the beginning of the film, performs French songs to her audience in an ambience of seduction inspired in Orientalist fantasies that infects João, who sees in Vitória an embodiment of beauty, glamour, and success.

In this context, it is not surprising that the nickname given to the neighborhood of Lapa was "The Tropical Montmartre" (Durst 9), in reference to the famous French bohemian neighborhood. That nickname hints

at the dichotomies at play in such heterogeneous space, which accommodated both the elite and the most marginalized sections of society. In this construction, Lapa becomes Rio's "wild side[10]", where queerness is located to produce the necessary counterpart for the hygienic city center of the developmentalist narrativization of the country's future.

2.2 The mugshot: Limits of the Metronormative Narrative

The mugshot scene marks the beginning of the character's metronormative journey to success by characterizing its point of departure: the disempowered position forced onto black, poor, and non-heterosexual populations. Although the film as a whole does not refer to the dichotomy urban/rural in those exact words, it first places the queer character in a position where queerness cannot materialize so the desire to move to another position can exist, similarly to the structure that projects the impossibility of queerness on the economic and culturally underdeveloped rural site, and its possibility in the developed urban region. The tension between these two positions is based on the urbanization that provides the imagined metropolis needed to support the binary urban/rural on which metronormativity relies.

As discussed earlier, the government policies of the time promoted the obliteration of black populations through various strategies, such as their systematic exclusion from the work market and educational systems, which have been happening since colonial times. In the 1930s specifically, these strategies involved police persecution, vagrancy laws and other policies that produced and secured, as strongly as possible, the absence or disappearance of black populations from the physical space of the city and from the higher positions on the social hierarchy. The policeman's discourse reinscribes the racism, the heteronormativity, and the classism of the colonial social structure in the context of the country's process of modernization, making apparent the

10 In reference to Lou Reed's song "Take a Walk on the Wild Side", which invites the listener to know the "wild side" of the New York City of the 70s, characterized by the presence of transsexuals, drug users, male prostitutes. The song, together with "Smalltown", which opens the first chapter, can be read as a part of the construction of metronormative discourse because of its glamorizing and exoticizing of queerness in the space of the metropolis.

link between the enforcement metronormative standards and the failure of the metronormative narrative, in the sense that even in a big, developing city like Rio de Janeiro, work opportunities, community life, and the participation in the nationalist fantasy of progress are distributed according to exclusionary parameters.

In *Film Art – An Introduction* (2008), David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson define the frame of the film as follows: "[i]n any image, the frame is not simply a neutral border; it imposes a *certain vantage point* onto the material within the image. In cinema, the frame is important because it actively *defines* the image for us" (182). In other words, framing choices determine what we, as spectators, are going to see; also, they define how we are going to see that image, because the framing, combined with the editing of the scene, will give the spectator cues to whose point of view s/he is going to identify. Framing has a political potential and is an important part of the creation of meaning.

The image contained in the frame in Figure 1, a simple composition of a heavy volume against a clearer background, makes João's black body unavoidable to the eye, while the policeman's speech aims at his complete invisibility. For Leu, at this moment "João is made visible socially and […] through a specific gaze that sees the Afro-Brazilian male as criminal" (Leu 82). But beyond emphasizing João's entrapment in a racist and homophobic system, the scene excludes hegemonic racist discourses from the vantage point that is created by the framing and brings to the foreground the unavoidable presence of black bodies, both in the frame and on the streets. This composition plays with the scrutinizing gaze of nineteenth century scientific discourses, appropriating the overexposure of black bodies and their racist classificatory systems and returning them as an unavoidable reality.

Moreover, João is not presented as a passive victim of his criminalization, as Leu's reading appears to suggest. However battered and weakened, he gazes at the camera, breaking the limits of the screen and implicating the spectator in the racism and homophobia of the policeman's discourse. At the same time that the borders of the frame define the space in which João is discursively confined they also create the space outside them. This is space is not only occupied by the policeman, but also by the

audience. By having João look straight at the camera, the scene breaks with the illusion of a self-sufficient diegesis. The framing chosen for this scene functions as a visual cue to the film's portrayal of heteronormative, racist, and classist standards that hinder João's path to success.

The framing aligns the spectator with the point of view of the policeman/photographer holding the camera that takes João's mugshot. At the same time, the framing aligns the spectator with the film camera, which, throughout the movie, is going to take the position of the one who denounces the ensemble of racism, classism, and homophobia directed at João. By staring right at the camera, João not only defies the person behind the camera in the film, but also troubles our position as passive spectators and potential reproducers of the prejudices laid out in the policeman's discourse. This way, the scene does not only graphically represent João's subjection to a disciplinary gaze as Leu points out, but also creates a vantage point for João that troubles the passiveness of the spectator and brings visibility to the resisting black body on the screen. When João looks straight at the camera, the neutrality of the frame and the self-sufficiency of the diegesis are challenged, calling the audience's attention to how "vantage points" are distributed along the axes of power.

The developmentalism of the government was firmly based on racism, heteronormativity, and homophobia. Those exclusionary discourses were enforced onto the population in order to construct the metropolis of Rio de Janeiro in a process that worked for the gentrification of the city. This points to the building of a metropolis that does not correspond at all with the metropolis of the metronormative narrative because it does not constitute a "safe place" for queers; instead, it constitutes a very dangerous space in which queerness is criminalized.

2.3 The Nuclear Family

Figure 2: Tabu and Laurita doing housework.

In the period portrayed in the film, the patriarchal family became, in Trevisan's words, "the basic nucleus of the emerging Brazilian state" (172, my translation). Reproduction, the accumulation of capital, and other characteristics of the heteronormative understanding of human development were taken as the guides to the governmental policing of bodies and human relations. To the nuclear heterosexual family is given the responsibility of producing the Man of the New State, the idealized individual who is going to work for the development of the nation. Sexual roles were redefined and reinforced as masculinity-paternity and femininity-maternity, reiterating the link between sex and reproduction and rendering anything outside the heterosexual-procreation scheme abnormal and offensive to the State.

On the one hand, the break of the heterosexual nuclear family is considered by D'Emilio, as discussed in the previous chapter, one important factor for the establishing of the homosexual/queer identity. On the other hand, the metronormative narrativization of queerness emphasizes the

formation of alternative families and community groups that are supposed to welcome the queer community in the metropolis. In *Madame Satã*, the alternative family group formed by João, Tabu, and Laurita emulates the structure of the patriarchal family, reproducing patterns that marginalize some manifestations of queerness instead of empowering and supporting them. João, prevented from representing the main character of the metronormative narrative because of the marginalizations discussed in the previous subsection, becomes someone who, instead of taking part in a liberating community structure with Tabu and Laurita, functions as the reproducer of exclusionary prejudiced and exploitative discourses that are responsible, according to D'Emilio, for the rupture of the heterosexual nuclear family.

In his family relations, João sustains the commodification of Laurita's and Tabu's femininity and his control over them, even though his family is an alternative group formed by people with no blood ties (except for Laurita and her baby) who are settled together out of necessity due to their marginalized status. The group formed by a white female prostitute, a black *travesti*[11], and a *malandro* could enable the formation of a queer community of mutual support; instead, João establishes his authority over Laurita and Tabu and exploits his counterparts (who are marked by traditional femininity) in many scenes throughout the film. In one of those (00:10:48), João comes to Laurita and Tabu asking them about housework, pointing out that they are responsible for it and reinforcing the structure of the heterosexual nuclear family that constructs women as housewives and links femininity to passivity, obedience, and servitude. The camera fixed inside the house frames Laurita and Tabu from a door that opens to the house's backyard. In this scene, the frame constituted by the door, instead of isolating the two female characters, sharpens the image's focus on the misogynist mechanisms of their exclusion even within a non-traditional household (Figure 2).

The scene detailed above uses the same kind of fixed frame that characterizes the mugshot scene. João's voiceover parallels the voice of the police officer who reads the criminal records, but now in the context of his family relations. What he says reinscribes the women in the domestic space, marking his rude authority over them and their inferior places within the family group. On the one hand, João makes use of the

11 A *travesti* is someone with male genitals who embodies femininity in her daily life, resorting or not to permanent bodily modifications (see note on page 1).

oppressive privileges of the male within the patriarchal family. On the other hand, this family's father figure is played by a black, homosexual, criminalized *malandro*, not by the white heterosexual man of the New State. His appropriation of the white family man is distorted by the figure of the pimp, who also bases his power on the exploitation of women or femininity-invested individuals. The structure of power that is built when João occupies the place of the white father, however, continues to be based on the heteronormative patriarchal structure.

3 Colonial Intersections in the Construction of Closure

Metronormative closure, understood as the final stage of the trajectory from a disempowered position to a more empowered social status in the big city, can be seen not only as constrained by the social vantage points that frame the developmentalist agenda of the government, which excluded blacks and homosexuals and favored whiteness and heterosexuality, but also as dependent on those exclusions, because otherwise the character would not have what to overcome in order to achieve success. This structure reinforces the dichotomous social structure, within which what is constructed as success for some depends on the exploitation of others.

João cannot fit into the model of the metropolitan gay because of the exclusionary parameters upon which the social structure of his time is based, as discussed in the previous section. But in relation to Laurita and Tabu, the metropolis as it is constituted in the developmentalist agenda of that time allows him to find closure. From this point of view, the very structure of the metropolis—with its emphasis on the binary gender structure that keeps women in the domestic space and perpetuates transphobia—is what enables João to achieve his desired closure as he reproduces the exploitation and the marginalization of other marginalized groups—women and *travestis*.

The meanings of femininity embodied by João on the stage, which are the images of success for João projected by the film, evoke historical stereotypes of women in disempowered positions. These stereotypes glamorize many kinds of exploitation of bodies that are in some way read as bearers of feminine markers, in *Madame Satã* represented by the white woman Laurita and the black *travesti* Tabu. When re-presented

by a male body on the exceptional space of the stage, in a so-called "fluid" re-presentation of marginalized subject positions and cultures, the stereotypes are translated into empowerment within the regime constructed as the hegemonic within the story. When embodied by women outside the stage, however, only the expected tragedies related to those marginalized subject positions come forward, such as on the battered Laurita or on Tabu's exaggerated feminine vulnerability. The disempowerment is reproduced and returned to João in the form of the support he needs to achieve success, indifferent to how such success is dependent on the silencing of individuals who are constructed throughout the film as a family that reproduces patriarchal patterns and, at the same time, forms the supportive queer community around João. The characterization of their group results in a unilateral support that further exploits women and favors their male counterparts.

In *Madame Satã*, the closure projected for the end of the narrative is João's success as a performer, which depends on the overcoming of the obstacles to the character's journey, as mentioned above. From the first sequence, in which the glamour of the stage is contrasted to the violence of his imprisonment, to the last, when João is shown as the winner of the *carnaval* contest, the character's success on the stage is linked to the overcoming of well-defined obstacles in order to achieve success. These obstacles are represented by the processes of marginalization and effacement characteristic of the place and time he lives in.

The alternating structure of both the opening and the ending sequences suggests the separation between the reality of violence and the fiction of glamorized success. This separation creates a distance that the character is supposed to travel, moving towards closure. João is impelled by a narrative flow that leads him either to the closure of success or to the close of failure, as if the obstacles in the way would disappear and no consequences would endure. In the end, João becomes a universalized idealization of success that disregards the intersections of sex and gender that come to the foreground in the analysis of his relationship with Laurita and Tabu.

The character's salvation is constructed around the idea of the fluidity of his body, upon which the masculine and the feminine can, allegedly, co-materialize. Such fluidity is articulated through and constrained within the fictional space of the stage—be it the actual stage in the bars or cabarets, be it the imagined stage of his bedroom. The space of the stage enables him

to serve as a point of convergence for the hegemonic exclusionary regimes emphasized in the film's portrayal of the period, serving as an extraordinary site where a black male body can embody white and black femininities. The film creates a strong polarity between the two "sides" of the same neighborhood, pushing João forward and, in this movement, constraining his fluidity to only one direction—the imagined closure at the end. This way João becomes the exception that confirms the rule of separation of the binaries his performances transgress. It is only him, the exceptional artist, the one who can play with the traditional meanings of race and gender within that society. For the rest of the characters, such possibilities of queer embodiment are never enabled and/or empowered in the film.

3.1 Colonial Stereotypes

The developmentalist ideology of the government at the time had plans to conduct the country, specially the capital Rio de Janeiro, towards the idealized image of the big city devised by Eurocentric modernity. The slogan of Vargas' government, "Only work dignifies the Brazilian man" (Durst 52, my translation), led the efforts to constitute a Brazilian national identity, one of the tools used by the government to push the country towards ideals of development that had, at their heart, as Leu points out, European positivism (75). Beyond its relationship with positivism, the slogan hints at the effacement of the feminine from the government's plans for the future.

Positivism is a branch of epistemology that acknowledges as authentic only the knowledge acquired through the use of the scientific method. Science is constructed as objective and unbiased, rooted in observable, and measurable—and, therefore, incontestable—facts. In the 19th Century, the scientific study and classification of living beings, including humans, gave rise to what came to be called scientific racism. Measurements and comparisons of individuals from different places and cultures following the principles of the scientific method, such as in phrenology studies, converged to forge the concept of race and, as a consequence, the hierarchies that divided the world's population into different races and helped to construct the idea that some ethnic groups are more advanced than others.

Positivist emphasis on the truth that stems from Science strengthened the influence of scientific racism in the process of enforcing the racial hierarchies in social relations. Central to those hierarchies was the notion that societies evolve linearly, from primitive to more developed states. With studies that classify black and aboriginal races as primitive and whiter races as more developed, in this period of science emerged the logics that equals whitening to development. The link between whiteness and development reinforces the presence of whites and the absence of blacks within the limits of the metropolis, unless they appear as stereotypes that can be useful for the government's developmentalist plans.

If before the abolition of slavery the separation of the races was made unambiguous and well-established in the open racism of colonial society, after the abolition racial segregation took on different forms. On the one hand, the period saw the increased marginalization and criminalization of the black population, as demonstrated in the previous section. On the other hand, cultural movements such as Modernism as well as Afro-Brazilians' efforts to bring black cultures and heritages to visibility, ignited a process of legitimization of Afro-Brazilian culture. In this process, however, some racialized identities embodied by blacks were progressively de-politicized. Samba, *carnaval*, and other Afro-descendant forms of cultural expression faced strong government control and censorship (Leu 71), becoming cultural stereotypes within hegemonic culture.

Jobless people, who, in Leu's words, "spent a great deal of their time in the streets" (77), were called *vadios*; those who "preferred to live off illegal activity or their wits" (77), refusing the menial jobs reminiscent of slavery available for blacks after the abolition, were called *malandros*—the "occupation" João tells Laurita he is going to have. The stereotype of the *mulata*, the mixed-race, passive, sensual woman, enters this fiction as "the quintessence of the national, a representation of *mestiçagem* in an objectified form" (Leu 80). The celebration of the *mulata* hides the history of sexual abuse of black enslaved women perpetrated in colonial times, exploits the black and mixed-race female as an export product, whereas the racial politics of the time and governmental policies excluded real black and mixed-race women from the idealized future of progress. Thus, at the same time that these identities celebrated and promoted Afro-descendant cultures, they served to

objectify, marginalize, exclude, and criminalize the black population based on colonial, racist constructions that were at this time translated into ideas of development and progress.

Marc Hertzman (2010) complicates the relationship between *vadiagem* and *malandragem* (being a *malandro*) by examining the history of the terms and tracing the origins of their meanings and conflicts back to Brazil's imperial past. According to Hertzman, although the term *malandro* is often tied to a negative connotation, used to blame Afro-descendants' for the impossibility to adapt to the end of slavery, it is also seen in a positive way "as a quintessentially Brazilian form of cleverness" (594, my translation). Hertzman points out that in Rio being a *malandro* became a tool used by Afro-descendants to counter the *ideologia da vadiagem* (594). The appropriation of *malandragem* gave black males the opportunity to rise socially and to prove, in some way, that they were not as backward and incapable as the hegemonic ideology constructed them. In the context of Hertzman's study, for instance, in the beginnings of the popularization of samba, many *malandros* achieved social and economic recognition due to the success of their musical compositions. Racial and sexual tensions abounded, being many times referred to in the songs of the *malandros* of the period. *Mulato Bamba*, for instance, written by the well-known Brazilian sambista Noel Rosa, is about a gay *malandro* and appears in the film *Madame Satã* as one of the songs the main character performs on stage.

After the altercation with Vitória and Gregório mentioned previously, João leaves the cabaret and meets Renatinho (played by Fellipe Marques), a white young man who wants João to teach him *capoeira*, a type of martial art developed in Brazil that combines African and indigenous influences. The men question each other's masculinity: João wants to know if Renatinho is tough enough to learn *capoeira* and Renatinho wants to prove that he is both tough enough and that he can acknowledge João's authority over him. João embodies the streetwise *malandro* to subdue the young man and puts him to the ground with a few *capoeira* moves. João's confrontation with Renatinho is more of an enactment than a real confrontation. The stereotype of the *malandro* becomes a tool for the display of an excessive masculinity that contrasts with the model of femininity João is soon going to enact for Renatinho, based on Vitória's show.

João and Renatinho's impersonation of masculinity troubles the racial hierarchy in the sense that the black man is the one who has something to teach the white man; moreover, the white man is after knowledge produced by marginalized cultures. Although in terms of race it can be said that the hierarchy is in some way inverted, in terms of gender the scene reinforces the attribution of strength, power, and knowledge to masculinity and the attribution of delicacy, beauty, and objectification to femininity. This way, the so-called fluid representation of sex and gender roles is reproductive of the heterosexual binary and of the patriarchal structure that depends on the submission of women to a lowered position in relation to men.

Later on in the film João impersonates the *mulata* in a trick he plays at Álvaro (played by Guilherme Piva), a possible client Tabu finds at the bar where João, Tabu, and Laurita frequently go. Álvaro is interested in having sex with a man, but this is never said explicitly in the whole scene. Tabu and João refer to a fictitious sister, who would be the *mulata* Álvaro is looking for. The character's exchange of looks, however, points to João as being the one Álvaro desires. The trick articulated by João and Tabu is based on the *mulata*'s sexual availability to white men. By performing a queer *mulata*—the mixed-race woman embodied by a black male—João interrupts the whitening and heterosexualizing processes occurring within the construction of a Brazilian national identity, which foresees the heterosexual intercourse of a mixed-race female and a white male. Yet at the same time João reiterates the normative narrative of national identity building by effacing homosexuality and making use of the disempowerment of black and/or mixed-race women to hide the cleverness of the *malandro*.

By the end of the trick scene, João splits the money they stole from Álvaro, giving Tabu a very small share even though she plays an important role in the trick. João's exploitation of Tabu has appeared before in the film and is a common event in their lives. He humiliates her and even treats her by the masculine pronoun, disrespecting her female identification. In the critiques of the film referenced earlier, João's various embodiments of femininity throughout the film are often translated as empowerment, because he comes to represent a strong individual who dares performing on stage non-(hetero)normativity within a extremely racist and homophobic society, which punishes him for those performances. Tabu, in turn, lives

her queer femininity not on the stage, but in real life. Tabu's status is such that the impossibility of her situation emerges in her name—the Portuguese word for "taboo", a strong prohibition either because something is too sacred or too profane to be made or touched in any way.

That the intersection of race and gender is the site of João's hegemony is explicit in the scene when Tabu explains that Álvaro is looking for a girl "with darker skin, thick lips" (00:26:36-00:27:02) who is sexually available. Tabu is describing a stereotypical *mulata*, although presenting the potential client to a figure who does not carry any signs of that femininity. Tabu is the one who carries them, in her voice, gestures, and attire, but a possible embodiment of the *mulata* in her *travesti* body is never enabled. Although João and Tabu's celebration of their success in this enterprise "enacts a kind of revenge by the fetishized other for a history of unequal racialized patterns of sexual exchange" (Leu 87), their revenge reinforces the inequalities between Tabu and João's embodiment of femininity.

