9-2016

In Search of Argentinidad: Identity Affirming Bodies in Movement in Latino-America

Melissa Maldonado-Salcedo
The Graduate Center, City University of New York

How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!
Follow this and additional works at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds
Part of the Latina/o Studies Commons, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies Commons, Medicine and Health Sciences Commons, Other Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons, and the Women's Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
Maldonado-Salcedo, Melissa, "In Search of Argentinidad: Identity Affirming Bodies in Movement in Latino-America" (2016). CUNY Academic Works.
https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/1630

This Dissertation is brought to you by CUNY Academic Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Dissertations, Theses, and Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of CUNY Academic Works. For more information, please contact deposit@gc.cuny.edu.
IN SEARCH OF ARGENTINIDAD: IDENTITY AFFIRMING BODIES IN MOVEMENT IN
LATINO-AMERICA

By

Melissa Maldonado-Salcedo

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2016
In Search of *Argentinidad*: Identity Affirming Bodies in Movements in Latino-America

by

Melissa Maldonado-Salcedo

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

________________________
Date

Murphy Halliburton
Chair of Examining Committee

________________________
Date

Gerald Creed
Executive Director

Supervisory Committee:

Ismael Garcia-Colon

John Collins
THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

In Search of Argentinidad: Identity Affirming Bodies in Latino-America

By

Melissa Maldonado-Salcedo

Advisor: Murphy Halliburton

This project is a multi-sited investigation into the production of Argentinidad (the embodied feeling of Argentine national identity) post the economic crisis of 2001 known as el Argentinazo. A special attention is paid to the role of the body as a culturally and socially mediated site of identity formation. Additionally, this project engages with the intersections of cultural and psychoanalytic theories that have influenced Argentinean self-identity in addition to social identities that are negotiated in moments of personal and national crisis. This project examines the roles and relationships of family and migration within Argentinean diasporic communities originating from the Provinces of Argentina and the suburbs of Buenos Aires and examines their individual and collective (re)settlement practices and rituals within global (Latino) cities such as New York City and Miami. Underscoring these stories are the themes of pain, power, and pleasure. This investigation posits that national identity informs how these groups use, move, care, and (re)present their bodies within identity affirming spaces.
“This is our last dance…This is ourselves…”-David Bowie
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: Creé o Reventá (Believe or Burst) 3  
Chapter 1, Part 1: A Guide to Reading this Text: Insights and Backstory 4  
Chapter 1, Part 2: Setting up a Mood 48  
Chapter 2, Part 2 63  
Chapter 2, Part 2: Testimonios 139  
Chapter 3, Part 1: Enter the Futbol Mami 163  
Chapter 3, Part 2: Golden Dreams, Faded Memories 172  
Chapter 3, Part 3: Argentina’s Problem 241  
Chapter 3, Part 4: Giving and Taking it (through the) Back 260  
Chapter 4: Disorienting Moves 272  
Chapter 5, Part 1: The Reproduction of Vulnerability 307  
Chapter 5, Part 2: Choosing Yourself 326  
Chapter 5, Part 3: Racism and Bettering the Race 357  
Chapter 6, Part 1: Healthy Sickness 397  
Night Flights by Pablo Gaston Alvarez 430  
Chapter 7, Virtually Honest 432  
Chapter 8, Part 1: 451  
Chapter 8, Part 2: Interview with Performance Artist Susana Cook 479  
Chapter 9, Part 1: Inspiration and Conclusions on Loop: 3 Songs 485  
Chapter 9, Part 2: Concluding Thoughts on the Anthropologist as Student of Culture 496  
Selected Playlists 497  
Footnotes 499  
Bibliography 512  
Bibliography on Queer Argentinidad 533
List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Figure 1 Pieces of Me Collage</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Figure 2 Argentinidad in New York</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Figure 3 The Words on the Screen (Graffiti)</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Figure 4 Agustín, Promise Me (Handwritten Note)</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Figure 5 Las Madres</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Figure 6 My Mother is my Best Friend’</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Figure 7 Domingo en la Plaza</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Figure 8 Father and Son</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Figure 9 (Imagined) Argentine National Team 2014</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Figure 10 Macri es Hambre</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Figure 11 Asado and Malbec</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Figure 12 Dreaming Big</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Figure 13 Argentina Style</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Figure 14 Don’t Forget the System-Telegram</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Figure 15 Hincha Love</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Figure 16 My Dream</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Figure 17 Strategy</td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Figure 18 El Papa es de San Lorenzo</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Figure 19 Ni Un Trabajo Digno</td>
<td>306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Figure 20 Mate</td>
<td>355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Figure 21 Mothers Hands and Lalo</td>
<td>356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Figure 22 Petition</td>
<td>396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Page</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 23 Empanadas</td>
<td>396</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 24 Que Viva la Familia y Bowie</td>
<td>398</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 25 Torn Flag</td>
<td>484</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Growing up, my father told me bedtime stories every night. They always started and ended with the same words.

Había una Vez.......
JUST LIKE THIS IS JUST
ONE PHOTO, MADE OF MANY.....THIS IS ONE STORY....

Figure 1 Pieces of Me, Collage, a photo by Melissa Maldonado-Salcedo
Figure 2 Argentinidad en New York, a photo by Melissa Maldonado-Salcedo
Introduction: Creé o Reventá (Believe or Burst)\textsuperscript{1}

This dissertation is a multi-sited exploration into the production of Argentinidad, which is best described as the embodied performance of Argentine identity. I travel into this text through imagined and real spaces that exist in memories, experiences, relationships, and beneath the skin. I also consider identity in relation to space as a destination because it is in constant movement. I highlight the ways in which emotions blur the boundaries between subject and anthropologist.

This is just another story about the unpredictability of life and how our deepest emotions compel us to live through them. This is a story about pain, pleasure, and power as told through the memories and embodiments of crisis within Argentina and beyond its borders as well. I cast a spotlight on how families are impacted by immigration within “identity affirming spaces.” Again, some are real, some are imagined, but all matter.

Rather than provide a traditional introduction, I instead offer a guide to reading this text. I explain my methods and choices as they relate to my intentions, sensibilities, and techniques. I also provide context to this project in an effort to set up a mood and paint a backdrop. This work should make you feel “a certain kind of way.”\textsuperscript{2} This is not an anthropological aptitude; this is just a significant part of my many selves that you will meet in this work. I could disguise, or “front” about my life and sound more in tune with this discipline’s authoritative voices, but that would be against my personal religion. I want to share my journey into becoming an anthropologist, but without ever losing my “other” privilege.

I chose not to summarize the chapters in this project because how this text is read is completely contingent on the identity of the reader in relation to me. The value of my
contribution to anthropology is subjective and relative. The “moral” in this story will be many and often conflicting. I rather just provide a framework. How you read this text is also in relation to who I am, what I represent, and this matters. By providing insight into my own identity, I felt ease in talking about the identity of others who I realized were not all that different than me. One important lesson I have learned about Argentina is that only the best and the worst are worthy of praise and condemnation, of honor and shame, and of glory and crisis. This is learned through the bodies we see, the ones we remember, and the ones that have left or disappeared. However patriarchy inflicts control over our bodies and the choices we make about them and through them. It also engenders the violence that is done to them, which is a recurrent theme in this work.

Murphy Halliburton writes about this dilemma, about how do we “do right” by the people who share with us their lives and histories during fieldwork. This can be challenging especially when bodies are central to the narrative. He shares, “While I was getting to know the world of health and illness in Kerala, the prospect of presenting information about this world in a way that aligns with the theoretical interests of social science seemed like doing violence to the complex reality of people’s lives, a sentiment many ethnographers develop during fieldwork” (Halliburton 2009:91). As an ethnographer, I was very cautious to not evoke mistrust or suspicion, because given the history of Argentina and the cultural significance of competition, it was imperative for everyone to feel that we played on the same team.

This ethnography is about how passion can empower and provide pleasure but it can also be painful as seen in religious experiences. I highlight throughout this work how individual and collective identities determine how passion, power, and pain are embodied. Since I take all of my relationships seriously, especially the one I am forming with you as
reader, I am compelled to share not only my thoughts but also my feelings. If you finish this work, independently of what you think about it, you know the many parts of me that have influenced the type of anthropology I practice and my rules of engagement (on and off the field.) The Argentine writer, Julio Cortázar wrote in *Around the Day in Eighty Worlds* (1967), “In quoting others, we cite ourselves.” This could not be truer; in fact, it is a guiding principle and indicator for understanding this story. Who I cite and what, what is written and that which is not, what is meant to be and what is an error or oversight, all of it matters. Even “mistakes” are important to painting a full picture about not only this story, but also, its many authors and readers. The positioning of the text against the image, which is used as text along with the music is part of one story…which is mine and simultaneously, not mine, but in the least, it is ours.
Chapter 1, Part 1:
A GUIDE to READING this TEXT: Insights and Backstory

Emotions as a Guide & Mirror

Renato Rosaldo (1980) argues that emotions can be used as a prism through which bewilderments of difference can be discerned. His experience with the sudden death of his wife and the mother of his children while on the field, allowed him to better understand why and how “grief could kill” after such a tragic loss. He became connected to his subjects, but by turning the anthropological gaze inward and recognizing his subjectivity. When our emotions are used as data, it can retrieve and centralize their role within fieldwork. It also can be transformative and push the boundaries of how we tell stories within anthropology, as read in The Day of Shelly’s Death: The Poetry and Ethnography of Grief (2014). Granted, I know that I run the risk of being read as the stereotypical Latina so often presented in popular culture as “irrational” and “overly sensitive.” I do not want this project to sound like a Telenovela, but at the same time, the Bible, gossip, and Telenovelas, were my most available story references to me before film and television served as ethnographic depictions of the outside world.

In this work, I appreciate that Latina womanhood means different things to different women who claim (or reject) this identity. The convoluted relationship between old and familiar identity referents can cause a lot of angst in regard to authenticity. I present my personal and intellectual struggles as a way of deconstructing gender myths and revealing their impact on my choices and methods. The relationship between memories and testimonies in the field could be contentious. What is “mythic” and what is “set in reality” blurs for everyone (me included). For this reason, I want to acknowledge that I share “authorship and authority” with my subjects in this greater story about our shared encounters with Latinidad and Argentinidad. I, in my fullest capacity, am grateful to the many families that generously shared with me and brought me into
their lives through this process. They showed me how my “protective fieldwork strategies” could present obstructions into their lives if I had let them direct my experiences. I convey our shared herstories and that of our families in order to challenge the many invented differences that divide Latino communities in the United States because of nationalist discourse. I attempt this task by exploring family roles and relationships across time and space and within real and imagined settings.

Mothers and motherhood are emotionally charged (and taxing) identities and experiences. Both shape gender and sexual identities. A mother however is not just a woman who births a child, as seen with adopted mothers, stepmothers, and mother in laws. Some mothers are also imagined or idealized, as seen in Mary mother of God or as in the Madres de Plaza de Mayo in Argentina. Mothers are evoked for political objectives too. However, science does not fully account for the ways mothers can shape identities. Conversely, biological parents in many ways are always present in the lives of children because they live in their DNA. So even when a mother dies, she lives beneath the skin of her family. However, emotions are exceedingly what determine the quality of the relationship between mother and child, in addition to its legitimacy. This is what courts look at when making custodial determinations, as opposed to the Department of Homeland Security, which solely focuses on DNA when family members are petitioned for, presenting yet another hole in our current immigration system.

I begin this extended conversation by presenting the concept and many dimensions of “mami issues.” I do not want to pathologize or essentialize motherhood in this story. For this reason, I place myself at the center of my explorations. I am never fully an ethnographer or a subject. I write and feel on the limits of both identities, which lead me to contemplate aspects of my identity that felt unresolved or unstable when thinking about family. John Collins posits that contemplation is an integral component within fieldwork. He rationalizes, “These affinities, or
mirroring, between Self and Other suggest the importance not only of introspection and communications, but also of interrogating how and why these reflections and engagements become possible”(Collins 2015:xiii). This is why my mind is an ethnographic space that I explore throughout this project. I live in my head, anxiously, and with my heart, intensely. This is why I made peace with being an artist, and this ethnography is one more creation. I question if this is a result of my condition or if it is just a marker of my personality. Your diagnosis is an opinion, but I provide sufficient evidence for you to make an informed decision about what drives this narrative art or anthropology. Or both?

Unlike traditional anthropological studies that take up identity as a static and uncomplicated “truth”, this endeavor begins with a personal exploration into my feelings concerning the many “selves” I engage with through memory, fieldwork, and family relations. Emotions have long been treated as “beneath the faculties of thought and reason,” which intimates that feelings can obscure the perception of reality. I present an alternative to this belief, which I suppose has limited the production and application of anthropology within everyday life.

I consider fieldwork a way of living in this world. My intention is to show how as an anthropologist, I am never also outside of the field. It exists at home, in my mind, in my memories, in my body, and in my dreams. All provide productive and sometimes opposing fields of inquiry and analysis. This is not something that is exclusive to my experience as an anthropologist. However, instead of treating this understanding as a less significant consequence of fieldwork, I centralize it and hopefully break down the walls put up by the gatekeepers of the discipline. When the other becomes an ethnographer, it comes with great responsibility but also a lot of stress, which I reveal as an integral component of this work. For this reason, I cannot ever leave my work at the office or even take a break from it. If ever I put my guard down, I can miss the most significant detail or ignore the most indicative silence. This is why I also focus on
connecting even the most disparate of ideas and experiences as modules of this story and integral to how I am telling it. I am practicing an “everything is everything” approach to fieldwork, thanks to the teachings of Lauryn Hill.\(^4\) Hence, my footnotes are equally valuable in understanding the breadth of my narratives; they give depth and provide clues.

However, Jorge Luis Borges taught this lesson as well, “A writer—and I believe, generally all persons—must think that whatever happens to him or her is a resource. All things have been given to us for a purpose, and an artist must feel this more intensely. All that happens to us, including our humiliations, our misfortunes, our embarrassments, all is given to us as raw material, as clay, so that we may shape our art” (SLEC 2011). Some scholars have warned women in particular to keep emotions out of our fieldwork. We are also trained to not treat them as active, because they can become a reason (justification) for our subordinate or outsider status within the academy. Growing up, I was “disciplined” to hide my emotions and to not share them because they would reveal “weakness.” It has taken a lot of effort for me to feel comfortable in sharing my constant anxiety, doubts, and needs with ease. Yet, I have also learned that they have been advantageous to me in telling the type of story I wanted to tell. Also, in order to make sense of my emotions, I first have to admit my limitations in dealing with them and my ways of coping with them. I believe this approach will give insight into how I understand and experience the field.

I consider how histories, memories, and lived experiences of crisis (political, economic, and personal) continue to shape claims to Argentinidad against an ever-growing influential Latinidad. Emotions as such become a productive. Sarah Ahmed writes and explains my reasoning for this interpretive tactic. She elaborates that, “emotions” shape our individual bodies; that “take the shape of the very contact they have with objects and others” (Ahmed 2015). The emotions evoked by and within this effort are vital aspects of this ethnography. A majority of the
stories that I share in this effort centers on a particular subjectivity engendered by the temporary visa waiver agreement between the United States and Argentina. This program allowed legal entry into the United States without the typical visa application process, which now demands financial evidence to determine whether the applicant is a tourist or a potential immigrant.

**The Importance of a Child’s Perspective in Fieldwork: Pablito**

I named my son after the two most important men in my life, my father and my husband. My family in Colombia has a tradition of recycling names as a way of honoring or maintaining a bond to other family members. The other go to name in my family is Juan, which was my grandfather’s name. It is popular because my family believed that if they named their boys after him, they would look like him. Interestingly enough, all but one of my cousins named Juan actually resembles him with blonde hair and blue eyes. He looks nothing like his mother or father. Juan David is also the only great grandson who received my grandfather’s blessing for the “use” of his name. I will say that it is not a fluke that numerous cousins born after me are named Melissa (or some derivative of it such as Meli or Issa.) I have also been asked to become a “godmother” to most of them. I am only a godmother to all of my sister’s three children. I will work to “help make their dreams come true” like if they were my own. For this reason and countless other ones, I did not want to follow this tradition of recycling names. I eventually did, but on my terms.

I found out I was pregnant almost instantly because I immediately noticed the changes in my breasts and appetite. I wanted to decide on a name as soon as possible. My mother called me often to share her short list of names. Her father’s name was of course included. Juan is also Pablo’s father’s name, which I would have considered had our circumstances been different. The possibilities names I considered for a boy were Astor (after Piazzola) and Imanol (which means God is with us.) I also wanted a biblical name because I found them to be timeless. Pablo had no
preference. He told me that when his brother and him were kids, they both liked the name, Tomas. They made a bet that whoever had a child first had “dibs” on the name. I remember that I blurted, “Let’s call him Pablo Rafael.” And, he made me swear that I would not change my mind. However, I could not imagine any other name that would mean more to me. It is funny because Pablo’s brother called a few weeks after we decided on a name to ask if we were going to use the name Tomas. When Pablo told him our choice, he shared, “Then I am using Tomas.” He was going to be a father too and would not be one-upped by his little brother.

Cultural references to the name Pablo were Picasso, the apostle, and Escobar. All three changed how we view the world I thought. However, I made a conscious decision to name him after his father. My mother asked me, “What if he (Pablo) leaves you. Will you still like the name?” She was stunned by my reply, “yes.” I explained, Pablo would always be my family because I share a child with him. This is something that I am putting forth because I am going to have to live with the choices I have made about sharing my own family in this work. I am doing so also knowing that family structures can change but, no matter what, Pablito will always make Pablo my family. This will never change.

Rafael is my father’s name, which means God has healed. Rafael is also the name of my brother, my father’s son who still lives in Puerto Rico. I think about him everyday because they say he looks like my father. Over the phone, he sounds just like him. However, because of his addiction and resentment towards my father, I decided to no longer speak with him. It was too difficult for me. However, he is very present in my life. He too is in my son’s name. I remember one of the last conversations we had over the phone. I had just been accepted into the doctoral program at the Graduate Center. I explained to him exactly what I was going to be studying in laymen terms. My brother works managing a cock fight ring in Puerto Rico, which I still find incredibly ironic. After my explanation, he asked, “You’re going to study black people?” He
then declared, “They come from dirt if you must know. You do not need to go to school to learn that.” Without even thinking twice I responded, “Well, you’re not exactly white so you must know.” He laughed and said, “You have not changed.” My brother lived with me for a few months when he turned eighteen and I was seven. He came from Puerto Rico to live with us. He slept in the living room where we had the only TV in our two-bed room apartment.

My father returned my brother to the island with his mother and (other) family. The details of why this happened have never fully convinced me. Apparently, my brother stepped out of the bathroom as my father was about to go inside. He had a gush of smoke (weed) hit him when the door opened. I have always felt more connected to him than the many cousins who I was forced to see and live with throughout extended periods of my life. My brother is always present in my thoughts; even though we do not speak or see each other. This perhaps explains my sensibility to meanings we give to family in our lives and the roles we assume (or challenge) within them.

There is not a day that I do not think about my brother and pray for him. Even though my father’s and brother’s story match up in regard to their strained relationship, knowing what I know about my other side of the family, I believe that there is an alternative version that perhaps is more consistent with what I know about the way the rest of my family plays “the game.”

I have questioned the meaning of family since I was a child, way before I “officially” took this subject up in my research. I knew that my family did not in any ways resemble the ones that I saw on television. We were neither the Brady Bunch nor were we the Huxtables. My media literacy/criticism skills have been especially tuned into family issues and Latino identity. When you do not have a lot of interactions or a diversity of worldviews available to you in real life, what you see on television is what you use to teach yourself about social norms. This is especially true if you are an immigrant in the United States from a Latino cultural background. You problematically imagine that the families you see on television are the standard to follow,
the ideal to reach, they are what the American dream looks like.

My mother named me after Melissa Gilbert. Why? My mother’s favorite show when she came to the United States and that she watched religiously on television was “Little House on the Prairie.” In the series, Melissa Gilbert played the protagonist Laura Ingalls. Melissa Sue Anderson played Laura’s sister, Mary Ingalls. I know every plotline of each episode by heart. I wish I could say that my mother named me after the Laura Ingalls who was a feminist, a trailblazer, and writer (per the books.) However, my mother named me after the actress who played her. I did not have red hair but growing up, I resented my freckles because I believed that they were Melissa Gilbert’s fault.

Media scholar Henry Jenkins argues that children are used as a reason and excuse within the construction of all types of narratives. Noting, “When we want to prove that something is so basic to human nature that it cannot be changed, we point to its presence in our children” (Jenkins 1998:15). However, as you will see throughout this text, our experiences as children shape everything about our lives as adults. Childhood memories can in fact offer clues into why we presently see the world through the lens that we do. In order for you to understand me as an anthropologist, I have found it helpful to give insight into how my positionality has been produced by various and often conflicting cultural scripts about what it means to be a woman, Latina, scholar, and mother. It all started when I was a child…

Families are the first institution we challenge and since they provide our first relationships where we question and negotiate our identities against; they are often a source of strength and distress, simultaneously. Trauma when traced to families can cause arrested development when it comes to social skills. This can explain aspects of our identity that remain unresolved. Lisa Jean Moore and Monica J. Casper determine that since the academic industrial complex controls our access as social scientists to children, especially when the body is involved, this renders our
analysis within our research incomplete. They declare that, “As social scientists, we wish to interrogate how (and why) children are constantly discursively produced as innocent...in the absence of actual information about their behaviors and experiences” (Moore and Kosut 2009:32). This explicitly reveals the urgent need to change the research paradigm that excludes children from our work or ignores the importance of their experiences. It is interesting that children are used to mobilize all aspects of society at times against the very women who carry them. Children (or the prospect of them) influence very personal choices concerning migration, reproduction, and work. This could not have been truer in experiences with women when they discussed their embodied choices during my fieldwork.

The Institutional Review Board (IRBs) often silences children within ethnographic research in particular because they are to be “seen and not heard...they do not get to speak for themselves” (Moore and Kosut 2010:53). I have attempted to cut through a lot of red tape by including my son’s voice, which is pronounced throughout this work. How else can I put forth the importance of motherhood if I do not speak about my own experiences or compare them in order to reveal and deepen my connection to this story? I have also included my childhood memories as integral sites of inquiry into myself and outside of myself.

I will say that Pablito is my most prominent point of reference throughout my research and my most rigorous research assistant as well. He was my “fact checker” when it came to soccer which we learned to watch with equal passion. Also, because of his questions about my work, I had to explain my choices. Through the process of articulation, I gained more clarity and confidence in this project despite not knowing the direction it would go or what it would look like in its final form. There is a significant push in our society to not trust the authority of children in their interpretations of the world. We are asked to protect the most unfiltered and
“innocent” perspectives in our society, without recognizing that children are often not safe (even within their homes.) In order to fully understand the social forces that shape patriarchy, what better place to start at than by reflecting on its impact on the most vulnerable? Why do we hold academic endeavors to a higher ethical standard that it is incompatible with our global social norms? Children are social actors with real questions that when we ignore them in our lives and work, it can misguide their choices but also our own.

In this project, I respond to Moore and Kosut’s call to “seek new ways to listen, represent, and share children’s stories” (55). When asked if I worried Pablito would grow up and resent my (over) sharing about our family, I admit that I have and continue to think about this possibility. Yet, I still believe that if I encourage and support my son to be his most authentic self, without judgment or fear, he will not treat the truth of our lives with shame. In this way, I teach him this lesson by example. Obviously, I am careful about how I present the truth. However, the truth remains no different than how I explain and share it with him in person, in real-life today (even the most painful truths.) I want him to make his own choices about what constitutes “good” and “bad” human behaviors because this lesson will be what he turns to when defining for himself what feels pleasurable and painful and more importantly, he will feel confident in his assessments of why.

**Writing and Becoming: Anthropology as Story Teller**

I was a storyteller and ethnographer before I ever was an anthropologist. Or at least, this is how I have understood myself in terms of my identity as an artist. Throughout my life I have experimented with different mediums in order to tell stories. I am trained as a playwright and screenwriter. I also studied photography and sculpture, and have worked and performed as a professional musician throughout the world. I expanded my mediums in order to amplify my voice. I remain a storyteller who now does ethnography. Through this work, I became an
anthropologist which I underscore as I develop this project. The topics and sensibilities that emerge in this dissertation have been unremitting and influential within my academic formation. They also remain highly relevant to my personal development.  

I experiment with ethnographic storytelling throughout my work and for this reason provide so many backstories that weave into one metanarrative about resilience and perseverance. I believe that context and contingency are imperative in order to fully appreciate the depths of the multiple stories I tell. Since they have a life of their own, within these accounts, the backdrop and soundscapes are crucial in order to further the stories I sometimes am not aware I am sharing. These are all stories within stories that sound like metafiction. I disclose the varied experiences and reflections that informed my personal and scholarly questions about varied identities-in-the-making. I was compelled to explore the dimensions of my relationship with Argentinidad while also surveying my identity as a Latina mother, which is grounded on complicated scripts of Latinidad. I undertook this endeavor in order to chart my transformation and negotiations around becoming an anthropologist. However, I also speak from different subjectivities as a means of blurring the boundaries between my professional and personal relationships during my fieldwork. I thought, what could my personal experiences reveal to me about my professional aspirations? 

I arrived to Argentina for the first time for an internship just weeks after I was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis in 2003. The country’s economic decline and social unrest was at one of its highest points since the Argentinazo of 2001 (when the country defaulted on its IMF loans and the country’s President at the time, Fernando de la Rua flew away.) It was through the many interactions and relationships I made that I thought about how personal crisis and trauma can create opportunities to reimagine a new self. It is not coincidental that crisis precedes born again testimonies, psychological breakthroughs, or artistic creations. I have purposefully crafted my voice to reflect my struggle with having gone so far “into” these stories and memories that I position myself (or am positioned) as subject in order to turn the traditional power dynamics within ethnography on its head. I ask throughout my research what actually happens when the ethnographer and subject become one? What are the conditions that make this possible? 

Despite what will read to some as “too much information” or “over sharing,” it is through this “truth telling” endeavor that I seek to also foreground what I will call, an “anthropology for
“Keeping it (mad) Real” and Other Anthropological Objectives

Anthropologists are trained to seek the validation and respect of peers in order to legitimize the value of their professional contributions to the field. Peer review is exclusive and problematic when you see your peers differently in relation to yourself. What about if your peers are not in the academy but in the field? Does the “peer” review process still have the same implications? I question if ethnography remains inaccessible purposefully because of the professional objective of publishing within journals and books that are inaccessible to the communities represented in such texts. Does anthropology assume that the relationship between reader and ethnographer is horizontal? In this exercise I seek to address the implications of ethnographic myopia on identity while also questioning the limits of “access” and its relationship to authenticity and truth within the construction of historical narratives.

I start this discussion by first acknowledging that the interpretation of a text (the practice of reading) depends greatly on various factors that might be counterintuitive to some but irrelevant to others. This then begs the question of who are we supposed to write for in anthropology, our peers or el pueblo? Let me explain my line of questioning first.

In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio (2002), Philippe Bourgois went to live in El Barrio, and shares the following:

For example, when I moved to East Harlem, virtually all of my friends, whether white, black, or Latino/a berated me for being crazy and irresponsible. Those who still visited me would often phone me in advance to make sure I would meet them downstairs as they descend from their taxis. Indeed, most people still consider me crazy and irresponsible for having ‘forced’ my wife and infant son to live for three and a half years in an East Harlem tenement. When we left the neighborhood in mid-1990s, several of my friends congratulated us, and all of them breathed a sight of relief (32).

In fact, in an attempt to describe why whites would “choose” not to live in the “ghetto,” he calls this “racist common sense.” Granted, he is writing about the East Harlem of the 1990s, a few years shy of gentrification. He was there before it held the “dreams” of a “Neoliberal City”
(Dávila 2004). However, how does one continue reading this work without being suspicious of his interpretation of this community if you actually live in el Barrio? Or is the assumption that residents of el Barrio will not have access to read about their community and how it is “captured” within his ethnography. I guess “racist common sense” is trumped by “classist common sense,” that indicates a top-bottom approach of the kind that I do not want to write.

I would like to also highlight that Bourgois also admits to using his own son as a way to gain access and “respect” from the crack dealers he was writing about. It is not unheard of to have one’s own family in the field and for them to have an active role and purpose within fieldwork. However, his child was used (based on his description) almost like a prop. There is an early Louis C.K. standup special where he talks about traveling on the 6 train in New York City to the Bronx. He missed his stop and felt that everyone knew that he did and so he points to himself and exclaims, “I don’t belong here!” This feeling seems to underscore many of Bourgois’s assessments of life in East Barrio as I went through his monograph whose title is also incredibly problematic and yes, borderline insulting. He depicts his informants as stereotypical caricatures of poor Latino men and women living in the “urban jungle” known as El Barrio. I was waiting to hear about how despite such gang violence (“all the bullets, all the babies crying”) this community still breaks into song to sing, “I want to live in America.”7

The fact that Bourgois was “able” to leave El Barrio stands out to me, and the fact that he “chose” or “forced” his family to live there, does too. This all reads especially trailing in relation to the narrative he seeks to construct about “respect,” which he clearly lacks for the community, and subjects. After all, it was his “real friends” that worried for him because of where he lived. This makes me wonder if he ever saw the very people to whom he owes his fieldwork to as anything more than his informants. Or were they just his “fieldwork” friends? You know, the type you can drink and eat with, but can never accept as a friend on social media because of
“privacy concerns.” The reaction by “Primo” (one of his informants) after reading his manuscript read inconsistent with real life interactions with drug dealers. In a pre-gentrified neighborhood during Giuliani’s New York, I find it difficult to believe that he was able to gain “such access.” Drug dealers are inherently private people and hyperaware of outsiders, especially when they have suspect intentions. According to Bourgois, Primo tells the anthropologist, “You make us sound like such sensitive crack dealers” (318). To be a fly on that wall where he “said” this would still not be enough for me to believe he did.

Apparently, the crack dealers were “appreciative” that Bourgois humanized them to the world. This sounded a bit a like the white man’s burden syndrome that has often characterized anthropology. I personally do not want to “make” my subjects sound like anything more than who they really are. I want their voices to articulate their worlds. Additionally, it is highly unlikely that someone who sells crack on such a small scale would boast about it and much less reveal it especially if they think you are an “informant.” A drug dealer can only ever “fully” reveal themself as a drug dealer to their clients. How much access can you gain from observing (surveilling) if you are not buying? I don’t buy it. The relationship between client and drug dealer is always “on the down low,” and never accessible in the way that Bourgois writes about. You’ll have to take my word for it, but isn’t that what he asks of us too, to believe him? I am not going to say I “know” more about this because my uncles sold drugs or because some of my closest friends did too, but it did make me question his legitimacy and authenticity more strongly than most.

Moreover, I find it incredibly unlikely that Bourgois “duped” his informants into thinking that he was their friend because drug dealers are especially suspicious of “all” outsiders. At one point when he discusses his own son’s (Emilio) presence “on the block,” he suggests, “As a parent, I was learning the lesson faced by all the working mothers and fathers on my block”
(263). Really? Cesar himself informs Bourgois that, “people think you’re a fed if anything. But that’s good; it makes them stay away from you” (33). So from the onset we know that Bourgois’ outside status as a white ethnographer shields him in a way that his neighbors could never experience. Also, if the community thinks that you are a fed or “narc,” how “natural” would they act if they believe they are under your surveillance? I will now offer an example of how to negotiate privilege without disrespecting the community and people you write about.

In *Revolt of the Saints* (2015), anthropologist John Collins shares his “acting” experiences on the field. He does this while also recognizing the elements of his performativity that were imperative in order for him to obtain “information” from opposing actors in a rapidly changing community. He points to this in order to procure the reader is able to consider his own positionality as a white man in Brazil’s “blackest space.” He reveals his discomforts and establishes his credibility by acknowledging his doubts and outsider status, despite being embedded in the community. He does not talk about these actors (behind their backs) but in stead speaks with them to best represent their lives. He also shares concern regarding the questions that he can and should ask, and how does he do it without foreclosing on the possibility of acquiring new knowledge. He writes:

> What to do then? Should I be silent and ignore the inequalities, immature searches, and redemptive fantasies that led me to an intellectual position, and career, via the Pelourinho? Should I deny what I understand to have been the rugged and initial steps in the genesis of the book you are to read? Or might I drown out such truths within rhetoric of engaged, professional, investigation and political commitment? Shall I then end this preface by taking many positions, or none at all?” (Collins 2015: xiii).

