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abstract

'Why Queer Diaspora?' intervenes at the intersection of queer theory and diaspora studies to ask how the conditions of geographical mobility produce new experiences and understandings of sexuality and gender identity. More particularly, this essay argues against a prevalent critical slippage between queer and diaspora, through which the queer is read as a mobile category that, like diaspora, disrupts the stability of fixed identity categories and thus represents a liberatory position within the material and geographical displacements of globalization. Instead, I posit that the work of 'queering' diaspora must be to examine the new articulations of normative and queer as they emerge in the transformations of the late twentieth century. To this end, the essay looks to two contemporary documentaries, *Remote Sensing* (Ursula Biemann, 2001) and *Mariposas en el Andamio/Butterflies on the Scaffold* (Margaret Gilpin and Luis Felipe Bernaza, 1996), as models of alternative articulations of the queer and the diasporic. Ultimately, I argue, it is a focus on the labour through which the seemingly natural categories of gender and sexuality are produced, that a queer diasporic criticism might offer.

keywords

diaspora; queer studies; globalization; sex work

The question that is the title of this essay is an earnest one, and I pose it to index two related but distinct lines of inquiry that arise as we confront the relation between queer theory and diaspora studies. What does it mean to 'queer' diaspora studies? To pose the question more broadly, what analytical possibilities open up when we consider the relation between sexuality, identity, and desire on the one hand, and the geographical mobility, estrangement, or displacement of people on the other? This essay will approach these questions by considering how the contemporary conditions of geographical mobility – the diasporic condition that attends the circumstance of globalization – produce new experiences and understandings of sexuality and gender identity. In this interest, this essay thus hopes to contribute to the timely work currently underway under the rubric of 'queer globalization studies'.

This, however, begs yet another question: what is at stake in the tendency, in much of that very same work, to conjoin the queer subject and the diasporic subject as theoretical twins? In the increasing number of anthologies and monographs exploring the intersection of sexuality studies and globalization, it is the diasporic queer subject in particular who is called upon to bear witness to the political, material, familial, and intellectual transformations of globalization. As I will explore in more detail below, such work offers the diasporic queer as the exemplary subject of globalization, in order to posit an analogy between queerness as that which subverts gender normativity, and diaspora as that which troubles geographic and national stability.

Such critical moves rest on the following line of thinking: on the one hand, it is asserted, the nation, through structural arrangements of citizenship, marriage law, and immigration regulation, always and unconditionally privileges heterosexuality. On the other, then, queerness challenges not just the nation's familial metaphor of belonging, but disrupts national coherence itself (Eng and Hom, 1998; Muñoz, 1999; Patton and Sánchez-Eppler, 2000). Newly emergent from the debris of nationalism is a figure of the 'sexile', a gay cosmopolitan subject who, once exiled from national space, is therefore outside of the duties, identifications, and demands of nationalism, and is paradoxically liberated into free transnational mobility (Guzmán, 1997). Carried to its logical end, this binary would suggest that to the extent that queers necessarily disrupt national coherence, they are always already extra-national. In the end, queerness and transnational movement are collapsed: queerness constitutes a mobile resistance to the boundaries and limits imposed by gender, and that resistance *is the same* as the migrant's movement through national and cultural borders. Put simply, the analogy is this: queerness disrupts gender normativity like globalization disrupts national sovereignty.

While there is much to be said for the transformative potential of queer and diasporic practices, I want to suggest an alternate line of inquiry for thinking about the intersection of sexuality and globalization. In particular, I propose that

the study of sexuality and globalization would do well to consider what kinds of critical and political work are done not just through the (geographically and corporeally) mobile bodies of queer subjects, but among those bodies and communities not marked as mobile, whether literally or theoretically. More specifically, I wonder how the study of queer globalization might attend to the production of new forms of normativity among diasporic communities, as well as the gendered labour that subtends post-Fordism's modes of production and accumulation. For it is my contention that it is precisely the critical analogy between gender mobility and geographic mobility that risks mystifying the material and psychic relations it would seem to illuminate. That is, as I will argue, the analogy conceals, by rendering them equivalent, the very links between desire, practice, and material relations that produce gender and sexuality as social formations. This critical move thus occludes the very question it would seem to want to ask: what analytical possibilities open up when we bring queer studies and globalization studies into closer proximity – when we think globally about queerness, and queerly about globalization?