João resorts to displays of excessive masculinity when his performances of femininity are put into question, such as when he argues with Vitória or when homophobic remarks are directed to him by clients in Amador's bar. Tabu's femininity, however, serves only as the necessary weakened counterpart for João's empowerment within the household or when dealing with clients. Tabu is a queer *mulata*, and is twice oppressed, by society and by João. Even when the stereotype of the *mulata* appears queered in João's performance, this queering of heteronormative and racist paradigms follows the tendency pointed out earlier of privileging characteristics tied to the construction of maleness and silencing the problematic that may emerge from the queer *mulata*'s femininity.

Figure 3: Tabu looks in the mirror.

The *mulata* and the oriental seductress are both stereotypes of femaleness created within patriarchal and racist discourses. Even though João approaches and engages those discourses in his performance of femininity, producing a queer version of the heterosexual orientalist fantasy, he produces that version on the historically established base of female oppression and racism. If the queer *mulata* João embodies enjoys the pleasure of being desired, such embodiment does not question whether the mixed-race woman or *travesti* who often engages in prostitution for survival is being violated by the structures that constitute her as an object of desire. Although João queers the stereotype of the *mulata* and troubles the naturalization of gender roles by calling attention to "the artifice of performance" and by revealing the performative character of gender roles as he "engages on the discursive work of being *mulata*" (Leu 88), this troubling stops at João's body, failing to reach out for the other othered bodies discursively produced by the objectification of both white and mixed-race femininity.

The intersection of race, gender, class and sexuality that marks the exclusion of Tabu from the empowering strategies used by João comes to the foreground in the scene following the end of their trick. Tabu, hurt by João's abuse, looks at herself in the mirror and imitates João's masculine posture (Figure 3). Laughing, she dismisses the attempt and descends the stairs back to the streets. What stops Tabu from making use of aggressiveness to impose her presence, as João does when he reacts aggressively to his effacement? If there can be a homosexual malandro, why not a *travesti malandra*? The scene emphasizes the kind of femininity constructed on Tabu's body: she is delicate, submissive, and easily scared. In the trick they play Tabu acts hysterically, pretends she is crying at the end by fear of the police. João asks Álvaro to take care of her while he gets her a glass of water. She plays the necessary feminine counterpart for João's masculinity to be effectively performed, a taboo femininity whose material embodiment is dismissed in favor of the empowerment of a character that enjoys privileges attached to masculinity.

João's performances on stage and at home reiterate the sexism, transphobia, and homophobia of the period. The dynamics of the relationship between João, Laurita, and Tabu often go unnoticed in the literature, although João's two companions play a great part in his self-(re)creation as an artist. The readings of *Madame Satã*'s appropriations and resignifcations performed by Rodrigues and Leu, discussed in the first section, emphasize the queering of racist and sexist social practices through the character of João, whose performances are translated into the empowerment of a black, homosexual *malandro*, who counters most of the idealizations of the Man of the New State. They leave aside, however, the possibility of reiteration of oppressive racial, sexual, and class patterns that come to the foreground as the focus of the analysis shift from the powerful image of João to that of the other characters that support him, who are both connected to the models of femininity at the center of João's performances. In these performances, femininity becomes a tool for the empowerment of a black male without being questioned for their own sake.

As a black *travesti*, Tabu is a queer individual whose genital configuration deviates from the heteronormative penis-male-man/vagina-female-woman matrix. In terms of the power structure established within the family, Tabu's queerness translates into the inferiority that the traditional vagina-female-woman body receives in the

white, heterosexual, nuclear family. To a certain extent, Tabu shares that inferiority with Laurita, because the white woman is also subjected to João's domination, both within the family relations and in the exploitation of her prostitution. Tabu's inferior position, however, has a transphobic dimension that does not reach to the white woman. When João leaves prison (00:58:00), Laurita waits for him outside but Tabu does not go along with her. In the next scene, João complains that Tabu did not even pay him a visit, to what she replies "I was afraid". As a white, cisgender[12] woman, Laurita does not share that same fear.

The reasons that make Tabu fear going to the prison are not explicitly addressed in the scene, but can be inferred from the discourse of the policeman in the mugshot scene at the beginning of the movie. The criminalization of homosexuality, femininity on a male body, racism, among other accusations made explicit by the policeman would frame Tabu in a similar way in which they frame João. The difference is that, while João performs femininity on stage, Tabu embodies it outside the stage. João does not carry on his body the confusion of femininity markers and masculine markers all the time as does Tabu, who has well-plucked eyebrows, wears clothes that refer to both masculine and feminine attire, among others. João only makes use of these markers on the stage, wrapping them, moreover, in an atmosphere of glamour. In this sense, João's performances of masculinity outside the stage de-realize his act on it (Butler "Performative Acts" 527), enlarging the distance between the femininity embodied by a black male body on the stage and the femininity embodied by a *travesti*. This makes the social sphere even more dangerous for Tabu, who does not resort to aggressiveness as does João, reinforcing, at the same time, the link between femininity and delicacy and masculinity and aggressiveness.

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12 "Cisgender" is a term currently in use to refer to people who identify with the sex and gender assigned to them at birth; that is, a person born with a vagina who identifies herself as a woman, or a person born with a penis who identifies himself as a man. It is important to notice that the term refers to bodies that present genital configurations within the limits of normality determined by scientific and medical discourses.

Figure 4: Tabu's close up, João in the background.

Another scene that emphasizes the difference between João and Tabu occurs when João approaches Tabu asking about the money she made from a previous sexual encounter with a client. Tabu's face is framed in profile and occupies most of the screen (Figure 4). Tabu's well-trimmed eyebrows contrast with her unshaven face, mixing up feminine and masculine markers. The sharp focus on Tabu's close-up also accentuates the physical traces identified by scientific racism as racial markers, making the blackness of her body and the confusion of feminine and masculine traits unavoidable to the eye. The overexposure of her body, however, does not translate into empowerment like it does for João.

From the background, João approaches Tabu as an out of focus threat who walks slowly towards her and extorts the money of her last sex client from her. He then proceeds to criticize her for having a white cop as a client, to whom Tabu refers as her "*anjo de bondade*"/"kindness angel" (my translation), a protector. When João impersonates the *mulata* Josefa for Álvaro or is active in the sexual intercourse with Renatinho, there is apparently no problem in using stereotypes of femininity to seduce a white man. When Tabu embodies markers of those stereotypes, however, she is disempowered by holding them.

As objects of consumption, deprived of political potential and under the control of the heteronormative system, *mulatas* and *malandros* were allowed to be re-presented in the idealization of progress of the period as cultural stereotypes. In João's second stage performance in the film (01:19:30-01:23:00), which he begins with a rendition of *Mulato Bamba* (the samba about a gay *malandro* referred to in the first section), the character denounces the objectification and exploitation of the *mulata*, referring to himself as the *Mulata do Balacochê* and asking the audience how much they would pay for her body. Laughing off the audience's offers of money, he suggests that the *mulata* is, in fact, a man in disguise. The character uses his denunciation of the objectification and the exploitation of the mixed-race female not to talk about her oppression, but to talk about the oppression of male homosexuality. In this performance, the *mulata* is (re) produced again as a means for the male to bring himself to the foreground. Moreover, the suggestion that the *mulata* on the stage is a man in disguise links *travestis* to deceit and further reinforces their marginalization.

3.3 Gendered closure

The relationship between João, Laurita and Tabu provides a chance to observe how, even though femininity is queered in João's performances on stage, the queering stops at the production of femininity off stage. The exploitation of women, the inferiorization of femininity, and the invisibility of the *travesti* sustain João's position of empowerment, pointing to how the femininities that are queered by João in his performances and the femininities lived outside the stage are differentially and intersectionally produced. In the end, the celebration of João's queer performances makes him a universalized model of queerness that reproduces and reinforces heteronormative and colonial stereotypes.

The portrayal of Tabu and Laurita often shed a sympathetic light towards these characters' sufferings, exploring the ways they are hurt and exploited in graphically and emotionally strong scenes. But these episodes are often soon interrupted by turns that point the lights back to João. For example, when João comes from the background as a threatening specter over Tabu, after abusing her he makes a joke and Tabu is shown as enjoying the disrespect as if nothing had happened before. In a scene with Laurita, she uses her body—which João has been physically abusing

seconds before—to seduce him and calm him down. Laurita and Tabu support João even at their own expense, as if the meaning of their abuse matters as long as it fulfills its duty towards the binary structure as the necessary weakened counterpart that enables his empowerment.

The way masculinity and femininity are articulated in the relationship among the family members reflects the ideal imagined for the country in the sense that the women occupy the same position in both the fiction of national development and the fiction of João's success: that of supporting characters. Laurita's story, for example, is one of someone in a disempowered position—a woman prostitute with a baby—who finds a "protector" who, as a presumed return, exploits her for household tasks, financial gain, emotional support, and as a personal assistant. In one scene (01:16:10), the characters share their idea of a successful closure for their lives. João expresses the wish to send the baby to study in a convent in France, claiming for a better future for the girl through a process of gentrification that links attaining middle-class, whitened, and Eurocentric values to achieving a better social position. In her turn, Laurita tells the others she dreams of remodeling the house, reinscribing women in the domestic space, confirming her place as provider of household services, and following the ideal of remodeling the city in the developmentalist effort. For Tabu, closure is getting married and sewing for her husband, in a utopian, white, and feminine/female housewife dream.

The film's closure, moreover, depends on disregarding the marginalizations that the successful João produces in order to be complete. Comforted by the thought that eventually, 10 years later João will become famous, the film's audience may forget about Tabu and Laurita, or what João's succeeding would or could represent to them. Would they continue being explored? Would they be even more exploited? Of course, Tabu and Laurita are not the main characters so the film might not account for their destinies in the same way it does with the main character. The issue is that the structure of closure created at the end reproduces a way of thinking closure as substitution that effaces the marginalizations created when João comes to represent all the marginalized subject positions that converge on him on the stage. The hierarchy that moves such substitution (re)produces regimes of power that depend on the production of "the one" who will prevail over the silenced "failed" others.

4 Final Remarks

Madame Satã is set in the 1930s, about seventy years before the film was made and released. The film's topicality, despite the chronological distance between the 1930s and the 2000s, indicates the permanence of the racism, classism, trans and homophobia, and sexism that we still face even after so much time has passed. João Francisco dos Santos' portrayal in Aïnouz's film occupies an important place among the representations of black queers in mainstream media, especially because he is presented not as a passive victim of a cruel system or, as pointed out by critics in the review of the literature on the film, as an allegory that effaces the complexities of being black, poor, and homosexual in Brazil. The character's awareness of how he is marginalized and his clever resources to counter such marginalizations constitute ways through which he gains empowerment, serving as a progressive model for other marginalized queers in our current times as it counters the whitening of the hegemonic representation of the Brazilian queer citizen.

Sadly, the contemporary neoliberal project in Brazil, marked in 2016 by the coup that impeached then-President Dilma Rousseff in an unconstitutional move led by the right-leaning conservative parties, is characterized by an agenda that is very similar to the agenda of the social context portrayed in *Madame Satã*. Today, the plans of those who occupy the place destined to a democratically elected president and parliament project a developmentalist project for the country that reproduces hygienist social policies, manifested sometimes surreptitiously and another times quite openly. The reproduction of heteronormativity, of the patriarchal structure, of racial segregation, and the enforcement of the exploitative market system that characterizes neoliberalism are becoming more and more openly spread out in the discourses of conservative groups, both in the government and on the streets. These groups defend, indirectly, a murderous project that excludes queers from the shaping of the country's future.

The contemporary reproduction of heteronormative discourses comes to the foreground in the social effacement of non-heterosexual individuals whose civil rights are constantly denied as laws to bring equality between heterosexual and non-heterosexual unions and to criminalize homophobia continuously fail to pass the parliament, in the rising numbers of violence against transsexuals and *travestis*, in the lack of concrete

actions against this specific kind of violence from the part of legislators, and in the rise of the conservative sectors of the population, who are more and more audacious in their trans and homophobic attacks under the guise of freedom of speech. Heteronormativity is also present in the perpetration of the pathologization of non-heterosexual sexualities performed, many times, by religious groups, among many other examples that can be found in a daily basis in the traditional and in the social media. The maintenance of the patriarchal structure is also attached to the strengthening of conservative and religious groups inside the government, such as demonstrates the difficulty to overcome the criminalization of abortion and proceed towards its legalization.

The criminalization of lack of formal employment and education take different shapes nowadays, but still works around the expendability of poor, black, and non-normative sexual embodiments. The control of the Afro-descendant population is still performed through the control of access to education, uneven distribution of wealth, wage inequality, shortage of job opportunities, and the sustenance of racism in daily social practices. The black population, marginalized both then and now, is still the main target of police violence, mostly through the appeal to the "war on drugs" in the invasion of *favelas* and other impoverished communities. The relationship between being poor, being black, and being a criminal is still very strong in Brazilian society.

All these factors complicate the workings of metronormativity within our context because metronormative narratives are strongly connected to the gentrified model of the capitalist gay and because they reinforces the link between the freedom to be queer and privileges related to race, class, sexuality and gender. The analysis of *Madame Satã* points to the significance of an intersectional analysis of the hegemonic articulation of queerness, calling attention to the reproduction of the coloniality of power in the regime of metronormativity and to the marginalizations created by agendas and narrativizations based on developmentalism.

XXY – Metronormativity and Sex/Gender (In)Decisions

1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the analysis of the metronormative narrative that underlies the story told in *Madame Satã* pointed to the intersections of class, gender, sexuality, and race that emerge from João Francisco's cultural re-creations and gender performances on and off-stage. My analysis demonstrated that even though João's performances powerfully challenge sex, race, and gender, this subversion ends within the space of the stage; his performances of masculinity outside the stage "de-realize the act" (Butler "Performance Acts" 527) of queering performed in his embodiments of femininity, marking the distance between João's (re)enacting of femininity and the femininity embodied and performed by Tabu and Laurita in their real lives. Furthermore, his performances within the family (re)produce the dynamics of coloniality in the relationship of interdependence between the members of the family, established upon patterns of exploitation.

Moreover, the analysis demonstrates that another limit of João's queering of sex and gender lies in the naturalization of sex binarism, as Tabu's non-binary *travesti* identity, which is one of many possible embodiments that challenge the naturalization of sexual dimorphism, is kept in the background and remains unproblematized in the movie. The presumption that one's genital configuration determines one's gender relies on the understanding of physiology as the ultimate site of sex and gender. This site is confined within the parameters of normality determined by scientific thought, which is one important discourse that supports the coloniality of power in the imposition of the heteronormative system and in the creation of the concept of race (Fausto-Sterling 2000, Dreger 2003, Lugones 2007).

This chapter aims at questioning the naturalization of sexual dimorphism through a critique of the relationship between metronormativity and developmentalism in the analysis of the Argentine film *XXY* (dir. Lucía Puenzo 2007), whose protagonist is an intersexual adolescent. *XXY* follows

a weekend at a family's home in the outskirts of a small coastal town in Uruguay, to which they moved from Buenos Aires some years earlier. The family is composed by the father Kraken (played by Ricardo Darín), a biologist, the mother Suli (played by Valeria Bertucelli), and the fifteen-year-old Alex (played by Inés Efron). The weekend during which the film takes place is marked by the visit of Suli's old friend from Buenos Aires, Erica, who comes with her plastic surgeon husband Ramiro and their teenage son Álvaro (played by Carolina Peleritti, Germán Palacios, and Martín Pyroyanski, respectively) to try and convince Kraken to perform sex-assignment surgery on Alex, who is intersex.

The film brings to the foreground many discussions around intersexuality, often brought to the screen on TV and the Cinema in stereotypical representations that "tend to rely on 'tried and tested' narrative devices" (Hart 27) such as the moment of revelation of someone's secret, a common strategy in films about transsexual characters that "has produced sometimes cruel and disrespectful revisions of life narratives" (Halberstam 57). The fictional intersex characters analyzed by Phoebe Hart (2009) are constructed as stereotypical passive victims of "the secret" about their bodies and, although such representations bring visibility to intersexuality and intersexual activists' claims, they fall back on reductive preconceptions and controversy (Hart 27-36).

One of the virtues *XXY*'s portrayal of intersexuality is that the film does not subscribe to its effacement through surgical intervention, "offer[ing] us an alternative approach to the intersexual subject in which the norms that rule the parameters of intelligibility of the human body are questioned, since it refuses the surgical normalization of such individuals", writes Lourdes Estrada-López (146-7, my translation). The film therefore resists the (re)production of intersexuality as invisible and/or the site of some sort of a tragic failure of a heterosexualized nature that should be corrected in order to become intelligible (Fausto-Sterling 76). Moreover, as I will argue in this chapter, the depiction of the main character's intersexuality challenges developmentalist oriented claims that link, directly or indirectly, bodily maturation with a decision concerning one's sex and gender confined within the limits of heteronormative binaries.

The main character of *XXY*, Alex (played by Inés Efron), is a fifteen year-old intersex person living in a small coastal town in Uruguay, to where ze[13] moved with hir family from Buenos Aires a few years earlier. The family group, formed by Kraken, Suli and Alex, is going through a hard path because of the conflicts brought up by the normative discourses that enforce gender binarism upon Alex's body. The film has enjoyed a good critical reception upon its release in 2007 and a number of awards at various film festivals in various countries[14]. The film's popularity and international acclaim helped increase the visibility of intersex individuals and of activist's claims, such as those against enforced early surgical normalization, an ethical concern addressed by intersex individuals, hir families, activists, and health care professionals[15].

In the section "Constructing (Inter)Sex Distinction" I address the construction of intersex within the binary sex system, analyzing the pathologization and effacement of intersex within the colonial, developmentalist, and heteronormative scientific discourses of closure. In "Assimilation and Coalitions", I explore the representation of intersex in *XXY* in relation to the assimilationist and coalitional discourses of the early Argentine LGBT movements. In "Dangerous Metropolis" I address the film's construction of the metropolis as a dangerous place for the intersex person, countering the metronormative assumption of queer salvation in the metropolis. In "Gender Difference and Transgressions" I examine the film's portrayal of gender difference and its enabling of non-normative embodiments and relationships. In the section "Towards a Non-Binary Gaze" I analyze the film's rearticulation of the male gaze. In the final section, I make my final remarks concerning the analyses presented throughout this chapter.

13 As there is no fixed way to refer to non-binary sex and genders in the English language, neither a consensus on a generalization, I have chosen for this study the set of neutral pronouns *ze* for the nominative case, *hir* for the objective case and as a possessive determiner, *hirs* as a possessive pronoun, and *hirself* for the reflexive case. This choice was guided by Leslie Feinberg's (1996) and Kate Bornstein's (2013) thougths on the issue.

14 A complete list of the awards the film received can be found at http://puenzo.com/#/xxy/

15 The book *Ethics and Intersex*, edited by Sharon E. Sytsma and published by Springer in 2006 provides a comprehensive discussion of these issues.

2 Constructing (Inter)Sex Distinction

The term "intersex" has been in use since the early 1900s in substitution for the term "hermaphrodite", which in medical literature has been used in the past to refer to people who, writes Alice Dreger (2003), "are born with anatomical conformation different from 'standard' male or female bodies" (3-4). Intersex people are subjected to an oversimplified process of categorization that is in itself already based on an oversimplification of the many possible physical configurations a body can present. Although the majority of humans fit into one of the male and female categories, sexual anatomy can vary much, even among those whose bodies suit the binary (3). Nevertheless, there are bodies that are seen by hegemonic eyes as being more different than others: they exceed the range of possibilities available within the realm of normalcy established with colonization (Lugones 196). Those bodies have been in the past and still are in the present exploited for so-called scientific advancement in order to determine the parameters that define what is considered normal physical development (Fausto-Sterling 36).