Collin’s relationship with Pelourinho and its people stands in direct contrast to Bourgois’ approach to El Barrio and his subjects.

While Bourgois undermines a crack dealer’s ability to perceive their enemies, Collins is hyperaware of how his perceived identity will impact his access and credibility as an anthropologist. This is mitigated by the relationship he cultivates with the reader, who he speaks
with and not at. He also presents fieldwork as an emotionally charged endeavor, which is
developed even before we officially conduct our fieldwork. The fact that Bourgois is able to
interview “crack dealers” means that they have been able to avoid incarceration during one of the
most aggressive policing eras in New York City. Would this not suggest that they are not
necessarily “sloppy” with whom they share their lives with or the nature of their business. What
is absent from his exploration is context. The relationship between a drug dealer and customer is
one of the most confidential ones that exists. A drug dealer probably knows more about their
client than their families. This seems like a fairly reasonable fact. These details seem to elude
most of his readers but more importantly, his colleagues. This is not to say that anthropologist do
not know about “drugs” or “use them,” however, how many will feel confident to call Bourgois’s
ethnographic findings into question by using their own experiences and relationships to
challenge his “expertise” or “authority” on drugs?

When you are born into poverty or oppressed by it, you are trained by your circumstances
to become incredibly perceptive and intuitive to danger or threats. You are especially aware of
your vulnerability because of the pervasiveness of crime, violence, and addiction, which are
symptoms of systemic poverty. Within these social worlds where poverty and violence are part
of the everyday, trust and respect only exist in relation to each other. Parkes explains that,
“Poverty and inequality are deeply implicated in violence, and violence associated with poverty
can lead to children and women finding themselves outcast, marginalized, silenced and damaged
by violence” (Parkes 2015:8). Therefore, it seems like did violence to this community who are
already vulnerable to stereotypes about their lives that can be exploited for professional gains.

I spoke to a colleague the other day that envied how much rent I paid for my apartment
on the Lower East Side. I was born and raised in the New York City Housing Authority
apartments (the projects.) They are often referred to as the “last frontier” or “prime real estate,”
because it is waterfront property. He told me that it was a small price to pay given that I lived amongst “so much crime and drugs.” He asked, “Are you not afraid of all of the drug dealers?” My response did not require any spinning, “No, I know them.” I know that he was not sure if I was being truthful or facetious but it did not matter to me. I have lived in some of the most posh and exclusive neighborhoods throughout the world and have also lived in some of the most dangerous ones too, and I have never felt safer than in the Lower East Side. I grew up knowing that people who sold drugs were not necessarily bad people (as crime, academic scholarship, and media would suggest.)

Ethnography does not necessarily fully reflect who we are as people; in fact, it can obscure it by using theory to distort implicit or explicit biases. Individuals subscribe to their own code of ethics that at first may not be apparent to the average anthropologist who “enters the field” without an invitation from his subjects. To learn these entry points, you have to first appreciate them, and then practice these codes if you seek to “earn respect” from your subjects. Even the most dangerous criminals and most violent actions, have a reason and can reveal the intersecting systems of oppression that engenders such behaviors. When you conduct fieldwork within a community that lacks socioeconomic capital or that is so vastly different than the world you grew up in or live in, some dangerous assumptions can be made and therefore undermine your findings or intentions.

Sometimes, subjects (informants) can be treated in the text as if they lack intelligence, principles, or as if they are passive recipients of oppression. Once the Institutional Board of Review’s vets projects, there is a false sense of authority. There is a belief that our professional ethical principles are now superior to that of our subjects. The anthropologist who ignores this impulse fails to understand that fieldwork is sometimes imagined before it is conducted. For this reason there is a relative ease in studying outside of our communities, families, and selves.
because it makes us more accountable to funders, institutions, and egos that determine “good” anthropological practice. However, there is a way to bypass this anthropological “arrogance,” in my view, which comes from revealing your own vulnerability.

For example, John Collins does not discount the perceptiveness of the actors nor does he diminish the agency they have in sharing with him their social worlds. This enables to him to maintain a horizontal relationship with his subjects, reader, and self by “learning” about the culture as a result of becoming part of it. It is through his shared experiences and his own personal stake in his work, that he makes visible the full sweep and complexity of his role as an anthropologist. He did not “get information,” he instead approached each actor with the enthusiasm of a student of their world. He writes, “Different actors produce, and array, information about daily life in the Pelourinho,” with privileging one over the other. Given this insight, he also had the necessity of altering his “social skin” by way of dress and talk, which is a delicate feat (Collins 2015:21).

Collins realizes throughout his explorations the importance of “costume” or performativity within fieldwork. However, this is different from “fronting,” which structures a dynamic in which deception is key. When he visited the “culture managers,” he dressed with leather shoes and Khakis. This made sense if he wanted to not be perceived as an “other” by whom he was interviewing at the time. He then wore short and flip-flops when he conducted work within the community impacted by the decisions of the “culture managers.” He synthesizes this performance as an essential factor to gaining trust (which is a different from trying to not raise suspicion.) This was not possible because of costumes but because of his willingness to change them in order to represent the exchanges he actively participated in as both subject and ethnographer. He notes that, “Changing clothes was important not because it offered some context for interpreting what I saw and experienced but by shape-shifting in this manner I began
to participate in the transductions of evidence going on around me.” He did not do this as a way of “manipulating the context of representation” but instead he was, “inflecting their trajectories on the basis of what looked like, and thus by means of who people took me—right or wrongly—to be.”

Collins embodied the data he was collecting by experiencing through his own body the ways in which people in the Pelourinho are forced to “contour” themselves to resist or endure the dominating oppression of the business of culture (Collins 2015:22). His use of the word “actors” for his subjects has an equalizing effect in his narrative. This approach proved especially instructional to me when writing about my own fieldwork subjectivity. In many ways, I learned just as much about his ethnographic contribution to the cultural study of Brazil than I did about “practicing” anthropology. When you are “personally” invested in the impact of your work, you do not just “move out” or move on from your subjects because like family, they stay with you even when they are not physically present. They and the lessons you learn from them will be present within your professional and personal growth, unless you decide that you have nothing to learn from the jumpstart of fieldwork (which can and has happened.) Just because subjects are “actors,” it does not mean you too do not act or perform some aspect of our identities with intention. The entire world is in fact a stage. Yet, by being forthcoming about the importance of these multiple roles (identities) that we play in and outside of the field, “searching for respect,” is no longer necessary. Respect becomes less of an incentive but rather, a give in that is earned because we have exposed our motivations for telling the stories we tell.

However, if you are on the outside, especially when you are “becoming” an anthropologist, you are inherently cautious on how and who you choose to be on your team because you are hyperaware of the power dynamics that underscore the traditional relationships between subject and ethnographer which are vertical (hierarchal.) However, what happens when
we employ a “bottom-up” or a horizontal view in fieldwork, where we recognize the way our relationships on the field transform both subject and ethnographer? At times, the experiences that come from this approach enables blurring said boundaries. Can this not change the game?

One question that has haunted me is the following: Can one “really” do justice to your subjects if you (only) see them as “informants?” James Clifford presents a similar dilemma when writing about ethnographic authority asking, how is this possible within the cross-cultural encounter which is then “composed by an individual actor” (Clifford 1983:120)? I have come to the conclusion that in the field, as an ethnographer, I can only present one version of the truth, while always mindful that depending on the prism by which it is viewed, it can read very differently… even like a lie. I try to highlight this challenge by referencing the constant revisions to memory that haunt Argentines as a result of crisis. Sometimes the truth can only exist in our bodies or in its absence (as in the case of Argentina.) What you remember haunts you if you do not reconcile it with a narrative and an identity. It necessitates a place within your social (or corporeal) memory. This can happen on a micro scale, but it also occur on a macro scale because of the institutions that police memory, be it family, the State, academia, or even religion. This is why I utilize art as an ethnographic text (especially music.)

Many things may have sounded sexist, homophobic, and racist during fieldwork but I needed to unpack their meaning against the history and culture in which they emerge in order to reorient my focus. Humans in general are not forthcoming if they have something to loose or fear judgment. How many are completely honest when the doctor asks how many drinks a week you have? Or when parents ask question that they do not deserve to know the answer to? Hence, trust is critical to any relationship formed and cultivated throughout fieldwork. I wanted to focus more on having deep relationships with my subjects, so that reduced also the number of ones I could have. I always think about the person who has 2,000+ friends on Facebook. Can they really be
“friends?” Can you ever really “know them” or their stories? Is it about quality or quantity in terms of the patterns we identify?

Sydney Mintz posits that, “The ethnographer must believe that the work they are doing is worth doing and must identify enough with the people at least to feel what they are learning, perhaps at some cost, this will enable them to provide a reliable account of their culture” (Mintz 2000:176). This explains why he recognizes Anastacio Zayas Alvaro, a sugar cane worker with whom he worked with for over fifty years, as an ethnographer. His treatment of him as a colleague that lacked “academic training in anthropology” was compelling to say the least. He presented “commonalities” in his contributions to the study of culture, on an equal playing field as other “professional” ethnographers like Roy Franklin Barton, Audrey Isabel Richards and James Mooney. While Mintz presents this analysis as a “backwards look” at anthropology, I believe he presents a forward thinking view on the endless possibilities that decolonizing the field can have over time. Historically, the discipline of anthropology in itself has struggled to reconcile the unbalanced relationship between subject and ethnographer by attempting to highlight each other’s (potential) power within the exchange of information (Di Leonardo 1987:5). Without “informants,” there is no ethnography. Hence Mintz also decenters the traditional power dynamics he is so weary of by noting that, “We are mere humans, observing other humans” (Mintz 2000:170). Di Leonardo adds to this discussion by pointing to an interesting dynamic on the field in regard to social power. She notes that if the “fieldworker,” who by design is “more prestigious than the interviewee by virtue of “nationality, race, gender, or class” the interaction is “all the more skewed,” but at the same time, she alleges that anthropologists will be quick to argue that the ethnographer is “vulnerable” as well due to the “informant’s power plays and social invasiveness…particularly if s/he is living abroad or is a graduate student” (DiLeonardo 1987:12). However, the recognition of this “skewed” view is
critical and puts the text into better focus.

To me, DiLeonardo’s viewpoint in conversation with Mintz’s review of ethnography, leads me to consider two questions that I have explored throughout this text, can the ethnographer and subject share equal authority? And, if so, how can both construct and benefit from the story? Mintz instructs ethnographers as a way to resolve this tension the following, “We need to do the best fieldwork that we can and to make the contemporary relevance of its findings both understandable and accessible” (Mintz 2000:1978). I found Bourgois’s response to Mintz particularly exemplary of the dynamics Mintz and DiLeonardo warn against and which he posits are detrimental to the discipline’s relevance in a changing world.

Each time Bourgois mentions “our discipline” in response to Mintz’s work, it discloses how distinct their visions for the field of anthropology remain. It is in Bourgois’ closing paragraph when discussing Mintz that he reminds readers (once more) about his “street credibility” amongst his informants. He complains about how his students seem to not “get it.” Students learn more from example than theory but if the theory does not set an example how are they to learn about such required “humility?” His tone, which is present in his ethnographies, assumes his readers consist only of his peers and never his subjects. Bourgois writes, “Having written this comment I am now more eager to run back outside to hang out on street corners sipping mal liquor with drug dealers, addicts, and articulate hustlers” (Mintz 2000:178). Does he establish sufficient “authority” as an anthropologist to teach on how to “talk humbly to real live humans?” I ask this as “an articulate hustler,” who also writes ethnography.

Boom.

(Mic drop.)

Sounding like an Anthropologist

I trust people who are able to laugh at themselves more than those who do not. I am not
the first anthropologist to reference comedians for insight into “real life” cultural issues. I recall an exchange I had with anthropologist Talal Asad about my concerns regarding my son and his use of expletives at Church. I do not recall how this conversation emerged but it was life changing. My son was only two at the time, but still, the congregation would have been less scandalized had Pablito started to speak in tongues instead of cursing. He had called his father the infamous “boludo” (dummy.) In Argentina, this is a term of endearment, an insult, and a formidable substitute for “che” (dude.) It is loaded and neutral simultaneously within the Argentine language.

However, for the rest of Latino-America, this is word directly references the male testicles (balls). Not only is it deemed vulgar, but also in church, this type of profanity is sacrilegious. To the onlookers of this community, genitalia by in large is never to be mentioned or used without God’s green light. Asad told me this reference, it all made sense to me. The next time I was asked why I let Pablito say boludo, I said, blame Talal Asad (when I am around academics), blame George Carlin (when I am around everyone else) and blame my mother (who slapped me across my mouth each time I cursed as a child.) Comedy is not just about truth, it’s about the “fucking truth,” the one no wants to hear but needs to in order to truly be “in the know.”

Asad asked me why I gave words such power and then he explicitly referenced George Carlin’s stand up on “The Seven Words that you cannot say on TV.” We were in the middle of our first year seminar. He could have referenced anyone from the cannon, but he did not. He turned to comedy as his cultural citation about why my son’s “inappropriate” use of expletives was really arbitrary.

**Laughing it Off**

Richard Pryor taught me more about the black experience in America, than perhaps many of the academic discourses on the topic. This is because when we read scholarly interventions,
our social science training compels us to question everything and to read analytical work as inherently incomplete because it is set in particular power dynamics that occur between ethnographer and subject. Through comedy, I learned that even white girls share similar issues when it comes to their bodies as seen in the stand-up routines of Amy Schumer and Chelsea Handler. My belief in the comedian’s version of a story is enforced perhaps by the voices I choose to inform me about American politics, such as Larry Wilmore, John Oliver, and Bill Maher. Wilmore’s show The Nightly Show was recently cancelled by Comedy Central despite it being one of the only late night talk shows to address systemic racism and institutionalized hate head with a diverse cast of writers. The later two comedians do not run as such commercials during their shows on HBO. Therefore sponsors do not dictate their content or messaging. This suggests that the hosts do not have a need to spin the truth because they stand for the most part outside of it and corporate interests.

Comedy is the only way that we can laugh at even our most uncomfortable societal truths (such as racism, sexism, homophobia.) In fact, we are asked to laugh it off as explicitly depicted in Laugh at my Pain (2011) the name of Kevin Hart’s standup show where he shares stories concerning family strife and the mourning of his mother. Perhaps this is why my lectures sound more like a stand-up comedy routine, than a traditional lecture. Interestingly, to this, I measure the effectiveness of my message when I hear students laughing. This is when I believe they finally trust me. Their laughter means that they “get it.” This is also why I feel ease in sharing so much personal trauma and sad memories; I have learned to laugh, especially at myself. This comes with learning to love yourself. This is, as Whitney Houston professed in her 1985 classic, “the greatest love of all.” I guess it was appropriate for our teachers to make us sing this song all throughout elementary school in Manhattan’s P.S 188. It was the anthem of every poor brown and black kid from “the hood” living through the HIV crisis and the Crack epidemic.
My use of stand-up comedy as ethnographic texts comes from my personal belief in the narrative of the comic. The comic’s version of reality is always accompanied by a social critique that stems from observation and experience, but also an unbelievable humility. They are for the most part hyperaware of their surroundings and identity. Most of the time it requires them to stand on the “outside.” Also, the comic can only be taken seriously when they are able to present to you a different perspective on familiar issues that derive from their most painful or embarrassing experiences. In order to formulate this type of critical perspective, comedians employ many of the skills that are essential in order to undertake anthropological research. However, it tends to be more horizontal. They do not pretend to know anything more than what they live, which is presented as a version and not as the truth.

Comedians and anthropologist observe, they listen, they question, and they privilege their outsider status within their analytical gaze. However, unlike the anthropologist, the comedian’s narrative is not bracketed in the same way in order to focus their stories on presenting the most uncomfortable truths about our society. The anthropologist has to manage their language and relationships differently too because their success determines funding, hireability/marketability, and also likeability. A comedian is unapologetic about their words, and expect refutation and hostility by those who are most offended by their truths. Comedians transition from cool to fool and back as they expand your perspective of the world. Their professional ambition is to make the world a better place through their stories, in similar ways as anthropologists. The biggest difference between the comedian and the anthropologist is that the anthropologist can sound like they are taking themselves “too seriously.” It actually is quite funny to think that you can call yourself an “expert” on a culture when your ethnography can read like the transcription of an episode of “survivor” or like the “amazing race.”

Those “realities” (as presented on TV) can read scripted and often builds on preexisting
tropes that fuel stereotypes about “the other.” The anthropologist can also “move on” once they are liberated from their fieldwork “obligations.” While the comedian can never fully ever escape the consequences of their jokes, some are willing to die for their right to tell them. Why do you think that so many comedians go into war zones to perform in front of our troops? It is the comedian who truly recognizes the importance of free speech and honors those who put their bodies on the line in order to protect it. Comedians ask us to “laugh at their pain,” so eventually we can laugh at our own too.¹

While writing this project, I was forced to laugh in order to not cry because I had to tap into many painful memories. To persistently search and share the humor in life, despite its trials and tribulations, this is a very liberating experience. In Argentina, some of the most popular theater shows are stand-up comedy shows by writers such as Hernán Casiari and Enrique Pinti because of their crude honesty about Argentina and its people. Additionally, comedians such as Les Luthiers, Alberto Olmedo, and El Gordo Porcel remain timeless voices within Argentine popular culture, having experienced international success. They made an older generation laugh about the struggles within everyday life throughout the Americas. Sometimes, laughing is the only way to deter from crying (Santos 2016). In Argentina, this becomes a way to “cope” with life. For example, while Argentine comedians Hernan Casiari and Enrique Pinti have a very local and specific audience and humor because of the issues they address, the older Argentine comedians were popular in my mother and father’s youth and had humor that made Latinos laugh. My father tells me he would listen over the radio to El Gordo Porcel in Puerto Rico while my mother in Colombia would watch Olmedo’s films.

Identity: An Infinite Question

I ask myself numerous times in this work, who am I? I feel as if I am learning to be, without ever fully becoming because I am a Latina, mother, wife, daughter, sister, cousin, sister,
artist, storyteller, friend, social activist, humanist, writer, aunt, photographer, feminist, a former-Pentecostal who stills “feels” things when talking about God, a pianist, singer, a worker, an educator, a student, who is Colombian and Nuyorican; I am a “project folk,” and accidentally an anthropologist. If I were asked to prioritize these identities that live within me and are claimed outside of me, I would not know where to begin this endeavor because identity is dynamic, contingent, and often even unexpected. Our identities sometimes can force us to hide our true selves (in a closet) and from our families. Juana Molina writes on this constant dilemma, borrowing from Foucault, and explains that, “The conflict around identities ensues from the clash of oppositional discourses such as feminism and cultural nationalism as they subjectively travel through “spaces of dissention” (Molina 2009:9, Foucault 1999:152). I will focus on “identity affirming spaces,” in order to contemplate on the performances of various identities (even my own.) I am all of these identities everyday. For this reason, I only know how to write from all of these perspectives.

When I stopped developing my pictures in darkrooms, I did not stop photographing moments with my eyes or putting experiences into frames. When I no longer wrote plays, it did mean I stopped seeing drama. The only constant part of my identity is my family and the relationships that I have through (and despite) them. However, even those are constantly in flux and go through phases of extreme highs and lows. My work focuses not only how families survive extraordinary circumstances such as crisis, migration, and reproduction but also how my own family informed my understandings of them.

**Music as Ethnographic Text: Sonic Graffiti**

Emotions are the “feeling of bodily change…” Music evokes feelings that move us to react in our most humanly possible way. Tears, smiles, rage. Emotions are inspirational as well. Music has the ability to bring out to the surface even what we seek to not remember because we
are sonically guided through our identity formation. Music can help us remember our first kiss, our first heartbreak, our first dance, and our most personally significant moments that can be relived in a song. There were many nights where I felt that David Bowie’s lyrics proved that he “really” understood who I was and therefore, there was at least (one other) person on this earth who felt outside of it. I saw myself in his music because it gave me an identity.

This relationship between music and emotion is why I have taken *rock nacional* as a historical and ethnographic text. We have a soundtrack that is familiar to us even before we are born. Hicks write, “The sound that dominates the unborn child’s world is its mother’s heartbeat. Other voices and familiar sounds add harmony to the already progressive composition of the uterine symphony. After the 24th week on, a fetus is listening to noise and music simultaneously” (Hicks 1995:31). I used to put headphones on my stomach and play Bob Marley to my son. I thought, that in this way, maybe he would be less anxious than I was since Marley made me feel that; “every little thing would be alright.”

Emotions do not necessarily emerge only out of the “self,” or even out of self in interaction with other (inter-subjectivity.) Emotions can come from the structures that surreptitiously shape these subjective interactions. Davies argues that in the field, “We must, recognize that our emotions are thus fielded” and they can in fact direct our “analytical attention” in order to reveal the ways in which our interactions with structures make us “feel.” Henceforth, emotions guide us in reading and “understanding” the world. (Davies 2010:16-17). I have included a few playlists in my conclusions that function as historical and ethnographic records.

Rap and Hip-Hop taught me about the world in many ways because it was my only pathway into feeling like an “individual,” against such standardized expectations about “fitting into” my family, church, and community because my parents, “did not understand.” When N.W.A was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of fame they called out Kiss front man Gene
Simmons who told Rolling Stone, “Rap will die…looking forward to the death of Hip-Hop.” MC responded at the induction ceremony, “I want to say to Mr. Gene Simmons that hip-hop is here forever. We’re supposed to be here.” Ice Cube put it all into perspective and context, “The question is: Are we rock and roll? And I say, you goddamn right we are rock-n-roll. Rock-n-roll is not an instrument. It’s not even a style of music. It’s a spirit …” I trusted more the spirit of rock-n-roll than the Holy Spirit because rock-n-roll is about creativity and rejects the status quo.

Rock and hip-hop provided a rich source for my individual identity formation. Henceforth, they served as key cultural texts throughout the development of this project. I am unable to ignore the processes that transformed these marginal cultural movements into the profitable mainstream industries they currently denote. The viewpoints expressed in the lyrics of both rock and hip-hop tend to create a collective consciousness that stretches out an identity to those who exist on the “fringe” of society or whom feel constricted by multiple forces that delimit their imagined and embodied movements.

I argue that both of these genres represent a form of escrache when specifically contextualizing their impact on Argentine identity formation. When conceptualized in the context of violence and crisis, the term “sonic graffiti” provides a space to consider the aural dimensions of resistance and protest that are part of sound. Music as a form of protest is of key import to the telling of this entire story. Mariano Plotkin explains, “The escrache is a form of protest that emerged in the last few years. It originated in the frustration that some people feel with the judicial system’s failure to punish former repressors who were active during the dictatorship”(Plotkin 2003:214). The escrache is best characterized as a “truth telling” performance, against the “official” narratives that seek to diminish the “pueblo’s” capacity to remember.

To “escrachar” literally translates into “the act of scratching.” It is an act of publically
“outing” silent truths. An escrache is the act of etching in counter truths into the public sphere. This is why graffiti remains ageless and culturally significant for understanding space and how people experience it. The practice of people writing their fears, frustrations, and alliances on the walls (or in songs) goes back to our earliest human histories. The literal “writings on the wall,” helps to cement the meanings attributed to space and memory, which are of particular import for anthropologists studying Argentina who cannot rely on traditional “truth telling” resources (the media and government.) Julie Taylor warns that when studying Argentine culture, “the anthropologist cannot rely solely on content analysis of different media.” In fact she decrees, “The observer must also scrutinize carefully the resonances of themes among carious categories of people.” She warns that texts must be examined in situ. She emphasizes, “One must look not only for themes, but also for the ideas and values that the members of the culture associate with them (Taylor 1979:2). This speaks to the polyvocality of music and its ethnographic import.

To consider rock nacional as a sonic graffiti makes a ‘geography of resistance’ visible through the sonic and it also frames my analysis of Bersuit’s songs as a distinctive ethnographic text for studying Argentinidad (Piles 1997). Victor Turner clarifies that this is part of the anthropological endeavor. He explains that the anthropologist, “cut(s) out a piece of society for the inspection of (their) audience (and) set(s) up a frame within which image and symbols of what has been sectioned off can be scrutinized, assessed, and perhaps remodeled” (Turner 1997:63). This is why it is impossible to mute music in this story. It has the power to penetrate our most private spaces and it taps into and distills the most guarded and defining sentiments of life (fear, love, and anger.) Music speaks to Foucault’s theorization on power where he affirms that it “circulates,” and it’s never “localized here or there.” This alludes to why it can be effectively subversive and even evade censorship (Foucault 1980:98).

I suppose that the term “sonic graffiti” encapsulates the ways in which music can speak
with our bodies as well. Music, in many ways like graffiti, also enables counters the noises produced by the mainstream media. Songs provide an alternative version of reality that can be read for ethnographic insight. Songs reflect a mirror that despite its distortion provides a reflection of the self.
The words on the screen read....

Lies
Manipulation
Disinformation
Fear
Distortion

LOMAS DE ZAMORA, ARGENTINA
2016

Figure 3 The Words on the Screen, a photo by Melissa Maldonado-Salcedo
Argentinidad: People, Places, and Things

The performance of *Argentinidad* is guided by the intention to present “better” than one’s reality. Only in this way can you really “become” the role you play. This might explain the popular misreading of Argentines as arrogant and neurotic. Domingo F. Sarmiento’s blueprint for the Argentine nation, *Civilization and Barbarism* (1845), presented *Argentinidad* as a process, practice, and performance. It structured why Argentine identity would be in constant flux by providing a mannequin framework of extremes and juxtapositions in order to understand Argentina. Goodrich explains that, “Sarmiento seems to suggest Argentines are doomed to disjunctions and separation,” arguing that a name alone does not unify the diverse peoples that make up the country (Goodrich 1996:110).

Globalization has shifted the focus of *Argentinidad* into an emotion that transcends borders. The popular soccer chant for the national team explains *Argentinidad* as an emotion, “*Soy Argentino, es un sentimiento, no puedo parar*” (I am an Argentine, it is an unstoppable feeling.) This is why I also explore if I can become Argentine by feeling Argentine through this endeavor. I can’t fight this feeling more.12 Many of Argentina’s biggest exponents of *Argentinidad* were not born in Argentina. Below a short list of Argentine national icons who were not born in the country.

- Carlos Gardel (Tango singer and first Latino male movie star, born in France or Uruguay, (His birthplace has yet to be established. Argentina has been disproven as his birthplace but confirmed as his “beloved” as the tango, “*Mi Buenos Aires Querido*” affirms.)
- Julio Cortázar (Writer, born in Belgium)
- Luca Prodan (lead singer of the rock band Sumo, born in Italy)
- Adrián Suar (actor and producer of Argentine television, born in Queens, New York)

Argentine performativity is intertwined with dreams because they are an expression of
identity. If you can dream it, you can become it. Within *Argentinidad*, identity claims and negotiations seek to embody the closest version of one’s dreamed up self. This “self” can come into fruition with each encounter and movement within identity affirming spaces. You can’t become it, without first dreaming it. In this way, commodities (what you buy or buy into) can provide clues into your “real” identity and into your imagined one as well. What you purchase and consume (material and ideological) becomes an end to a means, within the performance of *Argentinidad* and *Latinidad*. What you wear (fashion) in this way becomes an “object and target of power,” a point I borrow from Foucault in order to discuss the Argentine fashion industry and the anorexia epidemic that surged after the economic crisis (Maldonado-Salcedo 2010). My grandfather warned, “Dress how you want to be treated.” This lesson has problematic implications when it comes to gender and rape culture, but in terms of socially “passing,” fashion can be an important component and reflection of tastes and sensibilities (Maldonado-Salcedo 2010).

Throughout my fieldwork, I recorded the memories of families who discussed their economic choices within a competitive framework. This speaks to how sports (more specifically *futbol*) can become a metaphor for living life for Argentines. Everyday relationships are structured around strategy in order to reach individual goals. They shared experiences in which they often compared themselves to others as a way of self-evaluating their own social status. The family with the “most” desirable things always won but it was a momentary victory because they then became the “standard to beat.” For instance, if one family got a flat screen TV, this prompted another one to get an even bigger one. The onus to have technological innovations at your fingertips creates a challenge but also enables possibilities.

Computers, Smartphones, and the Internet are important tools that can reduce digital divides and improve access to information. Technology improves living standards. Yet, in the
same vein, in order to have the best (latest models and broadband access), expendable income is necessary and increasingly nonexistent. If one has to choose between any of these commodities and eating, it becomes a difficult predicament with negative outcomes where nobody wins. Being forced to choose between progress and survival is a result of the unequal distribution of socioeconomic resources that have overwhelmed Argentine working class families.

I thought about this in terms of how privilege can shift in accordance to distinct social spaces and border crossings. When families in the United States send their families in Argentina commodities that can appear to be a luxury, it is important to consider the ways in which these exchanges can have important psychological and economic significance. Many of the commodities that I took to Argentina, have a great value in the black-market because the technology marketplace is limited and lags in comparison to the United States. For example, stores stock their shelves based on the purchasing power of their customers. It does not make sense to sell 32GB Scandisk cards if the average person cannot afford the technology in which this commodity will be best used.

I spotted so many iPhone 4s and 5s, and did not recognize them at first, which made me hyperaware to how in the United States phones are upgraded along with technological advances which make them obsolete. I had forgotten what these older versions of my phone looked like. I asked a friend what type of phone she had because I saw that it was smaller than mine. I thought, “What a great size.” I also was drawn to the cover (a photo of Maradona.) She might have found my probing questionable, if she had seen my iPhone 6, which I quickly threw in my purse. In my defense, her screen was very cracked. I just noticed the practicality of the phone’s size fitting in my pocket. I thought mine was bulky but despite the convenience of a smaller iPhone, I would not downgrade mine. Cellphones are integral clues into one’s identity and social status.

In *Workers go Shopping in Argentina* (2013) Natalia Milanesio’s argues that Argentina
was socially transformed by the rise of Peron’s policies and the subsequent redistribution of wealth. Consumer culture presented socioeconomic possibilities of mobility or at least for “passing.” She points out that there was a pervasive anxiety amongst Upper and Middle-class consumers about being (perceived) as being on the “same level” as a “garbage collector” (123). When wages dramatically were increased during this era public and private spaces became less exclusive. This enabled passing on many levels. Therefore, a worker could feasibly pass as part of the “perceived” gentry because access now could be purchased into formally off-limit social spaces. The transformations brought about by Peronism, which socially uplifted the working class was one of the greatest features of Argentine national identity since its independence from Spain (Milanesio 2013:48). However, during the Menem years, when the Argentine national currency was dollarized, policing social climbing became much more urgent within society.

Milanesio identifies this Peronist phenomenon as the “democratization of well-being.” Until this day the performativity of socioeconomic status is heavily invested in the body and its ability to consume the right type of products, sensibilities, and ideologies. How it is dressed and how it is shaped also is informative to one’s socioeconomic reality. However, the body can be misleading as well (Maldonado-Salcedo 2010). Schools are another important site of contestation for social identities. I heard so many accounts about how class was policed in my interviews in Argentina. Teachers would interrogate perceived “outsiders” within exclusive private schools. Many working-class parents believed that even if through contagion, their children will ultimately become indistinguishable from the upper classes if they were educated together.

One family I interviewed shared how they sent both of their sons (Valentín and Joaquin) to bilingual schools in Argentina. They were educated in English and Spanish. Never would they have imagined that this would be advantageous when eventually leaving to Miami and seeking
work in the service industries. The English they learned in Argentina gave them a competitive advantage that other Latino immigrants who were newly arrived lacked.

Valentín, a forty-year old waiter in Miami, explained the relationship between clothing and identity when he went to school in Argentina. He shared that his father, Marcelo, worked as an independent tailor in Buenos Aires, Capital Federal. His family however lived in the Province of Lomas de Zamora. His father traveled over four hours per day to make it to and from their home. He had a small office in el Once (which is the garment industry in Buenos Aires.) He made custom suits for an elite clientele. For this reason, growing up, Valentín wore all of the latest trends. However, his classmates knew that although they were exact copies of the ones worn by celebrities and trendsetters, Valentín had not actually purchased them. His father made them. He laughed that he was hyperaware about this perception by his classmates. He said, “I sometimes would ask my father to please sew in the tags with the brand so then I could say that I bought it.” His father retired and Valentín and Joaquin provide their parents financial support.

