

HOMOPHOBIA IN AN INTERCULTURAL CONTEXT

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Abstract

The need to distinguish differences within *queer* theory leads to the study of the relativity of such concepts as those of sex, gender, desire, and sexual acts. However, this effort on which analysis depends has not been geared toward the concept of homophobia. The purpose of this paper is to propose strategic parameters for conceptualizing homophobia in order to enable fundamental analytical differences. Such parameters are herein illustrated based on the Cuban film *Fresa y chocolate*, and on three detective novels by U.S.-Chicano writer Michael Nava.

Keywords: homophobia; difference; queer theory.

Resumo

A necessidade, na teoria *queer*, de discriminar diferenças leva ao devido estudo da relatividade de conceitos tais como sexo, gênero, desejo e atos sexuais. Contudo, o mesmo esforço analítico não vem sendo direcionado para o conceito de homofobia. O presente estudo propõe alguns dos parâmetros necessários para empreender diferenças analíticas fundamentais. Esses parâmetros são aqui ilustrados e discutidos com base no filme cubano, *Fresa y chocolate*, em três romances detetivescos do chicano Michael Nava.

Palavras-chaves: Homofobia; diferença; teoria *queer*.

Ilha do Desterro	Florianópolis	nº 48	p.135-155	jan./jul. 2005
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Introduction

It is generally agreed that concepts relating to sexual identity/sexuality/gender must be socially-context sensitive—that is, they cannot be defined without regard (as putative “universals”) to the ways in which different societies bring them into ideological identity. This has been particularly evident, in queer studies, with the ways in which once absolutist terms like “passive” and “active” have had to be questioned as they relate, alternatively, to an Anglo-American psychoanalytically driven concept of homosexuality and the so-called Mediterranean one.

But what happens in the case of homophobia? Homophobia continues repeatedly to be used as though it were an unanalyzed and unanalyzable concept: homophobia is the hatred of lesbian/gay/queer individuals and their society, and it exists longitudinally as an invariant phenomenon. Yet, homophobia needs also to be analyzed in a fashion that is context sensitive. Beginning with the fact that the word *homofobia* does not appear in the dictionary of the Spanish Royal Academy (although it is now used extensively in speech and in print), this paper proposes various ways in which the concept varies as it is read through the optics of Hispanic society in Spanish in various Latin American countries and Hispanic society in English (and *caló*) in the United States as part of a Latino ethnic culture.

Specifically, I will look at film and narrative with reference to three examples of cultural production, one from Cuba, one from U.S. Chicano society, and one from Peru. Issues to be explored, respectively, are the homologation of the queer with political dissidence, incoherent social texts, and homophobic silencing and the generation of a subversive hypocrisy.

***Conducta impropia*: Cuba and the homologation of the queer with political dissidence**

There are many ways in which *Conducta impropia* (1984; dir. Néstor Alemendros and Orlando Jiménez Leal) is important for Cuban

studies, beginning with how it opened an international debate over human rights in the, at that time, fifteen-year old Castro regime. But my interest in it here is primarily for the processes of homology whereby homosexuality is used as the master trope for social dissidence in ways that are not that different for how they had been used by neofascist tyrannies in Latin America during the same period. For this reason, I will use the term "homosexual," not only because it was not as generally repudiated at the time that the documentary was made and continues to be less repudiated in Spanish than in English, as a medico-legal term used by a heteronormative straight world to define the sexual other or the other perceived to be different on the basis of sex; I will also continue to use it because it is the term used to identify the individuals who came primarily under the scrutiny of the operations of moral cleansing.

My use of the adverb "primarily" is an important strategic choice here. The scope I wish to give to this adverb is that it is the hub of a semiosis whereby homosexuality is perceived as the most confirming manifestation of social dissidence and, therefore, in the Cuban context, of antirevolutionary behavior. One of the terrible ironies of modern history is that for the left as much as for the right, homosexuality has marked the irretrievably damning: to be homosexual was to be in direct defiance of the Christian heteronormative patriarchy.