Bodies that do not fit the female/male categories are constructed as unhealthy and even threatening to the order of things (Hart 12; Dreger 32; Fausto-Sterling 37) in various degrees. Hormonal, surgical, and psychological intervention on otherwise healthy individuals except for their deviance from what is considered normal sexual development constitute exclusionary and violent practices that often cause, beyond the physical suffering associated with surgeries and other medical procedures, psychological pain and social marginalization. As Hart emphasizes in *Orchids: Intersex and Identity in Documentary*, "[m]edical treatment contributes greatly to a sense of social inferiority and shame" in the intersex person, who may feel satisfied with her or his body the way it is but—reasonably— unsatisfied with the consequences of the social stigma imposed onto them (6). Such affirmation points to the social aspect of the pathologization of intersexuality: it is not only about the body, but about how that body is read and built in and by the social context.

The kind of surgery that is often performed on intersex people with the objective of effacing the body's so-called ambiguity aims at assigning it one of the sexes of the binary scheme and making it conform to what is socially and scientifically considered normal. The terminologies used

to refer to these surgical procedures, "sex-assignment surgery" or "normalizing surgery", carry the implicit meaning that intersexuality is abnormal and the intersex body needs intervention to become intelligible. As Fausto-Sterling puts it, "[s]urgeons, psychologists, and endocrinologists, through their surgical skills, try to make good facsimiles of culturally intelligible bodies" (76); that is, surgical intervention aims at (re)creating an alleged natural truth, the constructed "truth" of binary gender distinction.

Sexual distinction, however, relies on changeable parameters, which are articulated differently depending on where and when they are set. Dreger writes that the parameters "necessarily chang[e] with time, with place, with technology, and with the many serious implications—theoretical and practical, scientific and political—of any given answer" (9). This means that the science that produces sexual distinction is both a product of the sociopolitical context and productive of it. The science that produces sexual distinction is therefore a discourse that does much more than describing and analyzing what can be seen and measured as European positivism purports. Similar to scientific racism, constructed as relying on observable and undeniable characteristics that justify racial classification but actually productive of the difference it allegedly points out (Quijano 551-3, Lugones 195) the science around binary sexual distinction produces the difference it supposedly describes.

For María Lugones (2007), "[t]he naturalizing of sexual difference is another product of the modern use of science that Quijano points out in the case of 'race'" (195). Both discourses work under the guise of a constructed-as-unbiased entity called Nature to ensure the establishment of the Eurocentric paradigm of development, which depends on racial domination and the consequent exploitation of peoples racialized as inferior within a gendered social organization that works for the Eurocentric paradigm of development (Mignolo 454). In many tribal societies, writes Lugones, intersex individuals were socially recognized "without assimilation to the sexual binary" that has become hegemonic through the reiteration of scientific and cultural constructs that produce and constrain sexual distinction. With colonization, the social organization was forcefully changed, thus enforcing a different paradigm of sexual distinction that serves the purposes of the colonizing efforts that established global capitalism (195-6). It is possible to perceive that each

change in the parameters that define the sex of a body does not only involve "the body" as an essential, irreducible element of an idealized nature constructed as something outside culture. The implications of such changes impact the way society is organized and the power relations that produce bodies and that, as Butler has argued, are produced by non-normative forms of embodiment.

The ways through which binary sex distinction have been naturalized took various forms throughout history, from determining sex by parameters that can be evaluated visually such as the presence or shape of certain organs, to more recent technologies that allow the measuring of hormonal levels and genetic investigation. Developmentalism emerges from these changes in the embedded subtext that says that as technology advances we are getting closer and closer to the "truth" about human sexuality. In this way of thinking, development—technological, economic, and cultural—means achieving an uncontestable definition about binary gender distinction; such distinction historically ends up at heteronormative or homonormative closure. Nonetheless, diversity is prevalent and the notion that there is a set of irreducible criteria that would justify and explain sexual dimorphism has been increasingly challenged.

The scientific efforts to find out how to be sure whether someone is male or female are justified by the importance of that distinction for the sustenance of the heteronormative social structure (Lugones 194-5). As part of the developmentalist efforts of colonization (Lugones 195), the enforcement of the heteronormative system follows the logics that naturalize and justify the various kinds of violence to which non-normative bodies, genders, and sexualities are constantly subjected. In this context intersexuality has been suppressed and pathologized. As Anne Fausto-Sterling notes in *Sexing the Body* (2000), although the social handling of intersexuality changed much from one country to another in the past, "all over Europe the sharp distinction between male and female was at the core of systems of law and politics" (35). This means that the distribution of civil rights and functions among individuals historically follows gender-specific and heteronormative regulations that efface forms of embodiment that are not male or female from the social attributions distributed by those regulatory systems.

By enforcing heteronormative standards, the developmentalist ideology of colonial power constructs the successful imposition of its models onto so-called belated peoples and countries as part of what development is. This way, heteronormativity[16] is constructed as a form of social, cultural, and economic development. The presence of the intersex body troubles binary gender regulations and becomes a site of tension that shakes up the colonial structure of power. To control that tension, intersex is transformed into the exception that confirms the rule of binary sex distinction as normalizing interventions are constructed as necessary means for the "salvation" of the binary structure of sex—suppressing and pathologizing the intersex person as if it were the intersex person the one in need of salvation.

There is an intimate relationship between the scientific knowledge constantly (re)producing sexual distinction and the cultural, economic, and political issues that sustain and constrain the materialization of bodies, carefully kept within the limits of heteronormativity. As pointed out in the introduction, the category of sex is often produced as irreducible in the process of naturalization. This category, however, has been subjected to processes that elide its constructedness. On what concerns the binary male/female, the intersex body appears as the different, the one in need of intervention and who causes itself trouble for not complying with the naturalized structure of binary gender.

2.1 Searching for Closure

In *XXY*, Alex has been raised as a girl and was not subjected to sex-assignment surgery in infancy. This means that Alex has been brought up as a girl in the eyes of the social context, but the genital configuration of hir body does not correspond to what is conventionally categorized as female. With the coming of adolescence hir body is changing rapidly and signs of what is hegemonically read as masculinization are starting to show. Heteronormative developmentalist discourses understand the changes happening in an adolescent's body not only as sexual maturation but specifically as heterosexual maturation. The idea of sexual maturation is limited to the binary male/female because it is based

16 And also homonormativity, as argues Lisa Duggan (2002).

on the idea that the reason why humans go through physical changes in adolescence is to make us fit to eventually produce other humans. These new humans are supposedly going to develop, when their time comes, into males or females and continue the cycle of heteronormative reproduction and reiterate heteronormative closure. This presupposes that all bodies will change within a certain range of acceptable variation until they achieve their closure. In contemporary culture, whatever exceeds this range is deemed pathological.

Alex's body is changing, but not as the logic of heteronormative closure foresees. Instead of changing towards dimorphic closure, it is changing in a way that can be read as more confusion. In the period the film takes place, Alex is beginning to reject the medication that prevents the masculinization of hir body, to question medical treatment, and to question the need for clear definitions of sex and gender. Alex's resistance to normalization points to the potential of bodily changes to produce embodiments that are not necessarily male or female—something other than what is foreseen by the binary. This "something other" troubles the heterosexual binary and challenges the developmentalism of the heteronormative timeline of bodily development, which bases its parameters of normality on heteronormative closure.

The obliteration of the intersex body that permeates the pursuit of heteronormative closure by scientific discourses constitutes a subtle and pervasive form of violence that comes to the foreground in the conflict between Suli's and Kraken's opinions about what should be done with/to Alex. Before moving on to the specificities of each of the parents' opinion, it is important to notice that for them *something* must be done or naturally happen. That is, they see their child's physical configuration and the changes through which ze is going through as a problem to be (dis)solved, either by the surgeon's scalpel or the passing of time. They presuppose that sooner or later it will be necessary for Alex to enter the binary, a position that implies a linear timeline of bodily development for social recognition. The parents' initial positions, although the father's can be understood as more progressive than the mother's, both adhere to the conception of the intersex body as the site of trouble and the one in need of intervention.

Kraken believes Alex's own body and psyche should determine which sex/gender alignment ze is going to adopt for adulthood. This implies that Alex has a "true self" and will eventually come to a conclusion in hir own terms and disregards the role of the social context in the decision. The father emulates the invasive and controlling eye of science—the science that claims the right to classify bodies into males and females and, in the process, to construct difference. That he works in biological tagging[17] suggests that his book is for rather than against sexual dimorphism. The title, *The Origins of Sex*, suggests both essentialism and developmentalism, in the sense that it presumes there is an "origin", a neutral un-constructed point of departure for sex differentiation that will be followed by development and, eventually to maturation (or closure), always within the binary male/female. In the biologist's point of view, which in the film represents the view of biological sciences, the tags point to a way to protect the population of turtles, their migratory movements, and the numbers of dead and surviving animals.

Suli believes Alex should undergo feminizing surgery, which is the reason why she has the surgeon Ramiro (played by Germán Palacios) and his family visiting them to convince Kraken to authorize the surgery before Alex's masculinization exceeds the range of physical configuration foreseen for either masculinity or femininity. Suli adheres to sex-assignment practices that supposedly aim at the well-being of the intersex person, but in fact aim at securing heteronormative closure. Although her concern can be justified by the various obstacles posed against an intersex person in a structurally heteronormative society, it reinforces the idea that the intersex body is the one that should be changed instead of promoting progressive social actions that depart from such idea towards a more inclusive body politics.

The father shows a presumed allegiance to nature, its processes, preservation and observation. Different from the medical opinion sought after by Suli and represented by Ramiro, Kraken's approach favors "letting nature follow its course", or waiting for Alex's body to develop "naturally". Rooted in evolutionist theory and in the scientific method, Kraken's view carries within it an anxiety for closure and definition in a model within

17 The father classifies the turtles as either male or female and follows their patterns of migration and reproduction

which observation, classification, and biologic determinism are coated with an appearance of protection and respect for that idealized conception of nature, which presupposes that there is a true self that is going to be expressed by the individual, disregarding the role of scientific knowledge as a performative discourse in the process of bodily materialization.

While Kraken's approach is different from Suli's and Ramiro's, they all "[adhere] strongly to modernistic binary notions of sex and gender" (Martin 36). Whether by investing in the idea that Alex should undergo normalizing surgery or by investing on growing up into adulthood as means to find out Alex's sex, the surgeon, the biologist, and the mother understand only male-man, female-woman possibilities of being. The binary is the limit of bodily intelligibility in their paradigm of knowledge. Moreover, they devise the binary system of sex as anatomical truth. What differs is the way through which that anatomical truth will be attained: for Ramiro, it is through surgery (or mutilation); for Kraken, it is through the "natural" development of Alex's body. The intersex body is erased in both discourses, even though Kraken's more apparently progressive approach seems to allow Alex more agency by refusing surgery and waiting until puberty to let Alex decide for one of the categories of the binary. By questioning the naturalization of the heteronormative standard, Alex shakes up what is understood as natural, exposing the constructedness of binary sex distinction. This way, the character changes the focus of trouble from the intersex body to the social body.

Intersexuality has been subjected to continuous and varied processes of violent effacement. For the father, moving Alex from Buenos Aires to the small town is an attempt to protect his child from the normalizing gazes and governmental policies that silence, persecute, and murder non-normative people, mirroring the fear of the disappearance of people in the dictatorial period. Kraken's concern about the obliteration of Alex's difference finds a parallel in the endangered turtles the biologist treats, tags, and returns to the ocean. Despite the biologist's efforts, however, he still finds turtles that he has previously tagged killed or hurt by fishermen. The protection that Kraken offers to both the turtles and Alex is narrow, which points to the limits of an alleged protection. By focusing on the presumed weakness of the ones put under protection, instead of looking at how that weakness is produced through the sustenance of a dangerous environment, Kraken reproduces the medical discourse that, in his view, threaten Alex under the guise of protection.

Binary sex distinction is constructed in the interplay of various discourses that define limits for the legibility of the bodies, strengthening the idea that there are only two sexes and whatever falls out of these two categories is wrong and needs to be corrected. Besides, intersex difference always is defined around the binary male/female. Intersex bodies, even when not understood as a failure in physical development, are understood as part male, part female, disregarding the differences that exist not only among male, female, and intersex, but also among intersex possibilities. Such reduction of intersex diversity walks hand in hand with developmentalist and metronormative discourses that project ideals of closure. While the former depends on the imposition of heteronormativity to fuel the actualization of Eurocentric ideals, the latter depends on the creation of an idealized body that does not account for diversity in terms of biological sex and physical configuration.

3 Assimilation and Coalitions

Having found no direct filmic evidence that places the story in a specific period back or forward in time and considering the technologies, including those of knowledge, available to the characters, together with the visual portrayal of characters and settings, it does not seem farfetched to assume that the story takes place at around the same time of the film's production. If Alex is fifteen when the film is set, it is possible to conclude that ze was born around 1992 and that the story takes place in a period of much political turbulence in Argentina, under the tension between skepticism and the anxiety to reestablish social and political agency. The emergence of gay and lesbian rights groups in the country is linked to the collapse of the dictatorship in 1983. "Historically", writes Stephen Brown (2002), "the Argentine state has not recognized 'sexual minorities' as legitimate collective actors and members of civil society" (124). Under the military rule, homosexuality was heavily persecuted, and the period was marked by disappearances that left profound wounds in Argentine society.

Sexuality has never received much attention from the Argentine movement, writes Brown. Although the period following the end of the dictatorial regime saw the emergence of gay and lesbian rights movements, the restored democracy was marked by police violence, unreported murders, bar raids, among other direct attacks to non-heterosexual individuals (Brown 121-22, Encarnación 107). The strategy used by rights-oriented groups was forming coalition with those who opposed the military dictatorship, focusing their discourse on the idea that there is no democracy if there is some kind of marginalization (Brown 124). Lesbian, gay, and anti-dictatorial groups would share the belief that democracy in practice is indeed a government in which everyone takes part equally. By claiming the right to participate in democracy, the formerly marginalized homosexual community claimed for equality, arguing that everyone has been equally wounded by the crimes perpetrated during the dictatorial regime.

As an impossible body, Alex is not equal to hir counterparts who fit the sex binary, even among gay and lesbian groups. This way ze is not equal within democracy. In practical terms, for instance, how could Alex register as a voter if ze needs to identify as either male or female to complete the request form? By the end of the film, Kraken checks with Alex if

ze is aware of the consequences of a police investigation by emphasizing that "everyone will know" about her intersexuality once they go to the police. At this moment, he is not only reminding hir of the people of the small town, but also of all the social institutions based on binary sex distinctions, starting with the police and traversing the gay and lesbian rights movement that flourished after the end of the dictatorship.

With the repressive response of the government to the first coalitions mentioned above with anti-dictatorship groups, the focus of lesbian, gay, and transgender groups changed, in Brown's words, "from organizing around sexual orientation, toward gaining legal recognition by the government" (125). That is, the movement moved from identity claims to civil rights claims. By claiming civil rights, such as the right to get legally married and obtaining the civil benefits of the institutionalized union, for example, these claims evoke sameness – everyone would be the same for the law. Liberalist politics such as civil rights claims and others based on humanist discourses, serve strategic and performative functions as well, yet they must also be problematized for overshadowing urgent struggles against rights-based or assimilationist politics.

Assimilationist discourses "normalize homosexuality", either by defending that we are all equally human or that we are all equal citizens (Brown 128-129), when in the material effects of discourse we are not. In other words, these discourses construct homosexuality as being as "normal" as heterosexuality. Both humanitarian and citizenship discourses rely on binary frameworks that reiterate essentialism by resorting to a human "essence" shared by us all that disregards the performative character of normalizing discourses. When assimilated into the "normal", homosexuality steps away from difference and this difference is projected on other possibilities of being not comprehended by the binary homosexual heterosexual.

Alex wears on hir neck turtle tags, which probably belonged to dead turtles that can be found at the beaches around her house. Similar to the people who disappeared during the dictatorship for the enforcement of a conservative government, the turtles disappear in the name of economic development, in a system that depends on the exploitation and death of

living beings in order to achieve what it understands as development. The turtles and Alex, from this point of view, form a coalition among beings that are different but upon whom effacement is inflicted by an exclusionary system. Such coalition exposes that, even though the turtles are tagged and kept under apparent control under the guise of protection, they still die and disappear. Although Alex is supposedly protected from violent procedures that harassed the family in Buenos Aires, ze is still subjected to silencing because hir intersexuality is made invisible by hir father's expectation of heteronormative closure.

4 Dangerous Metropolis

As mentioned in previous sections, the Krakens have left Buenos Aires to avoid the harassment of normalizing discourses that previously pressured the parents to authorize early sex-assignment surgery on Alex. Zoila Clark (2012) reads the family's movement as forced by that harassment. In her words, "Alex's family were forced to emigrate to the countryside as a result of being excluded from a civilization that will only confer citizenship upon those who conform to its strict delineation of what constitutes human normality" (4). This reading links civilization, citizenship, and normality to the metropolis, producing the fishing village as an un-civilized place, isolated from the culture situated in the metropolis, as if culture were situated in the metropolis alone. In the fishing village, culture would have no impact on Alex's presumed natural sex and gender development. This is both an evolutionist discourse of underdevelopment because it constructs the fishing village as not yet civilized and unmodified by metropolitan culture; contradictorily, it is also an essentialist one, because it relies on the idea that sex and gender are expressions of whom someone "naturally" is, constructing the fishing village as outside the system of culture of the metropolis.

In *XXY* the metronormative narrative appears somewhat inverted, because the family makes the movement from the metropolis to the rural, the opposite of the movement that characterizes the metronormative narrative. Nevertheless, the Krakens' moving still follows the metronormative logic because it is based on the idea that the small

town is a place where the non-normative can be made invisible. Such invisibility, however, represents a totally unstable safety, because the small town is still constructed as a place that is phobic to non-normative people and Alex's safety depends on the keeping of hir "secret". Indeed, as soon as Alex's intersexuality is "discovered" by hir colleagues, ze becomes the target of violent actions. Therefore, the narrative indirectly confirms the metronormative premise that the small town is dangerous to non-normative embodiments.

Deborah Martin (2013) argues that in *XXY* sexual politics are strongly generational. In her reading, the older generations, represented mostly by the parents, are more inclined to defend binary notions of sex and gender, whilst the younger generations can accept a more fluid body politics. This reading has a developmentalist tone, as it presumes that the new generations will not hold the same prejudices as their parents, echoing the metronormative narrative that puts together queerness, the break with the traditional family model, and progressist thought.

Moreover, although some of the younger characters do not demonstrate having prejudices against Alex, such as Roberta (played by Ailín Salas) and Vando (played by Luciano Nóbile), Martin's statement disregards the attempted rape perpetrated by the village boys, who are of the same age as Alex. The rape scene works as a reminder of the materiality of the social violence against non-normative individuals, which reproduces historical exclusionary practices that seek, directly or indirectly, to subjugate and obliterate the difference of the intersex body.

The rape attempt scene rearticulates the common trope of rape and rescue (Shohat and Stam 2006), in which white (and sometimes black) women are rescued by white men from uncivilized black males (236). From this point of view, Alex represents the individual to be rescued from the barbaric village boys who abuse and try to rape hir. Alex is indeed rescued by Vando's arrival, which interrupts and ends the violent action. Alex is not what is conventionally understood as a woman but a person whose body resists colonization by the heterosexual binary, both by not having had sex-assignment surgery and by Alex's refusal of medical treatment. The rape attempt concentrates the full extent of the physical violence of all the attempts to colonize Alex's body. In the rape scene, the colonial trope of rape and rescue and the metronormative

narrative get mixed up as at one moment the village boys represent the violent colonizer and at another moment they represent the uncivilized inhabitant of the small town of the metronormative narrative.