Valentín sends his father clothes that he buys in Miami with a special attention to big name brands. However, he explained that because his father was a tailor, he examines the confection of clothes with great attention to detail. When he buys more expensive brands, they often are better made. However, he assured me he goes to Marshalls or Kohls in order to buy them at a discounted price.

Joaquin remembered how one time, during the first day of school, the teacher sat the class around in a circle and asked each one where they traveled to on vacation. This happened over twenty years ago. Yet, he vividly remembers that he panicked, “I started to sweat and I was clearing my throat because I felt my mouth drying up.” As he was telling me, he started to clear his throat again. He had not gone away that summer. Instead, he played at the plaza with his friends and Valentín all summer. When it was his turn to report on his summer travels, he hastily
responded, “Brazil.” He thought, that since it was a destination that could be reached by car, no one would think he was lying. The teacher looked at him and said, “You are too pale to have gone to Brazil.” He felt “outed” and ashamed. The first thing he did when he was able to save for a vacation was to drive to Brazil with his wife and daughter when he returned to Argentina to vacation. He also made sure to stay under the sun for as long as he could withstand. He wanted to become even more “oscurito” (darker) than he was in Miami where he preferred to be out of the sun and in air-conditioning.
In Naomi Klein’s 2006 documentary on the economic crisis, “The Take,” one of the families she interviews discussed how due to the closing of the Forja factory and because of the
dramatic implosion of the economy, they (her family) could no longer take their daughters to McDonald’s. Instead, they were forced to eat home cooked meals. The irony is that the “better days” were when they could go and sit in McDonalds and consume food that was nutritionally deficient and overpriced. This made them feel “happy.” In order to highlight how dire their situation had become, the mother stressed that her daughters, “no longer even remember what a happy meal looks like.” This made her sad.

I saw many inflated pools in the backyards throughout the suburbs of Buenos Aires during the 2015 summer. In the United States, inflatable pools are almost exclusively associated with children. It is not uncommon to see a group of grown men drinking beer while seated together in one of these pools, in a Bonairense backyard. If they were unable to go on vacation, this did not mean that they were not going to experience leisure. The first time I saw this scene, it was strange. Yet, the more I saw it; the less intimidated I was by it. They were many a hot nights I sat outside talking to Pablo in the inflated pool we put on our rooftop in Buenos Aires until the sun came out.

The importance of performing your class status during the summer can be seen in the infamous case of the Mar de Plata beach goers this last season. They passed around an endangered dolphin in a crowd so that selfies could be taken. The dolphin then dies from dehydration and its body is discarded on the beach (Holley 2016). I heard so many comments from people calling them, “negros” and “low class,” because they vacationed in Mar de Plata. Only the “real rich” people travel to New York City to go see the snow during Argentina’s summer. This then authenticates a socioeconomic status that is superior to the rest of the swimming and tanned vacationers that stay in Argentina. This is what “real money” looks like, choosing the opposite from what others are forced to do.

Before their bodies’ disappeared from el Sur and reappeared up in Gringo-landia, many
of my subjects had already lost their economic stability. This is why the question of their personal and family’s future was taken up with great and familiar urgency. Ancestral migration narratives read new against the changing historical circumstances. Immigration in Argentina remains a “means to progress,” as explained by the father of the constitution, Juan Alberdi.

Whether migrating to or from Argentina, purposeful examples circulate that highlight how in one generation, Argentines can change their circumstances and family histories. For example, in one generation, the son of Spanish immigrants became president of the country (Fernando de la Rúa.) In one generation, the son of Italian immigrants became God’s right hand man (Pope Francis.) Maxima emigrated from Argentina and became the queen of the Netherlands.

Migration offers a path towards civilization and away from the social and economic constraints that tap into Argentina’s natural “barbaric” tendencies. Conversely, repetition is a familiar and an inevitable feature of Argentina when it comes to crisis and disappearances.

**Why photos as a story telling technique?**

During my last trip during “las fiestas” (the holidays) to Argentina, my father visited my apartment to literally “clean out” my closets. Given the dynamics between my parents, I was happy to offer him a place to visit. Yes my closets were messy. I filled them to the brim with many souvenirs, papers, and books that I had trouble letting go of. But it was also where I stored a lot of my personal papers. He threw out the only photo album I had of when I got married to Pablo. I had made it the day before we went to Homeland Security for our “interview” to discern if we were an authentic and “legit” family. I had pictures, “evidence” to prove to the State agent that we were. However, she had already observed our interactions and determined that we had indeed married “for love.” However, I remember that she did not look at our album. I asked her to please do so because I worked real hard on piecing our story together. My father however had no way of knowing how special it was. Also, we have no other photos because now that
everything is digitized, I store them through social media. However, our love story predates
digital photos. Since I eloped, I had no professional photographer to capture the moment. I just
had a few shots my friend took of us on that day.

I wanted to be upset with my father but he is blind. He has no way of knowing that he
was throwing out a photo album. He did not understand their importance to my (new) family
history. My dad captures memories through songs. He has a song for every important experience
he has lived. I knew it was something that I had to learn to live with, having no photos of that
day. However, I had the memory of that day that I shared with Pablo (and him alone.) I always
fear forgetting because that is one of the aspects that Multiple Sclerosis can attack…memory.

Photos help me remember. In fact, the way I was able to capture a lot of the moments in
this work is through photographs. Sometimes, I would take photos of the front of the buildings,
the people who were near and that I did not know, the background…it all helped me remember
(differently) the words that I had written or the feelings that escaped my notes. It is important to
examine photographs as artifacts of culture and the social processes surrounding photography as
“ethnographic” situations revealing of culture (C.F Worth 1976, and Ruby 1973b). I value the
role of photographs in the production of ethnographies because of the import of their materiality
and substance (Edwards and Hart 2004, Edwards 2001). Also, each person “sees” and “feels”
different as a result of an image. Keller explains that, “If you are interested in kin groups or
families, asking to see photos can be a great icebreaker and a powerful source of information”
(Keller 127). Kroes adds to this by stressing that it is important to examine the ways in which
immigrants within their new context maintain bonds with relatives, friends, and neighbors
within their countries of origin. This is why she argues that photographs are important; because
it can even help people who are very far apart “maintain” eye contact with each other through
photographs (Kroes 2010). It also keeps you connected to a memory in the present. This is why
the first page of this text are a compilation of the memories that shaped this story.

Goodall describes the photographer in ways that remind me of the anthropologist claiming, “We find ourselves in the most everyday of family experiences-finding an old photo album, listening to a story told reluctantly by a relative, anxiety about an encounter with someone close to us, a heart pounding walking in the night, a peaceful, reflective walk in the day or even in the midst of a daydream itself-and at the heart of it is a poignant ethnographic moment, layers of cultural coding inscribed on the very soul of the everyday” (H.L Goodall 2009:8). The experience keeps you present but simultaneously you have to be outside to inscribe it, to record it, to capture it. The relationship between photographer and subject resembles the relationship between anthropologist and subject in many ways that come through in this work.

Chapter 1, Part 2: CONTEXTUAL CLUES: Setting up a Mood

Immigrant Tourists

Currently within Argentina, in order to receive approval for a tourist visa, it is necessary to own property and have a stable job within the formal sector. Other factors are also used to make determinations that would suggest that the applicant has a “reason” to return to Argentina. Even then, final determinations are completely at the discretion of the consul who grants visas. They are trained to “read” the clues and cues about the visa applicant’s “real” identity. During the visa solicitation interview, applicants perform their intentions for travel: migration or tourism. Emotions are key for the performance of this intention. The resonating details provided are used to determine if the applicant is telling the truth. How they sound, how they move, how they dress, how their body reacts, all of these cues provide clues into the applicant’s unspoken
thoughts. However, emotions have to be balanced so that the applicant does not lose their cool. Sweat and tears remain especially suspect in this situation.

The embodied clues used to negotiate identity must match and make sense to the narrative that structures the performance. This was particularly a challenge for many of the Argentines that were to pass as tourists when entering the United States because a plane ticket was not sufficient to prove this identity. Pablo told me that on his flight to Miami, Florida from Buenos Aires, he travelled with a group that were carrying window wipers and other cleaning tools in their carry-ons bags. They even took them out while on the flight, and this is how Pablo saw what they were doing. It was a group of four who were traveling together. The other passengers stared at them, but no one dared to say anything out of fear that they would be implicated or found guilty by association because their intentions read clear. No one takes his or her own cleaning supplies on vacation (except my mother.)

However, maybe these guys did not know how to behave as tourists because they had never experienced tourism, which is where you pick up on the social cues that come with vacationing. Pablo acknowledged with a tinge of guilt in his voice that he did not see them go through customs. However, he knew he had to stay cool because his performance could be compromised if he reacted in a way that could be construed as fearful. Pablo’s older brother, Christian, had instructed him on how to act because he migrated a year before.

The belief that you are entitled to a vacation, especially if you are a worker is a residual from the Peronist era. I will say that this is a fairly radical idea as well, given the relationship between work and exploitation within Latin America’s populace. Recognizing that leisure was not available to everyone, even when they worked, President Juan Perón declared that, “We (the Argentines) want to produce, consume, enjoy or suffer- but equally with no preferential treatment for anyone in particular” (Milanesio 2013:35). Pleasure was presented as an
inalienable right in Argentina. To a certain extent this view opened up a space in which “wages” or “income” were relative to your social status. Time became a hot commodity and so if you were unable to “vacation” (because you did not have the time or resources) this became a social indicator of a less than working class reality.

Unhealthy Consumptions

During the presidency of Carlos Menem in the 1990s, the notion that pleasure comes from consumption was embedded within Argentina’s cultural milieu. Commodities took on a life of their own during this time and became vital props when performing social identities and negotiations against a changing urban backdrop where everyone went shopping. These cultural changes made social identity and consumption integral components within the practice of citizenship. Ismael García Colón underscores how in Puerto Rico, as a result of the land reform programs that sought to modernize the country and its people, the government created a “democracy of consumerism.” García Colón highlights how economic transformations indelibly transformed, “social relations, time, and space” which were part of modernization programs that fed the “democratic imaginary” (García Colón 2006:183-4).

The subsequent economic changes on the island had problematic consequences onto the health (body) of Puerto Ricans back then in ways that are still felt today. The emergence of health disparities engendered by the consumption of processed foods support this claim, as evident in the prevalence of obesity, high blood pressure, and diabetes within the Puerto Rican community at large. It appears that in the case of Puerto Rico and Argentina, there is also a self-perpetuation of this problem. I borrow from García Colón’s framework in order to consider the impact of neoliberal policies in Argentina where similar changes took place around the value of consumerism and its tenuous relationship with democracy. Today Argentina reflects similar social factors from the Menem era that continue to spring up with Mauricio Macri’s vision of
modernity and progress that are already having health consequences and creating barriers to care for Argentines. His promise of “change” is being fulfilled. However, his changes are making people sick (literally.)

La Negrada (Argentina’s Unblackening)

The families that left during the visa waiver program entered the United States because of the advantages afforded to them by this agreement. Bypassing the interview process enabled many who would be excluded from the possibility of leaving, to “pass” as (European-ish) Latin American tourists. They “passed” as tourists by capitalizing on Argentina’s narratives of euro-centricity, despite many being from the Provinces of Argentina whose residents are considered “cabecitas” (blackheads) or “negros” (blacks) in relation to Porteño culture and people (of the City of Buenos Aires.) The migration from the Provinces into the outskirts of Buenos Aires, and then to global cities such as Miami and New York enabled an “unblackening” effect that impacted their identities within and outside of their families.

This project builds on the recent efforts across various disciplines to offer alternatives to the performative understanding of “race” within Argentine narratives of identity and history. The recent contributions to this endeavor argue that race, as a social and analytical category is inapt when studying Argentine culture because it reaffirms Argentina as homogeneously white. Studies previous to the economic crisis contributed to whitewashing Argentina’s history by uncritically accepting its claims to Eurocentricity, especially in relation to its neighbors and within popular representations of the nation (Elena and Alberto 2016:4). Therefore, instead of focusing on the economic utility of remittances made by immigrants within the Argentine diaspora, I consider the immaterial exchanges that informs and reforms “identity” around social categories within Argentina and Latino-America. I do this within private and public social spaces in which identity can be claimed and (re)negotiated around gender, race, sexuality, and religion.
In this vein, I am arguing that *Latinidad* in the United States enables “*la negrada*” to gambit through various social categories within domains in which the experiences of power, pain, and pleasure are grounded on the unequal relations of men and women (patriarchy.) These embodiments then (re)define social relations within families and reimagine community. Benedict Anderson argued that nations must be “imagined” as a community in order to succeed and to offset for the lack of a physically shared sociocultural setting among its citizens (Anderson 1983). I examine specifically social and personal settings in which the national imagination creates communities (collective and individual.)

Isabel Molina-Guzmán comments on the importance of questioning identity in an effort to challenge dominant and historical misrepresentations that have profound impacts on Latina women in the United States. She writes, “By questioning how we are represented, we are provided the opportunity to redefine ourselves, and in redefining ourselves we critique dominant systems of social signification. Competing constructions of ethnic identity provide an opportunity to negotiate the symbolic colonization of Latinidad and open up more fluid understanding of the mediated performance of gendered *Latinidad*” (Molina Guzmán 2010:117. In order to begin this political and personal interrogation, I intend to first explore the myths that create the “cultural baggage” which weighs heavy on various identity formations within intersecting social worlds in New York, Buenos Aires Capital Federal, Lomas de Zamora, Córdoba, and Miami. I also explore my own trans-localities and displacements as remembered through my experiences growing up and resisting dominant narratives about identity within the Latino Pentecostal religion (church), my family, the projects (New York City Housing Authority or NYCHA), and within (as a queer afro-Latina feminist, artist, academic, and mother.)

I contend that these ethnographic and autobiographical stories (testimonies) presented in this dissertation reveal the limits and possibilities afforded by memory and how it shapes claims
that are fundamental to *Argentinidad* and *Latinidad* (even when conflicting.) I weave my narrative with an eye to the shared problems that arise as a result of migration, marriage, and motherhood. I synthesize the ways in which the Argentine diaspora then position themselves within Latino communities. Additionally, by casting a spotlight onto the national and cultural performances where the past is dramatized through soccer, dance, and violence, I consider the ways in which family becomes the central site of conflict and identity reconfigurations. I posit that this is due to the various distances created by the embodiments of “becoming” Latinos in the United States. I show how crisis strains family relationships, but also enables re-imagination and transformations within and despite them. I do not provide a “systemic analysis” in this monograph on Argentine identity. I do not pretend to even provide a linear sequence of the many recurring themes and experiences (migration, crisis, *gambetas*) within this book. Instead I offer a case study on how *Argentinidad* is not a given; it is in fact learned. It is conditional. It is about dispositions. It is a feeling.

**The Argentine Mind**

Underlining this text is a critique on how religion and devotion reveals more about the psychological make-up of humans and their existential condition than it does about faith or God. For this reason Freud’s theories and sensibilities are inextricable within this study on Argentine Culture. While the attribution of social crises to some essential dimension of the Argentine’s collective psyche is part of a long and fruitless tradition, Psychoanalysis remains embedded within Argentine culture. Venezzetti explains why and how Freudian analysis and Argentina “hooked up.” During the 1960s, psychoanalysis pervaded the social sphere because; “It was both a modern kind of psychotherapy, an object of consumption for middle-class sectors, and a multifarious corpus of discourse that provided a sort of general and common knowledge for diverse uses.” Psychoanalysis enabled marking greater shifts within social attitudes within and
about Argentina. This context accounts for why and how Freud, his ideas, and arguably his interests became a “permanent” feature of Argentine society” (Venezzetti 2003:174). However, like all “hook ups,” women are fair worst off as a result of his theories because they metaphorically screwed them over. This then legitimized values and attitudes concerning violence and also perpetuated problematic attitudes regarding immigrants.

Mariano Plotkin references how immigration historically within Argentina is linked to “observed mental disturbances” and a rise in “crime rates.” Criminology, psychoanalysis’s cousin, together sought to consider the ways in which urban overcrowding along with political and labor uncertainty caused “deviancy” because of “degeneration.” This in their view was also just a secondary affect of progress that is inevitable (Rodriguez 2003:28). This attitude still permeates Argentine society because of the influx of immigrants that come from peripheral countries and as far away as Senegal. This view might also in part produce another insight into the ways in which Argentines immigrants see themselves as Latinos when they settle in the United States. One subject returned to Argentina because he could not stand the idea of being called a criminal because he was undocumented.

It appears that the narrative in fact can be conceptualized as part of the post-911 approach to immigration, which criminalized undocumented immigrants and branded them “illegal.” I examine the conditions that engender violence throughout this work. I lean into Rocha’s analysis on “monopolies of power” and how they become a way within institutions (family, the state, church) within Argentina to “establish their own brand of leadership” (Rocha 2012:138). I do not silence my own experiences on the field negotiating my identity as an anthropologist in terms of my family roles and histories. The embodied emotions and experiences within the work are what also enable me to become subject in addition to ethnographer in order to tell this story, which only presents a version of a truth that is built on various versions (memory, popular culture, and
Anthropologist John Collins brings forth how these subsequent embodiments, and sensibilities can behoove the practice of ethnographic writing. He states, “These affinities, or mirroring, between Self and Other suggest the importance not only of introspection and communications, but also of interrogating how and why these reflections and engagements become possible” (Collins 2015:xiii). I made these types of contemplations a priority when writing about the way our minds relate to the world and move our bodies.

In my introduction, I chose to not provide a breakdown of my intentions, contributions, and conclusions for each chapter. Since I incorporate various storytelling styles and popular references that emerge from different “scripts”, I decided that I want this text to depend on the relationship it forms with the reader’s identity as well. Hence, I center a lot of my questions on my “problemas personales” (personal problems), which I take up as “cultural baggage.” It is my intention that “read against your preconceived notions of academic disciplinarily, research, language, and scholarship in order to reimagine the practice of knowledge production” which enables reader (you) and ethnographer (I) to “rewrite this text” together (Molina 2009:3).

Instead, I am opening this exploration with a discussion on potential questions or concerns raised because of my methods and choices.

**Waiting and Power: A(n) (anthropological) Test**

Waiting has become a typical daily practice in Argentina and immigration can also be a prolonged waiting experience by design. Immigrants are waiting to feel integrated and resettled, but never fully are able to experience this when families are divided because of distance (real and imagined.) Javier Auyero discussed in his work *Patients of the State* (2012) how in Argentina the State forced those dependent on public services to wait for prolonged periods of time as a way to assert and abuse their (patriarchal) control over their lives. When I read this text, I could not help but remember the administrative hurdles my mother-in-law had to go through in order
to get my father-in-law’s cancer treatment and medicine at the public hospitals. The administrators were completely desensitized to how painful it was to hear that you had to “wait” for something that could extend your life or improve its quality. I cannot forget that the last time I sat at a table with both of them was on the last day of our trip to Buenos Aires in January 2011. We were waiting for Pablo’s mother to return from going to file paperwork for his medicine at the public hospital. She had left before any of us had gotten up. She returned hours later in tears because she could not believe how “unfair” it was to people who “were dying.” She was devastated and it was the first time that I saw my father-in-law wipe his tears. He probably knew that if the cancer did not kill him, the waiting would.

Today, you get on a line to pay for food at the supermarket, to take out money at the ATM, to do just about anything that is necessary to live a relatively “normal” life. In Argentina, you wait to do things but at the same time, you are waiting for “change.” This was the platform that President Macri campaigned on, “Cambiemos” (let’s change.) The changes that I saw when I returned in May of 2016 were suffocating. I felt that I had lost control of time whenever I had to “do something.” This is why I understood the growing counter-culture to opt out of working within the formal sector. There was no greater way of retaining your dignity and individuality than by managing your time. The only people who were able to do this were those who had money to buy their way out of waiting (or could pay someone to wait for them) and those who were creating networks and systems that were on the “fringe.”

If you want to speed up anything, you are offered the option of paying for this luxury. For example, when I went to Servicios Nacional de Sanidad y Calidad Agroalimentaria (SENASA) to get my dog Max’s paperwork in order to return back to New York, I was offered the option of paying more to expedite the process. In this way, you are able to retain control over your time depending on how much you are able and willing to pay for this privilege. Yet, if you work and
are barely able to make ends meet, you wait. It is the most fiscally responsible thing to do. It then feels like your nerves are constantly tested as a result. Waiting on lines is necessary in order to do just about anything these days. I traveled into Capital Federal from Lomas de Zamora on public transportation a total of twice during my May 2016 visit because I could not handle getting on line to fill my Sube card. It works like a (greedier) New York City Metrocard. My anxiety made waiting feel even more torturous. I then had to wait on line to actually get on the train or the bus. I then had to wait on line to get money out of the ATM. I started to then take remís (car service) from Lomas to Capital. However, when it took fifteen to twenty minutes to even get a car service, I just stopped going into the City. This tested the limits of my adaptability. I noticed everyone was on edge and I felt like I was too.

**Writing subjects into characters (Personajes)**

In Argentina, everyone in his or her own right is a “personaje” (a character.) This term is part of the vernacular speech when referring to someone. This term also intimates that someone can be “an actor,” considering the dramatic and quotidian spectacles that are synonymous with Argentina. I am not the first to actually understand Argentine history and culture through this performative lens either. This is because Argentine identity, as expressed by Argentines, is rarely understated; rather, you are the most Argentine when you are the most pronounced in relation to other people (your audience.)

This is precisely why Lionel Messi’s allegiance to Argentina is constantly challenged by his compatriots as seen in the very public online campaign that supported his decision to no longer play for the National team after the 2016 lost to Chile in the America’s cup. He is relatively “unemotional,” in comparison to his historical rival, Diego Armando Maradona or even his Barcelona and national teammate, Javier Mascherano. He is called “el jefecito” (the boss) because he acts like one with his emotional performances on the field. Maradona though is
the best performer of what has been historically ascribed to _Argentinidad_. He cries unapologetically (on and off of the field) and he is loud. He speaks and feels with the same intensity that is mirrored in his body’s movements. Throughout this project I examine “other” symbols of _Argentinidad_ that are claimed within the contradicting identities that are deemed “Argentine.”

This cultural interpretation of identity leads me back to where I feel my most authentic self in order to fully see and interpret the spectacles in which identity is claimed and gambits are made…theater. Yes, all the “world is a stage,” but not all stages are equal or entirely visible. When you engage with the field as a theater, even the lies and silences matter. Also, your ability to evaluate the quality (or authenticity) of your sources changes as well. You realize that your “real” training for the field is best learned outside of the academy if you do not want to perpetuate the many gaps and problematic sins of our predecessors. I say this because if you just “learn” these skills through an institution (like a doctoral program) you will see your anthropological ethics as separate from how you live your life. If you are a liar (in real life) you will most likely resort to some “inauthentic” versions of (your own) truth because this is what is your norm. It is like if you change your last name in order to “present” differently or “similarly” to suit your pursuits. This could be misleading. It is not lying, but if you speak for and about a social group you are not part of and make no clarifications about your identity, does this not compromise your own anthropological findings?

For example, anthropologists are trained to adhere to “informed consent.” I find this particularly problematic when the anthropologist does not disclose himself or herself fully to the subject or in the ethnography. This gives an unfair advantage to the anthropologist in fieldwork because whatever “gap” that might happen in a cultural investigation is then attributed to the “others” account and not on the anthropologist’s positioning in relation to their subjects. This is
why “keeping it real” requires a level of vulnerability and honesty that higher education teaches us to shed because it can be a perceived as a sign of weakness or a disadvantage. Many anthropologists appear on the field with such authority as if they do not have to “prove” themselves as “truth tellers.” They are there to explain the truth to the people who are living it.

“Keeping it real” and “don’t snitch” are principles that are non-negotiable for entry into communities outside of the anthropologist’s world for the most part. The subject is not going to care about “informed consent” and IRB approvals as much as they care about integrity and honesty. Integrity means being honest with yourself. Then and only then can you recognize your privilege but also your limitations. The very structure of fieldwork can perpetuate many existing gaps within our research. Sometimes, the student goes away to a foreign country for a year and returns an expert. What happens when you do not speak the language and spend the first months simply trying to speak without “sounding” like a foreigner (outsider.) Then when does the student become “proficient” enough to conduct a conversation without the help of a translator? Is anything lost? Or is something else salvaged?

This all boils down to how trust and access are negotiated on the field, especially when bodies are central to our analysis. Murphy Halliburton discusses how researchers have problematized these divides when engaging with non-Western societies, and presents a way to break from this tradition. He writes, “Attempting to discern and map out local phenomenology, orientations to experience, which are not simply about the body abut about the condition in which a person lives as a combination of mind, body, and other locally construed modes of experience, should provide richer insights into the nature of mind-body dualism in the world outside the modern, middle-class West” (Halliburton 2009:17). His theorizations of how people experience enduring “pleasure and pain effects healing” in Kerala, India provided me a blueprint on how to map out this study. He provides an alternative to talking engaging with the body in
research without imposing the anthropologist’s interpretation of the embodied experience as truth or fact. It is important to hence use the “phenomenological orientation” of our subjects like a compass in our fieldwork, especially when working outside of our “comfort” zones and self (18).

If your subjects do not believe your relationship with them matter, you also probably will not be able to get someone from the inside to trust you enough to tell you about the things that are not said or that do not translate linguistically or culturally. Why should they trust an outsider, if they are treated like a specimen under a microscope and are kept out of the anthropologist’s life? The anthropologist can have good intentions in maintaining “professional” distance but then it is hypocritical to request “intimate” access into the subject’s life or world. It is important, in my opinion, that both anthropologist and subject recognize that they share one world during fieldwork, albeit if their experiences of it are differently.
Las Madres y Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo (Mothers and Grandmothers of La Plaza de Mayo) were predominantly housewives. When the state impeded their ability “to mother,” they challenged them. They sought answers from the military on the whereabouts of their missing children, who were disappeared. They congregated and started to march together demanding answers in front of the the Pink house (Argentina’s version of the U.S’s White House) while wearing white handkerchiefs. Seventy percent of the “disappeared,” were labeled “subversives of the state.” The majority were between the ages of 18-35 and embodied Argentina’s future. They were detained. They were tortured. They were disappeared. They exist in memory and song. They are present.

The public visibility of Las Madres (the mothers) and the Abuelas (grandmothers) mobilized other mothers and sympathizers to march with them and join their struggle. They held the photos of their missing children, in order to make them reappear into the public sphere. As “good Argentine mothers,” it was their patriotic duty to care for their children. They needed truth. Even if they were forced to sacrifice their own lives in order to obtain it. They challenged head on the forces which were responsible for their incomplete families. They no longer were able to stay within the private sphere or remain silent. Due to the cultural role assigned to mothers this was a radical shift from tradition where men were the ones who conducted public affairs. Motherhood because of these women became also a political category. Today, they utilize “motherhood” to mobilize for causes of social and economic justice in present-day Argentina (Taylor 1997). They are the mothers of Argentina.

Figure 5 Las Madres, a photo by Melissa Maldonado-Salcedo
“I am raising her by myself. Her father died when she was three. I could have given her a stepfather and brought someone else into the house. But, I did not want her to feel uncomfortable in her own home...in our home. I am really proud of this. It is not easy but I am doing it. I spoil her and get her everything that she wants. You know why? I don’t want her one day to be swept away cause some guy buys her the things that she wants or if he provides for her in ways that I don’t. She then stays with him because he gives her stuff, but then he treats her horrible. He could be violent and she will take it. Then he will have other women but she does not feel confident enough to leave because he destroyed her self-esteem. I want her to look at what someone has or can get her, but that is a good person. Sometimes, girls can be blinded by things. I work so she can be strong and not depend on anyone but herself...or me. She can always depend on me. I want her to fly real high and be everything she wants. She wants to go to the plaza. I come with her. I am tired. But never will I make her feel like she is not my most important and favorite person in the world. I will always hold her hand.”- Auria, 43,

“My mother is my best friend.”- Bella, 10

Plaza la Prada
Lomas de Zamora, Argentina
2016
Chapter 2, Part 1: Gendered Latinidad

Introduction:

“By questioning how we are represented, we are provided the opportunity to redefine ourselves, and in redefining ourselves critique dominant systems of social signification.”-Isabel Molina Guzmán

“No se puede gozar todos los días.” You cannot enjoy yourself everyday. This was my mother’s response to me whenever I asked permission to do things that did not involve relishing solely in the “joy” of my salvation. Even as a child, I was supposed to show and practice “gratitude” for Jesus’s sacrifice in everything I did. I could not forget that, “He died for my sins.” However, I always made clear, that I did not ask this of him. His blood washed away, “toda mi maldad” (Mathew 26:28). This can be one of the most confusing aspects of childhood when growing up within a Latino Pentecostal family. A child sinner is a contradiction, if children are innocent. Right? However, children are not always treated as such with various structures and systems. They can be legally trialed as adults in the United States criminal court. This is one of the reasons that the United States has not signed onto the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a multilateral recommendation made by the United Nation’s General Assembly. A pregnant twelve-year old, is legally emancipated in the United States upon giving birth. These political values of the United States government is as contradicting as the religious principles that guide them, especially when it comes to vulnerable bodies like that of women, children, and immigrants (Derose, Escarce, and Lurie 2007).

However, Christian fundamentalist (evangelical) teachings and Latino *machismo*
compliment each other because both provide justifications for female subordination and patriarchal control of female bodies in particular. DePalma explains that the Pentecostal church in New York and Latino identity are ensnared, “Pentecostal churches have played an important role in New York’s Latino community” because of the way the religion, reflects Latino culture and traditions (DePalma 2003). In this community, preachers and politicians emerge as “charismatic leaders,” that blur the boundaries between church and state in ways familiar to Latino culture. Latinidad was birthed from the union in which God and King were one (Colonialism.) Latino immigrants are especially susceptible to the redemption narratives that are used to gain “trust” and “support” from the very people their policies and teachings hurt the most. Being “born again” in many ways like immigration offers an endless array of (new) possibilities that can “wash away” the past.

Historian Timothy Smith supports this elucidation by explaining that immigrants react “to the alienation and confusion” of displacement in religious terms making the experience of immigration a “theologizing” one (Smith 1978). Scriptural texts also support this conceptualization that reveals this relationship between migration and conversion, after all both experiences require faith in “a higher power.” Immigration is a major theme within biblical stories. Adam and Eve were the world’s first immigrants, because they were cast out of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:22-24). The father of faith, Abraham, “set out for a place…not knowing where he was going” (Hebrews 11). Diaspora, nationalism, and displacement are also major themes in the bible (the Israelites.) This explains in part why Christianity has historically appealed to the oppressed and marginalized because of its liberating and reincarnation promise…amazing grace.

The Pew Forum recently ran a story that examined the shifting religious identities within the United States with regard to politics. Their data revealed that most Americans actually “hear
politics from the pulpit.” This is a direct violation to the tax-exempt status codes issued by the Internal Revenue Services, which prohibits behaviors that endorses a candidate. The Pew Forum also revealed that this is most practiced within evangelical congregations, which explains how Latino evangelicals can be roped into supporting conservative candidates and values as presented in the Republican Party (Pewforum.com 2016). Some support the party even when it can be against their own interests to do so. My mother stopped voting Republican when she learned that they did not support stem cell research because of my MS diagnosis. She saw this as sinful on their end because while she believes in God, she knows it is not incompatible to have faith in science as well. Given the many ambiguities concerning crime and sin as presented in the church, I still often demonstrate impaired judgment when it comes time to assessing risks and duties. When you are taught that saying a “bad Word,” and committing homicide are equal abominations, this can compromise “clear” judgment. Personal responsibility and accountability become irrelevant when, “the devil made you do it.” “It” can be just about anything. The “devil” is a snake.

Medical professionals eventually diagnosed my spiritual “affliction,” General Anxiety Disorder (GAD). The complicated interplay between culture and social anxiety deserves consideration because of the condition’s defining feature, “fear of negative evaluation of others.” When you feel constantly judged, no matter where you go, by God and his squad (which includes your family), anxiety is inevitable. I posit that immigration engenders or exacerbates this condition. For this reason the issues where this condition is best observed are integral themes (plotlines) I explore throughout this ethnography such as: individualism/collectivism, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality.