Although it may not be possible to separate out all of the processes going on in this privileging of "homosexual" as the point of departure for the construction of a field of social/cultural/legal abjectness in early Castro Cuba, it is possible to refer to some of the paradigmatic positions of the term. In the first place, it is used as an all-purpose sign to model social dissidence and, hence, the socially unhygienic. Working from a cluster of manifest signs that were held to constitute both the necessary features of the homosexual and, individually, circumstantial indicators of it, the social subject, once identified as homosexual, could then be subject to the whole array of the consequences of his uncleanness: bourgeois decadent, antirevolutionary, social pariah. The dynamic of homophobia is such that those handing out the label of

homosexual are never called upon to define it or to justify the conceptual chaining on which their denunciation is based: to call someone else a homosexual is an absolute right under the aegis of homophobia, and the inability of most of the accused to defend themselves is taken as confirming the correctness of the attribution in the first place.

That is to say, homophobia makes sure that it accuses those who are not in a position to defend themselves. Hence the way in which gays protected by the regime could never be accused of being homosexual. This was the case with the relative impunity of the painter René Portocarrero and the singer Pablo Milanés. And it insists that the inability of the accused to defend themselves is a certain indication of their unmanliness—that is, their homosexuality. Homophobia here is based on a recognition of the *maricón*, the presumed woman-wannabe who is recognizable on the basis of dress, bodily display, mannerism, language, and interpersonal traits: that is, as a man who is somehow less than a man.

Clearly, men of homoerotic interests who do not manifest any of these signs cannot be identified as homosexual, although one can never underestimate the ingenuity of homophobia to enrich the basis of identifying signs, to refine the degree to which they may become recognizable, or to generalize from the slightest shred of evidence to a full-spectrum assessment: the many individuals interviewed in Almendrés's documentary make it abundantly clear that the work of the homophobe—here in the guise of the vigilant revolutionary—is never done: some of these men (far fewer women are interviewed) are self-identified queers (a term which I use here to cover an enormous range of being sexually dissident), while some are only guilty by association.

In the second place, homosexual, as an attribute, becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, the UMAP system and the larger issues of moral cleansing that it represents, and goes beyond merely identifying who the queers are: it necessarily creates queers in order to confirm the significant presence of the social other so as to confirm the power of the norm to identify the other, to eradicate the other, and to demonstrate the triumph of the authoritarian establishment over the other. The fact that

this work is never done, because to do so would mean losing the excluded other required to confirm the prevailing norm, is what accounts from the outset for the requirement that the analyzing enterprise (in this case, homophobia) constantly renew its strategies of identification: less so in order for the enemy to elude detection, and more so because of the need always to have available a contrasting other so that the normalizing system does not collapse. Since one of the terribly ironic double binds of heteronormativity is that one can never prove that s/he is straight, but that you can potentially always find something to prove that s/he is queer, homophobia functions with unabated efficiency.

Finally, the chain of equivalencies that homophobia puts into action is an expanding matter: one thing leads to another, beginning with the innocuous but always ending with the homosexual. One could be, in addition to a self-confessed or self-confirming homosexual (a reference is made to the test called “la vuelta al salón”: we’ll just have you walk around the room, and the way you hold your body will tell us if you are queer), a Jehovah’s witness, or a writer, an intellectual, an unconventional artist, the hippie, and before you knew it, you were accused of being a homosexual, rounded up by the police, and shipped off to the UMAP camps. Since any and all of these traits are “manifestly” examples of the inability to adhere to the model of the New Man (or, for that matter, in one of the neofascist dictatorships, to the model of the Good Christian), they must articulate by implication and extension an adherence to the binary opposite of the New Man (or the Good Christian), which is the homosexual, in whom is invested all of the threats to the social order. The controlling motto of the UMAP camps was “El trabajo os hará hombres” (work will make you men), a motto that rests on the undemonstrated proposition that work produces men.