Toward this end, this essay will consider how national and transnational relationships of production codify normative gender roles within a hetero-normative national narrative, while remembering, at the same time, that the queer subject is also produced *through* transnational capitalism and the nationalist discourses that exist in tension with it. How does this queer subject allow us to reconceptualize the very formulation of national subjectivity within a transnational economic productive system, without fetishizing the queer diasporic as the 'localized' site of both national knowledge and diasporic consciousness?

the queer face of globalization

In the introduction to their influential anthology *Queer Globalizations*, editors Arnoldo Cruz-Malavé and Martin F. Manalansan IV open their essay with the simple and direct assertion: 'Queerness is now global' (2002: 1). Suggesting the timeliness of this development – the *now* of queerness' transnational reach – Cruz-Malavé and Manalansan ground their claim in two intersecting but distinct developments. First, they point to the increased visibility of queer sexualities through the global circulation of images of, and commodities for, queers. Second, they cite the transnational coordination of queer politics, a form of global coalition-building made possible through queer visibility in the marketplace. As they argue, it is the commodification of gay and lesbian identity that enables the international recognition of, and mobilization around, struggles for sexual and social justice, making not only the visual codes of queer identity, but also the struggles for queer rights, recognizable in a transnational framework.

It is the project of queer globalizations to chart the relations between these two developments.

At the centre of their framework is the diasporic queer subject, a figure imagined as both geographically and ideologically unlocateable, who mediates between the commodity-based queer identity and its political mobilization as the diasporic queer subject. That is, the mobile body of the diasporic queer serves as the 'mediating figure between the nation and diaspora, home and the state, the local and the global' (Cruz-Malavé and Manalansan, 2002: 2). Importantly, their central interest in the diasporic queer as a paradigmatic figure of globalization draws from a long critical conversation, one that begins with the 'transnational turn in lesbian and gay studies and queer theory' (Povinelli and Chauncey, 1999: 439). This position is elaborated extensively in a broad range of recent queer work. For example, in *Queer Diasporas*, editors Cindy Patton and Benigno Sánchez-Eppler site the queer diasporic subject as the paradigmatic body of a mobile, transitory postmodernity. Reading, through the story of Adam and Eve's banishment from Eden, an originary articulation between spatial and sexual prohibition, they make the case for a complementary relation between diaspora and queerness as analogous forms of mobility. In isolating the specificity of 'queer escape and reconstitution', *Queer Diasporas* thus defines the queer as a particularly peripatetic mode of sexuality, a 'mobility of sexuality across the globe and body' (2000: 3). The diasporic queer subject thus becomes a doubly mobile or transgressive body, who challenges not simply the repertoire of localized categories of desire but the stability of national identity itself.

Working within a similar logical frame, John Hawley has insisted on a parallel between queer and postcolonial studies, in which queer theory's deconstructive reading of identity enacts in an individual frame the global condition in which supranational organizations and corporations exert authority as a deterritorialized framework of power in which 'globalization, in effect, becomes queer' (2001: 8). Likewise, the special issue of *Social Text*, *Queer Transsexions of Race, Nation, and Gender*, looked to 'free up' the 'queer' from the specificity of sexuality, in order to throw into productive crisis 'the social antagonisms of nationality, race, gender, and class' (Harper *et al.*, 1997: 1,3). The title of the 1998 CLAGS (Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies) conference, 'Queer Globalizations, Local Homosexualities' betrays the same logic, uniting an identity-based 'homosexual' with the stasis of the 'local', and positing both against a more mobile, global, transgressive 'queer'.

Each of these frameworks unites the queer with the diasporic in a privileged relation of transgressivity, begging the question about the critical function of such an analogy. Both, it would seem, are fundamentally disruptive of static categories of being, of the hegemonic categories through which proper, normative subjects are produced. Taking this analogy a step further, the queer subject, as a fundamentally diasporic figure, becomes synonymous with globalization itself.

Within this analogy, the queer diasporic body is doubly disarticulated from the stasis of sexual and national normativity; likewise, he (gendered male) is doubly privileged as the site for interrogating the assimilative function of heteronormativity and national identity.