The previous chapter demonstrated that even though metronormative discourses say the opposite, the metropolis may be a dangerous place for non-normative embodiments. More specifically, the city of Rio is portrayed in *Madame Satã* as especially dangerous to blacks, homosexuals, *travestis*, women, and poor people (almost everyone who is not white, male, and heterosexual). The logic that devises progress through developmentalist parameters does not guarantee the end of the dangers posed to non-normative embodiments in the metropolis. *XXY* challenges the metronormative premise that the big city offers a safe place for *all* non-normative embodiments too. The big city represents dangers to the intersex person specifically, as the normative discourses of medicine that aim at exploiting and eventually eradicating intersexuality and substitute it through surgical normalization are located there. By pointing out that the metropolis can be a violent place for intersex people, the film brings to the foreground an important intersection of the metronormative narrative: the metropolis does not carry the same meanings of liberation for intersex people as they supposedly to other non-normative corporealities.

Emanuela Guano (2002, 2003, and 2004) and Dora Barrancos (2006) bring forward that the modernization process through which Argentina had been when neoliberalism hit the country in the late 90s and early 2000s aimed at "insert[ing] the country into the international capitalist market at the turn of the century" (Guano 2002 182, Barrancos 124-7). This process mirrored the process of modernization occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the city of Buenos Aires became known as the "Paris of Latin America". The title that bears a parallel with the one given to Rio de Janeiro's neighborhood of Lapa—the "Tropical *Montmartre*"—in the period *Madame Satã* takes place. Both Argentina and Brazil were looking forward to building a self-identity based on European models, which were at the core of what was being constructed as Modernity. This places the two countries in similar metronormative narratives that took their ideals of modernization and development from Europe, previously constituted as the site of the colonial metropolises. The efforts of this period had the objective of incorporating these two Latin

American countries into the global market. The modernization project of the 1990s aimed again at putting Argentina back in the international market, "this time in the orbit of the United States" (Guano 2002 183).

The modernization of the 90s in Argentina was marked by the emergence of an urban culture that suggested that the porteño white middle-class belonged "somewhere else" than the Latin America inhabited by "the disenfranchised masses of gauchos, *indigena*, Afro-Argentines, and immigrant workers" (Guano 2002 183). Barrancos points out that the mass of European immigrants that reached Argentina formed an impoverished working class whose work force fueled the building of the modernized Buenos Aires (Guano 2002 125). The architecture of Argentina's capital was changed to give space to shopping malls, which came to function as private places within the public space, and neighborhoods like Puerto Madero, known as "Manhattan on the Río de la Plata" (Guano 2002 187-8). At the same time that the transformations mentioned above created the illusion of modernity and development for the middle-class by reflecting the ideals of development devised in the United States, they also promoted the class segregation of the public space (Guano 2004 71). This segregation divided the urban space between the impoverishing white-middle class and those towards whom this middle-class nurtured xenophobe feelings, the racialized as non-white "uncivilized" native peoples and immigrants.

The Krakens' flight from Buenos Aires, away from the spectacularization of Alex's body can be read as a criticism to the gentrification of Argentina's capital, which was becoming ever more based on a particular "economy of appearances" rooted on a "dependence on [the] spectacle" (Tsing 84, Guano 2002 191) created by refashioning the city to make it look more modern. It is important to emphasize that the middle-class of the period was getting poorer and the government's agenda included reforms that complicated much the situation of the Krakens. Guano points out that these proposals included cuts in the salaries of teachers and funds for public education, it simplified the educational curricula, and created a "*flexibilización* that created avenues into the teaching profession for individuals who […] had not been sufficiently qualified", (2003 153) and the

privatization of public services, including the health system (Guano 2004 72) [18]. The reforms enforced during Menem's presidency shared many characteristics with the changes proposed in Brazil in 2016.

Being a white, middle-class scholar, Kraken could be running from impoverishment because of the educational reform and, because of such economic changes, it could become much more expensive to have Alex go through medical procedures. The latter can be read as the exploitation not only of Alex's body, but of the Argentine people as a whole, because they were being deprived of many civil rights. With this in mind, it is possible to see the Kraken's movement as a critique to neoliberalism running in the film; nonetheless, the family's status of white middle-class citizens may have contributed for the possibility of moving away from Buenos Aires to become a reality.

18 The Constitutional Amendment Proposal under appreciation of the Brazilian Federal Senate (referred to at the moment as PEC 55) contains similar propositions regarding the cut of federal expenses in the areas of education, health, worker's rights, and welfare. The status of the proposal can be accessed at www12.senado.leg.br.

5 Gender Difference and Transgressions

5.1 Gender Difference

Cultural issues in regard to gender difference are not directly addressed in *XXY*, resulting in a genderblind portrayal[19] of the decisions involved with intersexuality and its pathologized construction. That is, issues related to gender difference are not taken into account in the film's critique of the pathologization of intersexuality. The gender hierarchy implied in the film gives more prominence to the male characters, reproducing male privilege. The male characters (Kraken, Ramiro, Álvaro, Vando, the fishermen, the group who attacks Alex) have much more screen time and appear in a much greater number than the female characters (Suli, Erica, Roberta), even though it is an action performed by a female character—Suli, who calls Erica to visit them and sends Ramiro Alex's medical records—that creates the tension that ignites the narrative's movement. Not to mention that Suli's invitation is characterized as deceitful by Kraken, which invokes the traditional stereotype of that women are untrustworthy.

The male characters are engaged in every other event that pushes the narrative forward, whereas the female characters are kept in the background. They appear as caretakers, such as when Suli checks if Alex is hurt after the attack, or impelling the male characters to take action, such as when Erica insists that Ramiro must talk to Kraken and convince him of allowing the surgery to be performed. Genderblindess in *XXY* ends up creating a contrast between what it means to be female and what it means to be male, which is a cultural aspect that influences someone's sex and gender decisions.

Alex, who has been raised as a girl, only counts with the examples of silenced women or women who act in the background of men. The background position of women is emphasized in Kraken's visit to the intersex-born man who works and lives in a gas station outside town. Before their conversation starts, the man closes the door of the bedroom in which his wife and child are sleeping, shutting them out of his story, even

19 Carbado (2013) uses this term to refer to moments in which an intersectional analysis leaves out the issue of gender, generalizing it as male.

though it is the presence of the wife and the kid that allows him to affirm he has "a typical family" (00:48:03). This man's present investment in the heterosexual family is contrasted to a traumatic past of psychological and physical trauma when living as a female. The substitution of the little girl, who appears in the form of old photographs hidden away in a box, is represented as complete—this man has so successfully entered in the heteronormative scheme that he can give away his old pictures as tokens, symbols of the possibility to eventually fit the sex/gender binary and make the little girl disappear.

5.2 Transgressions

During dinner in the evening after Kraken witnesses Alex and Álvaro having sex, Ramiro offers Álvaro some wine. Álvaro refuses, to what his father retorts: "tonight you drink, you are big enough". Erica protests, but Ramiro silences his wife by responding that "[Álvaro] must have something in his blood", meaning that Álvaro's gender performance does not correspond to the traditional meanings attached to masculinity and therefore their son is not becoming a "real man" as he grows up. Ramiro's homophobic discourse is permeated by the developmentalist assumption that Álvaro has come to an age in which the child must be substituted not only by the adult, but by an adult that acts masculine. That Ramiro thinks that Álvaro is homosexual becomes explicit by the end of the film, when the father sees Álvaro watching Alex desiringly and, not knowing that Álvaro is aware that Alex is intersex (let alone that the two adolescents have had sex), understands his son's gaze as heterosexual desire. Consequently, he assumes that Álvaro's non-heteronormative adolescent behavior is finally giving way to a properly masculine mature individual, validated by Ramiro's remark when he witnesses that desiring gaze.

In *XXY*, Alex's parents and Ramiro project metronormative closure as sex-gender definition according to the narratives of bodily development established by science, this way reproducing the male/female binary and the homo/hetero binary. For this reason, metronormative closure is imagined as being reproductive of the gender binarism on which

same-sex or different-sex relations and desires are hegemonically articulated. Alex and Álvaro's relationship, however, cannot be explained or named within the regimes foreseen by the regimes represented by their parents, because it is neither homosexual nor heterosexual. The film gives the two adolescents' space to construct and experience their non-normative relationship through its (re)articulation of the male gaze, which is going to be analyzed in the next section.

6 Towards a Non-binary Gaze

6.1 Resisting and Returning the Male Gaze

Laura Mulvey (1975) argues that pleasure in the cinema is always gendered. In her words, "the cinema depends on the power to activate and attract desiring relations [which] depen[d] on a sexual and gendered economy of looking, watching and identifying" (83). The male gaze is a cinematic structure recognizable in traditional narrative cinema that works within the film to sustain the binary male/female and the social hierarchies in which it is immersed. In such structure, the female body is given an exhibitionistic role, constructed on the screen as a passive object for the gaze of the entity (the filmmaker, the people, or the filmmaking companies) behind the camera, of the characters inside the film, and of the spectator. For Mulvey, the cinematic gaze prevalent in this kind of filmmaking depends on the objectification of the female character, which appears on the screen and within the narrative as a source of visual pleasure for a male observer, both within the diegesis and in the audience. In "On Suture" (1983), Kaja Silverman relates the shot/reverse-shot pattern, a common structure in traditional narrative cinema, to the way the spectator gets tied to the story on the screen. Such structure functions as an ideological device that allows the audience's gaze to identify with the gaze, desires, and hierarchical positions of a particular character, making one character's gaze, desires, and position within the hierarchy being re-produced in the film the ones with which the audience identifies. Such character is, for both Mulvey and Silverman, a male character.

Figure 5: Ramiro – shot.

Figure 6: Alex’s feet – reverse shot.

The scene analyzed in the following paragraphs presents the filmic characterization of the surgeon as the sovereign subject against whom Alex builds agency as ze challenges the pathologization of hir body. In this scene, Ramiro is in the kitchen preparing food when Alex enters the kitchen, opens the fridge and drinks milk from the box (00:14:26-00:15:35). In Figure 5, the shot shows Ramiro's face. Something catches his attention, making him turn to that direction. Ramiro's expression demonstrates that he is looking at whoever entered the kitchen. Continuity editing creates the expectation that what Ramiro sees will appear in the next shot. Indeed, the reverse-shot (Figure 6) that follows shows what Ramiro is looking at—someone's feet. Slowly, the camera tilts up and shows more of the body of which those feet are part. The next shot shows Ramiro's head making the same vertical movement as the camera (Figure 7), reiterating that the look the spectator is following is Ramiro's.

Figure 7: Ramiro looks at the camera.

At this point of the scene, the audience is led to identify with Ramiro, whose gaze seeks to control Alex's bodily configuration and also controls the movement of the camera, determining who the object

is and how such object is going to be seen. Ramiro's gaze is not different from Kraken's gaze over the turtles he classifies, as both men act as if they are the ones who detain the knowledge to determine someone's sex and to act over the objectified bodies in order to sustain the sovereignty of their gazes and the suppression of the gazes they marginalize. Using the design of the male gaze, the film emulates the colonization of bodies and reveals the structures that enable such colonization—in this scene, the pervasive construction of scientific knowledge—, and its consequent (re)production of binary sexual difference.

Mulvey argues that sexual difference in film is represented through the manipulation of visual and erotic pleasure working for the sustenance of the binary male/female and its implied hierarchy. In the sequence mentioned earlier, the spectator gets tied to Ramiro's gaze, a character who represents the privilege of controlling the gaze over the female body because he is the male character. Besides, he is the surgeon who is there to examine and intervene on Alex's body in order to make it fit the parameters of what is considered female. The editing emphasizes Alex's objectification: the cut that stops the camera's tilt up movement over Alex's body occurs right before Alex's head appears in the frame, moving the spectator's gaze back to Ramiro's. The male character has a head, eyes, brains, thoughts, and opinions, which makes him different from the headless object at which he is looking.

According to Mulvey, "the unconscious of patriarchal society" (6) emerges in film as the erotic is coded through the linking of maleness to activeness and femaleness to passiveness, reproducing the "sexual imbalance" (11) characteristic of patriarchal heteronormative society. In the sequence being analyzed, up to the point when the spectator sees Ramiro for the second time (Figure 7), the surgeon is the active part and through his gaze Alex's body is objectified both to him and to the audience. In Ramiro's gaze, science's scrutinizing gaze and Cinema's male gaze get entangled, mixing the pathologization of the intersex body and the eroticizing of the female body to result in Alex's objectification. Moreover, Ramiro's look at Alex can also be seen as pedophilic, since Alex is fifteen years old and Ramiro is an adult. This reiterates a common practice condoned by hegemonic society that is the eroticizing of young female bodies and the erotic attraction of older males to younger females, oftentimes in a violent fashion. This devaluates women in terms of age and privileges men in the same respect.

Central to the structuring of the male gaze as described by Mulvey is the concept of scopophilia, which means taking pleasure from looking at sexualized objects. Through his facial expressions, Ramiro demonstrates his pleasure in looking at Alex in a scrutinizing manner, which is emphasized by the slow camera movement. The appearance of the female body connotes, as Mulvey writes, "*to-be-looked-at-ness*" (11); that is, the female body is on the screen to be observed, desired, and examined. Its presence creates a moment of suspension in which the spectacle of female beauty pauses the flow of the narrative. Indeed, the onscreen time spent tilting the camera up to show Alex's body does not serve to advance the narrative at all, although the focus of Alex's *to-be-looked-at-ness* is not on the traditional portrayal of female beauty but on the curiosity aroused by the intersexual body.

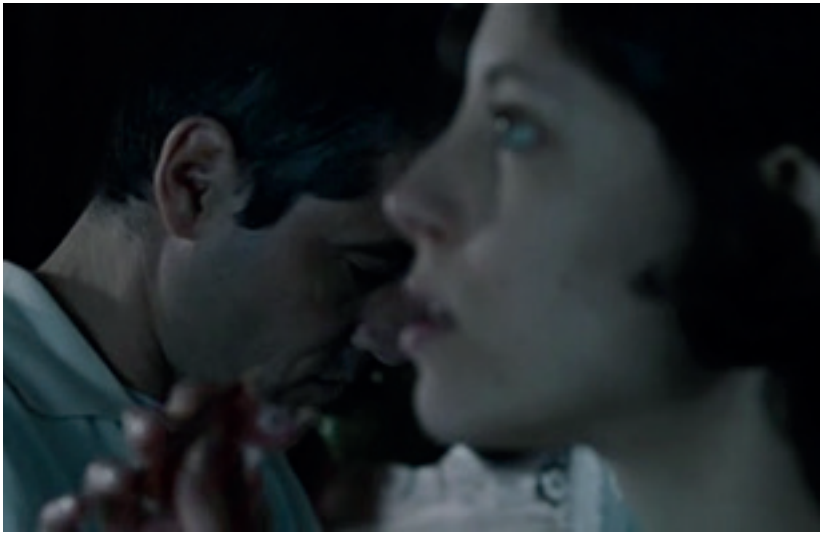

Figure 8: Alex in the foreground.

The sequence continues, though, creating an opportunity for Alex to return Ramiro's objectifying gaze, showing Alex's awareness and enabling hir to demonstrate hir critique of it. Alex interrupts him as he goes back to what he was doing, asking: "Do you like it?" The question, beyond showing that Alex is aware of Ramiro's scopophilic pleasure, creates doubt in Ramiro and the audience: to what that "it" refers? Aware of how ambiguous the question is, Alex responds "my house"—whereas the form of the sequence indicates it would be Alex's body that Ramiro "likes". Alex gets closer to Ramiro (Figure 8) and asks another question: "what about opening up bodies, do you like it?" Alex invades the space that was once Ramiro's, breaking the limit that separated them in the shot/reverse-shot dynamic and opening it up with irony. This way Alex can interpellate Ramiro from the same place, which is emphasized by the graphic symmetry achieved by framing and angle. Alex's questions refers, first, indirectly to the interpellation of hir body as an erotic object constructed with the shot/reverse-shot pattern; second, directly to the interpellation of hir body as a scientific object. This way, Alex discursively connects the erotic and the scientific objectification, calling attention to the problematic intersection of these two kinds of desire, both of which objectify and violate othered bodies.

6.2 Towards a Non-Binary Gaze

Two significant characteristics of *XXY* are the film's "refusal to spectacularize bodily difference" (Martin 38) and "the [film's] refusal to focus on Alex's body primarily as a site of tragedy" (Martin 37). The first characteristic addresses cinematic scopophilia directly. As mentioned before, traditional narrative cinema relies on the objectification of the female body, its overexposure on the screen serving male erotic fantasies and creating a pause in the development of the narrative for the erotic admiration of the sexualized image. The sequence analyzed in the previous subsection can be read as a coalitional critique of developmentalism because it interrupts the heteronormative flux of the traditional cinematic strategy, giving way for Alex to return and deconstruct both objectifying gazes ze is subjected to when Ramiro looks at hir.

The second characteristic addresses the critique of pathologization that comes forward in the film's portrayal of Alex's intersexuality, which hegemonic discourses understand as a tragedy that happened to both Alex

and the family. Suli, in a conversation with Erica and Ramiro, refers to the birth of Alex as intersexual as an unfortunate event that caused grief and interrupted the narrative of heteronormative development, resulting in the frustration of the family's expectations for closure. Instead of focusing on that way of reacting to the intersex body, the film focuses on building relationships that open up possibilities of enjoyment other than scopophilic pleasure—such as the exchange of glances and desires between Alex and Álvaro, which will be analyzed in the following paragraphs.

In Halberstam's various analyses of fictional and non-fictional accounts, the moment the "secret" about the discrepancy between someone's birth-assigned sex, the person's gender experience, and what is accepted as normal within heteronormative logics is revealed often brings violent responses, losses in social status, processes of pathologization, social effacement, physical abuse, among other pernicious consequences. In his words, "[t]he revelation of the secret of the passing [transsexual] man or woman […] seems to occasion a particular kind of curiosity, and […] produce[s] sometimes cruel and disrespectful revisions of life narratives" (56).

In *XXY*, the moment of revelation results in different exclusionary and violent responses. The father of Alex's friend Roberta (played by César Troncoso) treats Alex rudely when he finds them lying on the same bed, altering what he previously allowed in the relationship between Alex and his daughter (pointing also at the control men have over women). His reaction demonstrates the hegemonic expectations of heteronormative closure and the construction of whoever defied traditional paths of development as dangerous. The father of one of the attackers calls Alex an "endangered species" when confronted by Kraken, treating Alex with the same contempt he has for the sea turtles he kills when fishing. His response attempts to circumscribe Alex to the realms of the inhuman, implying that ze might disappear because of what is considered proper development.

Kraken's behavior towards Alex also changes when he sees that Alex penetrates Álvaro when they have sex, so he begins to use the masculine pronouns to refer to Alex because Alex penetrates Álvaro and thus, in the biologist's logic, must be male. As Monteiro and Nardi (2009) point out, the moment in which the father witnesses Alex penetrating Álvaro represents, for Kraken, the dismantling of Alex's feminine identity, emphasizing how much sexual practices are at play for the definition of someone's gender.

"Even if her/his genitals do not correspond to the normative ideal", they write, "the father has the expectation that, since s/he has been raised as a girl, it is Alex who should be penetrated" (40). It is because he witnesses Alex penetrating Álvaro that Kraken concludes Alex should be male, this way reiterating the supposed linearity of sex, gender, and sexual practices. Alex, however, challenges the father's conclusion when ze asks him about the possibility of not having to choose, breaking the father's expectation of heteronormative closure.

Figure 9: Alex and Álvaro share the frame.

Álvaro and Alex approach each other in a way that counters the logics of invasion and overexposure and relies on non-hierarchical exchanges and consent between the two characters. In the sequence that shows the arrival of the guests and Alex hides under the house, for instance, the only character who sees Alex between the wooden slats is Álvaro, whose curious gaze is returned by Alex with the same curiosity (00:05:38-00:06:09). Álvaro finds in the house photographs of Alex as a child and an adolescent; in the two more recent photos, Alex appears either with the head down or holding a hand up to the camera keeping the face hidden (00:06:16-0:06:27). For Martin, Álvaro's gaze is "investigative" and "revealed as insufficient by a series of blocks to

it" (39), referring to the wooden slats and the hand hiding Alex's face in the photograph, which would represent a barrier between these characters, a hindrance to Álvaro's gaze. But what Martin considers insufficient in Álvaro's gaze can be read in a way that grants Alex authority over who can see Alex, how much of Alex's body can be seen, how close Álvaro can get without invading Alex's space and body. In their relationship, Alex is shown to have much more control over the gaze that comes from Álvaro, and the dynamics of how the two characters are composed in more equal terms.