Conducta impropia provides something like a registry of what it meant to be gay in Cuba during the early Castro period, and it provides a case study in how homophobia works, both when it is specifically directed against gays and when it functions—in virulently macho contexts—to damn the lives of anyone by calling him/her homosexual; the latter, to be sure, only serves to increase homophobia, since many

otherwise honest persons will hate gays because to be alleged to be one of them can destroy your livelihood and even cost you your life.

Michael Nava: Homophobia as the defense of Chicano manhood

Michael Nava has authored approximately ten novels of detective fiction featuring the Hispanic lawyer/sleuth Henry Rios, an individual who experiences social marginalization on a number of different fronts. Nava's images of Rios's marginalization provides a crucial narrative principle in his stories, since how Rios deals with the consequences of such marginalizations is key to his success as a lawyer and as a detective, and a good deal of the interest of Nava's fiction concerns the description of the various forms of marginalization to which Rios is subject and how he goes about overcoming them in order for the moral and professional principles he stands for to prevail.

The greatest form of marginalization Rios must deal with is homophobia, and I allege that it is the core issue of Nava's work. It is often the case in genres like detective fiction that the main character and certain personal details are repeated from one text to the other and blocks of explanatory material are repeated from one title to another. This is the case with information regarding Rios's childhood and his subsequent career choices. The son of an insecure and brutish father, Rios grew up exposed to the constant violence of his father's inability to accept a gay son, or at least a son whose nature, if it could not be specifically defined as gay, deviated in alarming ways from the father's crude standards of masculinity. As a consequence, Rios becomes the paradigm of the deeply closeted man.

Rios's parents are dead, and his past is, as a consequence, closed in a definitive manner. Yet, this past is engraved in his soul as, in essentialist terms, the very core of his identity. Through the Rios books, Nava's protagonist continually reenacts the primal confrontation with the father. Whenever the adult Rios is the victim of physical or emotional homophobia, he returns to the brutality of his father, fully aware that

the latter was only blindly, fearfully, enacting the wide-ranging discourse of homophobia, in its Hispanic macho version. This discourse, among its many workings, obliges parents to be vigilantes of their children's sexuality and to, quite literally, beat them into submissive conformity with the hegemonic compulsive heterosexist standard. In a narrative plot that runs parallel to the story that is specific to each book, Rios relives the humiliations he suffered at the hands of his father. This includes the recurring ways in which he has attempted to come to terms with his childhood formation, and the ways in which he has never been able to have a satisfying personal life as the result of how an internalized homophobia, despite all of his commitments to gay personal dignity, continues to block his emotional and sexual fulfillment.

Nava is very skillful in playing the main plot of his novels off against this parallel narrative. Thus, details of specific cases at issue echo strands of his past, force him to relive events of his childhood and to come to terms with his sexuality and to have a measure of sexual life. For example, *The Death of Friends* (1996) deals with the murder of a man with whom Rios studied law and with whom he had his first gay sexual experience. The man goes on to marry and have a family, remaining in the closet; his closeted sexuality is what leads to his death. A principal point in the novel is the correlation between homophobia and the closet and how his friend's incapacitating dishonesty had led to the distance that developed between them. Thus, solving the identity of this friend's murderer obliges Rios to confront all over again the circumstances of their brief affair and the bases of their relationship, which have become deeply ingrained aspects of Rios's lived memory.

In this way, Rios's memory of a childhood enveloped in homophobia and the ways in which he lived through them to his life as an openly gay man become bases of his access to the privileged information necessary to solve the murders he investigates. There are several ways in which being a gay man and having a shared history with either victims, clients accused of murder, or, in the case of *The Burning Plain*, the murderer himself is useful to Rios in gaining access to privileged information. In the first place, he identifies with the sense of overwhelming

alienation, the crushing loneliness, and the debilitating confusion in the face of the multiple messages of homophobia. As he interacts with various details of their lives, he is able to make important connections. I do not wish to imply that Rios's life as an openly gay man is an unproblematic one. Rather, the point is that Rios's acknowledged status as a gay man and the issues that he has worked through, without necessarily resolving them, provides him with an added arsenal of human and social knowledge that is not only not available to his straight counterparts, but is one that they would even deny exists.