To be sure, inasmuch as the work of queer globalization scholars looks to foreground sexuality as a necessary category for thinking the material, psychic, and social effects of globalization, these interventions are both necessary and significant. At the same time, the emphasis on the queer diasporic subject as the central figure of that analysis produces a critical discourse that reinvests in the very categories it would seem to want to challenge. First, the structure of analogy between the queer and the diasporic establishes a tenuous partnership; here the work of Black feminist critics usefully reminds us that such critical analogies fail to attend to the complexities of differentially lived experiences (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 2000; Zack, 2005). Moreover, in focusing on mobility over stasis, these interventions have less to say about the conditions that enable or disable the body's mobility. In this way, such theories replicate what other feminist critics have isolated as a gendered dynamic in which women occupy, implicitly, the static role of the local, as well as a critical trend in which queer theory more generally has looked to disarticulate itself from feminism by positing 'queer' as mobile, in relation to feminism's presumed fixity (Martin, 1997). They replicate, as well, the critical paradigm evidenced in macroanalyses of globalization, which have had little to say about gender as an organizing category (Harvey, 1989; Waters, 1995; Appadurai, 1996). The result is 'the implicit, but powerful, dichotomous model in which the gender of globalization is mapped in such a way that the global: masculine as local: feminine' (Freeman, 2001: 1,008).

Such work would thus do well to attend to the critical history of mobility as a liberatory paradigm. This is the challenge offered by Sara Ahmed (2000), who warns against the reification of 'migrant ontologies' in which migration is understood as a necessarily transgressive mode of existence. Likewise, while recognizing the new patterns of movement that are characteristic of post-Fordist regimes of production and consumption, several feminist critics insist upon the importance of groundedness as well, questioning 'the presumption that rootless mobility is the defining feature of contemporary experience' (Ahmed *et al.*, 2003: 2).

As I have argued, this collapsing of the queer and the diasporic prevents us from forging a politics that could recognize the patterns of contradiction and complicity between the psychic and the social, the cultural and the economic, that converge to produce the formations of queerness we recognize today. The claim for the mobile transgressivity of queerness as its own diasporic category – the idea that it is necessarily disruptive of categories of nation, home, and family – misses the ways in which queer desire is necessarily constituted in

relation to such categories and can offer us no assurance of their disruption. The point is not to deny the power of mobility as a condition of modern existence, but to resist its epistemological centrality in contemporary scholarship and, in so doing, mark the specificity of forms of rootedness and movement as coincidental, not oppositional categories (Brah, 1996; Fortier, 2003; Gopinath, 2005). As Roger Rouse has observed, 'the cultural politics of domination always concerns the regulation of desire' (1995: 376); as such, queer desire, no less than other forms, must be understood to be fundamentally implicated in the social reproduction of globalization. To take the regulation of desire and domination seriously, then, I suggest we start by abandoning our sense of the forms that such regulation might take. Our starting point would thus take seriously Amy Villarejo's warning that 'there is no confident way of predicting *how* gender will be consolidated in the service of regulatory mechanisms in any given place or moment' (2003: 16). It is precisely in the spirit of such unpredictability that the critical insights of queer theory might be brought to bear upon the political, social, and economic transformations of globalization, not only to push the boundaries of what we might understand as queer, but also to offer new insight into the regulatory mechanisms and the forms of desire such global transformations produce.

compulsory mobility and the counter-geographies of sex

With such questions in mind, I would like to turn to two visual texts, *Mariposas en el Andamio/Butterflies on the Scaffold* (1996) and *Remote Sensing* (2001), each of which offers a distinct but compelling model for alternative inquiries into the sexual politics of globalization. Neither documentary has received wide commentary, and neither positions itself within the specific critical conversation around queer diaspora. And yet, both consider questions of sexuality, mobility, and the global relations of production and accumulation in ways that offer, I think, suggestive visions for expanding upon our current understandings of the relation between sexuality and globalization. Moving to the documentary form, I do not mean to escape but rather to expand the scholarly conversation outlined above. As creative and thoughtful interventions into this conversation, each film offers a highly specific picture of globalization, and in so doing, offers a way of contextualizing the political and material conditions of mobility that become the conditions of possibility for sexuality, understood in terms of both desire and identity. Taking as my starting point the understanding that globalization is not a uniform phenomenon but an ensemble of 'uneven processes whereby certain locales are constituted as "the global"' (Ahmed, 2000: 14), I will suggest that each documentary offers a critical language through which we might place such locales as intricate parts of a larger picture of the queer and the diasporic. Moreover, through interplay between the formal and narrative aspects of each

documentary, we see challenged both the grand narratives of globalization as a seamless and coherent system, and the privileging of mobility as a liberatory or transgressive position.