Instead of "learning" about Alex from what people other than Alex can offer him, such as Ramiro does when reading Kraken's book and Alex's medical records, Álvaro is led through the environment ze inhabits, perceiving Alex through hir own presence in the house. Different from Ramiro and Kraken, who anxiously turn to previously established pieces of information authorized by science and the scientific method of observation, annotation, comparison, etc, Álvaro's perceptions little by little accommodate Alex's existence, such as by gazing at the photographs, or visiting Alex's bedroom and seeing the modified dolls and the diary, both of which indicate Alex's bodily difference but do not instigate Álvaro to look after information with anyone else beyond what Alex gives him. Alex is able to approach Álvaro slowly too, directing him a gaze that is less objectifying and more curious, moved by the curiosity linked to the traditional construction of adolescence as a time of sexual discovery.

Figure 10: Alex dances.

Figure 11: Álvaro watches with pleasure.

The two adolescents, who are both queer each in their own way, exchange gazes in a non-hierarchical manner that can be seen in the visual symmetry often employed in the scenes in which they interact. They either appear both in the same frame or occupy symmetric spaces in the frame when the shot/reverse-shot structure is used. Figure 9 shows Álvaro and Alex in the same frame, performing the same action, pointing to the similarities between them instead of highlighting their gender and/or sex differences (00:10:01-00:10:26). In the sequence represented in Figure 10, Alex invites Álvaro to look at hir while Alex plays *to-be-looked-at-ness* willingly and playfully, what makes Alex at the same time the one to whom the gaze is directed and the one who controls the gaze (00:22:53-00:23:35). The shot in Image 11, which is the reverse-shot in relation to the one shown in Figure 10, shows Álvaro demonstrating pleasure in watching Alex, with Alex's consent.

Figure 12: Alex looks in the mirror.

Figure 13: Álvaro looks in from outside.

The sequence represented in Figures 12 to 16 happens close to the end of the film, when Alex and Álvaro have already had sexual intercourse, so the "secret" surrounding Alex's body has been already revealed to Álvaro, although Alex has not let him look at the ambiguous genitals (00:36:44-00:37:21). With an expression of sadness and anxiety (Figure 12), Alex looks at the mirror pointing the gaze at the genitals. The framing and lighting choices prevent the audience from seeing what Alex sees, frustrating any expectation for a "revelation" climax. Álvaro approaches Alex's bedroom window, occupying a position that favors his view of Alex's body (Figure 13). The reverse-shot shows Álvaro's point of view, as is expected from the shot/reverse-shot pattern (Figure 14). However, the framing and the lighting prevent the audience from seeing what Álvaro sees, sustaining the intimacy constructed between the two queer characters. Figure 15 shows the moment when Alex notices Álvaro looking through the window. Alex does not resist the gaze, nor does Álvaro. They occupy complementary positions in the frame, reinforcing their paralleled vulnerabilities and the idea that the gazes exchanged between these two characters are consented. Still, the film does not give consent to the audience to see Alex's body, thus avoiding the threat of a violating, non-consensual look.

Figure 14: Alex through the window.

Figure 15: Alex sees Álvaro.

The strategies used throughout the film to contest the violation of the intersex body mostly rely on plays between defying and avoiding the objectification and overexposure of that body to the audience. The film invests on creating a link between two queer characters that can look at each other because they are both objectified and violated by the non-queer around them. *XXY* presents a possibility for constructing a cinematic dynamic that at the same time reveals and resists the hierarchical, fixed structure of the male gaze and the ideological content of the scientific gaze, both of which are based on heteronormative, patriarchal notions. These notions are often, if not always, embedded in violent contexts of invasion, intervention, pathologization, and effacement. The plays with the gaze in XXY destabilize the spectator's sense of gender stability and romantic expectations, confirming non-normative desire for a non-normative body without falling into a libertarian humanistic trap of portraying Alex and Álvaro as people who are "like everybody else". That is, the film does not deny difference, but establishes a site where difference can be shared among different people who share the marginalization imposed by normative parameters.

7 Final Remarks

XXY ends before any suggestion of closure for Alex's story can be inferred from the film, both because the film ends abruptly and because Alex's intersexuality or any decision regarding hir body's normalization is not the focus of the ending sequence. Rather, at the end the film focuses on Alex choosing to report the rape attempt disregarding the breaking of the secret about hir body and on the consensual relationship established between hir and Álvaro. When ze goes to the police, Alex's body is reinscribed as the target of violences ze cannot either "escape" or "transcend". Ze does not "transcend" physical and/or cultural sex-gender norms to attain an idealized position for which the body would not matter—"not matter" in the sense that it does not come into materiality, and also "not matter" in the sense that it can be disregarded. Instead, the film presents an open end that is constrained by the laws that produce the moment of Alex's decision as it is, at this moment represented by the police.

The reinscription of Alex's body as the target of violence is not, however, constructed as Alex's victimization. Although the film returns to the tragedy, it does not do so moved by a claim for humanization through the equality of human suffering or for the exploitation of suffering as means to build empathy in an humanitarian claim, which could be expected as a form of metronormative closure. Rather, the film's return to the denunciation of the rape helps to avoid a salvationist future and, at the same time, remind the viewer that the film's open end, like agency, is produced through and constrained by the regulatory regimes that construct Alex's body as the site of trouble.

In the exchange of consensual looks between Alex and Álvaro at the end, the film creates space for the materialization of non-normative embodiments and relationships instead of producing an end based on reaching definition, such as the heteronormative closure of surgical normalization. Not even *not choosing* constitutes closure, because the film's ending does not concentrate on a choice from the part of Alex in relation to the gender binary. Instead, the film's ending promotes the reflection on the necessary social changes so the intersex individual can guarantee hir physical well-being and autonomy.

Such promising ending, however, is complicated when we think of how this open end becomes viable for Alex. Because it is a white, middle-class family, with access to formal education, the Krakens do not have to deal with the consequences of racialization and the limitations imposed by poverty, which are issues intimately related in the Latin American reality. It is important to emphasize that the film does not approach any matters of race, class, and gender that are preponderant in our social construction, especially with the process of gentrification in Argentina in the period during which the film takes place.

Developmentalist narratives, such as the metronormative narrative of queer salvation enabled by capitalism are troubled in their most basic presumptions in *XXY*: those that sustain the binary homosexual/heterosexual through the materialization of binary sex. In *XXY*, Alex's choice of not making a decision troubles the important colonial discourse of scientific knowledge. Science, constructed as unbiased, natural, irreducible and unquestionable, is central to the maintenance of the axes on which the coloniality of power is articulated. It defines the terms of what is human and what is not in terms of race, in terms of sex, among many others, recurring often to binaries such as primitiveness/development and immature/mature as means to attribute different values to normative and non-normative bodies, cultures, and performances.

Metronormativity in *Pelo Malo*'s Portrayal of the Bolivarian State

1 Introduction

In the previous chapters, the analyses brought forward and problematized the critiques of metronormativity and of developmentalism that are performed within the films. Both *Madame Satã* and *XXY* criticize in different ways the hegemonic narrativization of queerness as white, male, middle-class, and dependent on economic development in the articulation of the clash between metronormative and capitalist ideals of closure. The intersections that emerge from the contexts in which the characters are inserted point to the limits of the metronormative narrative, the colonial structure of power being the main point of articulation of those limits. The two films analyzed in the previous chapters take place in openly capitalist contexts, in which the reproduction of colonial patterns of oppression is paramount for the sustenance of the social structure. Both analyses bring out the need for coalitional critiques of sex, gender, race, and class in the specific, distinct Latin American contexts within the global hegemonic narrativization of queerness, showing the intersectional dynamics by which, within the broader context of the coloniality of power, sexual and gender marginalization take place.

In *Pelo Malo*, set in 2011, Junior (played by Samuel Lange Zambrano) is a nine-year-old boy living in an impoverished housing project in Caracas, the capital of Venezuela. Junior wants to straighten his hair and dress up like Venezuelan Rock singer Henry Stephen for his yearbook picture. Marta (played by Samantha Castillo), Junior's mother is a currently unemployed widow with Junior and a months-old baby to raise. While Junior tries different ways to smooth his *pelo malo*, or "bad hair", as black hair is referred to in Latin America and the Caribbean (Guzman 1, Bintrim 2), his mother walks the streets of Caracas trying either to find a new job or convince her former employer to give her security guard job back. Marta does not accept her son's obsession about his hair or the behaviors she understands as being effeminate, seeing them as a sign of a latent homosexuality. This arouses in the mother strong bouts of homophobia against the boy, who fruitlessly tries to please his mother and, at the same time, does not want to give up his wishes. Before the school

year starts, Junior spends his time with a friend, referred to throughout the film as "*la niña*/the girl" (played by María Emilia Sulbarán), watching older boys in the neighborhood play sports in the project's patio or watching beauty pageant contests on TV. He also spends time with his grandmother, Carmen (played by Nelly Ramos). Against Marta's wishes, Carmen encourages Junior, seeing his effeminacy as a way out from the context of violence and crime that surrounds them.

In this chapter, I analyze the developmentalist metronormative implications of the criticism to Hugo Chávez's administration presented in the Venezuelan film *Pelo Malo* (dir. Mariana Rondón). Different from the films analyzed in the previous chapters, *Pelo Malo* takes place in a state that adheres to a socialist reading of Simón Bolívar's ideals. In Section Two, "The Bolivarian Revolution", I offer an overview of the Bolivarian revolution and bring to the foreground how the film's criticism of the government uncritically reinstalls the metronormative idealizations underlying developmentalist projections for the future. In Section Three, "The Revolution at the Intersections of Race, Gender, and Sexuality", I analyze the film's (re)production of the metronormative narrative in terms of the reproduction of the colonial model of power, of gender difference, of racism, and of its reduction of homosexuality to effeminacy.

2 The Bolivarian Revolution

2.1 Authoritarianism, Developmentalism and Crisis

At the time *Pelo Malo* was released, Rondón dealt with a controversy with current president Nicolás Maduro when she criticized the environment of political intolerance that permeates Venezuelan society. Rondón's statements also addressed Hugo Chávez's public persona, constructed by Bolivarian Propaganda as being the savior of the country—he is often called the *Comandante Supremo* (Supreme Commander)—a god-like figure that must not be attacked in any way (Stivaletti 1). The main argument against Rondón was that *Pelo Malo* was made with financial support from the government she was criticizing (Stivaletti 2, Orduña 2013, Lozano 2013) and which, five years before, the director praised for the support to the development of national cinema provided by the *Centro Nacional Autónomo de Cinematografia* (Gómez 2013). The *Sistema Bolivariano de Comunicación e Información* (Bolivarian System of Communication and Information) published, in response to Rondón's criticism in interviews, a note affirming that the filmmaker showed disregard for the Bolivarian Government that funds her films. The controversy aroused by Rondón's comments points to the critique that is developed throughout the film, which addresses the authoritarian tone of Chávez government and its government's alleged failure to sustain the social changes promised when what has become known as the Bolivarian Revolution was instituted in Venezuela.

Chávez's period in the presidency started in 1999 and was marked by the elaboration of a new constitution and its institution in December of the same year. Composed by plans of political reform based on a socialist reading of Simón Bolívar's ideals[20], this constitution became known as the Bolivarian Constitution. It emphasizes participative democracy, economic self-sufficiency and patriotism, aiming at transforming economy and society through the implementation of cooperatives and of governmental programs to spread literacy, and to provide access to health care, food, and housing to the poorer sectors of society (Foster vii, Buxton 337). This agenda would go against the ideological position of

20 Simón Bolívar was a Venezuelan political leader who is considered to be the first illuminist to support decolonization. He is considered a hero who led Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Panamá, Peru, and Venezuela to independence from the European metropolis.

the previous governments and aimed at solving the social problems the latter aggravated. The social transformation intended by the Bolivarian Revolution would expand benefits often attached to the development of capitalism to the marginalized and exploited groups, but the film shows a social context in which such transformations either did not take place or were not finished, and the population was left abandoned.

Chávez's government was preceded by a series of democratic presidents with progressist ideals who favored urban, cultural, and technologic development, the establishment of multinational industries in the country, and the growth of the oil industry, Venezuela's main source of revenue. These governments relied on the implementation of neoliberal policies in order to promote the country's economic development, but ended up leaving it in a profound economic crisis. As discussed in the previous chapters, developmentalist agendas often—if not always—rely on exclusionary practices of exploitation and silencing that support the unattainable ideals designed as models of development.

Marta Harnecker (2010) points out that "Latin America was the first region in the world where neoliberal policies were introduced"; therefore, it was "[t]he first region in the world where these policies came to be rejected […]" (6). Neoliberal policies, part of Venezuelan politics since the times when Pérez Jiménez was the dictator (1953-1958) and sustained throughout the early democratic period, are held responsible for the increase of poverty and social inequalities that led to "deep popular antipathy towards the *status quo*" (Buxton 329). The populations that most suffer the consequences of developmentalist efforts are the working classes and the poor, groups whose marginalization is deeply enmeshed with racism, heteronormativity, binary gender difference, and the gender hierarchy established between men and women.

The crisis that built up during the early democratic period culminated in 1983 in the so-called *Viernes Negro* (Black Friday), when an abrupt and heavy devaluation of the national currency, the Venezuelan Bolívar, occurred due to economic exhaustion caused by neoliberal developmentalist efforts. From this moment on, the monetary stability of the country was at constant risk and class differences were even more accentuated due to exchange control, corruption, and deteriorating purchasing power. Moreover, these governments were marked

by severe cuts in civil liberties and massive popular demonstrations against repression. One of those has become known as the *Caracazo*, a popular demonstration against the increase of transport fares that lasted for weeks. The increase, according to John Bellamy Foster (2010), was an attempt of then-President Carlos Andrés Pérez (in office from 1988 to 1992) to "put Venezuela back in good standing with the IMF […] all on the back of millions of poor people" (iii). The government's retaliation, which resulted in the deaths of hundreds (maybe thousands) of people in the hands of the military and security forces "stripped away any illusions about Venezuela's fake democracy, and set in motion the struggle for a new society" (iv). Human rights abuses, suspension of constitutional rights, and civil persecution during the governments of Pérez and Rafael Caldera (in office from 1993 to 1998) also weighed in the population's mistrust in the government and increased the support for Chávez.

The early period of republican government in Venezuela is often divided in what has been called the Fourth and the Fifth Republics. The Fourth Republic comprises the period from the fall of Pérez Jiménez's dictatorship to the rise of Chávez, and the Fifth refers to the period of Chávez's presidency. Julia Buxton (2005) points out that, on the one hand, the Fourth Republic was a period that favored the upper classes and the establishment of neoliberal policies, during which the poor and the radical left were silenced; on the other hand, the Fifth aimed at fighting the hegemony of those who were privileged in the previous governments and at promoting social changes that would benefit the poorer and most economically marginalized sectors of society (345). The film's portrayal of the period, however, demonstrates that although the Fifth Republic held ideals of social equality, these ideals were far from being attained.

2.2 Social Exclusion and Urban Stagnation

Junior is about nine years old when the film is set, so he was born around 2002—the year when Chávez mentioned the implementation of a "more humane" capitalism (in Chávez's own words in an interview given to Marta Harnecker in 2002, qtd. in Foster iv). This places the boy and his family within the context of political unrest brought by the neoliberal agenda

of the previous governments that increased the social inequalities Chávez's government proposed to diminish. Marta and her deceased partner, Junior's father, possibly went through impoverishment during the Fourth Republic, which was not overcome during Chávez's government according to how their situation is portrayed at the time the film is set. Marta is unemployed, urban infrastructure and health care facilities are decrepit, streets are violent, and governmental support is utterly absent.

Figure 16: The façade of a building in the housing project.

The film presents Caracas as a stagnant city in which previous urbanization projects were abandoned and are now subjected to the effects of time without any signs of maintenance (Figures 16 and 17). The developmentalist efforts are well represented in the slogan of Jiménez's government, the "*Nuevo Ideal Nacional*" ("New National Ideal"). In an interview to Sandra Guzmán (2014), Rondón tells that the film was made in a housing project built during the time of "architectural urbanism in Latin America," in the 50's. In this period, Venezuela and other Latin American countries, including Brazil, were going through a phase of progressist politics that put the country among the most modernized countries in Latin America.

Figure 17: Junior and *la niña*.

Those housing projects were supposed to provide better living for the poor, the same population targeted by the policies of the Bolivarian government. The structures are, however, worn out, signaling neglect from the part of the current government and failure to sustain the promises of improving the population's economic situation. If Chávez proposed to give better living conditions for the poor, the portrayal of Caracas in *Pelo Malo* emphasizes that such propositions were not carried out by the leftist government. The characterization of the settings inhabited by the characters point to the abandonment of the developmental projects of earlier years and also to the failure of Chávez's government to fulfill its goals of making life better for the poor.

Looking back at Venezuela's recent political history, Buxton argues that there has been continuity instead of a complete break with "the 'politics of exclusion'" (329) that characterized both the dictatorial period of Pérez Jiménez and the democratic period initiated in the Fourth Republic. The Fifth Republic as it is portrayed in the film

is shown as not having challenged that politics of exclusion Buxton mentions. When comparing the Fourth and the Fifth Republics, Buxton points out that these two moments relied on maintaining the authority of the state and its hegemony, controlling oppositional ideas because they were "contrary to the national interest" (345). The construction of what is of national interest changed during both political moments, but they followed a similar binary structure.

In the 50's, national interest was constructed as urbanization, technological development, incentives to white immigration; in other words, the implementation of neoliberalism, which carries with it the implicit structures of racism, classism, heteronormativity, exploitation of natural resources and underpaid labor, among other patterns of oppression that sustain capitalism (Quijano 2002) . In Chávez's period, national interest was constructed as the concern with improving the living conditions of the marginalized classes and towards leading the country to self-sufficiency, departing from neoliberalism. The focus of those two administrations on the advancement of what they considered of "national interest" prevented the discussion of the social problems such advancements produced. This reproduces a past of exclusion and silencing that plays a great part on the issues addressed in *Pelo Malo* and the political postures criticized throughout it.

2.3 Bolivarian Propaganda vs. the Resistance to the Revolution

Figure 18: *La Piedrita*'s mural.

Another characteristic of the Caracas portrayed in the film are the propaganda murals and billboards spread throughout the city. The population contributed to the presence of revolutionary imagery in the cities through graffiti murals, such as the ones in Figures 18 and 19, among others throughout the film. The mural in Figure 18 provides us with the location of the housing project in which Marta and Junior live, the *23 de Enero* parish. The phrase "*La Piedrita Venceremos*" ("La Piedrita shall win") makes reference to the militia group *La Piedrita*, which has been in control of the neighborhood, heavily armed, for about 25 years. The militia's fight against the government begun during Jiménez's dictatorship and continued throughout Chávez's growing authoritarianism and neglect.

According to Ciccariello-Maher (2013), *La Piedrita* was formed spontaneously by the community, in an effort to fight against narcotrafficking and the corruption of the government that overlooked the issue.

When Chávez rose to power, *La Piedrita* maintained its autonomous activity, being accused by Chávez of being terrorists because of their resistance to follow *Chavista* ideology and surrender the space of the parish to the rule of the government, a position that reinforces the reproduction of the hierarchical, state-centered, and authoritarian model of power that is also characteristic of colonial power.