There is a process of feedback that comes to take place, as Rios's delving into the pasts of others brings back details of his own past, while at the same time the details of his lived experience as a gay man subject to homophobic violence and the victim of internalized homophobia aids him in the interpretation of the conduct of individuals in the present. The cast of characters that make up the plot rearticulate motifs, formulas, and dialogues that Rios recalls from the past. Characters—a brutal policeman, for example—may remind him of his father, while a young man's account of his coming out to his parents are replays of past conversations he has had with family, friends, and enemies. For example, in his latest novel, *The Burning Plain* (1997), there is the following exchange between Rios and a homophobic Mexican American police officer:

I made my statement into a tape recorder that kept malfunctioning, so that every few minutes I'd have to repeat a sentence.

"I said, the reason I parked across the street from his house was because I was working up my courage to ask him out on a date."

A look of comic disbelief flashed across Gaitan's face. "You wanted to date him? Are you a homosexual?"

"Yes, Detective, that's what I'm saying. I'm gay."

The disbelief shaded into disgust.

"But you're Mexican, man." (59)

The Detective's incredulous reaction at being confronted with a gay Mexican, an internally contradictory and, therefore, non-occurring category in the universe of his experience, exemplifies very eloquently—in this case, with a specific ethnic marking—the day-to-day encounter with versions of homophobia that bring Rios back to the circumstances of the formation of his subjectivity as an individual. That is, the Detective's incredulity cannot help but have recalled for Rios the voice of his father and the lengths to which he was willing to go in order for his son not to end up belonging to what the elder Rios may, too, have thought, to be an impossible coincidence of nature. The insult to Rios here is, therefore, a double one, based on two antagonistic sets of identity, one sexual and one ethnic. To be gay or queer is to be in general a social outcast in most realms of American society, but particularly in highly masculinized ones like the police. To be subaltern, by definition, is to be an outcast, and the cruel irony of the politics of race and sex in the United States is that the racism of Anglo society assumes all sorts of degeneracy in its ethnic minorities, no matter how the rhetoric of the expression of that assumption has changed in recent decades. Undoubtedly aware of this fact as a collaborator with Anglo society, the Mexican American police officer understands racism to work, he can only consider Rios's gayness an unsavory demonstration of the validity of racist beliefs about the inherent degeneracy of Mexicans. But the need to exclude gayness from the universe of being a Mexican, as much as it is a resistance to racist concepts of an innate Mexican sexual degeneracy, assumes, in a gesture of reverse racism, that gayness is an Anglo sin or affliction, and that by being gay or by claiming to be gay, the Mexican is somehow betraying his ethnic identity. It is difficult to understand how any of these positions are not versions of a homophobia that needs to deny, in any way possible, the validity of homoerotic life.

One of the dimensions of homophobia, as much as it serves to substantiate the narrowly defined ideologies of compulsory heterosexuality, is to render incoherent the scripts of homoerotic desire as an integral part of the process of eliminating them. Note that it is not homophobia that is incoherent: homophobia works in a very straightforward fashion, at least in its recourse to physical, psychological, and verbal violence in the defense of heterosexism. Thus, no matter how much the parameters of gay desire may vary, there is a certain universality about how homophobia works. But one of the strategies of homophobia is, no matter what the script of homoerotic desire may be, to render that script incoherent in order to justify the violent repression of homoerotic desire. Thus, the conjunction "gay Mexican" must be alleged to be an impossibility. Where all of this becomes particularly crucial in the relationship with the father is that home and hearth, in a patriarchal society, are essentially anchored in the figure of the father. If there is an element of the criminal alien associated with all subalterns, there is a specific dimension of the criminal alien associated with ethnic minorities. When this subalternity intersects with another one such as that of sexual outlawry, there is a synergetic compounding of marginalization at work: the internal exile of the ethnic subalternity is doubled by the gender exile of the disparaged homosexual.