Remote Sensing is the agile and adept work of Ursula Biemann, a German artist, theorist, and curator, whose interest in questions of gender and globalization has been at the centre of multiple videos, books, and curatorial projects. While I have referred to *Remote Sensing* as a documentary because of its reliance on interviews, voice-over interventions, and a realist mise-en-scene, it is also an experimental video-essay, juxtaposing multiple media formats, like close-up interviews with NASA satellite images and computerized data streams, in order to make visual as well as narrative connections between the different ways, global and local, abstract and particular, of knowing and experiencing the mobility of globalization. Distributed by the New York-based Women Make Movies, which produces and distributes films by and about women, the video's circulation quite explicitly places it within feminist conversations about gender, geography, and mobility; the film's screenings in multiple museums and film festivals in Europe, the US, and New Zealand have earned it significant recognition in international feminist conversations about migration, border crossing, gender, and geopolitics.

While the corpus of Biemann's work has won her an international reputation as a feminist critic highly attuned to the gender politics of geographical mobility, *Remote Sensing* (2001) is particularly compelling in its searing look at the sexual trafficking of women across the globe. In part, then, it must be understood as a creative engagement with feminist critics about the politics of sex work and, more broadly, the new conditions of circulation for women and girls forced into a mobile life of sexual labour. Put differently, Biemann's video offers an answer to the questions recently posed by Amalia Cabezas, who asks, 'what is new about global sex? How does globalization create the conditions within which sexual acts and sexualized identities develop?' (2004: 988). Biemann's video thus enacts a critical engagement with recent feminist investigations of globalization that have shown how the invisible trade in sex has developed in proximity to the formal tourist sector in many developing countries, exploring the ways in which informal economies of paid sex work provide crucial income in areas devastated by development policies that have caused currency depreciation, the devaluation of labour, and the redirection of subsidies from social programmes to debt repayment (Hubbard, 2001; Cabezas, 2004; Sanchez Taylor, 2006). Adapting to the difficult circumstances brought about by the implementation of free-market reforms and the devastating effects of the International Monetary Fund's structural adjustment programmes, communities have witnessed the growth of 'tourist-oriented prostitution' as a supplemental industry that accompanies the international financial community's formal investments in its tourist economy. Sex work, then, is a vital part of the global economy, one in which the class politics between global and local are played out in highly racialized ways that

'reflects the consequences and legacy of colonialism as they play out on this current stage of global capitalism' (Cabezas, 2004: 998).

In Biemann's work, however, the strains of mobility are manifest quite differently, as it is the women themselves who have been displaced, moving between cities and across borders as part of a seldom-visible network of migrant workers. It is this constrained mobility that is foregrounded in the formal aspects of the video, which shifts frequently between formats. Basing her claims largely on interviews with women touched in some direct way by the global trafficking of women sex workers (many of its interviewees are either former sex workers or activists mobilizing to help those women unwittingly or coercively recruited into the trade), Biemann intersperses such interviews with long shots of NASA satellite pictures of the Earth, dividing the screen into four panels so that, even as we get to know the women of the film, they exist simultaneously and directly connected with this broader, more abstract view of the global terrain they have travelled. And indeed, this juxtaposition is precisely the point; while resisting a simple contrast between local (woman interviewee) and global (satellite shot), this split-screen view nevertheless suggests interconnectedness between each person and the geographical terrain that engenders her ways of knowing. This is the message expressed in the video's opening shot; to the backdrop of these split-screen satellite views, the video opens with a voice-over, telling us that these 'remotely sensed' images, offering both 'the most accurate data' and 'the most ultimate abstraction of geographies', are insufficient to explain how and why 'women travel across the globe for work in the sex industry'. Instead, Biemann asserts, we need 'a ground-up view to fill in the missing data that will capture the complexity of lives, including the reason why women trace their routes across the land the way they do'. Switching, then, back and forth between shots of train tracks along the US-Mexican border, interspersed with shots of busy night-time sidewalks, where women and men loiter, talk, and circulate, Biemann concludes the first segment by asking what will be the video's pressing question: 'How can a technological geography be complemented with multiple counter-geographies that will map a gendered and possibly conflicting view of the world, that can account for migration and cross-border circuits, illegal and illicit networks, alternative circuits of survival where women have emerged as key actors'?

To shade in the contours of such a counter-geography is thus the aim of the video, and it does this through a mix of interviews with women connected to the sex trade, moving from the US-Mexico border to Thailand, Korea, China, Vietnam, Switzerland, and the former socialist republics of Eastern Europe, in order to illustrate the dynamic geographical movement of women in sex work, these 'alternative circuits of survival' that the satellite views, too abstract and remote, fail to illuminate. Key shots of text superimposed on the screen give us the numbers: 'There are 160,000 Nepalese women held in India's brothels, 200,000 Bengali women sent to brothels in Pakistan, 19,000 Pakistani girls sold to the

Middle East, 200,000 Burmese women trafficked to Pakistan, 20,000 Burmese girls trafficked to Thailand each year, 100,000 Southeast Asian women shipped to Japan each year'. As if to testify to the sheer magnitude of such numbers, women interviewed elaborate by telling their stories, describing a cross-border, transnational mobility that is hard to trace but nonetheless has real material, psychic, and personal costs. The voice-over once again interrupts to remind us that this 'costly transaction across boundaries' with women, a 'large and fragile cargo that is difficult to hide', means that 'corruption will always be cheaper than concealment'. Naming this sex work the 'giant Fordism of service', the interruptions of the voice-over provide a more comprehensive complement to the individual stories the film highlights.