On the left side of the mural (Figure 18), there is a representation of Jesus holding the Bolivarian Constitution; on the right side, a representation of a baby Jesus holding a rifle in the arms of the *Virgen de Coromoto* (Our Lady of Coromoto), saint patroness of Venezuela. Originally, the image of Jesus did not hold the Bolivarian Constitution but a Kalashnikov rifle, as does the baby Jesus. The original painting makes a direct reference to the Cold War, the period during which hegemonic powers were divided into communism and capitalism as opposed and exclusive. The armed Jesus of *La Piedrita* comes to represent the militia's resistance to be controlled by the government. The substitution of the rifle for the Bolivarian Constitution, however, breaks with the idea of resistance and, together with the image of the leftist leaders re-enacting *Last Supper* adds to the layer of mysticism and adoration for Chávez that the government's propaganda wished to establish.

In the film, the complexity of what *La Piedrita* represents in relation to both government periods is oversimplified as the presence of the painted wall serves only to emphasize that Caracas is a violent city and that the government does nothing more about it than substituting popular direct action by an ideal of state hegemony—even though *La Piedrita* repudiated Chávez's attempts to intervene in the community and submit it to the State. There is no further problematization in respect to what a whole self-supporting neighborhood may represent in terms of changing the social structure and the hegemonic model of power. This way, the presence of *La Piedrita* only serves to create a parallel between violence and the state as if that rifle were representative of Chávez government's militarization, disregarding that *La Piedrita* was, from the beginning, against that government. Moreover, this cooptational characterization of that wall painting strengthens the polarization of power in the dichotomy communism/capitalism—or, in the specific context of Venezuela at that moment, Bolivarian socialism/neoliberalism—in

a way that (re)produces the historical stereotypes that construct leftist governments, in Western hegemonic capitalist thought, as violent, authoritarian, and belated, effacing the history of the neighborhood and turning it into an emptied symbol of state violence.

The images in those murals caused great controversy among religious groups, who felt offended by their content. With Jesus holding the gun, the mural points to the entanglement between religion and politics that is characteristic of *La Piedrita*; with the change to Jesus holding the Bolivarian constitution, it signals to the messianic aspect of Chávez's image and to the narrativization of the Bolivarian Revolution as salvation for the country. Although the film presents only a flattened portrayal of the complexity of the relationship between the neighborhood and the government, Marta and Junior's location is a space within the city of Caracas in which the official state clashes with the autonomous, unofficial state defended by *La Piedrita*.

The film's critique of the government is based on a discourse that emphasizes underdevelopment in order to advocate for the country's development, projecting an idealized closure that lies outside the limits of the diegesis. This way, the portrayal of the Bolivarian Revolution suggests that the leftist government also projected an unattainable ideal for the future that assumes that structural exclusion can be overcome through economic development, while ignoring the need for distribution and recognition for social change. *Pelo* Malo's criticism of the social structure indicates that the parameters of exclusion pointed out throughout the film (namely, racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia) are the same parameters of exclusion perpetrated by developmentalist capitalist discourses, thus linking the overcoming of those exclusionary frameworks to economic development and, as a consequence, projecting a future ideal in which urban and economic development would mean the solution for oppression and marginalization.

Besides emphasizing the violence to which the militia group was prepared to resort for the sake of the revolution against neoliberalism and against the quasi-religious fanaticism constructed around the Bolivarian revolution, the murals also give hints to the gender roles available: men hold the guns, women hold the children. Figure 19 shows a well-known graffiti in Caracas that portrays various revolutionary leaders sitting beside Jesus in the manner of Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper*. Again, in

this painting men take the leading roles and women are utterly absent. Moreover, the use of Catholic imagery to portray the alleged union of the political leaders that appear in the painting reproduces the implicit baggage of racism of hegemonic Catholicism, since it effaces the presence of Afro-Venezuelan and indigenous beliefs from the attempts of revolution, even though Chávez made use of discourses that claimed for these two marginalized groups' rights[21].

Figure 19: "The Last Supper" with leftist leaders.

21 According to the Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the United States (2011), "Chávez [was] the first president in Venezuela's history to claim and honor his Indigenous and African Ancestry" (1). He even established a commission called "Presidential Comission for the Prevention and Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination in the Venezuelan Educational System", determined a date for Afro-Venezuelan Day (May 10), established a Vice Ministry for African Affairs, and proposed a national law against racial discrimination.

3 The Revolution at the Intersections of race, gender, and sexuality

Pelo Malo portrays the reproduction of social exclusion both through the economic stagnation that characterizes the city of Caracas and through the reproduction of gender inequality, racism, and homophobia within which the characters live. This way, the film constructs a state of cultural stagnation favorable for the proliferation and perpetuation of exclusionary discourses. The characterization of the social context within the film points to the (re)production of the metronormative fiction of the economic development that brings social and cultural progress and transforms the socio-cultural context from unfavorable to favorable to not only non-normative sexualities, but also to racial and gender differences. This calls for an intersectional critique of the film as a metronormative narrative.

3.1 Coloniality

The colonial structure of power[22] is explicit in the conception of "national interest" of the Fourth Republic, which is characteristic of neoliberalism. In this period, the developmentalist efforts promoted, indirectly or openly, such as in the case of incentives to European immigration, the gentrification of the population, and the relocation of poorer people to the housing projects far from the city (as it is possible to see in the film as Marta and Junior take long walks or bus rides home after being in the city center). The portrayal of Caracas suggests that these processes of exclusion sustained throughout the previous governments are still at work, even though there were attempts to promote social change and national development centered on the country's self-sufficiency instead of centered on transnational economic relationships.

A first glance in the agenda of Chávez's government may suggest the possibility of the Bolivarian Revolution being an alternative to the colonial structure of power. George Ciccariello-Maher (2011) understands the Bolivarian revolution as a process of decolonization, "or the construction of a decolonial socialism" that considers "the specific Latin-American and Venezuelan context of the struggle underway" and "recogniz[es]

22 Based on the institution of race as a universal parameter of social distinction and domination, the creation and sustenance of a global market, the control of labor, and the institution of heterosexuality.

that the Venezuelan class-structure is far from what is assumed in European-Marxist theories", which do not address the intersections of race and class (236). In this view, the decolonization of socialism is a process of turning socialist thought towards the specificities of the Latin American context, instead of reproducing it in its Eurocentered version, this way resisting the reproduction of the hierarchies established by colonialism.

For Buxton, however, such change in focus, which shows "a revolutionary shift in the distribution of power", also shows a "remarkable permanence in the art of its practice" (329). In other words, Buxton sees an inversion of the power hierarchy. An inversion does not mean, however, that the structure of power changed. In Buxton's view, such profound changes did not happen in the Bolivarian Revolution since in practice power continued to be exercised towards the disenfranchising of the poor. With this in mind, the Bolivarian Revolution did not promote decolonization. The main characteristic of the Bolivarian Revolution was its populist tendencies, which often leaned towards explicit authoritarianism from the part of the state towards the people, relying on military participation in domestic policies. This characteristic reinforces Buxton's argument that the Bolivarian Revolution did not challenge the hierarchical, colonial power structure, since the government's authoritarianism reproduces the colonial structure of power in an inverted way.

3.2 Racism and the bad hair

Racism, although addressed in a political discourse "that celebrates indigenous and Afro-Venezuelan rights and seeks to alleviate the social suffering of the poor" (Gulbas 2012, 87), is nevertheless very strong within Venezuelan society. As Lauren Gulbas points out, whiteness is still a marker of social and moral superiority whereas the association of blackness with inferiority is maintained. In Elizabeth Gackstetter Nichols's (2013) words , "[w]hile the ideology of national authenticity in Venezuela might have theoretically sought a specifically American *mestizaje*, this process in effect concealed and recreated the hierarchies of the colonial legacy" (172). In *Pelo Malo*, the hierarchies of the colonial legacy come to the foreground tied with racism, in the form of the meanings attached to Junior's hair (already invoked by the film's title) and in the visual aspect of the film through the contrast of colors.

Figure 20: Junior in the white Jacuzzi.

Figure 21: Class difference in colors.

The first mention to racism occurs right in the beginning of the film, when Marta still has a job as housekeeper for a white middle-class family. She loses that job because her employer finds Junior bathing in her Jacuzzi, in a reaction that evokes the developmentalist colonial ideas of race as contagious and of racial purity *versus* racial impurity. The employer's racism, mingled with classism, is responsible for Marta's dismissal, although the employer does not make her racism explicit. It is through the contrast between the darkness of Junior's and Marta's skin against the whiteness of the surroundings (Figure 20 and 21) and of the contrast between that apartment and the place the lower classes live that class and race inequalities come to the foreground. The silent racism in the employer's reaction hints at the negation of racism in Venezuela. This negation is strikingly marked by the removal of any question concerning race from the Venezuelan census in 1954[23]. Such removal has produced the institutionalization of racism through the effacement of race and its material effects from governmental policies, (re)producing the posture that affirms that miscegenation resolves racial divides and, because of that, claims of racism are meaningless.

For Roland Denis[24], "[i]t is rare to speak of racism in Venezuela" because it has been historically constructed as a country of *mestizos*. For scholars like Vallenilla Lanz and José Gil Fortoul[25], Nichols points out, "the long process of mixing had wiped out all traces of unique African and indigenous identity and had discarded any negative impulse of the undesirable races" (174). Political propaganda often uses racist, sexist, and homophobic language, both by the *Chavistas* and the opposition (Fernandes 258). Again, similar to the reproduction of homophobia in the discourses of politicians mentioned above, racism is perpetrated by the very government that was supposedly concerned about the marginalized sectors of society, race being an important factor of marginalization.

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23 Specific topics on race were incorporated to Venezuelan census in 2011 (Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the United States 2011).

24 In Spronk and Webber 2011.

25 Lanz's and Fortoul's were leading representatives of positivism in Venezuela and important supporters of Juan Vicente Gómez's dictatorship.

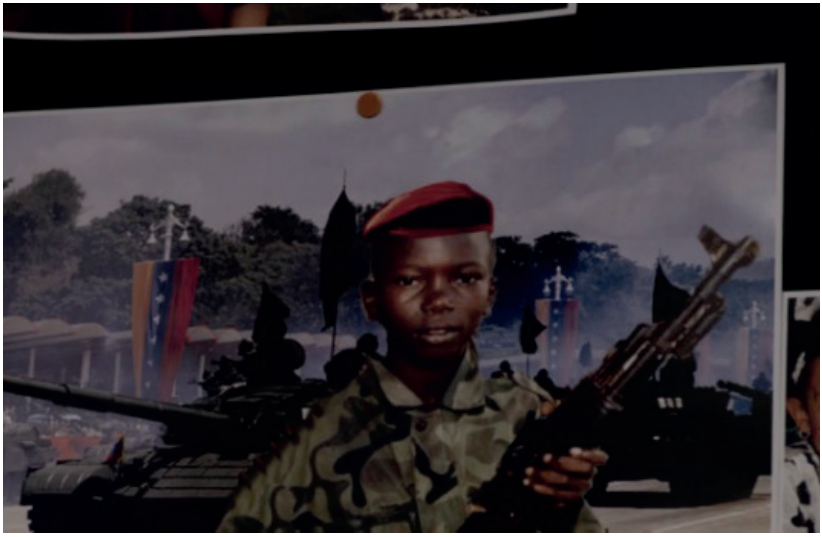

Figure 22: The model picture for boys.

Violence is also constructed as a racialized social institution. When Junior chooses what picture he wishes to take at the photographer's. Then the man points to a picture of a black kid holding a Kalashnikov rifle (just like adult and baby Jesus in the mural paintings), with tanks and the Venezuelan flag in the background (Figure 22). The red beret has become an important symbol in the Bolivarian Revolution's imagery, since it was part of Chávez's military uniform, which he was constantly wearing in his public apparitions. For boys like Junior, the role available is that of the military revolutionary. More than being a role only ascribed to boys, the picture emphasizes that it is ascribed to non-white boys, pointing to the reduction of poverty-to-blackness-to-the-military, and vice-versa. The boy's image emphasizes both blackness and hair cut short, in a military cut. The military buzz cut is a strong symbol of subjection and obedience, being an important rite of passage for someone who enters the military armed forces. Beyond subjection and obedience, in opposition to freedom of choice over one's own body image, the military cut emphasizes maleness, indirectly linking the long hair to femaleness, which would be unfit for such position.

Junior's hair not only represents race, but also class, gender, and sexuality. The emphasis on the role of hair appears early on in the film's title. Casandra Badillo (2001) notes that in the Dominican Republic "curly hair carries a symbolic weight, a social stigma" (1). She tells women are segregated according to the appearance of their hair: they are called ugly, (white) people in position of power instruct them to straighten their hair so they "look more decent". According to Badillo, the power relations involved with hair styling—"hair politics" is probably a suitable term—demonstrate relationships of domination and subjection: "[h]air straightening is a sign of docility and subjection to painful acts […] It is a ritual of humiliation, yet also a double game of rejection and reward" (36). It is important to notice that the concerns about hairstyling and the violences attached to it are discussed in the context of femininity, as if hair were not a male concern or does not affect men in some way. Indeed, the weight of beauty standards is different for men and women. The problem is that the understanding of hairstyling as a female concern generalizes such concern as feminine, leaving aside other embodiments for whom hairstyle may be a significant aspect of their bodily presentation and identity, such as what happens with Junior. Even if his mother supposes that because he wants to straighten his hair he is gay, this is not necessarily a relationship of cause-consequence.

For Rachel Buchman (2001), the control over someone's hairstyle refers back to patterns identifiable during slavery. Cutting off an enslaved person's hair could be a form of punishment in a period when hairstyle represented a way of keeping cultural heritage from complete effacement (190). In *Pelo Malo*, Junior's hair does not represent racial empowerment at any moment, as the movement "Black is Beautiful" aimed at promoting, but a threat to his survival. Cheryl Rodriguez (2004) points out that for many Afro-America women hair styling has served as a survival strategy that resulted in being harassed less because they conformed to white standards (69). For Junior, the threat for his survival is not only related to his conformation or non-conformation to white standards, but also to heterosexual standards. In Marta's point of view, Junior's hair makes his queerness visible. In this sense, cutting off his hair is a way to be assimilated and perhaps become less of a target of prejudice. Moreover, it could bring him better chances at achieving a better social status.

As discussed before, race and class maintain an intimate relationship as being racialized as black and/or *mestizo* is also being classified as poor, ugly, and other negative connotations. The desire to straighten his hair, in this sense, can be read as a desire for whitening, similar to the desire for rhinoplasty to make broad noses thinner and, therefore, get closer to both beauty standards based on whiteness, not to mention an improvement in social status. It must also be considered that a rhinoplasty demands money, as does straightening curly hair. Junior tries various house made methods, such as using cooking oil or mayonnaise. With money he would perhaps have access to other technologies for transforming his hair and achieving what is read in Venezuelan society as signs of belonging to a higher class. At the same time, however, even if Junior had the money, he would still be a victim of the homophobia that links hairstyling to femaleness and femininity and rejects what is understood as femaleness and femininity in a male body.

Figure 23: Junior cuts off his hair.

Marta's homophobia towards Junior relies on an understanding of her surroundings as dangerous to whatever is not heterosexual and male and of financial security as representing a protection against the racism that would push Junior into crime and violence, which is a position that reinforces the link between poverty and blackness. This link becomes explicit in Marta's discourse when she desperately attempts to soften the impact of the racism that converges on the boy's hair as she says "it is only a bit curly". In her analysis of black literary characters who passed as white, Abby E. Brisbon notes that what moved the characters towards whitening and straightening their hair were not the hegemonic beauty standards, but the changes of socioeconomic status passing as white could bring (64). This can be identified as one of the reasons why Marta acts the way she does towards her son's hair.

At the end of the film, the boy panics, because he wants to stay within the family and perform the masculine role of taking care of his single mother and baby brother, as a "real man" would do. He promises Marta he will change, but she does not accept that. She demands, in turn, that he cuts his hair. His efforts to perform masculinity are not enough—he has to get rid of the hair and all the meanings attached to it throughout the movie. Marta places a hair clipper on the table and gives him a choice: he either cuts his hair or leaves. The pressure of the family institution ends up being stronger for Junior than his desire to be like he wishes, and he takes the hair clipper and cuts off his hair (Figure 23).

Figure 24: The housing project and the children in the school's patio.

Figure 25: Junior at school with other students.

The cutting of the hair works as a rite of separation between the dreams and fantasies of childhood and the entrance in adulthood. This way Junior enters the order of things, accedes to the norms of sexual and gender distinction and ensures his masculinization according to those norms. An aerial shot (Figure 24) shows the children well-arranged in straight lines while singing the country's national anthem on the first day at school. They are small figures trapped among squares of concrete. Junior, having lost his uniqueness, remains silent among the children (Figure 25).

3.3 Disability

Pelo Malo is set in 2011, around the time then-president Chávez had just been diagnosed of the cancer that led to his death in 2013 and prevented him from fulfilling his fourth term as president. The year can be deduced from a scene in which Junior and Marta watch a public demonstration in support of Chávez on TV, in which people have their heads shaved on a public square. The scene on the TV shows the deep involvement of the population with the figure of Chávez, who relied on his strong popular appeal to rise to the presidency and stay there for approximately fourteen years. But the characters who watch the demonstration, especially Marta, do not show the same commitment with and approval of the leader. In the first newscast watched by Marta, the sequence in which the people are showing their support for Chávez smiling as they have their hair cut is alternated with a shot of Marta in the apartment with a look of exasperation directed at the TV. In the second newscast, we hear the reporter talk about a man who committed murder asking for a miracle to save Chávez.

In both of these sequences, Chávez's supporters are characterized as crazy and fanatic, as if unaware of the problems that existed during his administration. As if completely taken by the God-like figure attached to Chávez and, due to that, deprived of rationality, they are characterized as different from Marta, who is dealing with the material reality of the struggle for survival. Such portrayal homogenizes Chávez's supporters in a generalization that depends on the reproduction of marginalizing fictions such as the reduction of religion to fanaticism, and the construction of religiosity as opposed to rationality—here understood as one's skills to perceive one's own surroundings and the power relations at play within it. Someone's constrained ability to

comprehend reality within the range of what is considered normal is often pathologized; due to that, such representation of Chávez's supporters reiterates prejudices attached to mental health and links the support to a leftist government to psychological underdevelopment.

Chávez's supporters are characterized as alienated from the social context in which they are inserted, to the extent that those supporters do not appear as "real" characters of the story, but as fictionalized entities on TV. Such portrayal of the government's supporters can be read as a criticism of the government's (ab)use of propaganda (Lansberg-Rodríguez 7), at the same time that it implicates the population in that abuse by constructing them as either as naïve fanatics, like the smiling people shaving their heads, or like psychopaths, like the murderer, simultaneously victims and (re)producers of what the film constructs as responsible for the decay of the country and even of its people's mental health—the Bolivarian government.

It was a profound dissatisfaction with the previous regimes that led to the substantial popular support that kept Chávez in office for so long, relying on Chávez's ideal to promote a "more humane" kind of capitalism. The characters of *Pelo Malo,* however, do not live in circumstances that could correspond to whatever Chávez may have meant by a "more humane" kind of capitalism. The colonial system that exploits and marginalizes people under racism, classism, sexism, unemployment, and political intolerance depends on the differential attribution of humanity, as demonstrated in the previous chapters as characteristic of the functioning of the neoliberal capitalism Chávez's ideological position criticizes. The film portrays Junior, Marta, and the other characters as people who do not enjoy the advantages of being considered worthy of a humane treatment. This is emphasized when Junior goes to the doctor's office and tells the doctor Marta says he has a tail. The animalizing trait attributed to him reiterates the construction of queers as inhuman. Moreover, in evolutionist theory the "human tail" is a reference to vestigiality, which is the presence of a genetic attribute that have lost its function during the evolutionary process but continues to appear on a body as identifiable physical structure. Therefore, Marta's comment about Junior's body brings up the issue of physical underdevelopment which, once again, points at the construction of the inhabitants of the Bolivarian State—represented by Junior, who was born in the beginning of Chávez's administration—as inhuman and disabled.