Homoerotic desire as an incoherent script serves as an integral part of the detective stories Nava writes, in the sense that the narratives of criminal violence that Rios needs to solve are crisscrossed by a homophobia that, by insisting on how such desire makes no sense at all, only impedes the solution of what happened. Crime is itself often a process of rendering incoherent the social text because it disrupts the conventions of law and order that sustain that text.

One repudiation of homophobia, at least on a conceptual level, is simply to ignore the proposition that there is a problem requiring explanation. Nava is not interested in how Rios becomes a gay man, but rather in how whatever it is that constitutes his gayness is always a factor in his personal and professional life. Yet there is one issue relating to an explanation of the dynamics of homophobia that connects his

fiction with the universe of *Conducta impropia*. That issue is the extent to which homophobia functions, as much as it goes about the business of denouncing and eliminating gays, to create gays, beginning with the creation of gay children.

Homophobia is a semiotic science of a sort, in that it engages in reading and interpreting signs. Where others may perceive no signs requiring scrutiny, homophobia finds a sign that requires bracketing as evidence of homosexuality. Such signs may match in an overdetermined way narratives of homophobically defined homosexuality, such as coming upon two individuals fully engaged in anal sex. Such discoveries are important moments for homophobia, since they confirm categorically the existence of the horrendous deviation the persecution of which justifies homophobia in the first place. However, such precious moments are not always forthcoming, and the homophobic semiotician must be content with sign-fragments of the still reigning master narratives: looks, glances, inflections of voice, suspicious emotions, wrong color choices—the list is quite endless. Fixating on such signs triggers a process of extrapolation by means of which a detail is interpreted synecdochically as a harbinger of the full narrative program.

In recollecting Rios's relationship with his father—a recurring motif in the Rios stories—Nava has his character say:

I was inspired [to be a criminal lawyer] in equal parts by a childhood veneration of Abraham Lincoln, the TV series *Perry Mason*, my father's brutality and my awareness, from the time I was sixteen, that I was gay. The last two were related. My Mexican father was a hard man who had survived a hard life, and he despised the softness he *detected* in his only son and was determined to beat it out of me. All his beatings had accomplished was to incite in me a hatred of authority and injustice. Not until I fell in love with my best friend in high school did I begin to understand that what had

driven my father's violence was every father's ultimate nightmare: a homosexual son. A *maricón*. (*The Burning Plain* 6; first emphasis added)

What is explained here is how Rios's father scrutinized the son's body in the effort to detect signs of sexual deviancy. The idea was always to beat those signs out of his son. Such intense fatherly attention, and attention by fatherly surrogates, certainly does not produce homosexuality, and, in fact, it is designed to impede its development and to eliminate whatever there may be of it already present in his son. But what it does is two-fold. In the first place it forceably associates a particular sign with homosexuality, insinuating implicitly that the two are linked, without, of course, ever being able to offer any evidence of such a link. The father reacts, however, to a particular form of behavior, being soft (details are not provided), and he assumes it to be related to his eternal fear, as a father, that his son might be gay. The term "gay" is used here more as a place holder than as a specific social subjectivity. This is so, because there is no evidence that Rios's father uses the term or knows precisely what it means, an ambiguity that involves also conflicts between Mexican and Anglo definitions of sexuality. Indeed, Rios's father is likely to have used the word *maricón*, which like "gay" is more of a place hold specific to Mexican culture, since it does not just mean "fag," but rather covers a spectrum that refers to anything that is considered unmanly, feminized, or effeminate. His reaction, rather than offering a proof that his son is gay thus serves to create for the young child the fatal association between being soft and being deviant. But whether or not it can properly be interpreted to refer to the one, fatal deviance, that the son is a *maricón*, is left undemonstrated, and it is only the hegemonic effect of homophobia that suspends any need for such demonstrations to take place.