I hope to suggest, instead of arguing the fact, that latin@ cultural baggage can explain why Latina women in particular can often feel at the verge of “un ataque de nervios” (a nervous
breakdown.\textsuperscript{22} The germ for this condition is passed on through patriarchal systems and structures, which regulate Latino movements. Many institutions and industries are complicit in making Latina anxiety appear as if it is a natural state of embodiment as seen in popular culture and read scientific literature alike. A 2010 study on the cultural aspects of social anxiety and Social Anxiety Disorder found that the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (the DSM) presented a culturally incompetent understanding of this particular type of embodiment and condition. The study called for a different methodology in which, “an individual’s social concerns were examined against” the context of the person’s cultural, racial, and ethnic background in order to assess the degree and expression of social anxiety and social anxiety disorder” (Hofman and Asanaani 2010:1117). This is not the first time that this standard text was proven incomplete and problematic. It too is under constant revision in order to remain relevant. Is this (my) anxiety not more a “symptom” of a greater (social) illness called patriarchy?

This question moved me into personal and professional spaces where embodiments of pain and pleasure gave insight into the dimensions of this “condition.” Repressing pleasure and joy goes against our most human embodied desires and logic. Yet, it is “naturalized” through state discourse, religious teachings, and popular stereotypes about sacrifice and womanhood within Latino-America.\textsuperscript{2} Isabel Molina-Guzmán connotes the responsibility of Latina women to question competing discourses about ethnic identity because it is through this interrogation that an opportunity “to negotiate the symbolic colonization of Latinidad” becomes possible. Only then, a “more fluid understanding” of Latinidad can emerge, evolve, and become inclusive (Molina-Guzmán 2010:117). However, the nature of the “cultural baggage” unloaded onto Latina identity formation needs to be first unpacked. Where does it come from?
Love Hurts

The prevalence of corporeal punishment within Latino Pentecostal child rearing practices indicates another problem that merits close scrutiny. I was exposed to teachings, which endorsed this practice. My most vivid memories of being hit as a child actually took place at church, literally. I wonder if these memories exist because this was where I felt most under attack. I do not remember church ever being a sanctuary of any sort. I am not the first nor am I the last Latina to grow up fearing the *chancleta* (slipper) and *el cuco* (the monster). I feared them with an equal intensity as I used to fear God and mother. Though, sometimes, I feel I have not fully outgrown these fears. Preachers would often urge parents to “hit,” their children in order to prove that they loved them. We were told that only parents, who corrected their children with “the rod,” truly loved them the “right way” (Proverbs 23:14). This logic can also rationalize the use of similar “corrective” methods of discipline for a wife at the hands of her husband. When violence, love, and discipline are inextricable, this is a dangerous predicament that produces vulnerability.

The (misguided) belief that God sanctions violent control of wives leads to what experts call, “Biblical wife battered wife syndrome.” It also stands in direct opposition to the idea of “free will.” Kathryn Jones writes on this problem declaring that because in many evangelical churches domestic violence is not sufficient cause for divorce, women believe that they have to “endure.” This in her view explains why domestic violence is actually “an epidemic” within communities of faith where women are called to be “submissive” to God, husband, and country alike. This explains why spiritual duties and civic obligations for women throughout Latino culture are grounded on motherhood and the reproduction of more bodies and souls. Women who find themselves in this “bondage,” are convinced that they are “obeying God” by enduring pain and suffering at hands of her abuser (Jones 2009).

Evangelical teachings concerning tribulations (crisis) often stress that God afflicts “his
children” out of love. Therefore, it hurts (John 3:16, the hand Nazareth). This is a very convoluted idea that can create “daddy issues,” and as a result violent and controlling men become idealized by young girls. Dr. Barbara Greenberg comments on the future consequences of “daddy issues,” affirming that the way in which fathers treat mothers is critically important to a child’s development. She argues that, “If a father treats the mother poorly, not only will it influence the (daughter)’s choice of partners later in life but also what she’ll tolerate in terms of abusive or unkind behavior.” This also will have a direct impact on her self-esteem. In this way “negativity” and “neglect” become embedded within patriarchal gender dynamics that overwhelm machismo and the Latino Pentecostal church (Thomas 2016).

My father used a cotton stuffed slipper whenever it was his “turn” to discipline my sister and I. His reprimands looked more like slapstick comedy. My mother had a different approach to admonishments; she used “warnings.” She carried in her purse a small leather belt used to pull suitcases. She showed it to my sister and I as a cautionary hint whenever we were in public so that we would fall back or get back in line (relax.) This was a short-lived technique because my sister and I confabulated to throw this weapon out the window. When my mother asked if we had seen it, we replied, “the Lord works in mysterious ways.” We confessed to our scheme years later after we were certain that it no longer mattered (to her.) It took a lot of prayer and therapy to disassociate love from violence in my personal life.

If you ask my mother if she would change anything about the way she raised my sister and I, she would understandably say no. She is very results-oriented. She is also the first feminist I ever met. I want to explain my mother as a way of fully introducing myself into this work. Sarah Hardy shares the importance of mothers on our personal identity. According to her, “Our sense of self, pride, vulnerability, and job security, our life long preconceptions and anxieties, our peace of mind” depend on our mothers (Hardy 2000:4). My mother never really had a
childhood. Her “inner child” understandably at times (still) struggles to “come out.” It was repressed by the constraints of poverty, religion, and later on, by immigration.

My mother’s childhood was shaped by the structural imposition of adult responsibilities on to her life. Before her first kiss, her family already depended on her to contribute income to the household. My mother was also responsible for her personal survival and had to learn to manage her emotions (and vulnerability) strategically. She was denied the opportunity to receive a formal education. Despite this, she taught herself to read and write. This is why she impressed so strongly the importance of a higher education. She measured the effectiveness of her mothering by our academic achievements. It pains me to think that she was not hugged very much as a child. Tears like hugs were limited because they could be used “against you.”

When the Orlando Massacre happened, I was in Buenos Aires. My mother called me because she knew that the news would “hit me” hard. It was the first time she recognized me as queer and she was moved to mourn with me. When I read about the story of Brenda Lee Marquez McCool, the mother of eleven who saved her son’s life during the Orlando Pulse shooting, I was moved to tears. She shielded her son with her own body as the gunman pointed and resumed shooting in her direction. Shot at least twice, she died (T.M Andrews 2016). I thought about how “motherly instincts” are often shaped by the cultural expectations of “sacrifice,” especially when it comes to children.

I remember falling down a flight of stairs when I was four with my mother. She shielded me from banging my head on a metal pipe. She has walked with a limp ever since. She also has never complained about it. The correlations I started to make forced me to retreat and ask what intellectual assumptions have I made about motherhood in relation to my personal experiences?

Revising the meaning of Mami Issues

If you are a Latina woman who lives in the United States, you probably struggle from

*Mami* issues become embodied and performed between mother and daughter in what is said and not said; in what is done, and not done. Many of these cultural constructs and stereotypes severely overwhelm Latina identity and become internalized through institutions…that engendered this predicament. The institutions that craft *mami* issues are immigration, family, education, and the media…I never took into consideration my hips, booty, or breasts when it came to evaluating my future (183-4.)

These types of issues structure our memories and our relationships with our bodies. In order to provide depth to my investigation on Latina identity formation, I evaluate the effect of various embodied identities and institutions such as: memory, Catholicism, childbirth, family, motherhood, crisis, and migration in order to consider the ways in which *Latinidad* and *Argentinidad*, shaped my own emotions concerning gender, sexuality, and race.

Traditional empiricism, upholds the view that emotions can undermine objectivity. Emotions in this way must be removed or subdued because “crouching feelings or affects” can produce bias research (Davies 2010:2). Emotions however are central to fieldwork. They inform how we experience situations and people while interacting within compromising life worlds (Davies 2010:1). These emotions can be personally revealing and productive sites.

*Telenovelas* and Ethnography: Latina Storytelling

How do border-crossings alter gender-specific behaviors and how is this represented within the American public? The tensions between old and new value systems prove harrowing. I believe the prominence of scriptural myths cannot be examined separately from the ways in which they appear within melodramatic depictions as seen in film and television, but more importantly, these myths are circulated within *telenovelas*. They ultimately shape gender and sexual identities within Latino communities in profound ways. O. Hugo Benavides explains
that, “Since their development, telenovelas have had an important impact on people’s daily life, as they dramatically portray such controversial issues as illegitimate children, misplaced identity, the burden of social conventions, amorous rejection, and the ever-productive notion of forbidden desires, sexual and otherwise” (Benavides 2009). This points to why at times this work can read like it unfolds like a telenovela. They are how I learned to see drama that mirrored in many ways my life.

The experience of watching telenovelas is also imbued with cultural implications for the family and is just as significant to them as other cultural rituals such as religion and sports (fútbol.) Barrera and Beilby explain that watching Telenovelas is “a family affair.” She elaborates that, “for many Latino viewers, the preference for telenovelas over other forms of episodic programming developed in their country of origin.” But in the United States, it is sustained by familial practices in which viewing them “is often a taken-for granted routine of everyday life” (Barrera and Beilby 2001:1). It was a very important ritual that I actively participated in throughout my fieldwork and for many years before it too.

Telenovelas were informative since childhood. I remember rushing home after school in order to watch Carrusel that ran from 1989-1990 and aired in the 4p.m. timeslot. I learned later that the Mexican version that I watched was actually based on an Argentine series called, Señorita Maestra. These dramatizations introduced issues of class, racism, classism, and even sexuality into my life. However, it was often done through the scope of religion. I remember that in the 1992 Telenovela Cara Sucia (Dirty Face), the protagonist was raped by the man she eventually marries and has a “happy ending” with. I mention this because it was a very confusing story about violence and love, kind of like Disney’s Beauty and The Beast. My mother rarely watched daytime telenovelas especially if they were produced by Venevision, as Cara Sucia was because she did not connect to damsel in distress depictions of women.
My mother often critiqued the protagonist women in the Venezuelan soap operas produced by Venevision because they were too “passive” (weak.) They were too “co-dependent,” she said and this did not resonate with my mother who was in many ways very different than these women. According to her, “It is always the same story. A poor woman who falls in love with a rich man who eventually finds out that she is not really poor. That means that he could “logically” marry her. They all find out that she is the illegitimate daughter of some other rich man. And they live happily ever after.” This is why when Colombian telenovelas like Café con Aroma de Mujer (1994) and Yo soy Betty, la Fea (1991) started to play in the United States, in their original form, the Salcedo women became devoted to “el cajón del Diablo.” (We were hooked.)

Biblical tropes are often used within popular depictions of latin@s when characterized by the dominant lens. An example of this trend is seen in Richard Glatzer’s 2006 film Quinciañera. In it, a teenage Latina appropriately named Magdalena goes a “bit too far” with her boyfriend while in the park (but not all the way.) They live in California, which suggests that she is not as isolated as her worldview suggests. There is a scene in the film where she is singing a hymn at her Pentecostal church. I was able to see how I looked like to the rest of the world. I no longer was “like Magdalena,” but I could see myself in her. She was singing, “Yo tengo un gozo en mi alma” (I have a joy in my heart) like so many times I did during church services growing up. Her father was an evangelical pastor. Mine was too before he became a el renegade (the renegade.) My dad was the original one in my world and not Lorenzo Lamas.

In the film, Magdalena’s family was preparing for the costly rite of passage into womanhood (the Quinciañera.) Interestingly, the family prioritized their finances around the celebration because of the cultural importance it had within their community. In mainstream American culture, the same ritual takes place a year after. However, the Sweet sixteen as
depicted in shows like MTV’s *My Sweet Sixteen*, is about “showing off.” This one-year difference subtly implicates that Latina girls become women faster than their Anglo counterparts. I celebrated both rituals because; I was able to use the gap between the two festivities to guilt my parents into helping me “fit in” with my classmates.

Magdalena ends up getting pregnant despite retaining her virginity because she had “un-penetrated vaginal sex.” Her conception is believed to be a “miracle” by her father, thus she is elevated to a divine status and eventually gets the hummer limo she wanted for her party. However, this is only possible after a doctor confirmed that her hymen was still in tact. In the film, Magdalena’s role moves closer to a rendering of the mother of God (Mary) and she becomes exceedingly less like her foil, whose name she shares. The New York Times reviewed the film and said that it did not, “offer any magical solutions,” despite the highly improbable premise which drove the story (Holden 2006). This is the other type of (traditional) portrayal of Latina women per Hollywood, which remains America’s most popular ethnographic industry. Even the most hypersexualized depictions of Latinas, has undertones of Catholicism. The representation of Latinos as more religious and superstitious than any other immigrant community, juxtaposes the other popular depiction of criminality.

Recent attempts to merge these two extremes have also proven successful such as in the film, *María Full of Grace* (2004). The story centers on a 17-year-old María, a Colombian woman who chooses to traffic pellets of cocaine into Queens, New York. She ingests them despite being pregnant. She seeks to escape poverty and her dysfunctional family, which consists of her grandmother, mother, and sister. Her mother pressures her to financially support her sister’s illegitimate child, as if it was “her responsibility” to do so. According to Susan Boyd, the film “provided an alternative to the mythical drug smuggler and more closely represents the type of women who end up working as drug couriers, or drug mules, as they are commonly called.” U.S
Customs agents were consulted on the film and claimed that María passed through customs (after they find out that she was pregnant) because, “racial profiling does not occur at customs because they are afraid of being sued” (Boyd 2008:38). My mother and aunt during the height of Pablo Escobar’s drug trade, endured cavity searches every time they returned from visiting their family. I doubt that they were “randomly selected,” as I am, each time that I travel outside of the country.

The film also helped blur the lines of fiction and fact by depicting real life characters that played themselves in the film, such as Orlando Tobo or as he called, “Don Tobo.” He still works in Jackson Heights, helping repatriate the bodies of women (“swallowers”) who die because of the explosion of pellets. He continues to collect the bodies of unclaimed Colombian women, helps contact their family, and when he can’t do so because they have entered using false identity papers, he buries them himself. He humanizes their choices, affirming emphatically that these women are in fact, “human beings.” He shares, that, “people who die bringing drugs in their stomach…have been abused by their economic situation.” They have committed a “grave mistake” that cost them, “their life.” Which he believes, is “sufficient punishment” for such a crime (Sessi 2004).

The cinematic depiction of this story was more like an ethnographic representation. Tobo shares that many of the circumstances of these women and their journey into the United States are based on real cases he has worked on. He claims they are, “almost identical.” Tobo shared that he gets his call to service from his mother, who died in the 1990 Avianca plane crash returning from a trip to Colombia where she took clothes to poor children. She is described as a saint, which justifies his (unpaid) service and devotion to this particular cause. (He gets his calling from his mother.)

The relationship between drugs and Colombian women is very strong, and sadly
mistaken and influential. The way, in which the relationship between women and drugs are depicted in the United States, has shaped the popular (global) imagination. I can’t escape this stereotype not even in my personal life. When I visited Argentina twice in 2015 and then in 2016, it was insinuated by Pablo’s uncle that this was probably due to the fact that I “trafficked.” I was warned that it was suspicious that we had so much leisure time and expendable income, especially since we did not “really work.” To be a graduate student is perceived by a lot of our families as being “unemployed.”

Another version of the tawdry plot line appears in the critically acclaimed television show *Jane the Virgin*. The Atlantic hailed the series for “proving that diversity is more than skin deep.” Diana Martinez writes that, “Explaining its use of its telenovela format, she reminds that, “the Telenovela is an important cultural touchstone for many Latinos,” despite the “outlandish world of hyperbolic gestures and emotions” (Martinez 2015). When I first watched the show, I had difficulty appreciating its “over the top,” depictions of Latino life. I texted my best friend Alexander (a white gay Texan), “Do we really look like that?” He responded, “#truth.” I was not offended. I often felt like I lived in a melodrama but then I started to wonder if this is how it appeared to other people (non-Latinos) as well?

I thought about my own “stories” and the production of this entire ethnography in the context. It will read to some like a telenovela because of the inevitable melodrama that exists within even the most banal affairs or interactions. I realize this is where I build a significant part of my story which focuses “on the drama” of living. Is it a result of my writing style or my (natural) penchant for drama and theater? Is this “part” of my culture? Are “we” naturally dramatic or is it just me who feels dramatic or only sees drama? If I tell you that I walked across a desert in order to get to a bus stop after a strike left me stranded in Peru, does that not sound dramatic? Or that it was love at first sight when I saw Pablo? Do you hear the violins? If I tell
you that my cousin was involved in a plan to have me kidnapped in Colombia when I was thirteen? Can you hear the suspenseful music? Or that another cousin poisoned me by slipping something in my drink? Do I know any other way of telling stories without having them sound outlandish? Or are they just that, inherently theatrical?

I consider how telenovelas shape ideas about Latina bodies and emotions, which are often represented as inextricable domains of rationalizing irrationality. According to anthropologist Julie Taylor, myths about women, are strategically revised in order to include elements of “reality” which then serves to maintain a patriarchal grip on society and the relationships that form within it (Taylor 1979:9). The political and personal disjuncture caused by these embedded beliefs creates real barriers for the general health of Latina women and their (transnational) families.

I employ throughout my analysis social learning theory, which suggests children learn behaviors and meanings through social interactions and they then internalize the expectations of those who surround them in their everyday. I am chiefly beholden for the opportunity to present my own thoughts and claims to Latina identity through my use of autobiographical memory in this text. The women and stories that animate this chapter have forever changed my own identity as an anthropologist, Latina, and mother.

(I AM) ….All about my Foremothers

What I know about being a woman, I learned first and foremost from my mother. I inherited her limitations and strengths and in many ways, made them my own. My mother learned about being a woman through my grandmother and the bible. She had no alternative models of womanhood available to her because of how small her world was growing up. My grandmother must have learned from her mother, although I have no record or recollection of who she was. I do not know her name, how many children she had, or if she ever fell in love.
Back then; procreation was more a strategic and practical reality, and not an emotional pursuit. I used to believe these details held very little significance to me. However, it is an ostensibly important aspect of my life that I must consider given my curiosities. I employ autobiographical memory throughout this chapter because of the dimensions it provided me for thinking through these matters. Autobiographical memory “depends not only on an awareness of self in the past, but also on an awareness of others with whom one has shared the past, as well as an awareness that others may remember the past differently (Fivush and Nelson 2004:575). Memories are malleable and contour to explain or excuse willful and enforced “choices” regarding identity.

Fivush and Nelson argue that parents vary when it comes to reminiscing styles. They claim that, “Some parents talk a great deal about past events, asking many questions and providing a great deal of embellished details, whereas other parents are less elaborative, discussing the past in less detail and asking fewer and more redundant questions” (Fivush and Nelson 2004:575). I suspect that the ways in which parents who have migrated remember is often subject to how painful and violent their memories and experiences were before migration. Migration enables a revision to these memories that become abridged because of the way that time and distance shapes recollections of the past, which then determines if and how a child develops the necessary skills to employ autobiographical memory as well (Nelson and Fivush 2000).

My grandmother? I do not recall ever having a full-fledged conversation with her. I have only two “good” memories with her. The first is of her giving me my first taste of coffee. I know, this may sound stereotypically Colombian. I recently started to wonder if I created this memory. How am I sure that what she gave me was really coffee, it could have been water, soda, or even poison for all I know. I remember that I was barely able to look over her knees as she spoon-fed me from her own cup. I remember I was standing on my own, so I could not have been younger
than three years old. I spent the first two years of my life with casts on my legs that hindered my mobility. They were put on me in order to treat my hip dysplasia. My mother took me to Colombia for the first time after they were taken off and I was able to walk without any impairment. I will skip the miraculous story behind my ability to walk. The second memory with my grandmother is of me cutting and painting her toenails on my aunt’s porch in Barranquilla, Colombia. I was nineteen. I do not remember why I did it but I cannot forget us sitting in silence as I applied red nail polish on her really small feet. Mine nearly doubled hers in size. Yet, I could not fathom walking in her shoes but I certainly was able to appreciate that I did not have to as many of my cousins who lived their life within walking distance from her home did.

**Our Bodies as Historical Sites and Mediums**

Growing up, our dinner table was always filled with numerous dishes for the holidays. Yet, my sister and I were never really allowed to eat in peace. Tía (my mother’s sister) always led a prayer before we filled our plates that included gratitude for our food while also proclaiming the importance of restraining our appetites. Her current approach to food is to “always stay a little bit hungry.” She has a tendency to equate carnal suffering with spiritual transcendence. While my mother’s approach was very corrective and fully supports Foucault’s notion that power is repressive and productive (Foucault 1995). When my mother felt my sister and I were gaining (too much) weight as kids, she would buy us new clothes that were two sizes too small. She then said, “Work to fit into them.” Her behavior modification techniques rewarded and punished us simultaneously. It is no surprise that my sister and I both have antagonistic relationships with food. However, I understand where my mother’s “fear” of fat comes from…her family.

On the surface, my mother and aunt resemble my grandmother greatly. The high cheekbones, the prominent foreheads, and the dark hair that cannot hold curls or pins…all these
bodily traits come from my grandmother. They resent that they did not look like their father, who was “white.” I became interested in learning about the aspects of identity that cannot be explained by biological inheritance. These questions have been explored within anthropological studies before, especially through the lens of migration. Studies suggest that for women in particular, our bodies become repositories of history in ways that can (re)produce (gendered) vulnerability and violence. María Cristina Alcalde for example studied the lives of migrant women in Lima in order to consider how the construction of race, class, and place become historical structures of oppression, that then she argues, made these women vulnerable to Intimate Partner Violence (Alcalde 2006). While the work of Kimberly Theidon addresses how the body remembers and creates new meanings as a result of maternal embodiment and trauma.

In her examination of the phenomenon of “La Teta Asustada,” Theidon focused on memories of gender violence in Peru. She explains that, “Memories also sediment in our bodies, converting them into historical processes and sites.” Women who shared their recollections of violence with Theidon discussed how they feared breastfeeding their children because they did not want to transmit them their “milk of sorry and worry” (Theidon 2009:9). When I read this I wondered if my intense fear of electricity came from the memory of my uncle’s tragic death. I was about to turn one when he was electrocuted. My first birthday party was cancelled because my mother had to go and bury him. He was on the roof of his house fixing the antenna so that his pregnant wife could watch television. It was raining. My mother still has the newspaper clipping of his dead body in our family photo album. When I was ten, I was electrocuted from plugging my cassette player into a faulty socket in Puerto Rico. My father had bought me the new Menudo tape. I have an intense fear of electricity that does not permit me to walk over metal grates or on top of sewer tops. It is real challenge for me to walk in a straight line in more ways than one.
These particular ethnographic contributions on gendered violence indicate how distress and trauma can pass down from generation to generation. Theidon elaborates that, “There is a memory specialization within these communities, and it is women who carry—who incorporate—the pain and mourning of their communities (8). This elucidation affirms that women embody memories of violence that history makes them subject to in ways that raise (under theorized) public health concerns. Finkler supports this assessment with a study on Mexican women’s health and violence. In it she argues that, “Women’s health cannot be isolated from family structure, from the men and children in their purview, from the cultural context, from gender ideologies, and from cultural comprehensions of sickness” (Finkler 1994:9). The limitations in many of these ethnographic studies however rests on the inability to ponder how family and religion can engender (or exacerbate) historical traumas and suffering through the very narratives that underscore their identities. Historical and intergenerational trauma is not limited to just trauma that happened a long time ago, but more so, it is a product of historical practices that survive in memory (Whitbeck 2004). Therefore, we must remember (pain, suffering, trauma) in order to break the cycle of all the violence in our histories we wish to forget.

This I know…cause the Bible (and my mother) Tells me So

When I attempt to discover a shared identity referent between the three generations of Salcedo women I first present in this chapter, I (begrudgingly) return to the Bible. The bible is a text I learned to read “into,” in order to effectively challenge, question, and consider the ways in which its lessons about gender inform my (deeply personal) choices as an anthropologist, mother, and woman. For a very long time, the Bible was presented to me not only as a religious text, but also a historical one. Nancy Bercaw argues that the complex domain of gender reveals the ways in which power reconfigures historical knowledge about social relations. According to
her analysis, any present day investigation on gender relations first necessitates a historical purview on the cultural dynamics in which they emerged. Hence, as a starting point, I consider the social and political constructions of gender throughout the Americas in order to contemplate why and how they continue to create conflict in the lives of Latina women in the United States. I seek to “unpack” this “cultural baggage.”

My ethnographic exploration on these topics moves through various domains, historical moments, bodies, and social worlds in order to shed light on how “cultural baggage” weighs heavy on identity formations, affirmations, and claims. Van Meijl suggests that identity formation is constantly in flux, which also explains why it is a challenging object of analysis. He explains, “Since in the view the construction of identity, or rather identities, is a never ending process, always incomplete, unfinished, and opened ended…Rather than being characterized by a singular and stable identity, in the contemporary global world the subject is constantly ‘suturing’ itself to different articulations between discourse and practice, which in turn, leads to multiple identifications (Van Meijl 2008:175).

For this reason, identity for Latina women can be traced back to Christian beliefs about gender that seek to “naturalize” patriarchal power relations and dynamics (Bercaw 2000). By examining the modes in which the historical and social ideals of Latina womanhood are constricted by problematic understandings of patriarchy and Catholicism, I begin the process of unloading what Darrett and Anitman Ritman specifically classify as “cultural baggage.” This clarification enables me to give depth to the special place motherhood holds not only within Argentine culture, but also throughout the various dimensions of Latino culture.

**Heavy Thoughts on Culture**

Cultural baggage remains a heavy cross to bear for many Latina women because of the ways in which our mother’s teachings “permeate our thinking, speech, and behavior without (us)
being aware of the process.” Their judgments deeply penetrate our “unconscious” and unaccounted for ideas about our bodies. I trace a significant amount of this baggage to Colonial beliefs about gender, which still manifests within hegemonic power structures throughout (Latino) private and public life (Thornton, Dill, and Zambrana 2013:183). The patterns produced by these teachings and ideologies compelled me to question the messages Latina women receive about their reproductive worth and national contributions. I contend that this information shapes their roles within family and society and determines attitudes about motherhood and citizenship. Isabel Molina-Guzmán raises a poignant question that is relevant to this debate. She asks, “…what happens when popular discourses about the nation and national identity are challenged by docile bodies” that then “redefine the very borders that contain and/or exclude them” (Molina-Guzmán 2010:14)?

The real and imagined expectations concerning Latina motherhood questions how popular depictions and distortions about them problematically shape immigration, health, and labor policies in the United States. I probe how these viewpoints and (mis)representations successively inform Latina identity claims and negotiations within public life, especially on private matters (like sex.) This is why this chapter is recursive; like memory it is not undeviating. I navigate through various personal memories, social memories, and histories in order to contemplate how Latina women reclaim their identity despite and because of them. I use testimonios (testimonies) at the end of this chapter in order to further this venture.

Catholics Myths and Latina Identity or Was Eve a (kinky) Feminist?

"Are we really self made or did our parents, teachers, friends, and family have a hand in it?" 

My earliest memory of my gender identity derives from the (Christian) symbolic referent of Eve (Adam’s life partner.) Even though I grew up in New York City, my life within Latino-
America followed gender norms that truly dated back to the Colonial era. Within the Latino Pentecostal purview, these dated values were still appropriate and relevant. As such, they were policed with great (social) consequences within my immediate community. Growing up, I was not allowed to wear pants, jewelry, and make-up. I could not go to the movies or music concerts. I was not permitted to shave my legs, nor could I cut my hair. My mother also did not permit me to wear it in its “natural form,” which is curly. She remarked that it made me look “unruly” which is consistent with how curls are called in Spanish, *rulos.* *Aqua Net* is an aerosol hairspray popular for keeping hair “in place.” Meanwhile, she unsuccessfully would perm her own hair so it could look like mine. Even though my mother graduated beauty school in the top of her class, she could not against nature. No amount of *Aqua Net* made her naturally “straight” hair hold a curl. This confused me until I saw *Mirrors of the Heart: Race and Identity* (1993) in my first anthropology class as an undergraduate and understood where her complicated beauty ideals came from.

On Saturday nights, my mother washed and blew out my hair in preparation for the following morning’s Sunday service (a blowout.) She tugged, stretched, pulled, and even burned it with the intense heat that came from the proximity of my hair to the dryer. All the while she would remind me that, “beauty hurts.” (*El que quiere azul celeste, que le cueste.*) The saying translates there’s a price to pay if you want the heavens. I think about the phrase differently now because of the color’s relationship to Argentine national identity. The closer, the hotter, but in the log run, it was to turn out all the better. This was how you ironed it and took out the kinks. Often, the room filled up with smoke from the grueling process. No matter how much my mother tried, I was born with natural curls, and therefore, it (I) could never be sufficiently straight to pass. “Straight hair” or “good hair”, as it is often referred to, is highly fetishized within communities of color (Rock 2009). Not withstanding, fetish discourse within anthropology has
Eurocentric, imperialist, and racist roots as seen in the application of the term by European Colonizers. It was used to describe African religious rituals revealing, “a misunderstanding, undervaluing, or denigration by one culture of the rituals and practices of another” (Gamman and Miniken 1994:16).

The earliest discourse on fetishism was concerned with “witchcraft and the control of female sexuality” (Pietz 1985:6). This raises an interesting connection as to why “curly hair” is associated with race (curly hair is often called black hair) and the hair on the genitalia, which is often used to determine sex (pubic hair.) Yet, another synonym for this type of hair is, is “kinky,” which is loaded with sexualized connotations. I then think about the entire Saturday night ritual with Nehmahr’s ethnographic theorization of the sadomasochistic body, as “subject, object, and method” that purposefully enables also a “reconstruction of meaning” (Nehmahr 2011:15). This begs the question can this passive body be a site of transformation and growth, as the bible teaches? Can religious practice be sadomasochistic and/or can beauty rituals be masochistic? My mother would then wrap my hair in a doobie. Brittney Cooper referred to the doobie as a “ghetto crown of sorts” when Rihanna wore this do to the American Music Awards in 2013 (Cooper 2013). I however wore this to bed, which made sleeping with tiny metal bobby pins holding my hair up feel like I had pins and needles, but on my head. It felt like hell.

The “kink” in my hair revealed a scandalous truth about my mother’s choice of husband, a truth she tried to diminish within the context of her family. I had “black” genes. Goffman’s notion of “abominations of the body” synthesizes what these character traits can mean with regard to identity. He explains, stigma of character traits are “blemishes of individual character perceived as weak will, domineering, or unnatural passions, treacherous and rigid beliefs, and dishonesty, these being inferred from a known record of, for example, mental disorder, imprisonment, addiction, alcoholism, homosexuality, unemployment, suicide attempts, and
radical behavior” (Goffman 1967:4). The kink in my hair had kinky implications for my family in terms of my mother’s sexual choices. Interestingly, kinky is also another way of actually calling curly or coarse hair. “Kinky” is a stigmatized identity because of the implications of “contamination,” or deviancy, as seen in the rhetoric around stigmatized identities within American culture. My father is black. He only visited Colombia once to meet my mother’s family. Ever since, he has adamantly reiterated time after time that, that he has no intention of ever going back. With his skin color, I could only imagine. Although I never asked details about the trip, I eventually made an educated deduction about how he must have felt.

My Colombian side of the family are incredibly enamored and invested in the prospect of mejorando la raza (bettering our family’s race.) Sadly, this is not an uncommon concern for Latino families that migrate to the United States because of strong sentiments of “anti-blackness.” It is a familial duty to “make our future generations whiter.” When her “black” boyfriend impregnated my cousin in Colombia, it was a “huge” scandal. I kindly reminded my family that it is far more scandalous to marry one’s cousin, as in the case of her parents. My uncle Nelson’s wife is my second cousin. All but one of their six children does not have blonde hair and green eyes. However, it was the prospect of a half-black granddaughter that presented a “real problem” for her family. I am not going to entertain the idea of thinking about “cultural relativism” when it comes to incest because that would be implying that it is not immoral, over there and for them but it remains a taboo here, for us. That further perpetuates the idea of the global South being inhabited by primitive people who are frozen in time and who because of this are exempt from shame with regard to these types sexual behaviors and choices. Actually, if I go through my family’s genealogy it is sure to sound like a V.C. Andrews novel, set in Macondo.