What is most interesting about *Remote Sensing* is the careful way in which the film explores the dynamic and devastating links between labour, migration, and sex. Such references to the Fordist nature of global sex work suggest a highly systematized process, reminding viewers that questions of labour, capital, and exploitation are at the heart of such work; despite the seeming invisibility of sex work in the calculations of state GNPs and on the ledgers of the World Bank, this labour is not without material benefits for the State, as well as for the individuals who traffic in sex work. As one telling scene describes a series of ad campaigns in the 1980s that attempted to popularize Thailand as a tourist destination by attesting to the desirability of both Thai beaches and Thai women, the camera pans bars, beaches, and cafés populated by aging white men, presumably European and American men who have come to sample the promised bounty of marriageable women advertised in covertly-circulated catalogues and mailings, which, according to the video, 'featured photos of Thai women by the thousands' and promised browsers that '[their] bride is in the mail'.

Such moments highlight the acutely racialized and gendered nature of this economy, and Biemann's focus complements feminist analyses of sex work as not peripheral to the tourist industry, but central to it (O'Connell Davidson, 1996; O'Connell Davidson, 2001; Cabezas, 2004; Sanchez Taylor, 2006). In the overlap between tourism and sex work, websites appeal to potential tourists by promoting the fantasy of unfettered access to women and girls of varying ages and ethnicities as part of a vacationer's experience in an 'exotic' location. Such marketing strategies promise authentic contact with the racialized Other, where wealthy white men from Europe and North America are solicited as sexual adventurers in a new, foreign landscape (O'Connell Davidson, 1996). In its overt promotion of white patriarchal power, this industry, while largely illegal, is utterly in keeping with the classical liberal state's protection of white men's interests in women as property (O'Connell Davidson, 2001). As such, this industry is not irrelevant to the consolidation of state power, but enabled by state and international policies that make such labour necessary. This point is reiterated by one unidentified interviewee who comments at length about the increased sex

trade between Western and Eastern Europe since the 1990s. Noting that the European Union has taken sex trafficking into little account in its migration and border policies, she concludes with a pressing observation: 'I find it ironic that we hear that women should get support in leaving the sex trade, and the State, on the other hand, holds on to the structures which strictly forbid them to work in another profession. So you wonder to what extent the State is interested in reducing the traffic in women'.

At this point in the film, the screen splits. On the right, the camera offers an aerial view of white men in suits deliberating across the table of a conference room. On the left, text scrolls up the screen, detailing the shape and form of the kinds of labour that comprise the highly gendered migration at the film's focus: marriage migrant, cabaret dancer, prostitute, and domestic worker. Under different names, these kinds of work overlap and collide as parts of the underground or illicit trade unaccounted for on global balance sheets. At the same time, at corporate conference tables across the globe, another kind of work transpires, and their clever juxtapositioning in the side-by-side frames begs the question that the video asks in so many different ways: how do we trace the paths between border brothels and corporate conference rooms so as to reconnect seemingly disparate points in the global circuits of capital accumulation? This is not, then, to find refuge in the local as an alternative to the global, but to understand the global as a constellation of interconnected points that undercut 'the global' as an abstract concept. Ironically, it is from the distant gaze, the 'orbital perspective' of the camera itself, that the circuits of the sex trade can be put back into proper perspective, reintegrated with other forms of labour and migration to claim its significant, if ignored, part in the global economy.

It is important to note that while *Remote Sensing* is interested in the specific relations between migration and sex work, it in no way claims the local as the 'authentic site of identity formation' (Kaplan, 1996: 148); in fact, the video keeps us perpetually displaced, and the women and places remain unidentified throughout. Instead, the video redirects our attention to the vastness of this work, the large scale of this unaccounted-for economy. It wants, too, to demonstrate from up close and afar, the costs of the emotional, material, and physical labour that is the global sex trade. In the end, this is a video about work, about the material and physical costs of globalization seen from a particularly gendered vantage. The video elaborates the many ways in which women sex workers' disempowerment shares much in common with the situation of exploited workers and global migrants in other trades: insufficient monetary remuneration, physical threat and intimidation, lack of access to labour organizing and unionization, illegal immigration status, and little or no state protection.