The second effect is to consolidate the conviction, via the paternal detecting of always yet one more sign of deviance, reinforced by yet one more beating. This process of constructing an overdetermination of the gay child is what I mean when I say that homophobia here func-

tions to impose a perception of homosexualized deviance on the body of certain social subjects. Just as there are many ways of being gay, there are many ways in which one “finds” a gay identity. As dreadful as homophobia may be, it may for some individuals be one way in which they come, by force, to confront sexuality. Certainly, this is not the gayness or gay identity that Rios discovers at the age of sixteen nor the history of homoerotic desire he lives out as an adult, from the time he falls in love with his best friend in high school. Rather, the gayness that is constructed is the identification as a *maricón* that the father and the society of compulsory heterosexuality attributes to, and in fact imposes on, the son. In other words, the semiotic reading becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy because its interpretive efficiency cannot help but confirm what it originally set out to detect.

No se lo digas a nadie: Peru and the generation of a subversive hypocrisy

Joaquín Camino’s father tells him at one point in Francisco J. Lombardi’s 1998 excellent adaptation of Jaime Bayly’s rather mediocre 1994 novel that, in Peru, “Se puede ser cualquier cosa, menos maricón.” It is never explained why it is possible in that country—which is no different from the vast majority of Latin American societies—to be a thief, a drug dealer, a murderer, a rapist, a child molester, a corrupt politician, or a dirty-dealing businessman but not queer. Moreover, no attempt is ever made to identify what is meant by the word, although this is not surprising, since, as one of the guiding principles of homophobia, those who use the word *maricón* negatively and disparagingly, if not directly as a call to murderous violence, are never called upon to define such a term. Indeed, the two lacunae in the social discourse go hand-in-hand: there is never any demand to identify what *maricón* actually means, and there is never any demand to explain why one can be anything else except a *maricón*.

One supposes that, as far as wondering why no explanation is ever forthcoming as to why the one thing that one cannot be in

Peruvian society is a queer, must relate to the need for a ground zero of social abjection. Thus, it may be instructive to look to those Latin American or other societies in which being queer is no longer totally abject to search for what has replaced being queer as the realm of absolute total social proscription.

If homoerotic desire, and the accompanying identities, behavior, and acts that may attend the pursuit of such desire, is an integral part of human sexuality then Peru is no different from any other human society. This is so whether or not one subscribes to the inevitable homoerotic dimension of all human intercourse when viewed from any number of theoretical lenses ranging from a Christian theology based on the weaknesses of the flesh, to Freudianism, to contemporary studies on masculinity and the components of homosociality. Although there is nothing especially perceptive or innovative in saying that the only "sins" virulently defined, rigorously proscribed, and violently punished are those that are most likely to be prevalent, the slippage between the deontic and alethic meanings of the predicate *possible* serves to occlude an understanding of how being allowed to be gay and, in fact, being gay (anyway) are two very different propositions.

It is an occlusion that serves to make it difficult if not impossible to contemplate how homoerotic desire is part of the human condition, how always a rather startling number of social subjects are, when statistics began to be constructed, gay or queer after all, and how social life for many may mean being gay to various degrees of active fulfillment of a homoerotic agenda while (occasionally not with complete success) keeping below the radar of the always fine-tuned homophobic apparatuses of detection. One might well argue that the function of such apparatuses, like the insistent confessor determined to ferret out one's most buried and denied sins, cannot allow itself to be frustrated by the absence of deviances to be denounced. There must always be some queer to smear: no one is beyond suspicion.

Lombardi's film is, however, squarely centered on the aforementioned parenthetical "anyway": no matter what, one is gay anyway; no matter what, one has same-sex partners; no matter what, one adjusts

one's accommodations with the heteronormative patriarchy in order to have same-sex partners. And no matter what, the business of society proceeds apace despite the violations to its integrity which threaten its very survival in the form of disrupted procreation and disrupted family life. In other words, Lombardi's film is about the powerful force of hypocrisy that works in appallingly efficient tandem with homophobia, to ensure that what is *possible* both defies social truth and permits that which is disallowed.