Aura Bogado writes that for Latinos growing up in the United States, “Anti-blackness was firmly instilled in our minds from the moment of birth…we’re not necessarily proud of these
practices and rarely air them publically, though we are called on to shake these practices.” I want to break with the tradition of ignoring how these beliefs are toxic and pervasive within Latino communities. Bogado explains that, “the white standard of beauty translates into preferences—up to and including increased emotional availability—for white, of whiter children” (Bogado 2014). My designation as the family’s “black” sheep had deep racial implications for my own identity and the role I assumed within my family.

Yet, a significant part of my earliest memories embodying femininity remains tied to enduring public shame because of how I looked. My mother controlled my entire appearance, and the church controlled my mother, and the church vaguely practiced a form of machista Christianity. I mean, given the import placed on the soul, getting a haircut should not have cast me out of heaven. This instruction certainly affected my self-esteem and instilled in me self-doubt. This is an odd consequence given that faith is supposed to have the opposite effect on one’s identity. Faith, it is the voluntary suspension of logic, while doubt begets questioning. Hence “blind faith,” tends to be antithetical to the core of most scientific methods. Doubt and faith are mutually exclusive when it comes to interpreting reality or versions of it. I was therefore lead to believe that my hair was connected to my moral worth within society but also within my family.

I realized that shaved legs had implications in regard to my sexuality as well. This is more a result of the religion and culture’s heteronormativity. They teach that men want women, and not women who have similar physical traits as they do (short hair, hairy legs, wearing pants, etc.) This is probably one of my earliest queer realizations. My use of queer identity rests on Michael Warner’s discussion of queer however, Molina expands on it and explains how the category seeks to problematize identity politics by looking at the intersections of ethnicity, race, gender, and sexuality against the dominant assumptions about identity (Molina-Guzmán
2003:142). My body never fit into these domineering categories. I have never felt “in line” with my culture’s version of femininity and it made me uncomfortable in my own skin.

Zoologist Charles Goodhart argued that men have preferred the “hairless trait” in women since its inception and that ancestral women (apes) were selected for “sex” because of this quality. She then would pass this trait on to her offspring, which in my case, suggests that even evolution can be flawed (Penman 1985). I genetically took after my father’s side of the family who were darker and considerably more hairy. This is just one more reason I resented my mother’s imposition of such (divine) bodily norms. However, she was following the dogmas of the church, which did not affect her in the same way. She did not even own a razor because she had no need for them. She was “naturally” hairless. Therefore wearing skirts in the summer did not present the same challenges for my mother as they did for me. When I started to attend Catholic school in seventh grade, I felt that it allowed me to blend more amongst my uniformed classmates. At least I did not “stick out” for the wrong reasons. I wore dark tights until I started to shave the following year. My mother would then question why I shaved my legs in the winter when I was a teenager because she assumed it was because someone (of the opposite sex) was seeing them in their naked form.

I am confident that if chastity belts had been a commercial possibility, my church would have manufactured and sold them to all of the mothers who worried about their daughter’s virginity. Indeed there was a market for them given that I grew up in the midst of the AIDS drugs, and teenage pregnancy epidemics that devastated New York City’s “hoods” in the 1980s. I learned early on to associate sex (and relatedly pleasures) with something that could potentially “kill.” Pleasure was dangerous and sinful and for this reason it always appealed to me. So while no physical restraints were put on my sexuality, fear and risk certainly twisted my exploration of it. I was told by various institutional authorities to “just say no” to all that (potentially) sounded
gratifying (sex, drugs, and rock and roll.) I felt that God was always watching me so it definitely factored into my bodily choices. My mother’s depiction of him per the Bible made God sound like a vindictive and jealous boyfriend, who was needy and insecure (Deuteronomy 5:67, Exodus 20:3, Exodus 34:13, Isaiah 45:5). He was the most critical “spectator,” (Boal 1992:xxxi). God and mother both tested the limits of my conformity, while (always) watching. In order to win against these social forces that sought to beat me into submission, I sought to capitalize on my disadvantages and turn them into an advantage. I will explain this by “using the language of theater.”

Staging Resistance

Christian underpinnings support patriarchy in all of its forms, which functions to devalue a woman’s (self) worth in relation to men. It is difficult to challenge these (destructive) messages if they are constantly circulated within mainstream culture. These viewpoints were persistently disorienting to me and read incomplete like in the story of the Garden of Eden. I did not accept Eve as deceptive, but instead read her as inquisitive. The fact that I rejected the prevailing beliefs concerning this myth made me uncertain about my own judgment. Why was it that everything that was deemed “bad” (sinful, criminal, and selfish) tempted to me? My inability to fully “believe” in these types of gendered teachings inevitably pushed me to question my identity as a Pentecostal. This self-doubt prevented me from making decided choices about everything that ranged from dating, dieting, and faith.

Latino Pentecostals treat the bible like the Republican Party treats the constitution. In fact, both groups share core principles, especially about gender (Sanchez 2008). Their devotion to these texts is devoid of historical and cultural context or analysis. I reoriented my questions about the Bible to consider it more like a cultural one that had great implications for Latina identity and sexuality. Instead of asking if Adam and Eve were real, I learned to question what
lesson this myth intended to teach me about the world. In this story, it became apparent that men were advised to “never” listen to their feminine “other.” If they did, this decision could result in eternal damnation.

Gale A. Yee confirms that this “symbolization of woman as the incarnation of moral evil, sin, devastation, and death,” as presented within the Hebrew Bible, actually “interconnects with the issues of race/ethnicity, class, and colonialism” that were present at the time (Yee 2003:1). Accordingly, said (mis)representation of woman has a purpose in a society that purports that by keeping women “in place,” and by “controlling” their choices, order is restored (or at least, maintained.) This approach to population control stays pertinent during times of crisis when changing backdrops publically challenge gender roles and sexual identities.

Women historically have been subject to the violence this patriarchal view can engender in their private lives even at the hands of the State.42 Eve maintains a distinctive symbolic relevance for Latino women when read against these types of encounters between the Christian state and their bodies. In her seminal work on goddess culture, When God Was a Woman (1976), Merlin Stone discusses the reasons why these gendered myths are so powerful and pervasive throughout the world. She mentions:

Myths present ideas that guide perception, conditioning us to think and even perceive in a particular way, especially when we are young and impressionable…they define good and bad, right and wrong, what is natural and what is unnatural among the people who hold the myths as meaningful (4-5).

Christianity is responsible for teaching Western society that the first woman (real or imagined) is responsible for the fall of man. This narrative is internalized and reflected within systems and structures that fuel Western civilizing projects like Colonialism, capitalism, and democracy. Merchant further supports this theorization by highlighting how said narratives incisively form our current reality. She clarifies, “Our lives are shaped by these stories we hear as children; some fade as we grow older, others are reinforced by our families, churches, and schools. From stories
we absorb our goals in life, our morals, and our patterns of behavior” (Merchant 2003:3). In this light, I guess Eve was my first feminist icon because I eventually concluded that she rebelled against an oppressive system that was working against her.

I could not help but attach the implications of this creation myth to embodied parallels concerning female identity and iconicity. For example, why is it that women who seek and gain power within Latino public life are never fully “trustworthy” and are deemed morally weaker than their male counterparts? Additionally, in order to legitimize their power, they do so by claiming very conventional gender roles as a way of appearing nontthreatening to the status quo. No greater example of this exists than in the story of another Eve, Argentina’s Evita Perón. The same woman who Jorge Luis Borges writes about in his story “The Mountebank” and whom he insinuates “was always fake, a doll…” (Wilson 2006).

The Other Eve and Karen

Eva “Evita” Peron self-identified as “the loyal wife of the great leader and mother of the ‘Great Peronist nation.’” She then encouraged women by mobilizing around this public image, especially those of the working-class and who supported her husband Peron, to mind “hearth and home” (Molyneux, Women's Movements in International Perspective 2001:170). Molyneux sums up that Evita’s rhetoric did not deviate from activating women within the confines of their traditional gender order. Further, Molyneux references Jo Fisher’s argument concerning her public appeal stating, “Despite Eva’s controversial role in Argentina’s political life, she can be credited with having included working-class women in the efforts to refashion the Argentine nation…. The way in which women would then gain “political rights and some measure of social welfare” within Argentina, would be “by virtue of marriage, employment, or motherhood” (Molyneux 2000:58). All of these roles then became civic obligations for women in Argentina.

I suppose the ghost of Eve have yet to be exorcised out from Argentina’s social body given Evita’s legacy as woman and symbol of the nation. To this point, Julie Taylor considers
how a country like Argentina manipulates symbols like Evita to provide an identity “internally and externally” in response to the various circumstances that challenge its national representation against a constantly changing global stage (Taylor 1979:8). I present Karen’s story as one that reflects the historic and new challenges women faced concerning marriage, employment, and motherhood as lived within the Argentine diaspora.

_Verdulera to Ensaladera: From Daughter to Mother_

Karen is thirty-four years old and currently lives in Staten Island, New York. During the week, she works morning shifts at an upscale Italian restaurant as an _ensaladera_ (a salad maker.) On the weekend, she works as a live-in nanny for a British family who reside in the Upper West Side. Karen’s paternal grandparents were actually from England, so when the employment agency matched her with this family, they favorably mentioned that her last name did not, “classically sound Spanish.” For this reason, “It (this job) could be a good fit.” The family was not shy to admit that Karen’s last name was one of the first things that made her stand out from the bunch of other job candidates. Karen claims that this family “really appreciated” that she physically resembled their children. The job description indicated that they looked for, “A woman who could care for the children and speak with them in Spanish.” They also desired someone who also was willing, “to cook and clean for the entire family.” Karen exceeded their criteria, which suggested that what they really wanted was someone who looked white, but was sufficiently Latino to work as a traditional _domestica_. (They wanted someone who spoke Spanish, cared for the home, and were also underpaid for her services. Why else would they go through Normita?) When they Karen for the first time, she noticed that the mother took a deep sigh of relief and said to her husband, “She could even pass for a family member.” At that point, Karen says that she knew she was hired.

The father explained to Karen, “We don’t want our children to look like they are being
cared for by someone who can feel exploited. *We* understand how this could not be healthy.”

They introduced Karen to their friends as the children’s au pair, which she figured had to do with the fact that she did not look like a lot of the “other” nannies in the neighborhood.

Karen is “a natural blonde,” and has “real” blue eyes. She was placed with the family after they started to give their full-time nanny, Berta, the weekends off. At the time, Berta, had already been with the family for over three years. The kids understood and communicated in Spanish because of her. Berta is in her fifties, Dominican, and also really good friends with Karen. Karen says that when she first started working with this family, Berta would leave her arroz moro (white rice and black beans) and *morir soñando* in the fridge. *Morir soñando* translates into “to die dreaming.” It is a popular Dominican drink made with orange juice, tons of sugar or condensed milk, and regular milk. Black beans and rice is also called *moros y cristianos* which is a racialized reference to (black)Muslims and (white) Christians. Berta worried Karen was too thin. 

Apparently, the family became increasingly apprehensive about the dynamics of the work and family arrangements soon after the case of Joselyn Ortega. Ortega actually worked as a nanny within walking distance from their home. She stabbed to death Leo and Lucia Krim, whom she had been caring for over two years. Berta physically resembled Ortega, who also had dark skin and dark hair. All evidence suggests that the Krim family were especially kind and generous to Ortega. She shared with friends and neighbors how kind they were to her. The Krim family even visited with Ortega and her family in the Dominican Republic (Kleinfield and Ruderman 2012). This indicates that they did not suspect she was struggling financially and emotionally, as the news reports claim she did.

Soon after the tragic event between Ortega and the Krim children, Karen claims that the family worried about Berta’s mental health. They started to doubt their own instincts or perceptions. They feared they did not see any “warning signs” or “red flags” with Berta. Yet,
they assumed that they were there and more than likely in clear view. They opted to tread lightly
and not “burn her out…just in case.” Karen noticed that the family trusted and valued her
significantly more than Berta, despite her working less hours and knowing them for a shorter
period of time. This is what she concluded, when she learned that she was paid more and
assigned less domestic tasks during her normal workday. Karen was allowed to “order take out”
instead of cooking on Saturdays. She also admitted to me, “Berta mothers these kids and I think
that this is why they (the employers) might want to let her go. The closeness might make them
uncomfortable because of how Ortega’s case ended. They even asked me if I was interested in
working for them full-time and so I warned Berta about this so she is not blindsided.”

When Karen was single, she did not mind her current work arrangement because it
allowed her to save for college. She described the two children she cared for on the weekends as
“manageable,” although she never really felt as if they were “part of her family,” like Berta did.
Karen explained, “This is my job. I pick them up, take them out, and watch them. I feed them. I
bathe them. I put them to sleep. Repeat. Then I leave to my real life in Staten Island.” I first met
Karen at a small Pentecostal church I visited while researching New York City Latino
Pentecostals in 2006.47 I recognized her accent immediately when she led a prayer from the
pulpit for a sick member of the Church. Holding hands with the rest of the congregation, I could
see that because of her blonde hair and pale skin, she definitely “stood out.”

This is not to say that in God’s army (which in Spanish is referred to as God’s people…el
pueblo de Dios) they’re no white people. However, in this particular congregation a majority of
the members were of Central American descent. Karen was taller, thinner, and whiter than most of
the women and men in the congregation. She explained that within the flock, she was treated
“different.” Karen later ascribed said differences between her and the members to her church to
her identity as an “Argentine.” She hated how during International fútbol tournaments, the
congregation would root (and pray for) Brazil or Spain, and not Argentina. Karen eventually left the church because she grew tired of the other women accusing her of being “arrogant” and “vain” because they perceived that, “She cared too much about her appearance.” This implied that she neglected her “inside” (soul) as a result. She remembered, “They constantly accused me of thinking I was better than them so they stopped inviting me to the birthday parties, the weddings, and the dinners. They cast me out of the community.” When Karen resettled in New York from Argentina, she initially visited the Church because it was walking distance from the basement apartment she shared with two of her other friends from Córdoba.

When the Pastor found out that Karen drank wine, she was put “on discipline” (en disciplina) which is the penalty that comes from disobeying or breaking the dogmas. You are unable to actively participate in any Church activities or rituals, until you are disciplined back into submission. I was just as familiar with this practice from my childhood as I was with detention in high school. When the pastor visited her home and saw the empty bottles by her trash, he told her that what “happens in the dark, comes out in the light” (Luke 8:17). Karen was offended by this allegation because she was not hiding anything. Her church in Córdoba was more “open” and “less literal” when it came to rules. Drinking wine is not prohibited in most Argentine Pentecostal churches, as it is within most of the Latino Pentecostal ones in the States. I used to say that if Jesus was against imbibing wine, his first miracle would have looked very differently. Turning water into lemonade is less epic and newsworthy, than turning water into wine (John 2:1-11).

It is important to note that Karen often wears her hair up in a bun. To my mind, the first time I saw her, she evoked the iconic Evita. I asked her why she liked to wear it up, and she explained that she wore it like her mother, clarifying, “We (her family) are not Peronists.” Her family was part of the opposing party, Radicals. Given Evita’s reverberation within Argentine culture, I could see the vestiges of her iconicity in Karen. Graham-Jones explains why this might
be the case for Argentine women today in regard to how they perform their femininity, “Evita’s capital—commercial, social, symbolic, historical, and political—has only increased since her untimely death.” Eva Perón for many Argentine women embodies the Virgin and whore dichotomy ever so prominent within Latino culture because of *marianismo*. This point is further developed, “She (Evita) has tended to alternate between sensationalized images of sanctified martyr and sensationalized images of demonized fraud” (Graham-Jones 2014:3).

Evita remains a dynamic symbol and an identity referent for Argentine women today. When she passed away, Juan Peron fled before securing Evita’s remains. As a result, their whereabouts were unknown for over 16 years. During the military dictatorship’s ban on Peronism (1955-1971), it was illegal to utter Evita’s name or that of her husband, Juan, at home or to have photos of them as well. In 1971 the dictatorship claimed that her body was buried in Italy under the name “Maria Maggi,” and that it was significantly damaged due to its storage and transport. It was originally embalmed so that it could appear as she if was eternally and beautifully sleeping, like Stalin’s body (Ara 1974:65). Her tomb today, which is nuclear-bomb proof, lies in the Buenos Aires Recoleta cemetery. It is highly secured. Biographers Marysa Fraser and Nicholas Navarro posit that Evita’s body has to be guarded strongly because of what its legacy represents for Argentina’s patriarchal society. In their view, “It reflects a fear…a fear that the body will disappear from the tomb and after that, the woman, or rather the myth of the woman, will reappear” (Fraser and Navarro 1996:192).

Karen emigrated from Córdoba, Argentina soon after graduating high school. According to her recollection, when she arrived in New York City, this was when she, “finally became an adult.” Although, Karen was twenty-years old when she left her family, she was still cared for like a child when she lived with them. Her mother made her bed, ironed her clothes, and cooked all of her meals. Karen is also the first woman in her family to earn a diploma, which explains
why the cultural stress to be domestic was not so pressing in her household. Her father had owned and operated a small vegetable store in their upper working-class neighborhood. Growing up, she was called the “verdulera” (which means she sold vegetables.) Growing up, she enjoyed many working class privileges, which included family vacations to Mar del Plata (the coast), sporting the latest fashion trends, driving a car, and a weekly visit to the salon with her mother. Her mother would go to have her “roots taken care of,” so that evidence of her natural dark hair color disappeared. Karen went to have it nourished with conditioning treatments that made it shine (even more.)

Karen decided to migrate to New York because her family no longer could, “outrun the crisis,” it caught up with them. With the rapidly declining economy, Karen’s professional opportunities were suddenly limited. After graduation, her family reasoned that they could not afford to send her to college. Karen regrets not knowing that her family’s economic stability was not a permanent one. She resents her mother’s emphasis on appearances, asserting that had her family paid more attention to her grades, she would have thought about her future a little differently and dedicated more time to her studies. Karen laments, “I would have studied harder so that I could try to get a scholarship.” She explained that her mother was able to marry her father because she came from the same working-class background as he did and so their roles were clear once they married. She recalls, “My father worked at the store and my mother worked taking care of the house.” Her mother would leave dinner in the oven and immediately go and primp herself up to great her father when he returned from work. Karen describes that when her father arrived, “She (her mother) did not have one hair out of place, not one wrinkle in her dress, and her lipstick was perfectly fresh.”

Karen, on the other hand, could no longer aspire to marry a college-educated husband in Argentina, if she only had a “high-school diploma” to offer. She explained, “If I wanted to marry
someone from a better social standing, either I would have to be from a rich family or be college educated.” While the public university options are tuition-free, she could not absorb the associated costs of attending college after the economic crisis hit its peak. She still would have to pay for food and travel and buy clothes and books. When the family’s store was forced to close due to the big box supermarket that was erected adjacent to it, her life prospects became imminently restricted. The day her father closed down his store, Karen remembers that she saw her ex-boyfriend come out of his car holding the hand of a very pregnant woman. She did not know who she was, but Karen shared that she felt envious of her. She said, “I did not want to be pregnant, but I knew that she had less worries than I did because he was going to take care of her now.”

Karen reflected, “I knew that I was not going to marry someone who would offer me a better life than my parents did in Argentina. When we ran out of dollars, my father asked me what I wanted to do.” He knew that Karen had friends who were heading up North because like her, they had little prospects for socioeconomic opportunities and mobility in El Sur (The South.) Her mother, fearing Karen would choose to leave, would often try to set her up with the son’s of pastors and other members of the Church. Karen’s family had converted to the Pentecostal religion when she was in middle school; a year after their business had expanded from a vegetable stand into a full-fledged store. She remembers that the pastor would often describe non-Pentecostals (Catholics) as “ignorant” and “poor.” It was inevitable that the members of her congregation were more in line with her (newly acquired) tax bracket.

Karen’s describes her old church congregation as “very ostentatious.” Its membership consisted mostly of families who owned businesses, properties, and other luxuries that testified to “God’s blessings” onto their lives. However, when these same families noticed that her mother’s dark roots were showing, her shoes looked worn, and that she looked more and more
“like a Peruvian or Bolivian,” as they warned her. They started to avoid her company. Karen claims that she does not remember when she stopped, “Dreaming about a prince charming.” She was now forced to think about what realistically was in store for her if she decided to stay in Argentina. At the time, the question of how she could help her parents became more urgent. Her father was getting older and her mother could no longer look younger. After the store closed he took a job as watchman in a private building. Karen was an only child; therefore she reasoned that she would eventually be responsible for the care of her parents. Her mother was (emotionally) devastated by her (public) economic constraints. She complained about her reflection and would walk around with her stomach sucked in especially hard.

I met Karen for coffee on a Saturday by her job we then went to shop. As we walked through Whole Foods, she clarified her decision, “I left because I did not want my mother’s life.” When one of her next-door neighbors in Cordoba decided to move to New York, she convinced her parents that she too could go and “try it out.” Karen sold her car in order to pay for a round-trip ticket and to have a bit of a small fund as she tried to get on her feet in New York. Karen paid for her mother to go to the salon before she left. She did not want her last memory of her to include her protruding dark roots, the source of shame. Within a week of arriving to New York, she felt that her possibilities were now “endless.”

Karen grabbed an apple and then pointed to the price per pound, “Ridiculous.” I nodded in agreement. She continued, “Everything we used to sell (in Córdoba) was also organic but we did not overcharge for it. We knew that the food we sold was to feed families.” She went on to explain that because these families were part of the community that took care of each other. However, she confessed that it did not bother as much now to buy “over-priced fruit” when she worked. This was where she met her boyfriend, Donald. Whole Foods had a sentimental value, in her heart, “despite its pretention.” Donald is a Pediatric nurse originally from Kansas. Karen
explained that she was “technically working,” when describing what lead up to their fateful encounter by the produce aisle. She believes that if she had stayed in the Church I met her in; she probably would have never met Donald. The pastor had told her that she should not “work” anymore on Sundays because that was “The Lord’s day.”

In addition to caring for the family’s children on the weekend, Karen’s responsibilities included buying groceries for them as well. They gave her strict orders about where she could buy fresh fruit and vegetables. When Karen met Donald, he ignored she was a nanny, from Argentina, and that she an “expert” picking out vegetables. He did notice that she probed the fruits and vegetables methodically. He was buying his own groceries and asked her to help him pick out a ripe avocado. Donald then went to buy his groceries every Sunday at the same time for the next three weeks until he saw her again. He asked her out and she accepted. He told the story when he was toasting at her birthday party. He went on to say that he, “admired Karen’s selflessness with regard to her family and was also very impressed by her independence.” Yet, when they visited her family in Córdoba a year after their engagement, Karen firmly warned him, “This isn’t Kansas.”

Karen eventually quit her weekend job because, “It served its purpose...to meet Donald.” She laughed, “Now that I’m pregnant, I will care for my own kid.” She then told me about the status of her college-fund and her plans to eventually attend culinary school. I thought that every time she talked about this “college fund” she saved for, she meant that the money was for her own studies. I learned it was money put away for her future child. Karen revealed to me that she was having a daughter and declared that she was not worried about her future. She had prepared for a child (with a college fund) as soon as she “became a woman.” I asked her if it was always in her plans to become a mother, given her financial choices. Karen’s response to this question is remarkably demonstrative. She shared, “From the moment I learned I was a woman, I
understood that I will become one day a mother. I hope that I can teach my children to fight for a better future and that education is the most important weapon to fight that fight.”

When Karen’s daughter was born, Macarena, her mother visited from Argentina to meet her new granddaughter. Donald arranged for her to come and help Karen transition into motherhood. I met her at Karen’s newly acquired home in Staten Island. My first impression was that Karen resembled her mother. Her mother however refused to speak to me in Spanish, which I found strange. Apparently when Karen married Donald, she started to take English instruction because she wanted to eventually come and live in the United States with her daughter and granddaughter. Prior to Karen’s marriage, she never showed interest in even visiting her. Karen explained that her mother thought that she lacked “financial stability,” because she worked so much. However, Karen never has told her mother or Donald about her “college fund.” She explained to me why, “My mother also taught me something about being a wife, and that was to always have also a backup plan just in case because I will always be a mother but there is no guarantee I will forever be Donald’s wife.” Karen planned for the “just in case.”

Rachel Weitz explains that when women deviate from the social and cultural norms concerning “appearances, behaviors, and practices” related to the body, this divergence puts strains on their public and private lives. Also, this strains family relationships (Weitz 2010). Karen went on to express concern for her role as a wife, while she prepared for the uncertainty as a mother, because of her experiences as a daughter. I found elements of Evita’s symbolic resonance in her approach to family and the future, in Karen’s present quandary. Anthropologist Julie Taylor writes in Eva Perón: The Myths of a Woman (1979) that, “Argentineans have explicitly described Evita’s leadership not as political, but as spiritual, moral or religious.” Taylor claims that Argentines when “venting hatred” or “expressing their love” for Evita, describe her leadership as “emotional and intuitive, violent, mystical, unconstitutional,” while
also emphasizing that her leadership was actually “irrational, unanalyzable, uncontrollable.” Her ways, according to Peronists was “mystic-religious, moral, or spiritual,” because she embodied Peronist ideology (Taylor 1979:11). When Karen introduced me to her mother, whose name happened to be Eva, I was floored by the coincidence. Or was it? I was compelled to point out to Karen, “You’re a spitting image of your mother.” She laughed and said, “Hopefully I take more after the other Evita than her.”

**Code Red means Queer: The Dangers of Work**

Christian myths about gender are limited. They are unable to account for the social, economic, and political transformations that unfetter women from their subservient positions through divorce, abortion, and migration to name just a few of these liberating examples. Migration can constitute a “queering experience.” The undocumented labor market destabilizes traditional gender roles. For example, many Latino men now work in the kitchen and Latina women work outside of the home (in other people’s homes.) Yet, this does not mean that Christian teachings about gender do not inform Latina identity in some form, especially when considering the dimensions of maternal embodiment in the United States. The prevalence of said myths does not suggest that patriarchy did not exist prior to Colonialism, but it instead intimates that colonialism was the process by which these myths became institutionalized within public life. We can discursively and historically trace the power of these myths to the formation of a “queer Latinidad.”

Juana Molina explains that queer Latinidad is, “The spastic contradictions and wild paradoxes of bodies and sites, identities and spaces intersecting are exemplified by the juxtaposition of these two terms, both provisional and immediate” (Molina 2003:9). I believe, that Latinidad is a queer identity, because of the “contradictory impulses and practices of erasure” that result from the contentious discourses of “nations, states, languages, and bodies” by
the cultural category of Latin@. These contradictions are then inherited and renegotiated within family structures that appraise motherhood (12). While Judith Butler caveats that “queer” does not sufficiently stick within “non-white communities.” I argue the contrary by elucidating the ways in which, socially constructed and politically loaded categories such as “Latino,” are very much queer by design and thus I claim the term is more inclusive than what Butler suggests it can be. I use the experience of Argentine mothers to further challenge this limited perception concerning its applicability to cultural studies regarding Latinidad. I explore the ways in which Latino history and culture, make apparent moments in which “queer” as identity and process is at the foundation of identity claims and formations. To this point Butler writes that, “the term queer” is to be, “A site of collective contestation, the point of departure for a set of historical reflections and cultural imaginings, it will have to remain that which is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes (Butler 2011:228). In order to support my use of the term with regard to Latinidad, I offer a few examples of how “queer” identity is present within Latino history.

June Nash notes that the Aztecs had a division of labor that was clearly patriarchal. In it, men crafted the land and metals, while women tended to the children and other domestic affairs (Nash 1978:355). On the surface, this example may read as if it conforms to the gendered division of labor instituted by Christian teachings. However, the existence of the god Xochipilli (god of dance, beauty, flowers, and beauty) within Aztec culture suggests a deviation from traditional binaries, as it is the patron saint of homosexuals. However, if one looks towards the classic Taínos in the island of Hispaniola, they were actually a matrilineal society. Women participated in all aspects of society even “wielding power” and “accumulating wealth” (Deagon 2005:600). These roles were then supplanted with one’s supported by Christian myths, which
were heteronormative and mannequin. One can deduce that Colonialism was contributory in guaranteeing that men and women were not treated equally because of their designated roles in society per the Christian faith. However, Christian conversion has yet to fully wipe away the embodied memories of the “different discourses of history, geography, and language practices that collide” and become possible because of the movement of bodies (within and amongst) other bodies (Molina 2003:9).

I recently found my childhood Garden of Eden coloring book. I was cleaning out my mother’s closet and found it. I learned from it that I apparently envisioned Eve to have red hair. Also, I confirmed that I never could “stay within the lines.” Her red hair was possibly due to her “allegedly” wicked ways.” Today, I understand the story of the Garden of Eden as the first (biblical) instance of society’s (unnatural) propensity to “blame the victim.” How was it that Eve was depicted at fault in this story? In the coloring book’s depiction, God points a judgmental finger at Eve, which he wags, as Adam looks down in shame. Though my understanding of history and science has since evolved, I am often conflicted by the way in which this story reduces Eve to a “bad woman.” Its arbitrary messaging about the “weaker” and “lesser” sex reflects how Christian patriarchy still overwhelms American public life, especially within Latino-America. It remains a source for moral codes that substantiate cultural views concerning female subordination and it serves to legitimize their (legal) exclusion from public life and private choices (Sehat 2011:104). For this reason I seek to vindicate (this) Eve by claiming her narrative and iconicity as feminist and queer.

After all, I do not think it is coincidence that Latina writers such as Giaconda Belli have reclaimed Eve’s power by putting into perspective her importance in relation to the (gendered) world. By following the myth’s logic, the text suggests that history or humanity would have not existed if Adam and Eve had not been cast out of the Garden of Eden (Belli 2009). Another
feminist interpretation to Eve that directly relates to Latina identity in today’s world is offered by Quinn-Sanchez. She posits that if we read this story as one of (a woman’s) search for knowledge, it actually provides a nuanced explanation as to why an empowered woman can be perceived as an ungodly and dangerous one. Knowledge, came directly from Eve’s choice to eat from the forbidden fruit, hence it “brings power, and as a result, the possibility of more freedom to create; all of this results from choice. Without choice, there is no knowledge, no power, no freedom, no creation (Quinn-Sanchez 2015:x). This is why the practice of “choice” for women, particularly Latina women is indistinguishably criminal and sinful under the male gaze, while albeit liberating for embodied femininity.

Reproduction in Context and Nation: Zika, Sex, Latin@s

Throughout Colonial history, motherhood (due to Catholicism) has been treated as a feature of female citizenship. Mothers serve (God and nation) by reproducing more citizens and souls. This in part explains the Southern region’s current stance on reproductive rights, which extends right into Conservative North America’s political agendas. Reproductive rights are actually at the core of why many Latinos vote against their economic interests in the United States. I was able to sway my mother on this debate when I presented the “pro-life” position as one of “anti-choice.” I explained that no one really is “pro-abortion,” while discussing why “language” matters, I reminded her, that reproductive rights were about being to choose over your own body.

It took a pestilence like the Zika virus to reintroduce the abortion debate within Latin America and the Caribbean and within Latino communities in the United States as one of political urgency with important health consequences. The region maintains some of the most “restrictive abortion laws in the world,” which cannot be seen as a separate aspect of Latino cultural norms within the United States. These restrictions are increasingly punitive towards
women as seen in the case of El Salvador, where women are “jailed for miscarriages and stillbirths” and are given up to 50-year sentences for these “crimes” (Wilkinson 2015). However, despite the potential health risks to mother and child associated with the Zika virus, religious authorities continue to lobby against “loosening” restrictions on safe and legal abortions.

It is interesting how Zika as a public health concern becomes entangled with medical discourse on sexual behaviors that in times of hyper-nationalism become racialized and remarkably unhampered (as per the 2016 Rio Olympics.) In fact, an Olympic record was set by the number of condoms and lubricants provided to the athletes competing in Rio. Athletes from previous games discuss the rampant sexual activities amongst athletes during this time. For this reason there was a public pressure to “protect” the Olympians against Zika (and themselves.) This is the first time in history that women have been provided female condoms by the International Olympic Committee, suggesting that they did not want to “take any risks” (Steinbuck 2016). There must be something about the spectacle of competition, endurance, and cross-cultural socialization that produces the conditions for (high-risk) sexual activities.