This strikes me as a compelling linking of questions of globalization and sex, migration and sexuality. Within the focus of the video, sex is a product sold within an illicit and lucrative market, and the camera's gaze is limited to women. At no point does the video take on questions of queerness, of gay sex tourism or male prostitution. In my view, however, there is still much that a queer diasporic reading might gain here. For in the video's careful look at the global trade in sex, it suggests that we might begin to consider how these sexual practices are produced in relation to global capital and its circulation. More precisely, the video makes clear that the production of desire – not just sex but sexuality – is inextricably linked to the global distribution of capital and the shifting relations of power, surveillance, and protection across borders. Far from confirming the liberatory potential of migration – a globalization that is celebratorily 'queer' – *Remote Sensing* demonstrates the devastating effects of these mobile articulations of normative, patriarchal sexual arrangements as they are felt by the least empowered subjects of globalization.

In recognizing sex as work, the video intervenes in a critical dialogue about queer globalization by forcefully insisting on the material value of desire and its relation to conditions of compulsion, coercion, and commodification. While the subjects that feature in Biemann's documentary are in no way marked as queer, her intervention positions sex as a kind of labour that is at the same time divorced from and articulated through sexuality as an identity category, such that the women recruited or stolen into migratory sex work are not given the opportunity to articulate the forms of their own sexual desire, even while their livelihood depends upon recognizing and fulfilling the fantasies of others. That we do not know, and cannot know, anything about the sexuality of the women interviewed in the film is precisely the point. What we know is that the commodification of desire and the work of producing themselves as lucratively gendered and racialized subjects is what the trade demands. Most importantly, Biemann makes clear the utter danger of privileging mobility as a liberatory condition of globalization, instead putting labour at the centre of her gaze. In the formal and narrative links she makes between boardrooms and brothels, Biemann insists upon the centrality of this marginalized and often invisible kind of labour.

While it would be easy to see this sex work as just another kind of exploited labour, albeit along particularly gendered and racialized terms, at the same time *Remote Sensing* demands that scholars of sexuality take pause and consider how both normative and non-normative patterns of desire participate in the sexual exploitation of others. As many scholars have argued, North American politics of gay and lesbian liberation hinge on strategies of queer visibility that often have counter-effects in other parts of the world, inspiring new policies of surveillance in homoerotic encounters and closing off important possibilities for non-heteronormative social and sexual desires (Altman, 1997; Morris, 1997; Puar, 2001).

Thus complicating the transnational spread of US politics of gay liberation, the mobile status of queerness is also troubled by the questionable circumstances through which gay and lesbian identities are formulated as mobile by gay cruises and tour companies that specifically market gays and lesbians. Many queer subjects, no less than others, benefit from the privileges of race, gender, and class that protect their global rights as consumers, rather than citizens, and replicate the imperial framework that grants mobility as the privilege of whiteness. As the largest growth area of gay capital, gay tourism in particular upholds a dichotomy between consumer and producer perfectly aligned with a First World/Third World hierarchy in which the 'queer fetishized native' is the silenced and place-bound product, which the gay tourist is encouraged to consume (Alexander, 2005: 70). Thus, the fact that the encounters in *Remote Sensing* are largely heterosexual ones in no way invalidates the question of how all forms of desire are articulated not against but within the uneven distribution of wealth across race, gender, class, and national lines. The question then becomes how forms of desire and sexual identity that are transgressive in certain contexts can function normatively, even coercively, in others. Queer globalization studies must thus take into account how sexuality forms a crucial part of these uneven relations, through the regulations within which certain sexual identities are socially legible and internationally legitimated, validated by state laws and international policies.

sexuality and the labour of gender

I want to turn now to a more specifically queer venue for the further consideration of these questions, by looking briefly at another film that places the queer subject of globalization at the centre of the camera's gaze. Margaret Gilpin and Luis Felipe Bernaza's (1996) *Mariposas en el Andamio/Butterflies on the Scaffold* is an appealing documentary about Cuban drag. Filmed over a six-month period in Havana by a largely Cuban crew, the film debuted at the Havana Film Festival in 1996 and has since enjoyed an international circulation, screening in film festivals in over 26 countries. Unlike *Remote Sensing*, the film's direct focus is an absolutely localized one: its central figure is in many ways the place itself, La Güinera, a settlement outside of Havana that was adopted by a community of squatters and turned from a 'marginal area' into a vibrant community. Shortly before the film's release, La Güinera's achievement was recognized by the UN Environment Programme for 'the cultural development promoted in the community', and this award underscores a general feeling of development and progress that guides the film. Sharing the spotlight is a group of drag queens whose contributions to the area, we learn, have helped to transform it into the notable community it is. The story, however, is largely told by Fifi, the chief of housing construction and a community member revered by the