One dimension of Lombardi's film involves the representation of how Joaquín Camino's father undertakes to enforce heteronormative expertise, and Joaquín defies the hypocrisy of heteronormativity, while at the same time becoming yet one more spokesman for it.

Lombardi's film is intransigent in portraying the almost ludicrous attempts of the senior Camino to ensure his son's development as an appropriately masculinized member of society. Such a program includes the mandatory sequestering of the male child in an all male world, in which it is taken for granted that the setting and its guardians will collaborate together to develop all of the charges confined to it along similar and forthrightly characterized paths of manly deportment. However, the most painfully ludicrous demonstration of Camino's attempt to take seriously his fatherly obligations vis-à-vis his son's masculine identity comes in a long three-part sequence during the first part of the film, which essentially is built around a tripartite division: masculine initiation, youthful rebellion and escape, and the return to, literally, the fatherland.

In the first sequence, the father attempts to engage his son in a boxing match, "to make a man of him"; Joaquín makes a very poor showing.

In the second sequence, Camino senior takes his son hunting to provide the son with a new opportunity to test himself in his father's presence and to prove he is a man; once again Joaquín fails. Yet he has begun to learn how to deal with his father, and he dissembles in two important ways. First, he actually goes on the hunt with the son of the *cholo* (indigenous peasant) who is caretaker at one of the father's rural

properties. This son, who is Joaquín's age, allows the latter to deceive his father by alleging that it was he who killed the deer that is actually shot by his indigenous companion. It is not clear whether the father believes his son because he is so anxious to be convinced that he is a real man, or whether he suspects the truth. In any event, he is overjoyed at the evidence of his son's manly accomplishment. The point of this incident is the way in which Joaquín has begun to manipulate the truth in order to pass as appropriately masculine in his father's society—or, at least, in his father's presence. Ironically, while the younger *cholo* readily and without hesitation or prompting accepts his role as an accomplice in Joaquín's lie to his father: in a racially stratified society like Peru *cholos* and others that occupy their same place in society know that one of the keys to survival is through dissembling and in providing the more powerful owners of power with the truth they wish to hear. As for what really took place, "Allá entre blancos" (That's between whites). The formula of hypocrisy as a strategy of self-defense is amply demonstrated here: *cholos* do not tell the truth to their social betters, children do not tell the truth to their parents, and queers do not tell the truth to the agents of the patriarchy.

The second dimension of this second sequence of Joaquín's education as a real man involves the swim the two young men go for in a mountain stream near where they go hunting. Although both remain in their underpants, the two are soon engaged in a game of "I'll show you mine if you'll show me yours." This incident of homosocial mutual confirmation, whereby one's masculinity is confirmed by displaying proudly the dominant phallic correlative, turns sour, however, when Joaquín wishes to touch the other man's penis. He is rebuffed with the brusque assertion that "los hombres no se tocan" (men don't touch each other). Why it is significant for men to see each other but not touch each other (as though seeing and touching were divided by a line in which the first is a non-erotic act, while the second is) is necessarily left unclear: Joaquín's demand to know why they shouldn't touch is left unanswered, because the imperatives of heteronormativity are customarily unaccompanied by explanatory glosses. Surely, touching

“must be” prohibited because touching is a first step toward executing a fully realized sexual act, but this can also be true of seeing.

The point is that, sheltered by his knowledge that the *cholo* is his social inferior, he attempts to initiate a sexual act with the former and is rebuffed: it is unclear whether the indigenous youth rebuffs Joaquín because of his own exclusive heterosexuality or because of a sense of the potential problems that it could bring him. In such a situation, were the two of them discovered, it would likely be only the *cholo* who would experience the wrath of the father, both his own, for compromising the two of them in the face of Joaquín’s father, and the latter, because it is always the nonwhite who is guilty of “corrupting” the white boy. The *cholo* violently rebuffs Joaquín’s advances and threatens to tell his father, only to be attacked by Joaquín. But when the two older men arrive, the father of the *cholo* (without really knowing what has happened) brushes the incident aside, in order not to challenge the authority of the master’s son. The point, in any case, is that the *cholo* youth learns that he must keep quiet and that Joaquín can appeal to the power differential in order to keep the former from snitching to either of the fathers, thereby providing Joaquín a more important lesson in hypocrisy than the lesson in manly sports that was the purpose of the hunting excursion.