Some governments have urged women (as a way of fighting against the dangers of the Zika virus in particular) to delay pregnancy. However this is a very impractical recommendation when contraceptives remain stigmatized, expensive, and inaccessible to women throughout the region and culture (Phillips, Miroff, and Cobb 2016). In the Colonial era, all discourse regarding family morals was ideologically related to the marriage reforms implemented by the ecclesiastic, political, and judicial authorities (which at the time, were one in the same.) The parameters of reproduction were clearly defined throughout the institution of marriage, which legitimized and protected children born within it. The sociological concept of Marianismo can further explain how these political ideals are still relevant to women within Latino culture despite the dated structures from which they derive.
Evelyn Stevens agrees that within the sphere of *Marianismo*, “women are semi divine, morally superior to and spiritually stronger than men,” based on the feminine virtues of the Virgin Mary (Stevens 1977:123). However, this is at the expense of her sexual identity because of her so-called “virgin birth.” Mary mother of Christ is foil to Eve in many ways, but more decisively because Eve “lost her innocence” at the Garden of Eden. It is worth noting that women, within the Colonial era in particular, gained a key role in the preservation of Christian virtues, chastity, honor, and lineage—i.e., the basic values of the society. Historical understanding of Latina Womanhood still emanate from the symbolic power of the Virgin Mary, who “presents a picture of wholeness and integrity, of nurturing and healing and power, which is comforting and validating” (Hall 2004:2).

Within Christian teachers of gender, wives are supposed to tend to the private affairs of the household. The household is comprised of many parts that need to be maintained and cared for in order for it to function, much like the living body. The wife, from this Catholic perspective, is the one responsible for the maintenance and survival of the household in the same way she is of the living body, which must be given nourishment and pleasure in order to be healthy and exist. Reproduction for Latina women remains problematically entwined to their gender identity and their cultural claims to their bodies. This is why the culture by in large is considered anti-choice. (Uruguay is the only country to date in which abortion is legal within the region.) In fact, until this day, there is no real distinction between miscarriages and abortions within the Spanish language. Both are called “*abortos* (abortions,)” which possibly causes women to internalize miscarriages as shameful and a direct “punishment” from God. If God punished Eve with a “painful birth,” then surely he is in control of a woman’s womb. This is why many Christian conservatives holding political offices in the United States feel a “calling” to overturn legislations such as Roe V. Wade and to create significantly more Targeted
Regulation of Abortion Providers (TRAP) laws that restrict access to safe and legal abortions for mostly poor Women of Color. These efforts have helped to pander to the ever-growing Latino voting bloc in the United States that culturally identifies with the above-mentioned Conservative platforms. I personally struggled with sentiments of shame and guilt when I had my second miscarriage, despite understanding how history and science worked.

**Motherhood is Painful and so is White Feminism**

Childbirth is sincerely one of the most transformative rituals a woman can experience because of all of the changes that happen as a result, especially before and after. Your body, relationships, time management, finances, and priorities all change (and continue to because of motherhood.) The sociocultural norms Latina mothers are expected to follow can feel as if they are dated because of the way in which guilt and sacrifice become the recurring themes within the experience and framework by which we express and understand it. I will admit I have used the “Don’t you love me?” distress signal with my son when wanting to sway his impulses. For this reason I believe the role of cultural heritage cannot be ignored when examining mothering practices and choices (Hay and Vespo 1989:88). I argue against the iniquitousness of mixed-messages concerning Latina expectations of motherhood (within popular culture and academia alike) because these references can create anxiety around the relationship between maternal embodiment, sexual identity, and citizenship within and throughout the United States.

While waiting for my due date, I quickly learned that pregnancy is one of the few times a woman is permitted to deviate from mainstream expectations of size. Although, this is increasingly changing as evident in the pressure put on women to get back into their “pre-pregnancy bodies.” I can wholly appreciate how good it felt to eat an entire pie of pizza without the shame or guilt that ensues the morning after. However, this privileged exemption to mainstream beauty standards ended soon after childbirth, which is rarely a straightforward
occurrence. This is especially true if you have options to modify the experience from that of our foremothers. With the passing of time, childbirth has become increasingly subject to technological advances that controls pain levels, it can offer better time management options (such as a scheduled C-sections) and it can take place under the conditions and location of one’s choosing. For instance, births at home and at birthing centers are becoming more common in the United States amongst women. In 2015 The New England Journal of Medicine published a study that provided some of the “clearest information on the subject to date.” The data stated that “out-of-hospital births” carried a greater chance of complications, which ranged from neonatal seizures and increased chances of needing things ventilators and even blood transfusions (Belluck 2015). I never idealized giving birth at home because I associated it with my family’s lack of choice in Colombia.

My brother-in-law’s wife, Renata, gave birth in a swimming pool at a birthing center in Miami. She sent us (the entire family) very vivid photos of the experience. We were not even on speaking terms at the time so imagine my “delight” to receive such explicit photos. While I can appreciate how modern it is to be so “natural” about childbirth, I have an even older approach to it. I wanted to take place in the “safest” place possible, which I believed was in an institution (despite my Marxist inclinations.) I did not want to take any risks associated with giving birth in similar conditions as my grandmother did in the middle of rural Colombian backlands. This reaction is not about ridiculing these types of birthing experiences, but rather I recognized that my grandmother did not have a choice when she gave birth under those conditions. My choice for a hospital birth with a physician was and is no less valid or meaningful than Renata’s choice to birth at a birthing center and with a midwife. Katz Rothman notes that, “the alternative to physician and institutional control of childbirth is childbirth outside of medical institutions, outside of the medical model… birth is an activity that women do” (Katz Rothman 2010:61).
Despite giving birth in a hospital, I believe that my participation in the process was front and center because my body’s presence and my control over its pain.

Dr. Michael Greene in regard to birthing choices concludes, “The question is what is most important to you and what risks are you willing to accept” (Belluck 2015). I wanted to give birth under the strict supervision of an obstetrician and other licensed professionals. I did not even entertain using a doula; I wanted the experience to be as institutional (and modern) as possible because I feared “uncertainty.” Katz Rothman interestingly asserts that when women are in labor, institutionalization has the opposite effect it had on me. She claims, “any institutionalization disempowers, drains power from the birthing woman and gives it to the institution itself, as it homogenizes the experience” (Rothman 2010:65). However, I was one of the first in my family within my generation to have access to a hospital where I felt I had protections, a chain of command, and a higher probability of surviving with my child. Also, to decide what and who gains power from the birthing experience tends to be a white feminist impulse within social science literature on the topic that overlooks embodiment.

My mother boasts that she gave birth to my sister and I, “a-lo-macho” (like a macho, sans painkillers.) Soon after returning home, my mother would run from one end of the apartment to the other in order to fit into her pre-pregnancy clothes. I could not comprehend how after the painful experience of childbirth, she would willfully suffer more by exercising and dieting immediately after. I noticed that she spoke about maternal pain as if it is transcendental and divine. I suppose that a painful birth is similar to how flogging feels to priests, or kneeling on rice does to remorseful sinners. There is a tendency within Latino culture to conflate masculinity with strength and femininity with the endurance of pain and sorrow. I guess these ideas were introduced quite literally at birth.

Pablo’s mother brags about when she gave birth to each of her four sons, they were all
through C-sections. She explains that she did this, “at a time when they sliced you right open across your stomach.” Granted this was not her “choice,” but her battle wounds often elevated her status amongst the dinner table, which included the three mothers to her grandchildren. She often mentioned that the scars of her C-section made a cross across her stomach. She could not bear the thought of actually showing them off. According to her, motherhood (and not age) forced her to “give up wearing a two-piece.” This confession intimated that she felt as if her sexual identity was sacrificed as a result of childbirth or of not being able to bare her stomach. She usually brought this story up at the dinner table when I would reach for a second serving of something (or least this is how I remember it.) As soon as she mentioned her pregnancy, I had a gut reaction to suck in my stomach. The impression that mothers lose their sexual identity as a result of motherhood is underscored within Christian ideologies about motherhood (i.e. the Virgin Mother) but not so much within cultural understandings of femininity (which promotes hyper-sexuality) within mainstream media. These confusing messages can be painful.

I recall that when I went into labor with Pablito, I made no reservation requesting an epidural. I was quite vocal calling out, “Give me the drugs.” I also had no qualms demanding copious amounts of morphine after I gave birth. “Give me more drugs.” I refused to self-reproach for my choice of requesting all of the pain relief options available to me. I also disallowed the idea that my birthing experience was somehow less “natural” because I did not “push,” which is another cultural misconception within Latino communities about childbirth. Natural births are usually referring to vaginal births. However, within many Latino communities, it also refers to giving birth without an epidural. I have been right-out asked if I had a “natural birth,” when knowing full I had a C-section.” A “natural” birth can mean an “un-medicated one” where women, according to this cultural viewpoint, are naturally suffering. It is pitched as a “less invasive” birth within the institutional birthing experience. Yet, I find it “unnatural” to choose
A generation ago, the women in my mother’s family were giving birth at home in the absence of medical professionals, indoors plumbing, and present husbands. I wonder if my grandmother would have preferred this knowing that she could be monitored and probed by someone who had years of schooling and training in order to become a medical “expert” on childbirth. She had no other option rather than surrendering her fate to prayers and her own mother who was a *partera* (doula.) My great grandmother helped birth all of her twelve grandchildren and my grandmother birthed many of her own daughter’s children as well. This is not the type of mother-daughter experience I personally would want for myself if I had a choice, and that is precisely my point. My foremothers did not have choices and so in the absence of doctors, they only had each other, which is the next best thing. Yet, there is a subtle implication and tone when non-institutional births are presented as more empowering than the hospital births that “uninformed” women choose.

Anthropologist Emily Martin makes a similar argument in *Women and the Body: a Cultural Analysis on Reproduction* (2001), when she critiques the ways in which the hospital mediates the childbirth experience in order to ensure that women efficiently work (labor) in order to produce a “product,” a child. She presents ways in which it is possible for women to resist these institutional constraints such as waiting for the last possible minute to head to the hospital in order to give birth. However, these assertions in my view make sense from a white feminist perspective, which tends to emerge within anthropological literature on the body. This recommendation lacks an intersectional lens because it assumes all women have the same care and no barriers to it. All reproductive bodies are not treated equally at hospitals. In fact, all bodies do not experience the same at hospitals either. Amy Goodrich recently reported that there is, “Evidence of racial bias and stereotyping in recognizing and treating pain among minorities,
particularly black patients” (Goodnough 2016). There is a tacit belief that managing pain with medicine could someone implicate passivity or weakness.

As a scholar, I can understand the complexity and the nuance in Martin’s argument because it presents a case for women to challenge an institution, which polices a woman’s (laboring) body. However, as a Latina woman who comes from an immigrant family who has suffered multiple barriers to healthcare (resources, distance, infrastructure, and trained professionals, to name a few) there is a level of relative ease and safety that comes from electing a painless or hospital birth. It seems like a natural choice, in my case. I was discussing this issue with my friend Bianca at my niece’s birthday party because we disagreed on the meaning of “natural.”

Bianca is from Córdoba in Argentina. She has lived in New York for fifteen years and is moving to Miami next month. Her partner purchased a home so they could have “a backyard” now that they were going to become parents. She is pregnant with a baby girl and has opted to have the “most natural birth possible.” She is literally planning to give birth “in nature.” Her friend Silvana (also from Córdoba but resides in Miami) made this choice as well and said it was a beautiful experience that “connected her” on another level with “mother nature.” Bianca was able to read my reaction as she was telling me because my eyes got (even) bigger and they rolled slightly to the left. Bianca opted to “show me,” how beautiful birth in nature could actually be. I reminded her, “Bianca, I come from the jungle. My grandmother gave birth in a hut to my mother, on a dirty floor, with a curtain for a door.” She then took out her phone and started to play a video. In it, this woman, with long blonde rasta braids (dreadlocks) is standing by a stream of running water. She squats, and starts pushing. I looked away and asked her to please stop the video, as I shoved her phone away from my field of vision. I asked her, “So you feel that you want to now give birth like your great, great, great, great, grandmother did? You came all the
way to the USA so that you can replicate the childbirth experiences of the Comechingones?”

50 Awkward silence. I then clarified; I am not saying this as a “medical anthropologist.” I somehow felt as if that was a necessary clarification given how my personal and professional perspective can become convoluted or confused. When considerable amounts of white feminists write about their experiences with their bodies, especially when it comes to illness, there is a tendency to overlook the ways in which their choices are privileged ones. These same choices may not be available or carry the same implications as they do for “other” women.

Activist Rachel Wiley poetically articulates the implications white feminist analysis has within anthropology (in particular.) She shares, “White feminism swears she will unlock the door to equality and let us all in if we just hoist her through this window on our backs” (Vagianos 2016). I take such deep issue when I read anthropology about “others,” that reads as if they are explaining the truth about our worlds instead of sharing their interpretation or experiences within it. Must we look deeper and farther than our own institutional instruction in order to fully ignores how capitalist systems can unequally disperse power from or to women. One woman’s oppression is another one’s privilege, and to deny (or not recognize) this is problematic within the holistic study of culture. These systems of oppression inevitably shape childbirth choices because it (health) is in fact a “business” in the United States as Emily Martin posits her cultural analysis on reproduction (2001).

Bianca asked me what did I look for in my childbirth experience when I had Pablito. “How did I choose my doctor?” I laughed and said my two deal breakers when I shopped around for an Obstetrician were the following: she had to be a woman and someone who had (personally) experienced childbirth. I realized that these were probably some of the comforting factors in having a homebirth that validated a midwife’s expertise (shared gender and embodied knowledge.) I want to acknowledge that I am aware that they are many men who are amazingly
competent obstetricians and many capable female obstetricians who have not experienced in their bodies childbirth. However, the question was based on what I required in order to feel as safe and supported as possible. This is obviously a personal response based on my subjectivity as well. (Support groups use the same criteria when forming because there is a shared embodied understanding that creates a community, trust, and authority. You won’t attend a support group for people with Lupus if you suffer from Diabetes.) An additional attribute that I desired within my OBGYN was that she shares a similar cultural background. I wanted an understanding (one that I did not need to over explain) about the importance (and the pushiness) of my family’s presence at appointments, sonograms, and the delivery room. I felt equally comforted knowing that there was a designated area, with walls, doors, and locks that separated me from my family should I chose to dismiss them if so needed to.

In all honesty, in some twisted way, painlessly birthing my son felt like a testament to our family’s economic and social progress. Although my sister and I both gave birth in the same hospital my mother birthed us in, the experience were fundamentally different because we both unapologetically “chose” not to “feel pain.” It was an empowering choice that we made, against cultural expectations about how childbirth for us should go. This brings me to question Katz Rothman’s assessment that, “Giving birth at home returns the power to the woman.” She argues that this challenges the prevailing lack of trust the United States has concerning women and the choices they make concerning their bodies (Katz Rothman 2010:63-64). Her argument, in my opinion, does not take into account the ways in which family histories can determine what constitutes an empowering experience. My sister rented an exclusive sweet in the hospital where our entire family was able to comfortably hang out. She did not share a bathroom, room, or nurse. This was her choice, and a very empowering and expensive one that she made, on her terms. Nonetheless, Rothman recognizes my underscoring point which contests the idea that
childbirth can be “homogenizing,” because as she puts forth in her conclusion, “Childbirth has social and cultural variations” that must be read against a woman’s “choice” and her systemic access to it (Rothman 2010:65). The cultural tendency to presume women incompetent over their choices is at the heart of this tension between what constitutes an empowering or disempowering childbirth experience. However, family histories provide an important insight into what personally influences women’s choices around childbirth.

The painful birth within Christian teachings reminds of the lessons learned as a result of the creation myth (Genesis 3:16a). Evolution, psychology, sexuality, and witchcraft are all implicated as a product of Satan’s intelligent design, and therefore are presented as untrustworthy pathways of information. On the other hand, Adam’s punishment was more a direct result of listening to his wife and disobeying God by not asserting dominion over his surroundings (Genesis 3:17). Eve was swayed by the serpent, which slithered his way into her brain (with very little effort.) Hence, the early beginnings of Christian belief contend that maternal embodiment is supposed to be laden with pain and implicitly; pain is also a blessing (because it brings you closer to God.) The rational comes from the idea that by breaking down the flesh (denying it pleasure or relief from pain), you fortify the spirit and come closer to God. This view suggests that painless births are in fact defiant acts against the natural order (Luke 9:23, Romans 6:6, Galatians 5:24, Ephesians 4:22, Colossians 3:5).

**When Motherhood is Criminal**

“Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised. Honor her For all that her hands are done, and let her praise, bring her praise at the city gate.” -Proverbs 31:30-31

The full scope of maternity (motherhood and mothering) is grounded on great cultural expectations that can be confusing and at times contradicting for Latina girls in the United States.
because of the encumbrance of “cultural baggage.” In a study on Latina sexuality, Lorena Garcia reports that many mothers shared that, “They struggled with the judgments they encountered about their daughters’ sexual behaviors and by extension, on their parenting skills” (Garcia 2012:30). These types of judgments are called “el qué dirán” (what will people say), and it asserts great influence within Latina mothering practices. Growing up, whenever my mother would respond with, “What will people say?” what she implicitly sought to teach me was to consider my personal decisions as having very public consequences.

All throughout my coming of age, I resisted and resented this approach to policing my actions and choices. I challenged my mother by reminding her that we no longer were subject to the same “honor and shame” codes that were upheld in the motherland. I would exalt, “This is America! Aren’t we supposed to live free? Didn’t Jesus set us free? Isn’t that the point of democracy, Christianity, and the benefit of living thousands of miles away from your family?” I rejected the imposition of social norms that made equal sense “here” and “now” as they did “back home” and “back then.” To day drink, engage in public displays of affection; wear sweats, curse, and travel alone, were some examples of these types of “inappropriate” behaviors that were timeless in my mother’s book of proper etiquette. As a teenager she warned me that “people” could think I was, “a woman of the night” if they saw me at bars or at clubs. I figured that if my financial independence, educational accolades, and professional success were secondary to what I did on a Friday night; something did not “feel” right about this logic. I questioned, what stereotype was I challenging and which was I conforming to when I made my choices because they were not many shades of grey when it came to Latina (public) identity.

The stereotypes of Latinas within mainstream media bleeds into policies that (re)produce social anxieties within the American imaginary concerning the (insurgent) bodies of Latina women. This is evidenced within the rhetoric of old and new immigration debates which
succulently warn against the “browning” of America (Chavez 2008). Stigmatizing and
dehumanizing terms like “anchor babies” and “illegal” have made a comeback within the
Republican Party discourse. The 2016 Presidential campaign headed by Trump attests to this
resurgence and mainstreaming of xenophobia against Latino immigrants. (He clearly does not
have similar concerns against immigrants coming from Eastern Europe per say.) This type of
language reinforces the tawdry idea that children born to undocumented immigrants are
somehow less worthy of the benefits and protections afforded by citizenship. Which makes the
many documented cases of law enforcement treating pregnant undocumented women as
dangerous criminals even more disturbing and indicative of our cultural milieu.

Immigrant women in U.S immigration detention centers give birth in the custody of law
enforcement officers. At times, they are even shackled to their beds as well. Not only is a doctor
and nurse present to ensure the safe delivery of the child, but also an armed uniformed officer.
This is another type of institutional birth, one that I am very much against and that clearly
exposes an effort to dehumanize mothers when they are subject to these policies and practices
during childbirth.

In 2011, shackling during childbirth was illegal in 14 states and against official U.S
Immigration and Customers (ICE) policy. However, if a pregnant woman who is undocumented
is detained for immigration-related offenses classified as criminal, such as driving without a
license, they can be handcuffed to their bedsides, be denied the right to have a family member
present in the birthing room, and even denied the right to hold their baby for more than 24 hours
(Constantino 2011). This sends a powerful message to the mother and community she belongs to
about the ways in which the state retains ultimate control over her womb. Her body is then
subject to the law of man. There is no doubt that by demystifying childbirth under said
conditions; maternal morale is broken (like the system that enables this type of practice.) After
all, it is virtually impossible for a woman who recently gave birth to physically escape with her baby from a maximum-security prison, armed only with her will and two feet. That type of flight, if pulled off, would outdo that of Mexican kingpin, El Chapo’s. However, this “cruel and unusual” punishment of giving birth in shackles is just a means for the state to punish and police the reproduction of immigrant women, especially ones who are considered to be irresponsibly hypersexual…like Latinas.

Tonrnton Deill and Zambrana argue in relation to this positing that Latina stereotypes influence not only social policies but also, it impacts the ways in which dominant healthcare providers treat their Latina patients and the type of healthcare they are able to access. Studies affirm that these stereotypes disproportionally impact Latinas and other women of color since the beginning of (Christian) time (Thornton Dill and Zambrana 2013:183). Yet, these misrepresentations do not occur in a vacuum but rather emerge as a direct result of how social and historical narratives about Latina immigrant women are constructed. For most undocumented immigrant women, a child usually is a “mixed blessing,” despite popular opinion. It is absurd when the right-wing media portrays reproduction (and crime) within immigrant communities as reckless and indiscriminate. They have a tendency to minimize (or fully ignore) that a U.S. born child does not protect the mother from deportation. In fact, having U.S born children is “rarely” factored in immigration decisions (Root 2015). However, it does make it less likely that a mother would choose to return to her country of origin, which is also something that is perceived as a threatening incursion with abysmal consequences to the “American way of life.” Constantino reported that a law enforcement official continued to remind a woman who was giving birth shackled to the bed that she would, “return to Mexico” as soon as she gave birth (Constantino 2012). With every push she was reminded that she was an “outsider,” and a criminal, which was secondary to her motherhood.
Raising a child in the United States is not an easy proposition for most Americans; but for Latina immigrant mothers it is an extraordinarily costly and dangerous one because of the many barriers to health immigrants they face due to limited economic and social resources. Ultimately a baby demands preparedness for countless uncertainties, “another mouth to feed, another obstacle to finding or keeping a precious low-wage job, another complication in an already complex life that, in many cases, includes providing for older children left behind…” (Constable 2015). Many of the undocumented women who have come to work to the United States in one of the many industries that is sustained by their labor, are referred to as partaking in “birth tourism.” It is almost as if undocumented immigrant women within right-wing propaganda are denied the right to a sexual identity. Their sexual values and behaviors raise more eyebrows and red flags within anti-immigrant crusades than that of the hate crimes against immigrants resulting from such campaigns.

**Milking your Family**

Tamara arrived to Miami, Florida from Córdoba, Argentina in 2000. The reason she moved was because she wanted to help her younger siblings eventually go to college. Her parents were struggling to stay afloat because of a shopping mall that was built blocks away from their small clothing boutique. It directed traffic away from their shop and as such, this hurt sales. The family ended up having to close down their business because they were unable to compete with cheaper prices. In Argentina, more than ever, designer brand names from abroad are the sensation. Ever since they closed the shop, her parents sell purses, which they manufacture at home and then sell to small stores in other Provinces throughout Argentina. They fabricate them during the week and pack them up in their car on the weekend. They then go from store to store trying to strike a deal with vendors in the hopes of establishing a market for them. However, competition continues to drive their sales down and forces them to drive farther and farther in
order to find merchants that are interested in their purses.

With crime and delinquency soaring at alarming rates in Argentina, Tamara worries about their overall safety when conducting business. Her siblings are ten years younger than her and abstain from helping their parents in these sales ventures or in the production of their product. They focus on “school,” while Tamara attempts to help them do so by sending them money and (American) things that they could not afford or access back in Córdoba on their parent’s (limited) income. During the first couple of years in Miami, Tamara noticed that her siblings would ask her for things that she did not buy for herself. She still used her Discman that she brought over from Córdoba. She listens to the same artists (Charly Garcia, Indio Solari, Los Piojos) since I met her at a time when CDs were still buyable. Her siblings on the other hand, listened to music on their iPods. She started to notice that her financial sacrifices seemed to support the ostentation of her brothers but she only realized this after her coworkers pointed it out to her. They too struggled with similar transnational family dynamics.

Tamara said, “The first time I sent back money to my family, I felt so proud of myself. My parents thanked me, and I felt my brothers were so excited because I also sent for them to be able to buy new soccer cleats.” She wanted to take care of them (her family) because she started to feel guilt for having an expendable and steady income in Miami. Every time Tamara bought a new dress or pair of shoes, she thought about the trips her parents had to make in order to pay for their basic necessities. With the passing of time, Tamara’s younger brothers requested the latest sneaker brands and then asked for fancy watches, they then “needed” the latest smartphones. First the phones had to have a color screen, then a camera, then a video camera, and eventually, they became more specific with their demands, they only found I-phones acceptable. Her family still lived in the same working class neighborhood she grew up in; but her brothers were now treated like “chetos” (rich/posh kids) by their neighbors and friends.
Tamara’s mother was impressed at the girlfriends her brothers brought home and often boasted to Tamara about how “important” they were. They came from “good families,” which meant their father’s had “good jobs.” They were upper-middle class in relation to their working-class status. However, Tamara insinuated that this was all probably an outcome of her brother’s showing off. They were the first family in their street to have a flat screen television, smartphones, and they dressed with (real) brand name clothes. When Tamara showed me a photo of her brothers, she commented, “Do you think these guys match with their girlfriends?” She outright stated that their sex appeal was due to what they (financially) presented to the families of their girlfriends.

Tamara’s brothers even had a car that she helped buy at her mother’s (persistent) request. Her mother claimed that a car would allow them to do “more things.” Yet, when her parent’s car broke down, rather than lend them their car so that they could work on the weekend, her brother’s did not even offer them a ride to their house from the bus station. Those “things” her mother said a car would enable them to do did not include contributing to their parent’s care. It did not include becoming self-sufficient.

Tamara believes that “deep down” her parents enjoy the “envy” of their neighbors. She believes it reminds them of when they lived comfortably from the income generated by their family business. This nostalgia is affirming to them. Tamara thinks that this is why they never asked details about her job in Miami. They did not want to feel as if they depended on her work, which she believed made sense. She told me, “No father wants to think that their daughter is taking care of the family.” So they chose to not ask where or how she sold her labor (to help them.) Tamara worked as a stripper, and ever so often she also picked up “side jobs.” The club she worked at was a block away from my apartment when I lived in South Beach. We reconnected over Facebook a few years after I moved back to New York. However, it was only
after she settled down that we were able to fully connect. Before, our work schedules did not permit a lot of “in person” socialization between us.

During one of her shifts at the strip club she met Antonio. He was from Italy, and worked as a bartender in South Beach. He was attending a co-worker’s bachelor party and was instantly charmed by Tamara. While he was very loud and intense, she seemed to mellow him out. Antonio told her early on in the relationship that he was fully able to financially support her. He even offered her a means to adjust her status. He offered to marry Tamara not only because he was in love with her but also because he “wanted to protect her.” He had paid a Cuban girl to marry him when he first came to Miami seven years prior, so he already was a divorced U.S citizen who also happened to be an eligible bachelor. He did not want her to work anymore in the strip club but more than anything because he felt that it was her “family” that exploited her. He was eager to start his own family because he was getting older. He was forty-five already and wanted to be able to “enjoy his children.”

Tamara still felt that she had financial obligations with her family back home in Argentina. She was at first hesitant and forewent having a wedding celebration when they “tied the knot.” She felt remorseful that she could not afford to include her family in the festivities. When she married Antonio, her family was at first surprisingly angry with her. When Antonio then took her to meet his family in Rome a year after, her brothers complained that she did not offer to take them to Italy as well. The insisted, “They have always wanted to visit the motherland.” Her mother alerted her that she should have visited Argentina before Italy, since her brothers were in need of guitar strings and an amplifier for their rock and roll band. In this way she would “kill two birds with one stone.” I remember the pain in Tamara’s voice when she told me, “I’m thirty-five. What did they expect?”

Tamara was disappointed because she told her parents that she could sponsor them when
she became a citizen so that they could come to the United States. She thought that it would be a good thing for her siblings to eventually move to Miami so they could access educational opportunities and more importantly, so that they could finally hold down a job. She does not remember a time in which they were gainfully employed. If there is one thing that you can do when you get to Miami if you are young, able bodied, and speak Spanish, it is work. At their age, she reminded me she worked a full-time job and could not afford to go to college the way they were able to do so.

Tamara shared that they went to the music conservatory because they wanted to be musicians when they dropped out of their first stint at the public University. They had e-mailed her requesting for a list of instruments for their band. They did not start off requesting a tambourine either. They then enrolled in a private University. They both failed out of that one too. They were “looking into” other educational pursuits and this was why they could not commit to a job. Also, they often told her about how the “system is not meant for working.” They were very much about “working” but not for “the system.” Tamara believes that they must have read a book during their brief college career and received all of their “revolutionary” ideology as a result. She knew that they spit these “lines” to mask their laziness. When they decided that they would become music producers, Tamara was floored. However, to her knowledge, they paid bars to let them play their music. They were never paid (not even with free drinks.) She asked, “How good could they even be?” She talked about her twin brothers as if they shared more than their mother’s womb. She thought that they shared a “brain,” and she was certain they shared “their women” too.

Tamara found out she was pregnant a few months prior to my last interview with Antonio and her. I was excited to hear the details. Tamara cried when she shared the news with her family about the new addition. It was mostly because her mother started to cry profusely over the phone.
However, it was not from joy as she first suspected. But rather, much to her disappointment, it was due to the fear that Tamara now would “completely forget about her family.” Antonio was exceptionally disappointed with Tamara’s mother’s response because he could not understand it. I did (sort of.) He stood up and walked to Tamara who was holding her stomach and staring at the floor. He said, “You have your own family now to worry about. Your brothers can work. My parents are still working in Italy; they sell bread at our bakery. My sister and brother help them because they know that it is for the benefit of our family. You have your own responsibilities now Tamara, you need to take care of the baby and me. We are now your most important part of your family.” I wondered silently if this was a common occurrence within transnational families. I saw this same scene before. I had heard these same words spoken by Antonio spoken by my father before, and then I repeated them to Pablo myself.

The next time I saw Tamara, one of my first questions I asked her concerned her family. I was constantly intrigued with these stories because they soothed me. I felt as if I was not “overly sensitive” about certain family dynamics when I realized that it even happened “in the best families.” These patterns happened as a result of migration and the changing socioeconomic dynamics that followed and strained families. I asked her where exactly had she left off with her family, now that her daughter Maria was about to turn one. I only followed her updates by what she posted on Facebook since she was a new mom; I knew she had a lot of changes to adjust to. I caught up with her for coffee at Antonio’s newly opened bakery near North Beach during my last trip down South.

Tamara confessed that she only sent her family money for birthdays or during the holidays now. They money was no longer “steady.” She told me that her mother had bashed her on Facebook the other day saying that she was disappointed that Tamara did not “help her family the way she (her mother) deserved.” Tamara was at first devastated but then her feelings turned
to resentment. I asked her if her family had sent her a gift since the birth of her daughter. After all I reminded her, the post office in Argentina not only received things from up North but it also worked to send things from down South. I stopped and apologized when I realized that I was projecting my (personal family) issues with that last comment. Every now and then my snarky side gets the best of me when these family situations hit too close to home. Tamara knew where this came from but I felt it was nonetheless out of bounds. I just wanted to put out there that I related to the frustrations she shared concerning her family dynamics. I knew what it felt like to be angry at what can be perceived as a lack of interest for her daughter. I also knew it was more complicated than I even wanted to admit.

María was the first granddaughter born to Tamara’s family and the fifth born on Antonio’s side of the family. Tamara regretted that her family never expressed anything near Antonio’s parents when it came to María. They cried every time they heard her voice over the phone. His mother had already visited them to meet María and she was slated to return with his father and sister next month. She told me that every now and then her family embarrassed her because they acted so materialistic and sounded so selfish. She had gratitude that Antonio never judged her family and only insisted that they were just “missing out on María.” I tried to comfort her by sharing how I still could not convince my mother to (financially and personally) cut off her family in Colombia. I told her that even after countless efforts, Pablo’s mother felt “a certain kind of way about me and my intentions” with him. This “needs based approach” to engaging with the family happens within those types of relationships, I assured her, and that she had to just let it go. I shared the simple piece of advice I learned after thirteen years of marriage, “It is not productive to compare your family with his, or his with yours. There is only one family.” Even if she divorced Antonio I told her, you will always have Maria. You will always be a family.