drag queens for the encouragement she provided in integrating the drag shows into the workers' cabaret. Identifying herself as a domestic worker recruited to work by age nine, Fifi testifies that '[she] couldn't enjoy much of [her] childhood'. Looking into the camera with a palpable sense of satisfaction, she continues: 'Now I've had the opportunity to work on the development of La Güinera and I feel like a new woman'. Her centrality in both film and community is underscored by several of the drag performers, who attest, 'She opened a cabaret in the workers' cafeteria and brought us into it. She made us face the herds of public we were afraid to face. She reassured us.... Fifi should be honored by us'.

On the surface, then, this is a film about place, and about the local success of a community that has embraced members who, not long before, were targeted for harassment and persecution as sexual dissidents. But *Butterflies* quite cleverly ties this narrative to the broader questions of development, both economic and ideological, charted most clearly through Fifi's own changing perspective on the place of these workers in the community. At first, she admits, she was skeptical. While the camera scans a series of buildings, we first hear her voice saying, 'Our first building was this one to the left. Then we built one with 30 apartments and then one with 45'. As the camera quickly cuts to a close-up of her face, she continues: 'This met the needs of the neighborhood. We set out to build new houses and to build the new "man in our society"'. Her voice then accompanies a long sequence of clips from the community drag performances, as she elaborates:

At first I rebelled. I'm an older woman. I wasn't accustomed to running around with this class of people... The workers brought me one to show me. I said 'no... please... I can't be around you guys. I wouldn't be doing my duty to society. I'm too old for this stuff. I've never been involved in these things.

Through Fifi's guidance, we are thus led into an inspiring community of workers, all of whom attest to strong allegiance to the collective project of post-Revolutionary nation building. Not only does she intervene at several points in the film to lead us through the community and to tell, in greater detail, the success stories of its development, but she also offers us a model through which we witness a second transformation, in this case not across gender lines but political ones. Fifi's growing acceptance of the drag community and, as importantly, her defence of the drag performers as invaluable workers in the building of both 'new houses' and 'the new man' makes her centrality in the film all the more interesting.

The film refuses to linger solely on the local dimensions of this community, however; it takes many a clever route to its explication of how this local movement for social equality and queer recognition is linked to a national politics of queer repression, and a global politics of immigration and exile, development and scarcity. One particularly moving sequence features various

performers detailing the materials they use to substitute the commodities necessary for their performances which they are unable to obtain: one scene features Armando holding up a black and sequin robe, noting that, among the dyed goose feathers and sequins, he integrated 'crinoline, tulle, and plastic, normally used for garbage bags. It is "airy" and functional for a costume'. Another, while carefully applying eyelashes, laments, 'although you won't believe it, I'll lose an eye at any moment. This is acetate. Real eyelash glue disappeared from our world'; a third then adds, 'other drag queens use their own eyelashes or they make them out of horse or wig hair.... Since I can't buy them I make them out of ... carbon paper from the office'. Finally, a fourth performer, attaching fingernails, explains, 'this is *baje* – glue. If it gets on my dress it'll ruin it. It's used to glue shoes and for many other things'. In the swift gloss over these preparations, the film registers in one poignant moment the economic difficulties of the 1990s resulting from the collapse of the socialist trading bloc and the US embargo (Susman, 1998; Cabezas, 2004). The fact of loss and scarcity is not subject for further comment, however, and the camera's long pauses with each performer in her preparations gives us time to register, on this small scale, the kinds of adaptations signalled in these moments of making-do with what is available. At the same time, the sequence strikes a determined finale, thus reaffirming the communal value of this process, and the labouringly gendered bodies it produces.