Figure 26: Junior and *la niña* wait by the door.

In one visit to the photographer who is going to take the children's pictures for school, Junior and *la niña* wait by the door after the girl's picture is taken, instead of leaving right away (Figure 26). The spectator is left to wonder why they don't leave until the photographer passes by them saying "There will always be one of them". The image contained in the frame shows the two children dressed up in accordance to the roles they are supposed to perform in the social structure as it is portrayed in the film: with different and well-defined roles for boys and girls, men and women. There are three characters that remain unnamed throughout the film: *la niña*, *el jefe*, and *el bebé*. The two first represent the gender and sexual roles available in that society. The girl represents the role ascribed to women, one of submission to beauty standards and, thus, to an inferior position in relation to the men. The boss represents the social advantages of being a man, being able to use his masculinity to submit women to his power and control their lives. The baby represents the blank page into

which these roles are inscribed. Junior cannot fit any of these stereotypes because he embodies characteristics that are linked to both women and men and his strong character resists effacement by fitting these categories. By trying to prevent Junior from being a homosexual, Marta wants him to have the privileges men have in that society, privileges of which she is deprived for being a woman.

Marta, the young widow with two children, embodies the clash between traditional views of womanhood, standards that weigh heavily in Venezuelan society (and in Latin America as a whole), and the need to take on positions traditionally linked to the male gender in order to gain means for supporting her family and raise her two kids. The film portrays Marta's unemployment as the result of the country's economic and social crisis entangled with the practices of a very sexist society. The absence of men contributes to the characterization of Marta and the other women in the film as vulnerable.

In the beginning of the movie, Marta works as a housekeeper for a white middle-class family, a form of employment that is very common for impoverished and uneducated women and that oftentimes does not count with the benefits of formal jobs. Indeed, as soon as Marta's employer (played by an uncredited actress) finds Junior bathing in her Jacuzzi she dismisses Marta, who gets out of the job with no labor rights. Informal occupations are the rule for the women in the film. Perla (played by an uncredited actress), Marta's neighbor, finds ways of making money either by taking care of the neighbors' children (she often takes care of Junior and the baby when Marta is at work or looking for work) or by hosting meeting for women who want to lose weight. Perla, the same way as Marta, does not have any guarantees over the money she makes, which a formal job could provide. This puts these two women in a very vulnerable financial situation that compromises their own and their families' survival.

Chávez's government, Thomas Purcell[26] points out, was supposed to put women's rights in the center of many of the government's social policies, which "have given many women the opportunity to work in newly formed cooperatives and develop skills for employment elsewhere" (236). Even though the governmental cooperatives are female-dominated and are supposed to provide women with work and a

26 In Spronk and Webber 2011.

better financial situation, the wages for women who work in them are much lower than what they could make in the private sector, which is, however, dominated by men (236). Those governmental cooperatives and missions are completely absent from the film and are not an option for Marta. This absence points to the abandonment of women's issues on the part of the government. Marta's only options are either to struggle in the private sector controlled by men or to find alternative means of survival, such as what Perla does.

After losing the housekeeping job, Marta gives another try at a car wash that is looking for a security guard. She has experience in the position, but her application is not even considered because she is a woman. Instead, the owner offers her a cleaning job, which she refuses. The reasons for her refusal are not made explicit, but she may very well have refused because she understands the sexism that pulls her towards jobs that pay less. The editing that cuts from Marta being rejected at the car wash and leads to Marta watching a beauty pageant on TV emphasizes the roles ascribed to women in that social context—they are either going to be exploited for their looks and treated as decorative, or they are exploited in low-paying jobs. Her awareness of such sexism prevalent in the city as it is portrayed in the film comes to the foreground when, after trying many times to get her old security guard job back, she eventually trades sex with her former employer for the work position.

The decline of the patriarchal family model is responsible for many of the controversies involving the policies for women implemented during Chávez's government. Currently, many families are led by women, in a "fatherless-matriarchy" (Kermode 1) functioning in a very sexist and homophobic cultural context that puts a lot of value in the family institution. The expression "fatherless matriarchy" emphasizes that the workings of society are still the same as within patriarchy, but without the fathers. The word matriarchy, however, refers to a form of social organization in which women take leading roles—which is not the situation portrayed in the film. It would be more adequate to call it, in *Pelo Malo*, a "fatherless patriarchy", since the women never reach any empowered position.

Sara Motta (2013) explains, under feminist-marxist lenses, that in the capitalist system the family and the community are responsible for the production of the laborer "through the unpaid labor of the housewife" (39). With more women working outside the home, many times without

men to share the expenses and responsibilities, women are becoming poorer and overloaded with work like Marta, who has to financially support her children at the same time that she has to care for the sustenance of their daily lives and all decision making. Marta's storyline, combined with the city's decay and abandonment, reinforces the characterization of the social context as belated by presenting it as a place where the social and cultural progress that advance women's rights struggles did not yet take place. Moreover, such characterization implicitly empowers maleness as it shows women as victims of a system that give much more value to men—not only to those who hold the positions of power (such as the owner of the car wash and Marta's former employer), but also to those who are absent like Junior's father. In one scene, when Marta visits Carmen to ask for help with the children, the women reminisce about Junior's father Marta states that things would be better if the husband were alive, as if his presence could spare her the suffering she is going through. The expression "fatherless matriarchy" emphasizes that the workings of society are still the same as within patriarchy, but without the fathers, putting an even heavier load on women.

According to Motta, neoliberal policies "le[ad] to a feminization of poverty, responsibility, and obligation" (35). At the same time that women are involved with the politicization of social and subjective relationships, they are the most exploited and alienated ones. Although the film affirms that women are being more exploited, it does not show them taking action. Instead, women succumb to patriarchal norms, including the surreptitious norms that construct women as competitors among themselves. Perla and Marta do not help each other out unless Marta can exchange Perla's time for money. This reveals that they are not allies, although their situation as single mothers puts them in similar social positions. Carmen and Marta also do not help each other, much because of the suggestion made by Carmen that the baby may not be her grandson. The reason for such antagonism is the possibility of Marta having cheated on her son, this way reinforcing the superior position of men in those women's lives and the judgment of women because of their sexual activities.

Marta is portrayed as a sexually independent woman who looks for sex when she is interested, such as when she has sex with one of her neighbors or as when she has sex with her former employer to get her job back—and teach Junior a "lesson" on heterosexuality. It is also suggested

by an indiscreet comment made by Carmen that her younger child may not be Marta's husband's child, thus implying that Marta may have had sex outside the marriage. The portrayal of the judgmental society comes to the foreground not only when Carmen makes the suggestion about the baby, but also in the way Marta behaves after having sex with the neighbor. On the one hand, Marta does not seem satisfied after the sexual act shared with the neighbor, but guilty as she rushes the man out silencing her own possibility of having pleasure. On the other hand, she looks more satisfied after she has sex with the employer, because she did not do it for her own pleasure but as a sacrifice for her children, even though after the man is gone she appears depressed.

Religion plays an important part on the definition of gender roles. As mentioned before, the religious imagery in the film either represents women as saints or completely leaves them out, as in the case of the Last Supper with the leftist leaders. When Marta receives *el jefe* at the family's apartment, the framing of the dining scene reflects the position of the characters in the Last Supper graffiti. Marta occupies the center of the table—the place of Jesus, the divine figure who made the ultimate sacrifice in the name of humanity's sins. Marta is about to make a sacrifice in the name of her family, a sacrifice that works in two ways: first, to guarantee her job back; second, to try teaching Junior to be heterosexual. If on the one hand Marta's actions are homophobic, on the other hand they are justified by the difficulties Junior is going to face growing up queer in the homophobic and society that is constructed in the film.

Femininity is constructed throughout the film as a weakness in the system, and women are located in positions of vulnerability, which they deal with only because of men. Marta is alone with her two kids *because* her husband died. Marta and Carmen both mourn the death of the absent father; the widow even invokes his presence as an increase to the quality of their lives when she wishes "he could have stayed with us more" so he could help them financially and by serving as an example of heterosexuality for Junior. Silently, the narrative resorts to maleness and the presence of masculine men to sustain its critique to the disempowerment of women, homophobia, racism, and economic crisis.

The film shows how strongly marginalizing discourses are intertwined, and how, because of such profound entanglement, the global, white capitalist gay is an ideal that cannot be attained by Junior.

The problem is that the ideal of closure for the film's metronormative narrative reproduces those marginalizing discourses by not giving any chance to other possibilities of embodiment not even in the characters' minds, not only in terms of issues hegemonically considered *queer*, such as those directly related to sex and sexuality, but also in terms of what is left out of the hegemonic definition of queerness, such as race, geographical location, wealth, and gender difference.

3.5 Institutionalization of Homophobia and Effeminophobia

Nelson Ruiz (2011), whose study focuses on the presence and meanings of homosexuality in the Venezuelan press, writes that there are still blockages and censorship when talking about sexuality and politics and that the issues related to homosexuality are not a priority for the Venezuelan government. The author brings out three main assumptions taken by the written press about homosexuality, which reflect traditional cultural stereotypes of homosexuality. First, the association of homosexuality with deceit in the figure of the men "*que lucen como hombres pero que son gays*" / "who look like men but are gay," which leads to a hyper vigilant society afraid of entering into contact with fake heterosexuals; second, the transphobic tendency to see transsexual women as men and to think they should keep some "masculine" traits as not to cause confusion on heterosexual men; third, to think that lesbians "look like men", disregarding diversity in style and behavior among lesbians; and fourth, to see homosexuality as a sin in the eyes of God (214-15). His findings indicate that the political changes have not been enough to transform the ways homosexuality is seen in the country; additionally, the high value given to the patriarchal family model, added to the influence of the Catholic Church, constructs same-sex unions as a risk to the social structure (202)—a structure that is already at risk in the "fatherless patriarchy" mentioned in the previous sections. Ruiz also identifies a silent censorship that curtails the discussions around themes associated with homosexuality in the written press (211).

The signs of a hyper vigilant homophobic society are explicit in Marta's behavior towards Junior, always observing him so she can identify, as early as possible, any markers of effeminacy on Junior's body or behavior. The vigilance reduces homosexuality to effeminacy—that is,

"visible" homosexuality is the presence of femininity on the male body. In one visit Marta makes to the doctor, without Junior, she asks the physician directly if the boy is homosexual and if he is going to suffer through life because of the possible non-normative experience of his sexuality. She points to factors like Junior's concern with straightening his hair, his liking for singing, among other behaviors that she reads as pointing to a latent homosexuality, this way constructing homosexuality as a series of specific behaviors that are read as effeminate by the mother. The reduction of homosexuality to effeminacy and vice-versa reproduces binary gender distinction as it reinforces the idea that there are two genders; moreover, it completely effaces the possibility of transsexuality, heterosexual male femininity, and other emergent codings of non-normative sexualities, not all of which are categorized or even legible, like the relationship between Alex and Álvaro (analyzed in Chapter Three) and Tabu's *travesti* identity (analyzed in Chapter Two). Love between women is as absent as coalitions that could be built between them. Again, the generalization of queerness as male homosexuality is reproduced together with the attribution of more social value to maleness.

Figure 27: Junior sitting on the toilet.

Figure 28: “Kevin trejo es marico.”

It is in the bathroom that Marta’s investigation of Junior’s homosexuality frequently begins, not only in the visit to the doctor but also at home. Marta gets anxious for his delay in the bathroom in one of their visits to the clinic. She enters the bathroom looking for him and finds Junior sitting on the toilet (Figure 27) and, enraged, tells him “men don’t sit down to pee”, demanding that he comes out of the cubicle. As Preciado (2006) argues, the bathroom is an important technology of gender, and Marta’s reaction to seeing her son sitting on the toilet reveals one way how such technology works. The difference between sitting and standing to pee is related to how the body is constructed and constrained by scientific discourses in the reproduction of binary sex distinction; moreover, it reinforces the link between certain behaviors and binary gender distinction.

As the two leave the bathroom, they pass by a graffiti on the wall in which it can be read “*Kevin Trejo es marico*” (“Kevin Trejo is a faggot”, Figure 28), a public “accusation” of homosexuality in the complicated space of the bathroom, in which the limits between the public and the private get blurred. In the interview to Stivaletti, Rondón declares

that homophobia "is worse among the poor", and she blames the government for that. Also, she tells that many times, when they run out of arguments, politicians often "accuse" each other of being gay (12). Apart from reinforcing the construction of poverty as homophobic—a characteristic that can be identified in metronormative discourses—, it reinscribes homophobia as a governmental institution by linking the clinic to which they go, one of the public clinics built during Plan Bolívar 2000 to serve the poorer sectors of the population, to the proliferation of homophobic discourses under the Bolivarian agenda that appears in the film as the institution responsible for the population's poverty.

Figure 29: Junior at the doctor's.

Figure 30: Junior struggles with his hair.

The institutionalization of the homophobic perspective also appears in the discourse of the doctor when he examines Junior. In the first visit to the clinic, the doctor examines Junior and says there is nothing physically wrong with him. Junior tells him his mother says he has a tail. After a quick examination, the doctor concludes that he just has "bigger bones" and lets him go. The framing of this scene (Figure 29) emphasizes Junior's hair, although nothing is said about it. Then the doctor motions him to the bathroom to get dressed while he talks to Marta. We can hear their conversation happening off-screen, with Marta asking what is wrong with the boy and the doctor answering that there is nothing wrong with him. The image we see while this conversation is happening is that of Junior struggling with his hair before the mirror (Figure 30). The juxtaposition of the sound and the image, combined with the emphasis on Junior's hair in the previous framing, suggesting that "what is wrong" lies in the meanings attached to the boy's hair. Moreover, this important revelation happens in the bathroom, reinforcing the place's significance in the policing of bodies and in the production of (binary) gender difference.

The visit to the physician reveals Marta's concern about homosexuality as being related to a physical abnormality, returning to an essentialized comprehension of the body as the site of truth about someone's sex, gender, and sexuality and reinforcing the authority of scientific discourse over the body and what is constructed as truth. The vigilance in the bathroom and in the doctor's office, both supposedly private spaces, reveals that those are not private spaces at all, but sites of construction of the fictional divide between the public and the private. Moreover, the of vigilance those "private" spaces is related to the distribution of privacy according to the degrees of intimacy enforced among family members, like the authority of one member of the family over another, such as the mother over the child. Such unequal distribution of authority often violates one's agency over one's own body, often leading to trans and homophobic violences that are protected by the hierarchies instituted within the patriarchal family. In the sequence mentioned above, Marta and the doctor are shown as having the authority to determine what Junior is or is not, producing the silencing of the child in the name of heteronormativity and reproducing the authority of scientific discourses over the materialization of bodies.

There are no other queer characters in the movie, so Junior has only traditional gender roles to see as models for his behavior. This creates a context in which homosexuality is completely invisible, thus justifying Junior's claim to be looked at. He wants to be acknowledged as a citizen, just like everyone else, but that is not a possibility that takes shape in the narrative, as it is blotted out of his horizon of expectations. As Ruiz points out throughout his essay, there is a silent censorship around the theme of homosexuality permeating the Venezuelan media (and, therefore, the population). Junior is the only queer character in the whole movie. The only role models he has are either heterosexual, like his mother, or do not make any reference to their sexualities, such as the grandmother and *la niña*.

4 Final Remarks

The film presents a criticism to Chávez's government that goes beyond the economic and infrastructural problems faced by the characters and which appear as the main concerns of the Bolivarian project, addressing the intersections created by the projection of closure of the Bolivarian agenda. The ideal of metronormativity, which links urbanization and economic progress to sexual freedom, haunts the film's portrayal of the social context, turning the latter into a site of political silence that imprisons the characters in a racist, homophobic, and sexist society. Junior's black curly hair, the main focus of the film's narrative movement, becomes a symbol of those oppressive categories to the point of pathologization.

The film relies on the emphasis on underdevelopment to articulate its criticism, thus returning to developmentalist ideas of cultural and economic belatedness as a hindrance for non-normative forms of embodiment. This way, the film ends up projecting the globalized gay as salvation, forgetting that the image of the capitalist gay of hegemonic discourses cannot materialize in Latin American countries because of the consequences of colonization in our social structure. More than that, the capitalist gay should not be enforced as a model for Latin America because it is specifically structured on the marginalizing discourses that obliterate the specificities of the Latin American context.

Although the film critiques the intersections of race, sex, gender, and class that characterize the metronormative, it projects an unattainable ideal for the future in a way that leaves no space for embodiments that differ from the hegemonic. The extent to which such ideal is unattainable for Junior comes to the foreground in the credits, when Junior appears, finally, dressed as a singer and with his hair straight. This closing sequence reinforces the position of a better future as outside the context portrayed, so much that it comes to the screen only when the film is over and Junior has already given up on the desires thus reduced to his "fantasy".

Pelo Malo is, no doubt, a very powerful film in respect to how it represents the harsh reality of homophobia in Venezuela. It is, however, important to notice that it reproduces the very patterns of oppression it denounces, offering little resistance against the interlocking frames of homophobia and effeminophobia on which the reiteration of masculinity as empowerment relies. Instead of giving visibility to how queerness manifests in the Latin American context, it brings to the screen the way it is impeded to manifest because of the prejudices and social restraints perpetrated by neoliberal politics and by the sustenance of the colonial model of power.

Final Remarks

1 Revisiting the Metronormative Narrative

We have seen in Chapter 1 that the metronormative narrative as it is described by Halberstam in *In a Queer Time and Place* is structured around the production of a hierarchical relationship between the urban and the rural areas. In this hierarchy, the rural areas are constructed as unfavorable to queer embodiments, thus projecting the possibility of a satisfactory queer life onto the urban areas. The example of a metronormative narrative provided in the beginning of this study comes from the song *Smalltown*, in which a man tells of how and why he moved from the small town where he was born to the big city of New York. The differences between this example and the narratives told in the films analyzed in this study are many. In Reed's song, the character is a man who lives in the United States, and for whom closure is achieved when he reaches the supposed freedom of the big city. There is no mention to any process of racialization marking the character as non-white, so within the regime of unmarked universalism he is most probably white; the same way, there is no mention to him being transgender, or intersex, absences that make him quite possibly cisgender. There is no mention to his previous financial situation, which makes social class not an issue in his decision to move. Even considering all the disadvantages he could face in the big city, the song paints a quite simple trajectory for him, one that runs unmarked by the intersections that the analyses of the selected films bring forth by contrast.

The intersectional approach to the metronormative narrative developed in the analyses in the previous chapters brings to the foreground the generalizations that are performed by this kind of narrative and the homogenizations it enforces. Who the character is, the place where the character is located, and what constitutes closure for the character matter much within the metronormative regime because metronormativity produces acceptance of diversity as dependent on an understanding of cultural and economic development that is constructed as universal and homogeneous. In *Madame Satã*, the main character of the narrative is a black man located in Brazil; in *XXY*, the character is a white intersex adolescent living in Argentina and Uruguay; in *Pelo Malo*, he is a nine years-old boy living in Venezuela. The analyses demonstrate that the specific characteristics of these characters and of their contexts shape their trajectories in ways that

are not foreseen by metronormativity, in which race is unmarked as white, sex as binary, and location as an imaginary place where race, class, physical configuration, and class do not matter.

Metronormativity is about individuals that are queer in some way, but it is important to emphasize that queer is not a homogeneous category. The queer can be many, like Anzaldúa's lesbian chicana who resists the imposition of adjectives ("To(o) Queer the Writer" 164), or Jasbir K. Puar's monstrous figure of the terrorist whose body becomes an assemblage "that resists queerness-as-sexual-identity […] in favor of spatial, temporal, and corporeal convergences, implosions, and rearrangements" (121). What puts us all together in the term queer is our power to transform it from a "false unifying umbrella that homogenizes, erases our differences" ("To(o) Queer the Writer" 164) to a critical position towards the implications of our categorization under it.