Tamara told me that the money she sent back to Argentina came from her own money.
She felt the need to make this clarification though I wanted to underline to her that there is no such thing as separate money when earned within a marriage. Tamara told me that she worked at the bakery on the weekends since Antonio took them off to be with María. He took care of her and she looked after the shop. She then unloaded that one of her brothers got a girl pregnant. This all started to sound more like her excuse for foregoing weekends with her husband and daughter. She (still) felt that she had to provide for her family in Argentina. She told me that the girl and her family had had her brother were de plata (of money.) The couple now lived together in her parent’s house and her mother constantly calls Tamara to ask if she could send over baby clothes. As luck would have it, her brother was going to have a baby girl.

Tamara’s mother asked her to also consider helping her brother by sending money so that they could buy baby formula when the baby is born. After President Macri took away public subsidies, she worried that the baby would “not survive.” Tamara kept this request from Antonio. She told me because I believe she thought I would understand her choice. Tamara then reminded me that she breastfed Maria. Accordingly, she suggested this option to her mother. Tamara’s mother replied, “What would people think if they see her flashing her breast to feed her baby? That we are poor?”

I am a Mujer

There is a popular saying within Latino culture, “te realizaste como mujer cuando te hiciste madre.” (You became a woman when you became a mother.) After twenty-three hours of labor, had a pinched optic nerve that gave me temporary blindness, also my blood pressure was rising. Then my obstetrician was clear, given the circumstances “they will try to save both of our lives.” Growing up I knew my paternal aunt was faced with a similar predicament during childbirth. During her fourth pregnancy, she carried the fetus to term but had complications due to the size of the baby. Her husband had to decide between her life or that of “the baby.” He
chose her life because she had three children left to raise. He was not going to cook, clean, and care for them. That was the job of “his wife.” When she woke up, she immediately cried and hated him for the rest of her days.

My aunt Tonia had been with Abraham since the age of twelve. He had physically beat her, cut her with a knife, and verbally abused her ever since. Yet it was “this choice” that she deemed unforgiveable. Independently of my feminist convictions and staunchly pro-choice stance, I deeply understood her choice and resentment. At the time, I had developed a relationship with the child I was carrying. It was one that I was unwilling to forego. By choosing myself, I felt that I failed to protect my child and it is my affirmative duty to do. I thought if Pablo chose me, if it came down to this decision, he failed as a father. However, to recognize an unborn fetus even when viable outside of the wound as a child can be a tricky proposition with great implications. So I would like to clarify that I personally felt I was a mother to my child during pregnancy, even if I defend the laws that protect not imposing this view on anyone by way of policies. I knew that he loved chocolate, that he loved to kick, and he had my father’s nose before I even held him in my arms.

I told Pablo, “You pick him or I will never forgive you.” My mother was praying and thought she was entitled to make the decision, because she was “my mother.” However, that is not how the law works I told her and at the time, my mother and Pablo had a strained relationship because she barely knew him. I did not fear death, if it meant giving life to my son. I did however fear living with the pain that I saw in my aunt’s eyes every time she saw a baby. Pablo put on his scrubs, and my mother and sister were to wait in the room as they wheeled me away. (Only one person is admitted into a C-section delivery room.) Everyone believed I would curse and yell because of the pain, which according to the doctors, I must have felt because of Pablito’s shoulders that, were banging on my hips with each contraction. There is no epidural
that can diminish that type of pain. Yet, I can honestly say that I did not feel pain and so I did not curse or yell. This was not the first (or last) thing I wanted Pablito to hear from me. When I heard him take his first breath and scream, I was certain that I made the right choice.

I was so scared once I took Pablito home from the hospital. I felt that I could control more in the hospital because I had a considerable amount of oversight from people who “knew better” and “more” about babies. I remember the first time that I went to the supermarket with him. I started waving my hands over him as we walked down the aisles to ensure that no can or other flying object fell on top of him. It was a similar hand motion my father made when he carried him as a newborn. Since my father is visually impaired he was afraid he would crash into a wall whilst carrying Pablito. I guess we both feared simply not being “prepared” for (unforeseeable) “uncertainties’.”

A Different Type of Sacrifice, a Source of Perpetual Guilt

I will admit that during my fieldwork, when I embarked to do non-motherly activities that were integral components to my research, I felt guilty. Whenever my son was not involved because he was either too young, it was too late, or it was not an age-appropriate experience for him, I felt guilty. I will also admit that I did not learn to love soccer with the passion that I do until I saw my son’s love for the game. It was infectious. It was only in the field that I discovered not only the importance of motherhood in my life, but it also allowed me to see my mother’s choices with more empathy and compassion than I did before. It also allowed me to find a new understanding and more sympathy for the other mother in my life: Pablo’s, my mother-in-law.

Both of these women have indelibly shaped who I am not only as a mother and wife, but also as a scholar. Their criticisms, experiences, and perspectives underscore the questions I asked not only of my subjects but of myself too. My ethnographic intuition was very much tied to my “motherly” instinct. While I do not want to essentialize Latinas and mothers, I do want to suggest
that there is something that can be learned from the power of the reproductive body and how it can also be deemed subversive in unexpected spaces and interactions because of patriarchy.

My use of the term “Latina immigrant mothers,” focuses on undocumented women for the most part of this project, but is also inclusive of women who were formally undocumented or who are excluded from certain aspects of community participation and decision making due to their economic status, race, or sexual orientation. I also do not want to undervalue that all of the mothers in this project were daughters before they were mothers. I underscore through their narratives how many of their challenges are a direct product of history, culture, and their interaction with the institutions and systems that govern them. However, I also put on an equal playing field for scrutiny their interactions, memories, and relationships as mothers, wives, and daughters. Though, the term Latina, in the United States, identifies and homogenizes women. A Latina is defined as, “any person currently living in the United States of Spanish-speaking heritage from any of the 30 Caribbean and Latin American countries…an imagined community of recent, established, multigenerational immigrants from diverse cultural, linguistic, racial, and economic backgrounds” (Valdivia 2004:207). Latina immigrant mothers, in this age of “terror”, face numerous consequences, opportunities, and paths by way of the migration experience that render them particularly vulnerable to exploitation, oppression, and violence. However, it can also offer liberation and transformation. It is important to contextualize their role as immigrant mothers and workers, as a residual effect of Colonial projects that bred uneven development and dubious modernization throughout the Americas. This is what motivates migration (push and pull) effects. The accelerated environmental, demographic, social, political, and cultural changes throughout the region have resulted in women reinterpreting their motherhood within the framework of migration. I find this to be something that despite my proximity to many of the women and families in these stories is beyond my complete scope of understanding.
In 2014 I traveled for an interview to San José, Costa Rica by myself. While I had previously traveled to Argentina (in 2006) and to Utah, United States (in 2007) without my son, there was something that felt completely different about my trip in 2014. My son was nine, fully capable of abstract thought and incredibly expressive. I was gone for only two days but he cried when he left me at the airport profusely, because he worried about the countless “what ifs.” When I arrived at Costa Rica, one of “our songs” played on the radio and I started to cry hysterically on the plane because I was scared. He was all I could think of, and the possibility that I could not see him again because of something that was outside of my control made me literally vomit. The song triggered my anxiety because I felt helpless. This is when I realized, that many Latina mothers who migrate and are forced to live with this feeling when their children are not with them are incredibly brave. This is not to say that all mothers have the same “type” of feeling, but the stories I heard growing up about my aunt leaving my cousins in Colombia to come to the United States suggest that this is no easy feat and that the body reacts accordingly. One day she woke up and her teeth were all crooked because her gums were weakened due to her grinding her teeth. It probably feels incredibly worst if you do not know when you will be reuniting, or if you ever will, as some of the women expressed in this project. Remember, many of the Latina women whom shared stories with me about their motherhood experience in the United States, left behind their mothers in Argentina who live with a similar anxiety about their children’s safety their age or location. For this reason, many families find comfort in social media and the Internet, because it enables communication.

I never once heard mothers them describe their experiences of migration as joyous ones, even when they started new families abroad. My aunt petitioned for her daughters as soon as she could, but when she went to INS, they asked her who her lawyer was and she responded, “Jesus Christ.” Even though she was eligible for family reunification, her limited resources and
understanding of the system prolonged the reunification. Faith alone was not enough to navigate the system. A motherly presence becomes as a result of these types of challenges particularly important even when it is only a virtual one or embodied in goods (the things she sends.)

**The Social construction of Latina Motherhood in the United States**

The sociocultural construction of Latina womanhood, considers motherhood and sacrifice cardinal to female realization. Meaning, if you are not a mother, and if you are not self-sacrificing (such as putting your family before yourself), you are considered a “defective” or “lesser” woman within your family and community. The premium placed on motherhood is incredibly high because this was the only form of participation in public life women were allowed…reproduction and rearing children. The expectation that a Latina “good” woman should never choose herself before motherhood or family is culturally instilled within Catholic ideals of gender. For this reason infertility is often viewed as a “punishment” instead of a biological constraint. In fact, women who use “IVF” are viewed in a similar light.

My sister, Yezenia, was married for ten years before becoming unexpectedly pregnant. I say unexpectedly because she found out about her pregnancy after eight and a half months gestation. She had undergone bariatric surgery and so she felt that all of those “rumblings” in her stomach were gas and not my nephew Charly. She was considering IVF treatment but wanted to first get “into shape.” Interestingly, a rumor had started in my sister’s former church congregation claiming that she had “undergone” IVF because “God was not blessing her.” My sister laughs it off now but at the time, she felt great “shame” about not being able to conceive. She went on to have three kids consecutively but says that she made peace with the possibility of never carrying a pregnancy to full term after I had my son because she felt she was also “mothering him.” She still calls Pablito, “my first.”

The belief that Latina women should only participate in family affairs is what has
caused great political divisions amongst the Latino community in the United States as previously mentioned. After Presidential candidate Donald Trump said that there should be some “sort of punishment” for women who have abortions, his appeal increased exponentially within many Latino evangelical congregations. The urgency of immigration reform is trumped (literally) by the desire to control the wombs of women. This view ignores the very personal reasons many women seek terminating pregnancies or at that, why they might choose to prevent them. This is especially complex when considering the trials and tribulations of immigrant women.54

The Need to Work: Migration as Sacrifice

“Love does not fill your stomach.”
-Latino proverb.

The U.S/Mexico border serves as a tangible and metaphorical border that embodies, on many levels, the gendered “age of terror.” Nancy Morawetz situates the lived reality of the border, as the birthplace of our present “humanitarian crisis.” While said border literally divides the United States from Mexico, it also is the most accessible gateway into the United States, for a significant majority of the Latino population whose social conditions deny them the means to enter “legally” by way of a visa. Independently of the numerous risks involved with immigration, financial, physical, and emotional costs are outweighed by the limited economic opportunities at home (Abrego 2009:191). However, where does that leave mothers who need to migrate? Within Latino culture, mothers are expected to provide more emotional care than fathers; therefore their absence has a greater traumatizing effect on children. Yet, migration for the immigrant mother, becomes an “investment,” that yields greater returns from the potentially higher wages up North (Chiswick 2000).

_Marianismo_, and _Machismo_, shed light on Latino understandings of gender and how these notions then translate into embodied practices and experiences, like immigration.
Marianismo provides an alternative view as to why Latina immigrant mothers are willing to put themselves in such a vulnerable position, in order to gain entry into the United States. The mass migration North by Latina mothers (or women who are in the age of reproduction) have dramatically increased over the last years as a result of aggressive globalization processes, failed neoliberal policies, unfair trade relationships, and regional political instability. Mothers (future mothers) were forced into the public sphere as workers, head of households and “keepers of the faith.” A female, according to Catholicism, “cannot hope to attain full spiritual status until her forbearance and abnegation have been tested by male-inflicted suffering” (Stevens, Machismo and Marianismo 1973a: 62). In line with this context, migration tests a Latina immigrant’s mother devotion to her faith and family. By recognizing the role of Marianismo within Latina migration, we make this cultural ideology into a resolute actor with a mind of its own.

In Sigmund Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia,” he describes mourning as an act in which the mourner refuses to leg go of a loss object and consequently, cannot overcome the “psychic burden of loss.” Also, he argues that the mourning process requires a rebirth that if unattained, means that they will be doomed to live in a melancholic state. Loss is a constant feature of migration that comes out of geographical, cultural, and socioeconomic displacement, despite its “born-again” characteristics. The “double consciousness” of Latina immigrant mothers, can be conceptualized also as a loss, the loss of psychological stability and the loss of a whole self because of migration. One might argue that for this reason, Latina immigrant mothers hold on even stronger to the image of the Virgin Mary, “a feminine vision of unconditional love, peace, and forgiveness” in the midst of violence, crisis, and displacement (Hall 2004:1). Even though I was raised Pentecostal, I remember watching The Passion of the Christ (2003) with my mother. She started to cry because she could only “imagine what Mary was feeling” as she witnessed Jesus’s sacrifice at the cross.
Motherly Choices in the Field

I often think about the challenges of being a mother and worker in this contemporary society. Even within “professional” work environments, cultural identity has to be negotiated with personal and social expectations of motherhood in the work place. For example, I know that many mothers travel as part of their professions and leave their children with caretakers. In fact, after my 2014 trip to Costa Rica, a year later, I was offered a traveling faculty position. It would have taken me to explore countries throughout the world doing what I love the most about my profession, teaching. However, the possibility of not seeing my son was too much for me to handle. I am not a helicopter mom and in fact, I attempt to encourage my son’s independent thought and identity in all ways. When he wanted to wear his hair long, I had no problem with it. When he asked to pierce his ears (at ten), I personally took him. However, my insistence on being present comes from the realization that yesterday, I was a child. It feels like it all went by so quick and eventually, he too will want to pursue his own adventures. Therefore, I just want to be with him as much as I can in meaningful ways that he will remember and turn to when in doubt.

Often, as professionals, we are expected to underplay our motherhood in order to prove we are capable of being (fully) “professional” and “reliable” to our fields and professions. When and if our priorities include family, it can suggest that we are not as competent as our male counterparts or that we are “less” serious about our work. I once went to interview for a position and was asked how I managed my work and family life. The committee knew that I was teaching and writing up my dissertation, in addition to pursuing other professional projects simultaneously. I responded honestly and said that I worked harder knowing I had to because I (felt) as if I had to always “prove” myself. This is probably fueled by imposter syndrome and my own natural anxiety. I added that I was the “type of mom” who still made breakfast, packed a
lunch, and baked the cupcakes for the soccer game before grading or writing my papers.

I said this with pride in an effort to highlight my (incredible and extraordinary) time management skills. Granted, I did not mention that my son’s socks rarely matched, we ordered dinner way too often, and I have yet to convince him to eat vegetables. Motherhood and work it is a common concern of women in academia, who are often forced to “share the care of her offspring with others” (Magurran 2000). I realize that the more professional we are in our careers, the stronger the pressure to outsource our mothering responsibilities (as defined by our American culture.) This is a totally valid choice, but what if you choose to also be the “soccer mom?” Or in my case, the “futbol mami?” Is this incompatible with anthropology? Academia?

I do not want to be silent about the relationship between academia and motherhood because silence perpetuates many of the challenges women (especially of color) face surrounding motherhood in the workforce. During my first year of Doctoral Studies, I was left a very encouraging note by a professor that asked me to consider if “anthropology was my cup of tea” because “it required work.” I had worked in the informal economy since the age of seven and in the formal sector since sixteen. At that time, I was already financially independent. I was a mother when I started my doctoral studies and was also a mother when I obtained my second Masters and graduated Summa Cum Laude from New York University. Despite this, I felt that the note had less to do with me, and more to do with my identity. I had never requested an extension or turned in a late assignment. Therefore, I was perplexed about what exactly she was implicating if not that I was (somehow) lazy. This also revealed to me the gaps that need to be filled around Latina motherhood scholarship in general. I thought: if I don’t write about it, do I contribute to these gross assumptions that can (and more than likely has) steered Latina mothers out of the Academy?

I can understand (but not excuse) why a white woman who did not experience
motherhood could construe my promise as a Latina scholar as limited. In fact, life had already prepared me for this type of reception within my field. The same year, another professor told me that the reason I probably got into a graduate program was because, “I was Latina.” So either I am a freeloader, lazy, or a statistic (in their eyes.) Or at least, this is what their “feedback” suggests. Or no? I want to be “real” about this so I do not misrepresent how difficult (and lonely) academia can be when you are not “expected” to be part of it. Nonetheless, by sharing my own personal experiences in these fields I hope to challenge the culture of silence that is prevailing amongst Latina women within academia. We have to be critical of (all) of the institutions that govern our lives in challenging ways and for difficult reasons that I still am processing throughout this project. Yes, we sometimes have to “grit our teeth” and “take it” in order to move ahead, but that does not mean that we have to be quiet about it because silence is demobilizing and stifling for (real) creativity and critical thinking. Also, it kills transformation. I take it all (the sexist, racist, and elitist) feedback, as an opportunity to learn, reflect, grow, and produce work that directly challenges it. The smallest details can reveal the biggest picture.

I would like to suggest that it was precisely because of my identity as a feminist queer mother, Latina, and daughter of immigrants (from the “hood”) that I maintained a strong sense of focus and purpose within academia. I share many of the experiences that shaped my own identity because it connects me to the questions I asked in the field, the witnessing and testimonies I learned from professionally but also personally. I am motivated by students whom I meet in my classroom and because of me, can see themselves no longer as “others.” This is the power I found in becoming “the ethnographer” of my reality and world. For this reason, I think it is important to “correct” the perception of Latina mothers (inside and outside) of the Academy by privileging and centering their narratives as potentially contributing depth to cultural understandings about motherhood, Latinas, and migration. These studies by in large continue to
be deficient of “first person” narratives.

I want to also stress that I do believe mothers who are able to find that balance between work and familial obligations in the academia are resourceful and enlightened in ways that necessitates further academic inquiry and discussions. I contend that the ability to “mother” is not exclusive to women. However, my intention is to privilege the voices of women because their expected silence on the topic is pervasive. This allows me to make a greater commentary about motherhood and sacrifice within different social dimensions. Pamela Stone explains that women who “opt out” of careers are making “complex and multi-layered” choices; they too “face a gap that is a function of a double bind created primarily by the conditions of work in the gilded cages of elite professionals” (Stone 2007:19). This suggests that mothers are constantly given expectations that are impossible to achieve given the patriarchal idea that reduces women to either mothers or workers, but never can they be comfortably be both. Our decisions as mothers are complicated and personal, but also incredibly political (as most issues related to reproduction and the body generally are.)

I do not want to conflate the experience of traveling for work with the one of migrating for economic survival as many of the women in this study and in my personal life did. However, it was when I was physically separated from my son in 2014 that I truly thought about the ways in which Latina immigrant mothers have to cope and work. What I was feeling is amplified and a constant for many immigrant mothers due to the multiple uncertainties within their lives. This gave me a new appreciation that came from the knot in my stomach, the tears I shed, and the heart palpitations that came from just thinking that my son was so “far away.” I remember that when I was a child, that type of distance was not very real to me.

When I visited Colombia as a child, my father never went and so I did not get see him for months at a time. I would miss him greatly because I was and continue to be very close to him. I
remember one time I was eight, and I went around the corner from my aunt’s house in Barranquilla where there was a cliff. It was night and I had prepared all day to shout out to my father. I stood at the cliff and yelled with all of my might, “Papi! Papi!” I thought that if I projected my voice enough, if I tried real hard, he would be able to hear me. He was a four-hour plane ride away. However, as a child, all I felt was that he “was not there.” As a mother, the experience of “distance” involves a lot of psychological management. I cannot help but tear up thinking about both experiences one as an adult, and the other as a child. I turn next to me, to see my son watching soccer and I realize how privileged my motherhood experience is in comparison to the women I am going to introduce in these testimonies.
Chapter 2, Part 2: *Testimonios*

Elzbieta Sklodwska presents the unique import of *testimonios* within Latin American narratives. She argues that they represent, “both the creative vitality of Latin American culture and its power to express defiance of subordinate groups and recover historically muted voices” (Sklodwska 2002:198). Within the context of this project, I used these testimonies in order to establish how patriarchy shapes the lives of Latina women in the United States due to preexisting ideas foregrounded on Christian (biblical) principles. Within these experiences, these women were able to identify a shared experience of femininity or womanhood that connected them into a community and Latina identity that they discovered through these stories of pain, pleasure, and passion. Also, I structured them in accordance to how the women felt most comfortable with in terms of how I presented their stories.

The first testimony is told in the first person, as this was Lina’s preference. She continuously told that she liked hearing the “I,” throughout the testimony because she was able to, “see herself as someone stronger than she believed she was.” *Testimonio 2*, which shares Gabriela’s story embeds within the testimony a narrative that highlights her relationship and trust with me as ethnographer. The third testimony, is about the ways in which families can be torn apart by addiction and abuse, and how motherhood is used as a way of challenging the feeling of hate. Following the traditional style of the Pentecostal testimonial, I cite biblical verses throughout this entire chapter as a way to explain or challenge choices. The entire chapter should read as a result like an extended testimonial about Latina women identity and the ways in which this identity is shaped across time and space. My selection of testimonials comes exclusively from the lives of Argentine women who inspired a momentous amount of this anthropological undertaking on gender. Within the Latino Pentecostal church, the act of testifying is also an affirming performance of one’s trust in God’s control over one’s life. The
testimonial often reflects the embodied struggle between sin and faith as lived through various experiences such as illness, violence, and reproduction. In these testimonials I found that, women generously shared their memories in which they negotiated old and new roles within their families and through their bodies.\textsuperscript{57} This chapter employs various Latina feminist strategies in order to counter the silences and erasures that traditionally overwhelm Latino family histories. All of these testimonies are composed from multiple interviews, which I edited into one testimony. Once they approved it, only then did I translate them into English.
Testimonio 1: The Bermejo and Quintana Family Story as told by Lina.

Two months after we arrived to Queens from Argentina, my brother asked us to leave his house. He gave us a few days and said that it was getting too uncomfortable for him and his wife. He made sure to ask me when Horacio was at work too. He had cola de paja (a straw dick.) They did not have children so they were used to their privacy. All of a sudden, we were all living together in a one-bedroom apartment. He was not mentally prepared to live again with his family and all of the new additions to it. It was hard adjusting...for all of us. At least in Rosario, we had a house so my boys could go and play outside. All the kids on the block played in front of the house. My boys were very talkative too. Matías was younger but he would always boss around Carlos, my eldest. In order to keep them still and relatively quiet, we would put cartoons on the small television. But, they would put down the volume since they were not in Spanish but English. They boys would make up the dialogue and laugh out loud. They are very creative.

I was so stunned by my brother’s request, which was really an eviction. My husband Horacio was always generous with him. He helped pay for the hospital costs when his “wife” lost the pregnancy. They lived with my mother at the time and we had more economic stability than they did. This is why they also left to the United States before we did. We would have not left if we did not have to. I called out to the boys and told them we were going to go outside. I felt like I was a zombie dressing them. I did not know where I was going. I thought that I could stay in the courtyard until I calmed down. I did not want to show any weakness in front of my sister-in-law. Due to her previous pregnancy complications, she was sterile. I thought that because she wanted to be a mother so bad, that she would at least enjoy having the children around. But, I think she resented them.

I walked and took my boys by the hand. They could not walk very fast because they were little. I picked one up. I remember that I actually picked Carlos up and not Matías. Even though
he was older, he was lighter. He especially had a very hard time adjusting to New York food. It
isn’t that he was a picky eater. He just was not used to the food we had available to us here. He
complained that everything tasted different here. He was convinced that the milk and the Coca
Cola were poisoned because they both tasted like metal to him. He lost so much weight. I knew I
could carry him for longer and farther than if I lifted Matías.

One time, I went to buy groceries for dinner at the corner bodega. Carlos loved mash
potatoes. I remember that I saw a box of mash potatoes. Have you seen those? It is like a powder
like substance. I thought that the picture of the final product looked delicious. I thought about
Carlito. I thought that since he loved them so much he would finally eat a full plate of food
without having to negotiate with him. I also was relieved because I did not have to buy the extra
milk, butter and cheese that we used in our home recipe that required also real potatoes. The box
said it contained cheese and butter flavors so I was relieved and hopeful. In Argentina, we boil
the potatoes and mash them. It is a longer process but now I needed to save money. The things
we used to eat on a daily basis that were staples, were luxury items here

Horacio started working immediately after coming to New York. Literally, he was
working the day after arriving. We tried to stretch every cent because we had so many debts to
pay off. When it became clear we were slipping into poverty faster than what we could prepare
for, when we saw there was no way out of it, we headed North. The country was going to “la
mierda” (shit). When my father passed away, we started to think strategically about what options
we had to progress on our own. My mother is very level headed so she was the one who actually
convinced us to leave. She said to do it for the boys so that they can have better opportunities.
She told me that when her grandmother left Spain for Argentina, she could not have imagined
the life she was able to make for herself. She did not know how to read but she ended up having
her own business. Imagine, if a woman back then could do as much as she did, why couldn’t we
also probar suerte (try out our luck.)

I remember that I gave Carlito the mash potatoes from the box. I made it exactly how the bodega owner told me. He spoke Spanish so he said to just add water. Carlito did not want to eat it. He said it looked funny. I got so frustrated that I forced him and he started to cry. I wanted him to eat so badly. He continued to complain and whine. I was so stressed about everything; it was not about the mash potatoes. Carlito was so upset that he threw it all up. Then, my brother’s wife started to yell at him. I then started to yell at her. It was my entire fault. I was going to clean it up. I think that was part of the reason my brother told us we had to leave. He wouldn’t admit it though because he did not want to appear like she was controlling him. I always knew that she did not like us staying there. I could not believe that my brother forgot that when he got her pregnant, she went to live at my parent’s house. I had to share the bathroom with one more woman. I was at that stage where I needed my time to get ready.

Horacio and I were about to get married at the time. My parents had one more person to feed because my brother was not working. They paid for him to finish his college studies. They believed that by doing this he will be able to get a good and stable job because he was “a professional.” She never worked a day outside of the house after he took her in as his Señora. I mean; she won the lottery becoming part of my family because she was going to be taken care of for the rest of her life. My father gave us that example. I felt betrayed by my brother. Since he was the one who brought home the money, he should have stood up for his family. He should have reminded her that he was “the man” and “in charge.” At least, he should have done it for his mother. When my mother found out, she said that our father must have been turning over in his grave and ashamed at that type of son he was to her.

I was already talking out loud by the time I reached the courtyard. I could not contain my thoughts inside or could I disguise my anger. I thought he is my brother, my own blood. I did not
care if I had a roof over my head. He is my family! I felt abandoned. At least in Argentina, I knew how to get around. I could not ask questions or directions because I did not speak the language. He wanted me to leave knowing this? I got lost every time I went to the supermarket and this is why I only dared to buy at the bodega. They were Dominicans so they were very kind to me. I had trouble at first understanding the workers because it was a totally unfamiliar accent. However, I knew that they were always willing to help me when I asked them about ingredients because you know that some things do not have the same meaning here as they do in Argentina. I tried to explain to them what mate. They thought I meant “tea.” Do you know that the owner brought a few bags of Yerba (mate) from Jackson Heights since he lived next to a supermarket that sold it? He would tell me that he knew how hard it is to come to a new country. I finally had found a place that sold mate, and my brother who now only drank coffee, kicked me out.

My first impression of Queens was that the buildings all looked the same here in Forest Hills. At least where my brother lived, because then there is that section of the neighborhood that is filled with mansions. They were beautiful but it was another world to walk through those streets. I had come from Argentina with a coat but it was not heavy enough for a New York City snow day. I remember that I zoned out. My own brother did not care that my sons were so little or that they were having a hard time. My mother had dressed the boys with stockings…the type that girls use with dresses. She put them under their pants. This attire was in order to make sure they stayed as warm as possible. We were not used to this type of cold. Now that I think about it, it was funny that my boys wore pink or flowerily stockings under their big boy pants. I saved one picture of them with the stockings. We were dressing them to go to mass and I just knew that this was something that we will want to but should not forget.

We actually found it the other day and Carlos could not believe it. He asked me why I did allow my mother to dress him like a girl. I had to explain to him how at that time I actually
thought the stockings were such a great idea. They were cheap. Boys clothes are always more expensive than girl clothes. I would sometimes put two pairs on them under their jeans. I would hand wash the stockings at night in the bathroom sink and then dry them by wrapping them around the radiator. There was snow on the ground. I remember that I tried not to cry. When I left, my mother stayed in the apartment fighting with my brother and his wife. My mother called an ungrateful and lazy *Porteña* (from the City of Buenos Aires.) She cursed and yelled in front of the boys who were afraid. I mean, they did not say one word. They had never seen their grandmother mad and their mother sad at the same time…and this was because of their uncle and his wife. This was probably the first family fight that they ever witness. I feared that if I cried my tears would freeze on my face. It would make it feel even colder, and I needed to stay outside for as long as I could. I did not want to step a foot in that house. For a brief but intense moment, I thought about Argentina. I was angry that I left.

I do not know when I put down Carlos and I don’t remember how far we were from the courtyard, when I heard the boys laughing. I had stopped walking but my mind was definitely somewhere else. I looked down and Carlos had thrown Matías in the snow. Carlos kept opening his mouth trying to catch the snowflakes. It was then that I realized that this was the first time that they ever saw snow in real life. They had only seen it before in the movies or television or in a cartoon. They could not believe it. I could not believe it either. They were happy…despite it all…they were happy. Thank goodness that they had gloves on too. I didn’t have gloves on but I bent down and started to make little snowballs. We played together. I started to cry, but this time it was because I felt so happy that I was with them. The bodega owner had told me that when he came to the United States, he left his son behind. He did not get to see him again until he was sixteen. I felt so lucky to not miss out on these moments. We were all we had and it was more than most other immigrants have. I then felt that we would be OK. My father had sent me a sign
that he was watching over us with the snow. He wanted to remind me that this was why we came
here, so my boys could one-day experience new and exciting things that were not possible in
Argentina. Snow was just the first of these things. There is snow in Argentina, in El Sur, where
you have the penguins and whales. You know, where Cristina bought all that land. Only rich
people go to vacation there so they can ski.

It was a necessary experience. My brother did me a favor. I started to appreciate the little
things. It didn't matter we did not have everything we wanted but we had what we needed, each
other. We had our health too. My mother caught up with us as we played in the snow. She had
gone out to look for us because she worried that we had not returned. I had lost track of time. She
came out with a blanket that she wore like a shawl on top of her coat and covering her head. We
then saw Horacio who was walking towards us. He was coming back from work. My mother and
I explained to him what happened with my brother. My mother then offered us her savings for us
to rent an apartment. In the meantime, she had arranged for us to go and stay with her friend who
lived a few blocks away. In a really short time my mother had made friends with other women.
They were widows of Italian descent, who still spoke the language. My mother’s father was
Italian. So since she spoke Italian, when she got here she was able to feel more integrated than I
did. She told us that as soon as we were able to rent our own place that she would go and live
with us.

I did not want to leave her there with my brother’s wife. But he knew that he could not
kick her out. This is why she stayed with them. I knew what she was giving us, her savings; this
was what she was able to save from the sale of my family’s house. It was hers to sell when he
died. My brother left to New York two years before we did so he had already adapted to the way
things were here. Horacio eventually paid all the money back to my mother. It took a while
though. However, she never rushed us. Even today, when Horacio and I argue over stupid things,
he sides with her. What she did for us is something that we cannot forget. My boys adore her. She gets up at any hour of the night when they come home from going out with their friends. She goes and makes them *empanadas*. They call her to let her know where they are and at what time they are coming back. When they leave; she stays looking out the window. She stands their waiting for them. There is even a dent on the ground to mark the spot in the kitchen. This mark is her way of claiming her territory, her place, which is with us. We have been in the same apartment for so long. We were able to buy it and the one next to it, which we rent now.