These two sequences are important for Joaquín’s lesson in self-preserving hypocrisy, but none has to do directly with sexuality. In fact, once again in line with the underexplaining and the taking for granted of the internal logic of heteronormativity, no attempt is made to show why learning how to defend one’s self with one’s fists or being a successful hunter has anything to do with being properly sexed. (It is quite a different matter teaching a queer boy—or queer girl—to defend herself in order more effectively to deal with homophobic bullies, but that surely is not the intent of Sr. Camino, given the contest in which the lesson takes place.) What is at issue here is the way in which the heteronormative discourse functions on the basis of a number of interlocking premises that remain unproven and of which it is not even possible to demand proof, premises whose interrelationship is predicated on a relationship of dense metonymy, such that each premise evokes

and sustains the others and such that a failure or rejection of any one of them brings into question the fulfillment of any of the others.

In this fashion, being unable to engage in any of the manly sports—here, specifically, boxing and big animal hunting—necessarily entails a failure in the realm of a fully functioning, reproductive heterosexuality: being unable to hunt means being unable to have proper sex with a woman, which means in turn being unable to contribute appropriately to the maintenance of the species through reproduction. Concomitantly, a failure in any one of these metonymic tests necessarily presupposes a failure at any and all of the others, and it is this tight interlocking of circular entailments and presuppositions that provides the texture of density being invoked here. And while it is clear that there is some directionality in the various propositions (i.e., one usually learns to box and hunt before one learns to engender children; a girl usually learns to cook before having a baby), internal logic is always precarious, so that unless all of these truths about being a man are self-evident to the spectator, one wonders what any one of them have to do with the others. To be sure, cultural texts that endorse heteronormativity—such as the vast majority of Hollywood filmmaking and the vast majority of Latin American filmmaking made in the former's image—assume the unquestionable logic of the dense tangle of masculine-confirming metonymies *No se lo digas* refers to.

Conclusions

Nava's narratives are built around the need to make homoerotic identities transparent, to transcend hypocrisy and dissemblance, and to affirm that, yes, one is gay. One has a lot to be thankful for in terms of the extent to which such a trajectory is possible in U.S. society. One doubts if it really is, and Nava's fiction is couched in all sorts of cautionary details regarding the rather jejeune idea that one's sexuality can always be and ever frankly pursued. But whatever the circumstances of publicizing one's sexuality in the United States may be, the two films I have examined here are eloquent in demonstrating the ways in

which homophobia is imbricated with many other social discourses such that it cannot be separated off and displayed unaccompanied by notable consequences: this is evident in Nava's writing when homophobia is bound up with maintaining an "authentic" ethnic identity. The Cuba of *Conducta impropia* no longer exists: Cuba today has other issues to worry about than sexual hygiene. Yet the degree to which the discourse of homophobia is showcased in this hotly contested documentary is of a whole with circumstances that still exist in many parts of Latin America—from nonmodern societies like Bolivia and Paraguay, to considerably modernized ones like Chile (arguably, still the most homophobic society in Latin America at the present moment). And the circumstances of hypocrisy foregrounded in Lombardi's *No se lo digas a nadie* is, quite frankly, part of a healthy respect for the defensive tactics that are an integral part of all Latin American societies, the so called "double discourse." None of this is meant to contrast "honest" U.S. with "dishonest" Latin American culture(s). Quite the contrary: the degree to which Latin Americans are convinced that people in the U.S. simply "don't get it," don't understand that patriarchal society is far from having run its course, is infinitely more tragic than the attitude of Lombardi's protagonist, who has simply found out how to get on with his affective and sexual life while remaining below the powerful radar of a still intransigent heteronormativity.

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