In the films analyzed in the previous chapters, queer is constructed as the abject of the metronormative, not as producers of alternatives to the hegemonic. For João Francisco, being queer is being black, poor, gay, and *malandro* in the Rio de Janeiro of the 30s. That João Francisco's embodiments of femininity are constrained by the fictional space of the stage demonstrates that there is still resistance to have other non-normative embodiments occupying privileged spaces of representation. For Alex, being queer is being an intersex adolescent hidden in a small fishing town in a supposedly culturally, economically, and spatially empty Latin American coast. As if culture and nature could be separated, *XXY*'s construction of queerness reiterates the common exclusion of race and class from challenges to metro-, hetero-, and homo- normative embodiments. For Junior, being queer is being a young effeminate boy in a tragically failing bolivarian state that does not even grant him the imaginary projection of a socially legible queer embodiment. For these characters, being read as queer brings to the foreground much of what is effaced of their marginalizations from gentrified universal models that define one's chances to survive not only as a citizen, but as the possibility of a unique embodiment.

In the following sections I present my final remarks concerning the analytical findings of the previous chapters and point at the implications of such findings for a broader critique of metronormativity within the context of Latin American cinema.

2 Analytical findings

2.1 The (re)articulation of the metronormative narrative in the films analyzed demonstrates that there is an intimate relationship between metronormativity and the coloniality of power.

The analysis of the three selected films demonstrates that the relationship between metronormativity and developmentalism, beyond its link with the developmentalism of heteronormativity and of the binary urban/rural in the capitalist regime, shows a profound connection to the coloniality of power. Discourses based on metronormative concepts are tied to how the contemporary hegemonic articulation of power still revolves around whitening, the control of labor, the creation and sustenance of a global market, and the enforcement of hetero and homonormativity.

Race is a central issue in *Madame Satã* and *Pelo Malo*. The characters have not only what is projected as success but their very survival in the metropolis constrained by the structural racism of the contexts in which they live. Both films show that race and class are intimately related due to the relationship of cause-consequence at play between them: one is poor because one is black, since race determines one's chances in the work market. João enters this logic due to the consequences of the history of enslavement of black peoples and the government's supposed "failure" to account for the need to create jobs to accommodate the now freed black population. This is not a real failure from the part of the government, however. It is a necessary strategy used to sustain the social structure: some portions of society need to continue being exploited so the higher classes can keep their control over the distribution of wealth, to continue to occupy the best socioeconomic positions, and to continue fueling the global market.

This is true not only for the 1930s, but also for our contemporary times. The genocide of the black population all over the country happens through various means, from the police violence in the war on drugs to gratuitous police targeting of blacks on the streets, from the absence of blacks in mainstream media to the current governmental agenda that plans to cut social programs implemented in previous governments that

removed a great part of the Brazilian population from the state of misery and promoted access to free education through projects of affirmative action. The racialization and the genocide of the indigenous peoples is another facet of developmentalism. In the name of economic development through foreign investments, exploitation of natural resources, and agricultural and livestock business, the indigenous cultures that still remain are being forced into extinction.

For Junior, the relationship between his queerness, his racialization, and conceptions of beauty reveals an important aspect of Venezuelan society. As Marcia Ochoa (2014) points out, Venezuela has been a country known mostly for its internationally acclaimed beauty pageant contests and its export of petroleum (7). In this context, Junior's desire to straighten his hair can be read as an attempt to enter the narrative of the whitening of beauty standards that are "seen by many as a source of social mobility" (7), thus revealing a strong link between whiteness and wealth. At the other side of whiteness there is a deterministic future that links blackness to violence and poverty, evident in the scene in which the photographer points to Junior that his picture should be like the one of the black kid dressed as a soldier, and not like the one of the white kid in plain clothes posing in front of a waterfall. For the white kid, the imaginary representation of himself in the picture does not refer directly to his social position or occupation, which stresses the link between racialization and the control and distribution of labor.

In both *Madame Satã* and *Pelo Malo* blackness is a marker of queerness that is directly connected to impoverishment, violence against the characters' non-normative embodiments, and their pathologization. Race as a marker of queerness is absent from *XXY*, indicating that the open ending enabled for Alex is only possible because of the white, middle-class structure of the family. There is no mention to money or the lack of it in the discussions of whether or not Alex should undergo surgery. The dilemmas only revolve around the ethics of surgical intervention, which shows that the money necessary for those interventions is not an issue. Moreover, the link between whiteness and a middle-class position reinforces the fact that they have access to education and resources to know that the pathologization of intersexuality should be contested. It is demonstrated by the analysis of that link that peoples racialized as non-white do not share the chances of finding a way out of pathologization if

this way out depends on economic power. It is explicit in *Madame Satã* and *Pelo Malo* that João and Junior do not share those chances, as João is pathologized by the police and Junior by his mother and both cannot count with the economic means to hide away and pretend that sex and sexuality issues can be seen in isolation.

The metronormative narrative shows that one's life can be separated into a "before and after", a structure that depends on breaking with an underdeveloped past and on the existence of a somewhere more developed to go to. Moving from one geographical space to the other does not necessarily have to happen, because metronormativity appears as being more about the cultural differential ascribed to the discursive spaces delineated by metronormative discourses, even though the spatial element is crucial for the construction of that differential. Although neither João nor Junior move from one place to the other geographically, and although the geopolitical spaces they occupy do not change as territories, developmentalist projects redefine the spaces they occupy in ways that provoke a change on how these characters are produced as individuals. Neither Rio de Janeiro nor Caracas change in terms of national identification, but developmentalism pushes the meanings of those territories in a political and economic dimension, giving them different meanings and redefining them and the relationship of the people with them. With the developmentalism at play in Rio, João, Laurita, and Tabu are confined both to hierarchically inferior social and discursive locations and to specific geographical locations to which are ascribed hierarchically inferior meanings.

2.2 What queer is in the films lies at the intersections of the coloniality of power reproduced by the metronormative narrative, which perpetuates the rhetoric of Modernity.

The metronormative narrative oversimplifies the whole of the intersections that constrain and produce the hegemonic articulation of queerness within capitalism. The middle-class, white, capitalist, heteronormative values (re)produced by the metronormative model projects one universalized ideal of queer living that, although productive of important and favorable changes in terms of civil rights, survivability, health, among others, means the marginalization of groups that fall out of the gentrified model. In *Madame Satã* and *XXY*, there is the creation of alternative possibilities of embodiment, such as the successful queer *malandro* and the intersex person who is not forced to choose between male or female.

Those are, however, alternatives that involve achieving a certain status that already exists within the hegemonic paradigm that follows the logics of developmentalism. In *Pelo Malo*, there is only the projection of a deterministic future that confirms the hegemonic construction of queerness by contrast. Such deterministic future is all about race, class, and sex prejudice, leaving aside any possible valorization of queer embodiments that could come up from Junior's portrayal. These alternatives do not build alternatives *to* the rhetoric of modernity, but alternatives within that same rhetoric (Mignolo 466), thus effacing the non-normative character of queerness.

The logic of the metronormative narrative presumes linearity in terms of human development, which ends up inevitably in some sort of closure. In other words, the metronormative narrative invests in the projection of a stable and final stage of development that would mean the end of all the troubles that come forward as a consequence of embodying non-normativity. It is implicit in the metronormative narrative a transition from a state of disempowerment to one of empowerment. A problem with the idea of transition, beyond the one pointed out in previous paragraphs concerning the possibility of separating one's history into a past and a future isolated from each other, is that, as Mignolo writes, "once the new appears, the old vanishes out of the present" (467) in a process of substitution characteristic of the salvationist aspect of the rhetoric of modernity. The salvationist aspect of the metronormative narrativization of queerness runs on a gentrifying and developmentalist project that enables queer performances but keeps them within certain strong social, cultural, and economic restraints. Even though the films analyzed in the previous chapters do not reproduce queer as the middle-class white male homosexual, they reproduce the rhetoric of modernity as metronormative values naturalize, justify, and determine empowerment vis-à-vis marginalization.

For the characters in *Madame Satã* and *Pelo Malo*, metronormative closure is constituted by compliance to the norms of gender, sexuality, race, and work delineated by what the narratives project as advantageous. It is, however, impossible for those characters to achieve that closure. It is structurally impossible for them because if they could attain that closure the differential that sustains the social structure would break. In *XXY*, metronormative closure happens in the possibility of an open end, which is enabled by exactly what prevents the characters in *Pelo Malo* and *Madame Satã* to attain it. Were not Alex and hir family white and middle-class, the open ended closure might not be possible.

3 Topics for Future Research

3.1 Decolonizing the Metronormative Narrative

The trap of homogenizing discourses produces the effacement of difference among Latin American countries, reiterating violent generalizations. Each country depicted in the films has suffered the consequences of colonialism in specific ways. Thus, the queer embodiments produced within these heterogeneous contexts need to be analyzed according to their specificities. The analyses demonstrate that metronormativity enacts homogenization within different historical contexts marked by the colonial divide. In *Mamdame Satã*, it is possible to observe that race, sexuality, gender, and the participation in the work market represent hindrances for metronormative homogenization because it is the heterogeneity of the individuals' status that sustains the social order that follows developmentalism. In *Pelo Malo*, the metronormative homogenization is represented as a desired situation, which is inaccessible to Junior because the social order (as represented in the film) refuses developmentalism. In *XXY*, metronormative homogenization is only possible because the main character, although not male, has access to money and to education to resist effacement and find closure. The films take place in heterogeneous contexts of developmentalism, and to think of Latin America as a homogeneous block is to reaffirm colonizing discourses that constituted the territory as an acculturated space upon which it becomes necessary, in the colonizer's logic, to inscribe concepts of difference that are imperative for the coloniality of power. In order to decolonize the metronormative narrative, it is crucial to identify how colonial it is. The analyses performed in the previous chapters brought to the foreground many of those colonial characteristics.

Metronormativity relies on the inscription of fixed concepts of difference to support its logic. Tales of the metronormative gay, the one who obtains success and acceptance in the metropolis, are constitutive of a much broader discourse that works to obliterate the power of historically specific embodiments of queerness, shaped by heterogeneous Latin American contexts, in favor of the gentrified hegemonic model of development. In order to resist the inscription of metronormativity, it becomes important to examine its reproduction within the representation of queerness in the broader context of Latin American cinema.

As a structure that is interlocked with colonial power, the (re)production of the metronormative narrative, even when rearticulated and constructed as challenging to a certain extent, is an important normative discourse to be analyzed in support of the decolonizing process. Actually, it is pressing to analyze rearticulations that are challenging rather than focusing only on those that reproduce exclusionary stereotypes more blatantly. As they become hegemonic, once challenging representations are co-opted and transformed into new marginalizing categories of normality, progressist advances are turned into new exclusionary paradigms, and assimilationist politics efface difference.

It is important to highlight that Latin American queer embodiments do not exist only inside Latin American territory, but also in the foreign countries where *latinos* live. As Néstor García Canclini (2002) affirms, "what *latinoamericanidad* means is not found only by observing what happens inside the territory historically delimitated as Latin America. The answers about the *latinoamericano* ways of being also come from outside the region" (27, my translation), in the images of queer *latinidad* produced and lived outside Latin American territory, as demonstrates Marcia Ochoa's (2014) experience of shock when she notices that there are both the "fabulous queer *latinidad* in San Francisco and Oakland" (3) and the queer experiences of "spectacular femininity" (2) inside Latin America. Ochoa's choice of the terms "fabulous" and "spectacular" to refer to queer *latinidad* interestingly hints at the construction of queerness in the metropolis as the incredible fictional realm of the fable and the construction of queerness outside the metropolis as a spectacle performed by the individuals that embody queerness in their daily activities. This means that the analysis of the metronormative narrative in Latin American films must resist not only the hegemonic impulse to see sexuality in isolation, but also to the hegemonic impulse to see Latin America in isolation from the transnational context, and each Latin American country in isolation from one another.

Queer representations must take into consideration how queerness is productive of alternatives to the hegemonic in Latin America and by Latin Americans, wherever they are, emphasizing their unique and influential character. Because of all that it is paramount to think of Latin American productions in transnational contexts, bringing to the foreground that we are not passive receivers of imported cultural models,

such as the ideals of metronormativity. This way, instead of reiterating the production of the Latin American queer as the abject of the hegemonic queer, we can emerge as producers of alternatives to the hegemonic. We can then avoid reinforcing the fiction of Latin America as peripheral and isolated, which is a construction that weakens our cultural production, ignores its relational historical contexts, and again situates Latin America in a metronormative narrative of global dimensions. To problematize the metronormativity (re)produced in the films is to point at the intersections of colonial power and to counter the processes of effacement and homogenization that depoliticize and homogenize the production of queerness in Latin America.

One question that emerged during the analyses is how to read these films in the context of New Queer Cinema. As we observe that the context around the coining of the term and the context of the productions analyzed in this study, we see that they are quite diverse. In the first place, New Queer Cinema appears as a predominantly North American phenomenon. The festivals and productions mentioned by B. Ruby Rich in her text "New Queer Cinema" (2004) are mostly located in the United States and Europe. Moreover, these productions deal with queerness as strictly related to sexuality, leaving aside the queerness that is constructed when the consequences of the coloniality of power are taken into consideration. Translating metronormativity to the Latin American context becomes significant as it allows us to access the representation of sexuality together with ethnic and cultural issues that constitute the characteristics of the (re) articulation of metronormativity within coloniality, this way providing us a way to broaden the understanding of Latin American cinema's specificities in relation to the context of queer cinema and international politics.

The study conducted by Laura Rodriguez Isaza (2012) examines the presence of Latin American cinema in film festivals around the globe, investigating how what is acknowledged as "Latin American Cinema" as a transnational, globalized cultural product is shaped both by those who inhabit the territory and by "those with the power to shape international diplomatic discourses" (90). Isaza points that the idea of Latin American cinema has been constructed internationally in the relationship between cinema and developmentalist politics of modernity. In the second half of the twentieth century, the invocation of European historical influence over Latin American cinema performed in Spanish, French, and Italian film festivals aimed

at using the connection between the ex-colonies and their European roots to boost their control of these regions (Isaza 102). In this scheme, Latin American cinema is constructed in a way that reiterates colonial supremacy, keeping Latin American productions within the realms of the underdevelopment that supports the idealization of development of modernity.

The rise of New Latin American cinema in the 1960s provided a counterpart to the reproduction of coloniality of previous years. The international construction of Latin American cinema in this period regarded this cinema as intimately related to left-wing politics that constituted a cinema of rebellion against the imperialism of Hollywood. According to Sergio Roncallo and Juan Carlos Arias-Herrera (2013), the problem to be tackled by Latin American filmmakers of this period "was not that Hollywood affected film production, but that through it Hollywood was an instrument of colonization in Latin America", making the rebellion against Hollywood a fight against colonization (97). For the filmmakers of the New Latin American cinema, the representation of Latin America within Hollywood produced an "alienated consciousness of [Latin American] reality" defined in foreign terms. Thus, the critique to the colonialism of Hollywood was seen as a way to counter the colonized logic of representation of Latin America that "distanced the people of a deep understanding of their own reality" (8). Challenging Hollywood hegemony was, in this context, a way to struggle for Latin American autonomy in relation to the neocolonial context (López 1988 95).

Even so, at the same time that this period was marked by the critique of the import of neo-colonial cultural, economic, and political models of domination, the international acknowledgement of Latin American cinema was distributed according to revolutionary commitments that locked it in the realm of "political cinema", regarded as "not just a part of Latin American filmmaking practices [but as] Latin American cinema itself" (Isaza 157). This acknowledgement constrained the range of subjects that were considered "true" concerns for Latin American cinema, often overseeing the portrayal of sexuality as it would be a less urgent matter in the context of intra- and international politics (170) and therefore eclipsing the complexities of the relationship between nationality, sexuality, gender, and race. The films analyzed in this study tackle these complexities directly, thus being examples of productions that exceed the pre-conception of Latin American cinema as a "revolutionary cinema".

Actually, these films subscribe to a broader understanding of what is considered "political": race, sex, gender, and sexuality *are* political concerns, as we can see mostly in the analyses of *Madame Satã* and *Pelo Malo*.

With the end of the dictatorships, private investors come to negotiate trade agreements and tax exemptions that fueled Latin American productions and guaranteed their worldwide distribution. On the one hand, this meant the so-called "renaissance" of Latin American cinema in the 1990s (Isaza 184); on the other hand, it brings to the foreground the presence of the North American and European companies in the control over the production, distribution, and acknowledgement of Latin American cinema worldwide. Rich affirms that the films that constitute New Queer cinema are united by a specific style, characterized by appropriations and pastiche, irony, re-workings of history, and break with humanist approaches to sexuality and the individual. The analysis of the metronormative narrative in the Latin American context points to how the characteristics of New Queer cinema, which may represent a homogenizing model of queerness, re-emerge and are re-articulated in the representation of queerness within Latin American filmic production.

The films analyzed in the previous chapters are not characterized by pastiche, irony, re-workings of history, or with breaks with humanistic approaches to sexuality and the individual. Instead, they tell realistic narratives within context profoundly marked by the coloniality of power and the reproduction of the rhetoric of Modernity. Queer cinema in Latin America, mostly in the way it is represented by *Madame Satã* and *Pelo Malo*, challenge the homogenized model because they deal with a queerness that is determined by the effects of colonization. Differences in ethnicity and culture are entangled with differences of sex, gender, and physical configuration. The re-workings of history that might be performed in Latin American cinema must tackle the effects of colonization as those effects are significant markers of queerness that cannot be separated from sexuality. *XXY* reaffirms the significance of those markers by contrast, since it is the absence of them that allows for the film to create a space in which a non-normative embodiment is possible.

"[T]he question of how to engage sexuality along with ethnicity and culture", writes José Quiroga (2000), "is difficult at a time when the major gay and lesbian organizations take increasingly conservative positions within a politics validated by money and increasing access to mainstream spheres of influence" (193). The analysis of the developmentalist implications of the metronormative narrative allows us to access the axes of ethnicity, culture, economy, and transnational relationships that take part on the construction of sexuality as the films show that metronormative closure can only be attained by those who conform to the hegemonic model of queerness as white, male, and middle-class. Tackling the developmentalist metronormative narrativization of queerness in the context of Latin American cinema adds to the resistance against hegemonic normalizing discourses that produce Latin America as a homogeneous place and that produce representations of queerness whose political potential is neutralized. Moreover, this approach allows us to identify the intersections created by discourses that are "validated by money"; in other words, to identify and analyze the economic developmentalism embedded in assimilationist identity politics as our contemporary cinema depends on the association with U.S. and European producing and distributing companies in order to have a chance to participate in the global movie market.

Having critiqued metronormativity by analyzing and demonstrating its imbrications in coloniality, this research allows me now to explore some paths whereby Latin American queer film exceeds metronormativity. My next objective is to research Latin American film in order to broaden the translation of metronormativity into our context. My aim is to deepen the analysis of how we produce alternatives *to* the hegemonic articulation of queerness within our contemporary socio-political context and to seek productions that decolonize the narrativization of queerness in Latin American cinema.

One path to proceed in the elaboration on the issues brought up in the analyses performed is to situate them among the researches of queer embodiments in Latin America, such as the studies developed by Marcia Ochoa (2014) in the Venezuelan context, by Juana Maria Rodriguez (2003) in the context of Latin Americans living in the United States,

and by José Quiroga (2000) within the Argentine context, among many others. This path could include, moreover, the examination of how the queer image is traversed in historically-specific, even contradictory ways in different colonial contexts. In some of those, queer can be coded as primitive, in others as progressive, or even as terrorist. For this examinations, the works of Anne McClintock (1995), Mary Louise Pratt (2008), Ann Laura Stoler (1995), Jasbir K. Puar (2007), and Jin Haritaworn, Tamsila Tauqir, and Esra Erdem (2008), will certainly be of much value, both for expanding the understanding of the works and effects of coloniality and for broadening the comprehension of how queer comes to be in different contexts.

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