Moments like these are particularly telling, for the camera resists the urge to go too deeply into the individual stories of these performers. Instead, it stays carefully focused on the *communal* process of their performances and, even more interestingly, on the material process of each transformation. In scenes such as this one, the performers highlight the material production of these transformations, thus pointing to the extensive, expensive labour that goes into each performance. There are innumerable examples. In the only moment of the film that references Cuba's unwieldy northern neighbour, one bold performer mockingly chastises the audience, insisting: 'I'm sick of this local money. Give me a Washington'. Like other scenes, the economic effects of the embargo are here a subject of both sadness and amusement, and in such scenes we witness the performers' own careful work in locating La Güinera within the global economy and the particular history of US–Cuba relations. Each of these moments – in the disappearance of eyelash glue, fabrics, and makeup; the inclination towards US dollars; and the Spanish adaptation of American pop hits – reminds us that, however fraught, these performances take place within a transnational exchange of goods, ideas, and people.

Importantly, however, such transnational mobilities betray no particular diasporic privilege for queerness, and the film is unique in its refusal to valorize the US as the site of queer liberation. In this way, it works to tell a different story than that of other popular depictions of homosexuality in Cuba, in which exile

becomes the only possible condition of the queer subject (Almendros and Leal, 1984; deVries, 1995; Sánchez, 1998; Schnabel, 2001). It also works against the grain of the queer diaspora criticism I explored above: the kind of gender mobility the film documents is not linked to any particular geographical mobility; this is not, to borrow from the language of *Queer Diasporas*, a 'mobility across globe and body'. Rather, this is a vision of sexuality and gender identity inextricably linked to time and place, one which enacts a highly localized vision of community, and yet is no less implicated in the material conditions of globalization.

At the same time, it is a vision of drag that highlights the material and social labour of gender's production, and this comes through most compellingly in the performers' own perspectives on their work. In one telling scene, Maridalia recalls that 'At first [the construction workers] didn't understand us – they didn't see us as *workers*'. Another performer, Mandy, speaks of the accomplishments of the drag performers, saying that 'I'm proud of one thing... thousands come through here who never thought they'd do this kind of *work*'. At the same time, the camera lingers on long, uninterrupted scenes documenting the careful preparations for the shows, in which performers are aided by friends, lovers, and colleagues. This is a tremendous collaborative, collective effort behind this gender mobility, such that we begin to understand the gendered body as the product of social and material effort. Resisting the naturalizing of the gendered body, the film thus exposes the material production of gender as a form of communal work, a socially necessary labour that, while most appreciably performed through drag, is no less important in the production of normatively gendered (straight) bodies. While it does not reject the camp of drag, the film thus insists that gender production is far from simply a playful spectacle. And for this conclusion, we return again to Fifi, our guide, who argues that:

I think this type of work should go on all over the country because of the respect, pride, and responsibility with which they work... If the nation accepts these cultural workers, these workers for the society, as we did here in La Güinera, we'll be successful as a nation.

Insisting upon the necessary work of drag, Fifi thus links this labour to the success of the post-Revolutionary project and the liberatory possibilities of a new nation. As the film's guiding figure, Fifi's transformation becomes a model of our own, as the film guides its viewers toward a position of acknowledgement and respect for the strenuous and necessary labour that these workers have performed.

Butterflies on the Scaffold thus joins *Remote Sensing* in offering inventive readings of the relations between gender, sexuality, and globalization, readings in which, importantly, labour figures centrally. While *Remote Sensing* offers a suggestive look at sex work as a mobile, gendered form of labour, *Butterflies* asks that we consider how gender itself is a kind of labour – one that drag makes

explicit but that is nevertheless part of the production of all gendered bodies. As such, it insists that gender is a part of a material process, linked to the reproduction of nations, the formation of the 'new man', and to the broader patterns of global production and exchange. What these films share is a compelling sense of the material, psychic, and physical costs that comprise the everyday productions of gender, of sexuality, and of desire. Such productions might at first seem out of context in a critical evaluation of queer diaspora, for neither film takes as its focus the queer diasporic subject. However, in each film's careful interrogation of the production of the sexual subject within the particular geographical locations and dislocations of globalization, they offer the opportunity to reconsider this alignment between queerness and mobility, pushing us to consider how each of our contemporary articulations of sexual and gender identity are produced within, and in relation to, globalization. That is to say, the work of queer globalization studies is not simply to seek out liberatory positions for queer subjects in the shifting material, national, and geographical configurations of globalization, though some such liberatory spaces may indeed be found there. It is, as well, and perhaps more pressingly, to understand whether or not the material changes that attend the conditions of globalization, mobility, and diaspora engender new notions of the normative and the queer, new forms of discipline and liberation, and new articulations of desire, identity, and sexuality. To 'queer' diaspora is thus to reopen the question of the relation between the sexual and the global, without knowing in advance whether or not the forms that sexual identity might take will even be fully recognizable to us as queer or straight, normative or not. Such possibilities, I would say, are the most critically viable ones available.

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