My mother eventually was able to petition for us because of my brother. It has been a long process but we are here and we are “legal.” I was able to go back to Argentina for the first time. I went to visit Horacio’s family. I could not help but think about when my brother and I were kids. We actually all went together because it was also my aunt’s 80th birthday. It was good for my brother and I to visit our old neighborhood. I was able to forgive him after his wife left him. I was never really mad at him. But she took everything they had and you know who took him in? We did. That is what a family does. I told my mother if she wanted to go back to Argentina we could send her money and she has a pension back home. I want her to just relax. I told her that she wouldn’t have to worry. However, she says that she would be a worried sick without us. If we move to China, she told us, “I will have to learn to eat rice everyday.”
Testimony 2: Gabriela

Gabriela and I met at our kid’s soccer game. Her son played against my son’s soccer team. He was really good but I told her, “My son is the goalie.” What I was telling her (in codes) was that while I recognized her son’s skills, they were not superior to that of my son. Yes, futbol mami’s smack talk. While everything was related to soccer I took it as research, but they are just some roles that are prioritized. If my son is on the pitch, I am not just his biggest fan but I am his mom. I am part of his barra. My mother is actually probably tens times worse because she does not really understand the game. All she knows is that anything and everything my son does is what gets cheered for. Gabriela saw that I would have to ask her to stop cheering at the wrong times (even when my son made an auto-goal.) Gabriela thought it was funny and told us, that we should be cheering for all of the kids no matter what team. She had a point but I couldn’t (to be quite honest.) She thought that was funny too. We would gravitate towards each other at the games. My mother would also ask her to join us after with the boys for lunch. This is how our relationship started. The boys did not speak to each other on the pitch because they were not on the same team. However, as soon as the game finished, they would hug each other. My mother really liked Gabriela. She found her to be “hechada pa’ alante” (literally translates to someone who pushes forward).

Gabriela certainly was a strong and really smart woman. She was driven. She was a single mother and was raising a ten-year old, Santos on her own. He was really proper and well mannered. I would often have to apologize because my son would say “Che” to her, who is older. She was from Mendoza. She was living in New York for over a decade. In fact, she had come in 2000 with the intention of overstaying her visa. She was young and so she believed that it would not be unlikely for her to fall in love in the United States eventually and start her own family. However, in 2001 she had yet to resolve her documentation status (she was out of status.)
Her mother fell ill, and her younger brother was not mature enough to make decisions on her behalf. He had just turned eighteen but even though he was her caretaker, it would be too much for him to make any decisions about her life. She packed up her things and returned to Mendoza. She told me, “I did not think twice. I did what I had to do.” She sold everything that she could and left to reunite with her family in Argentina. They needed her.

I knew that Gabriela had left without a documentation status. However, I never asked how she returned. I did not want her to think that I would, in any way, judge her decision. I assumed that in order to return to New York, she probably had a lot of “suspect” maneuvering. Knowing her entry date into the United States gave a lot of context about her documentation status. However, one day we were all at a Mexican restaurant and she greeted the waiter with a hug and kiss. As she introduced him she told me, “We used to work together back in Mexico City.” My mother asked her, “When were you in Mexico?” She turned to her and said, “that’s a really long story.” Not wanting to be intrusive, I changed the topic and talked about the kid’s games. We had made plans to meet for happy hour that Friday night. She had a day off and my mother was taking the boys to see a movie.

“Tell me about Mexico?” I started to pour the carafe of Sangria. We had a two-finger rule. Two vertical fingers were how much we poured into the glass. She asked, “Are you going to use it in your book?” I had not thought about it so clearly. This was happy hour. “Do you want me to?” She took a sip and smiled, “Actually, I do.” Given the setting I had to make a decision. “Well, let’s set up a play date in my house with the boys. My mom can watch them and you and I go the diner.” We had met to just hang out and knowing how many hours that she worked and how rare it was that she was without Santos. Santos’s father would see him every other weekend. However, she would use that time to catch up on schoolwork. She was very autodidactic and was teaching herself about tax law. She worked as a cashier but was known for her tax filing abilities.
She knew every possible deduction. Through word of mouth she had started to get a following of people who wanted to file even if they did not have a status. She would charge them and get paid in cash. They trusted her. She had business cards she gave out while at work to the customers. She would slip them in their bags. They always commented about “how honest she was” because she would memorize the prices of various products that were sold cheaper at the store’s competition. When the prices where she worked were higher, she informed the customers that they could find it cheaper. Even if they purchased it at the store, they thanked her. She affirmed, “I really don’t owe the owners anything. I get paid a decent hourly pay but I also am being paid for one job even though they have me do three for the same price. I am not obligated to make them profit. I am on the side of the person who is getting ripped off.

When Gabriela arrived to our house she came with a bottle of wine her brother had brought from his trip to Mendoza. He worked as an accountant. He would take on extra clients but she would do the work. She did this work in addition to being a cashier. Working as a cashier allowed her to file taxes with her Tax ID number. She will be able to “prove” she is a good citizen when the opportunity came to adjust her status. The owners of the store trusted her so much after years and years of working with them that they paid her extra to “keep a close eye” on any “irregularities.” She confessed, “They treat all the other workers like shit. He (the owner) says that I am a good person.” She affirmed she never in her life has ratted someone out. She was not a “rata” (rat.) That would go against her “ethics.”

One thing I could appreciate of Gabriela is that she always spoke with a sense of irony. I was never fully sure if she was being facetious or ironic. (Something I totally relate to.) Gabriela’s brother, Martín was like another son to her. He had recently married and was going to be a father. This is when she asked him to sell their house in Mendoza. She did not want to do this until she knew he would stay for sure in the United States. Once he had a child; she knew
they both would never go back. This is now their home. Both of their children were the first generation of Argentine-Americans. “My brother told me that everything looks the same in Mendoza. However, they now remodeled the plaza. The mayor wanted to get support for his reelection so he upgraded the space. It has exercise machines and everybody goes there to exercise.” We laughed at how much he had drunk with his cousins. We saw the videos on Facebook. He said that even though they had not seen each other for so many years, it felt like time had not passed. Their cousins were married now. He said that all they talked about was their childhood. Everyone asked when she would return. They do not know that she is undocumented.

As we set the table Gabriela told me, “maybe one day I’ll go back but I need to make sure I can come back in.” At that point, I told her I was “obligated” to have her verbally consent and went over informed consent. At first, she looked confused. “You don’t work for the government, right? They won’t use this information against me?” I realized that I was treating my informant like a spy or at least that was what she was made to feel. I was not into that “type” of anthropology. “No, I just want you to know that I am going to now ask you specific questions and will take notes. Or do you want me to record it?” Gabriela paused. “I prefer pen and paper.” Pablo went and took the boys to the park so we could stay alone and have a “deep” conversation. They went to kick the ball so I knew it would be a while (they never get tired.)

“Mexico?” That is where I wanted to start because I was unusually curious. She told me her story, or at least she wanted to fill in the gaps I might have about what I already knew. She was candid when she explained the circumstances of her choices. She said, “I came in through the border.” That made sense but still was unexpected. She told me she had purchased a ticket to Mexico City. She had friends who had left to work there and were currently working in their professions. It was easier to adjust your status in Mexico. She told me that they were hostile towards Guatemalans, but they would tell her that they “loved Argentines.” She stayed and
worked with them until she was able to get enough money to “safely” enter the United States. I thought about how “safe” could it be through the border. She had left her brother set up in Mendoza where he started his studies. He came to the New York speaking English. Gabriela paid for him to take classes when she moved to the United States. She had a hard time learning the language and so she wanted him to come prepared so it would be a smoother transition. She knew that he would be able to finish his studies, but she had to work here in order to help him, “over there.”

“And then I got here.” I did not know if she wanted to me to ask a follow up. I felt compelled to but I had to also make peace with the fact that I was not willing to press her. “What was the “safe way?” She looked at me, “the one that would not get me killed.” I then opted to ask her about her son’s father. “Where did you meet Bruno, Here?” She laughed, “Yes, unfortunately.” I knew that they had not been together for a very long time though they coparented Santos (at a distance.) He would show up to the games and I knew that Santos looked happy to talk to him when he was there. Gabriela on the other hand looked visibly annoyed with his presence. She shared, “He is not a bad guy. He just is irresponsible. When we met, it was exciting to be with someone who was not afraid to start a new job or leave another one if he didn’t like it. He liked to have fun and go out.” However, once Gabriela became pregnant, she did not find him amusing anymore.

“He helps you with Santo?” She rolled her eyes and shook her head. “Help? Please.” She told me that he is living with this older woman who takes care of him. I asked her why she didn’t start dating or if she was actually looking for a relationship. “I have a relationship, the one with my son. That is whom I take care of. Now I am going to be an aunt. I have my brother and his wife. I don’t need drama. My life is dramatic enough.” She then told me that Santos’s father was actually the nephew of the storeowner where she was a cashier. “I should have known better, but
you grow up.”
Testimonio 3: The Power of Hate- Laura’s Story

I thought our story was special. We met the good old fashion way, through a friend of a friend. I had just finished high school in Córdoba and went to Buenos Aires in order to work and to try new things. Córdoba is the second biggest city but it can feel like a “small town.” He is only three years older than me, but he had already lived so much more. I was born in Córdoba but never felt grounded in a place because my parents moved a lot from neighborhood to neighborhood. We never owned our own house so we would stay in one place until we finished out our rental contract. It never felt like we ever fully unpacked. I think this is why it was not so difficult for me to leave Córdoba to Buenos Aires, and then Buenos Aires to New York. He was from Buenos Aires, but told me he liked Córdoba because he felt things were “simpler.” I used to think, maybe one day we can retire there. At the time, I felt like it was love at first sight. As I try to trace back what exactly went wrong with our relationship, I can point to many moments that clearly were red flags.

After all, he told me that he drank a bottle of wine per dinner. I did not think it was strange but he did not mention that he sometimes would continue to drink two more bottles right after dinner. The longest he probably abstained from alcohol was two consecutive days, when we went to visit my grandparents in San Juan. He however, didn’t stop smoking at the dinner table, which my grandmother thought was rude. However, they were very polite, as most old people from the campo (country) are. I had asked him not to drink because I did not want him to say something he or I would regret. I did not want my family to know that we had already started living together in Buenos Aires. We rented a small apartment near where he had the store, which became our family business.

We married when we found out that I was pregnant. His parents, who also had their own stores in Buenos Aires sold everything and went to Miami. His father sensed that things were
beginning to change very fast and wanted to leave (while he could.) He had lived in Argentina during the military dictatorship because he was unable to leave. He said that people were no longer buying things like they used to. By 2000 he had relocated his entire family to New York. He purchased a house with his brother, who had a thriving construction business in Staten Island. I did not want to leave to New York at first, but I was pregnant. In the course of a ten-year marriage, I fell in and out of love with him multiple times. It was hard because we had to get on our feet but it meant working day and night wherever we could. He had a hard time because he used to be the boss, and now, in New York, he was taking orders for and from other people. It is not easy to shift your mentality. He ended up becoming a manager at a store. We had two more children here in New York, and that was stressful too. My English was limited and I was afraid every time that the nurses would come in. I thought that they were going to take away my child because I was undocumented. I did not actually enjoy holding my baby until I was no longer in the hospital and had the doors locked.

We tried to stay strong. When he woke up early, made coffee, and gently touched my forehead, I would fall in love. When he drank, I simply hated him. I hated him so much that it left me feeling drained. I have always been someone who has focused on love, and hate was something I did not want to practice. I find it to be such a powerful word…hate. It makes you want to hurt someone, because you are hurt.

I did not realize my capacity to hate immediately. It was not even after the first time he hit me, nor when he spit in my face. Even in the midst of such degradation, I still felt love for him. I remember that the next day, after crying and professing a new beginning, I forced myself to believe that he was going to change. I have only vague recollections of what I was before I started to hate him because the sentiment has consumed me to the point of becoming part of my identity. I hated him when he drank. I hated him when he used to tell me in front of my kids, “go
and sell Lemons.” 58

I learned to hate him so much that he literally made me sick. The smell of alcohol coming out his pours and breath the day after made me want to vomit. When he hit me in front of my eldest son, I thought, this is what he want to teach him. So I needed to figure out how to teach him something else. This is why I left him. I went to a Church and told the priest what was happening, I confessed but told him I needed help. He immediately sent me to the rectory where there was a woman who sent me to stay at her friend’s house with my three kids. She told me that this woman took in women who were trying to leave abusive relationships and helped them get on their feet. She was this elderly woman from Colombia. This was the first time I had even gone to Jackson Heights. They all spoke Spanish there and I started to ask questions, found a job, and eventually after five months rented a basement apartment. We did not have a lot of space, but we did not need to depend on him anymore.

If I have to think about when I lost him, I believe it was when his father was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. It was sudden. His entire family turned his back on him because he did not move with them back to Argentina. All of a sudden, we lived in New York by ourselves and it was becoming hard to stay afloat. I had no one I could trust to leave the kids if we wanted to go out or run errands. He was doing well as a painter and had even been able to get into a union. I stood firm in my belief that he needed to be with his son and me because we were his family now and we needed his protection and presence too. And just like that, he would show up drunk when he came home. He started to show up drunk to work and that was when he lost his job. We had no one to talk to, and we stopped talking to each other. He would lie to me that he was not drunk as he slurred his words and barely was able to stand up straight.

I felt so alone and still feel like I am trying to recover from the experience. However, he is still my family. He is the father of my children. We share that for better or for worst. Since my
family disapproved of our relationship from the beginning, if I told them that he was drinking to the point of yelling and blaming me for everything from the dirty dishes to his father’s actual illness, they would have supported and motivated me to leave him sooner. I wish I did but I did not want to give up on our family. However, they would have told me to return to Argentina and that was not in my plans. I wanted them to be able to go to college one day. I did not want to feel like they would not have an opportunity to dream big. I did not know what I dreaded more, seeing this through with him or hearing, “I told you so,” from my parents. I thought I was strong enough to ride out the storm of our relationship.

I made myself so vulnerable to him that I realized he learned to use it against me. He was my abuser; I thought I love (at times.) As I share this, I try to recall exactly when I should have said, “enough.” Was it the time I dressed my son up in the middle of the night and left my apartment to the local McDonalds in the rain zooming with his stroller? I remember trying to make him believe it was a game and so as I sped off through the courtyard, he was bursting with excitement. I was slowly dying inside. What kid does not love to be cruising at full speed? I made the sounds of a car, a train, and even a plane while trying to hold back my tears that mixed with raindrops. He was always a smart boy so I thought God had sent the rain to make sure he did not know that I was crying. It was almost as if God knew.

I would look back in terror, as I got closer to the McDonald’s and farther from our building. Its sounds almost like a metaphor. I was scared he was following me and could eventually ruin “our game.” I worried that my neighbors, the people in my community who knew my family would see that I was living within a dysfunctional family. I was not enough to make him stop drinking neither was my son or our daughters. Our family, or what is left of it, was never going to make him happy. This was one of the most difficult things to come to terms with. “Why is he so upset? I get his father died but he has us.” When my son
started to ask the same questions and express the same confusion, I had to move forward.

I remember the first time he choked me. The following day with his fingerprints still visible on my neck, he accused me of provoking him. Also, he said something that I consider vile but indicative of the person he fully is. He claimed that if I was such a feminist, the fact that he hits me reflects that he sees me as his equal. He started to call me a feminist when I started to work. He said it like it was a bad word. After he lost his job and I was paying the bills, he used this to make me feel bad about myself. I am not sure what type of twisted sense of equality he was talking about, but you do not put your hands around your equal’s neck in anger. I knew his father to be such gentle person. He was kind, respectful, and understanding. I remember during the last night we had dinner he told his wife to check in on me because he had heard me crying in the room. I had just been thrown out of the bed in front of my son, because “someone” had drank too much (again.) They knew he hit me. They however never talked about it. I am sure they were probably wondering where he had learned that behavior from and were ashamed to find out.

I also remember the time that he pushed me and my head hit the metal rod on my bed. I hit it full force. It was painful but also humiliating because I felt like I was in a cartoon. I am not sure I would have laughed if he had been Tom and I was Jerry, but the scene, aside from tragic, was comical because it looked so ridiculous. I felt like such an idiot.

They were a few times when I was close to telling my parents. I was at the verge of confessing that he was an alcoholic. I was tired of making excuses for him, and in all fairness, I had run out of them. Like the time he fell asleep on his mothers couch and told me it was due to the fact that he had drank the mouth wash because he suffered from really bad breath. That was not true but no matter what he told me, I believed him. I would find beer cans and liquor bottles
hidden throughout the house…empty. Even when I knew I did not purchase them, I believed his reasons despite them not making sense. They were weekends when I would see over four hundred dollars just disappear from our bank account in small allotments. I would save and sometimes not even buy a soda on the street, and he could not help but drink. I would take on extra jobs to make a little extra, and through all this I have never had extra anything except grief, frustration, and resentment. It fluctuated.

I got to the point where there were days that I felt it would be easier to just give in and drink myself to sleep. At least during those nights, I liked him until something would trigger the pent up anger. Then I got into the habit of throwing out the alcohol, confiscating the debit cards, hiding the keys, and just plain old telling my son his father was drunk. I felt it was the responsible thing to do so he too would keep his guard up. I feared leaving him alone with his father. I was afraid he was going to hurt him in ways that you cannot heal.

One morning I had shared with him how I was definitively done with the drinking. He did not believe that I would leave. He made a budget of how much money “we” actually spent on alcohol per week. I begged him not to give me concrete numbers because they just made me feel awful and I wanted to move forward. He agreed. And that was the last time I allowed myself to believe him. When he came back from buying breakfast, there he was again in all of his truth, drunk. He stopped making sense. He told me, “I am here because I want to keep something in the fridge like you said.” I was dumbfounded. It did not make sense. Nothing really did. There was the guy I hated. At noon, mysteriously drunk but denying it to high heaven. That was a Sunday. I expressed that I just knew he was drunk and it would be better if he told me the truth. I disguised my voice with concern and understanding. He told me, “it is true, I drank one beer.” Despite the fact that my parents never drank, not even socially, I was very familiar with the difference between the effects of beer and cheap liquor. He had taught me. His breath would perfume the room in ways that were too familiar and equally
nauseating. Then he asked me, “Do you want to have sex?” He just threw that out there. I was grossed out with his proposition especially I no longer felt attracted to him.

How could I be so stupid? This is the worst question to be faced with not only as someone who has prided herself in being strong. In my desire to rebel against my parents, I tried my very best to will him into someone he never was and never will be. How could I have loved him so much? Addiction is a disease that does kill people, but in essence, it can also kill trust, good memories, and ultimately love. I know that he is sick, but I was sick of that life with him because I too was drowning. Even now. I cannot walk down the street without feeling that I might see him sleeping out there. I have not seen him in a year. I do not hate him; I just do not love what his alcoholism has done to our family but above all, to the person I once loved.
Figure 7 Domingo en la Plaza, a photo by Melissa Maldonado-Salcedo
“It is toughing losing. I thought we were going to win. I held on to papi, because he understands how important it was for me to win because I played my heart out. This one parent told me that there is no crying in futbol. I told him I was half Argentine, and that yes, we cry cause it really matters to us.” - Pablito, his team lost while playing at an away game. ”-Pablito

“I wanted him to see us win. We watched every game. We had our cabala. We were so close too. Again, Germany! I kept thinking I knew exactly how he felt because I cried with my father when we lost to them before. Even though we are here, we are always with our team. I hugged him so tight because we were devastated. I wanted him to win, I wanted us to win, we should have won. I want to cry again every time I see this picture.”

-Pablo
CHAPTER 3, Part 1: Enter the Futbol Mami and Passionate Games

There is probably no other country within Latin America in which the word cunt (concha) is used so flippantly and ubiquitously within the vernacular than in Argentina. “La concha de tu madre” and “la concha de la lora” (which means prostitute) are frequently used to respond to emotions that come out of the throws of impassioned exchanges and relations. In fact, it is a constant reference within Argentinean fútbol. It is said in the stands and in the field, at home when watching the game, and just about anywhere a “Andate a la concha de tu madre” (go to your mother’s cunt) is one of the most common phrases within the Argentine vernacular.

The website Mundo Deportivo researched the phrase’s cultural significance and came to the following conclusion, it only makes sense to Argentines. Some believe that “it is a common expression when faced with adversity,” or that its meaning depends on the tone of the context. It is used to insult or even to self depreciate. Others however think it is a pejorative. Argentine fútbol defender Javier Macherano was sanctioned because he said it to a referee, on the pitch, in the mist of the game, in Spain no less (Mundo Deportivo 2015). In the madre patria this phrase became particular offensive, given the fact that not only does this phrase insult mothers, but more so it was sacrilegious because it was said on holy ground…the soccer field. For this reason, sports language and its relationship to other aspects of behavior is of great anthropological interest” (Blanchard 1995:6). Let us embark on this “trip.”

A recent 2016 Heineken commercial put into perspective the relationship between immigration and soccer with regard to emotional identity negotiations. It starts off by declaring its outsider status and presenting the challenges many immigrants to the United States, “I wasn’t born in America. And arriving here wasn’t easy for me. They didn’t even say my name right. I thought I’d never fit in.” The narrator proceeds to implicate how they earned their place through hard work and determination stating, “But over time, I gained the respect. Respect turned into
admiration. Admiration into love.” It concludes by stating its inevitable presence, “The world better be ready because I’m an American now. My name is soccer.59 Soccer is not fully the same game as fútbol, and fútbol does not mean football. Within the United States, sports remains one of the “last boy’s club in mainstream culture.” Yet, as it becomes more about a profitable industry, there are needs for vast adjustments. For example, the gender disparity in the sport needs to be addressed. Women deserve “equal pay for equal play,” especially in a culture where money is tantamount to “respect” (Thomas 2016). In Argentina, like throughout the entire region, fútbol is about “honor” and “passion.” American will not be able to resist because of the country’s “browning” and the possibilities that fútbol offers transnational families to share in claims to national identity.

During the 2016 America’s cup, the bicentennial matches were played throughout the United States to sold-out crowds. Greta, who has lived in Argentina, shared the following with me, “it is different watching in the United States.” She traveled to Chicago to watch and “alentar” (cheer) the national team. She reminded me that, “in Argentina, we do not know people as up closer and personal that come from our rivals. My Chilean friends still are my friends, but when Argentina is on the pitch, as much as I love them, we are briefly enemies with scores to settle. This implicates that fútbol serves more to accentuate a “pan Latino solidarity,” while simultaneously claiming local identities within such globalized contexts. Consequently, fútbol fits into constructions of Latinidad because of its own migration narrative into American sports culture and constructions of Latino identity, “Latinidad epitomizes the contemporary situation of globalization and hybridity that partially defines the lived and symbolic experiences of transnational communities” (Guzmán and Valdivia 2004: 208).

One theory as to why Soccer was not immediately welcomed into the United States has to do with American bravado and exceptionalism. Also because it is a country made of immigrants,
the sport was first perceived to “bring out a defensiveness, an isolationist posture, a fear of mobs,” and their dangerous mob mentality which in the United States historical memory is reminiscent of (WW2, Cold War, hate groups.) Vescey suggests that, “Americans need double-digit football scores and triple-digit basketball scores…we like things big, like American restaurants doling super-size portions” (Vescey 2014:18). He likens the sport, in relation to America, to “tofu and beansprouts,” foods most associated with Vegans. This is an interesting contrast to Argentina where beef is a dietary staple within their cocina criolla (creole/native cuisine.) According to the Rough Guide to Argentina, “veganism is unheard of in the country,” which makes this symbolic reference particularly interesting (Phillips, Bonson, Aeberhard 2001).

Yet soccer while it can be a professional endeavor and whilst it remains managed by the soccer industrial complex, it is subject to the same different pay structures that are embedded into American labor policies, which are blatantly sexist. Women and men are not compensated equally, even when they are clearly “better” at their job than their male counterparts. Despite the United States women’s soccer team being crowned the “best” in the world during their last World Cup, they are not given equal veneration and validation. The team recently formally filed a Federal complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission listing several examples of “wage discrimination.” When compared with the Men’s national team, Women players receive lower Per Diems and less sponsor appearances, in addition to getting smaller World Cup Bonuses (Yourish, Ward, Almukhtar 2016). Yet, contrary to American apprehensions about soccer and despite its European roots, this sport accurately reflects in ways that other sports ignore, the shifting American identities within an ever-growing Latino-America. Soccer more and more is starting to look and sound like fútbol, “It sounded like prayer chants and universal rock, it smelled like beer and empanadas, wine and wursts,” and to me, like to many other immigrants and their families, the game feels “like home” (Vecesey 2014:20).
However, soccer may be perceived by “the stunted American male,” who is “frustrated with the changing demographics of the country” and also “gripped by the belief that his days on top are coming to an end,” as threatening (Kang 2016). It is believed to be a more relevant game for “softer” men (immigrants) and thus it treated within mainstream culture like a recreational activity more fitting of women and children. However, this contempt is changing. This tension though is felt most and complicated by the “two separate American soccer cultures” that exist, “one white, the other Latino” (Kang 2016). Argentines, often perceived as “white Latinos” are conceivably believed to be “the best” at the game despite not having the most metals or Cups.

While there is no crying in “American” football but tears are part of most sport spectacles within Argentina… Tennis (Juan Martin del Potro), Basketball (Manu Ginobili) and Boxing (Carlos Monzón) to name a few arenas in which Argentine competitors have excelled and shed public tears. However, It is important to consider how globalization has transformed the sport and the ways in which is embodied. Archetti explains that Argentinean performing bodies (players) were exported to Europe since the 1920, making them familiar bodies within leisure (Archetti 1999). I have spent the last fours years of my life invested personally in fútbol match ups that have tapped into many childhood memories while making new ones with my own child on and off the pitch. Yet, globalization implicates that “the production of home, community, and locality” can be designated as “local” or “national” despite sport practices being claimed as “one’s own.” This begs the question; “to what extent does the reinforcement of national identity through sport constitute a paradox in the present phase of globalization?” For example, can individual players like Lionel Messi be claimed as a representation of Argentina despite never winning a cup or star for Argentina? Or is globalization and national affiliations within sport, “intertwined and mutually dependent?” (Kummels 2013:14).

In this chapter, I attempt to address the characteristics that define fútbol by way of its
cultural significance to the production of Argentine identity. Eduardo Galeano writes that while soccer is a “metaphor for war,” it also can turn into real one where past debts are settled. He reflects that presently, “soccer fanaticism has come to occupy the place formerly reserved for religious fervor, patriotic and political passion… many horrors are committed in its name” (Galeano 2013:149). What is permissible by way of its rules and codes varies across regional contexts, despite the sport following the same rules globally.

While soccer is a “rule-based activity (a game),” it remains nonetheless inscribed with cultural values that appear in the “motions, gestures, contacts, and oral communication” between the players and spectators. The game performs a “struggle between two opposing sides” to gain control of the ball (the play) that can be as contentiously fought as any other confrontation. The game then “generates a social field in which social and individual identities are embodied (Ronsbo 2003:158). I treat this sport in particular like a category of cultural behavior as it pertains to Argentina and it local and international identity (Blanchard 1995:1).

Kendall Blanchard argues the merit of anthropological engagements with sport for the study of culture. Writing on the ritual of land diving competitions on Pentecost Island, Blanchard presents how its significance within the community makes it more than a mere sports event. It functions as “ritual, drama, and community entertainment.” It is often associated with the “coming of age” of young men (Kang 2016). Then spectators engage in dance and song in preparation. He elaborates that it reflected, “Hibridean values: the manhood ideal, the relationship between risk and ritual, the importance of ceremony.” By diving off the platform, the extent of his bravery and masculinity is put on display. This performance conveys the identity negotiations that take place by him competing against, “himself, the forces of nature, and his fellow tribesman.” Additionally, Blanchard’s analysis details that even the management of the ceremony is indicative of the native political norms. Embedded within the event are local’s
myth and legends that are reiterated through the performative act. This historical example substantiates how a culture can be outlined in a ritual. This implicates that studies of cultural identity must “look more clearly” within as a means of enhancing our understanding of a culture based on the value they place on athletic pursuits” (Blanchard 1995: 130-131).

In Argentina, fútbol in particular generates important “statements within broader discourses on social identity (Archetti 1999). It was an imperative for my anthropological endeavor to enter this field in order to understand the ways in which this cultural performance put into focus “the eye by which” Argentina saw itself. Fútbol revealed their “designs for living.” Victor Turner speaks to why fútbol is not simply a reflector or expression of culture, it offers an opportunity to be “active agencies of change” that outside of the stadium and the field is not possible. The ritual enables “performative reflexivity” because the memories of certain match ups provides a reflection on the “relations, actions, symbols, meanings, codes, rules, statuses, social structures and other sociocultural components that make up their public selves (Turner 1987:24). It offers an opportunity to reflect on “social relations and orders of dominations” (166).

Ronsbo discusses the importance of games within the milieu of a very segregated Salvadorian community where identity is negotiated through the retelling of matches. Therefore even the memories of games offer “an important vehicle for individual expressions of belonging” that are often not available to outsiders or the marginalized identities that are then “claimed and asserted in public” (Ronsbo 2003:169). He argues that a “theoretical adjustment” is necessary when writing regional ethnographies that take up this subject matter” (171). He recognizes that “culturally specific versions” of fútbol rituals take place in ways that reveal their own moralities, commitments and loyalties. Hognestad argues that from a supporter’s perspective, “the football-space may be seen as constitutive of a different reality. As a liminal ritual, fútbol is conducive to
experimentation with verbal expressions and behavior,” that can affirm or contest, old and new “identities of belonging” (Hognestad 2003: 99).

Fútbol tensions can intensify local and global rivalries. These then engender hostilities that are often expressed through violence as seen in the most researched aspect of the sport, hooliganism or barra bravas (100). The “bodily jouissance of carnival” is present in these encounters because of the possibility of “social breakdown” as evidenced in confrontations on and off the field concerning identity (Guilianotti 1999:61). Hoghestad discusses in his work how Norwegian identities are “constructed within the context of football support,” thus giving Anderson’s conceptualization of “imagined communities” significantly more depth because fútbol creates the, “conditions for transforming the purely imagined into an embodied experience of a ‘real’ community” (Hognestad 2003:110). National fervor is an intense emotional experience that as Sarah Ahmed argues, that emotions shape “the surfaces” of individual and collective bodies and shape the very contact they have with “objects and others” (Ahmed 2015).

Eduardo Archetti speaks to the relationship of fútbol and Argentinidad claiming that, “Notions of Argentinian identity are not exclusively constructed internally, within given boundaries. They can also be conceptualized in contraposition to other identities, recognized or not by the natives themselves. The ideas and images of the ‘national’ are quite often a mirror in which the glance of others is as crucial as the glance of the natives themselves” (Archetti 2003:228). In Brazil fútbol serves a different purpose that is completely a result of its context and history that delineates a “ sharp division” between the private (home) and public (street and family.)” He explains that Brazilian fútbol has embedded into the game a “system of hierarchal social relations and persons” that is also shaped by “the market and free individuals.” These worlds then combine in the “public ritual of soccer” (Archetti 2003:217). If we examine jogo bonito, fútbol within Brazil, “is for the expression of individual qualities” and less “an instrument
of collectivization at the personal level” (Matta 1982:27).

Bourdieu’s relationship with sport maintains that it has long been understood to be an efficient mechanism to indoctrinate youth with “values of sexism, nationalism, fanaticism, irrational violence, the culture of performance and competitions, the cult of idols, and the uncritical acceptance of the central values of capitalism.” Bourdieu’s claim that there is also a “perverse effects of sport” because it transforms the spectators-consumers of the performances caricatures of militancy because of their “imaginary participation” in the game (Bourdieu 1984:185). Yet sport, “transcends culture” and is simultaneously woven into the very cultural fabric that influences its movement” (Sands 2010:6). Sport like anthropology, produces multiple and often conflicting “understandings and experiences” that are contingent on local communities and whose meaning are best appreciated when we locate them as embedded in a much “broader and more complex cultural environments” (Moore 2004:27).
Pablo: “Yes!”
Me: “What happened?”

We were waiting for the game to start. I realized that Pablo was intensely working on his computer. I figured he was writing. Smiling and *proud of his accomplishment, he revealed to me what he had worked on meticulously for the last hour.

Me: “Why didn’t you put me in the squad?
Pablo: “It wouldn’t be believable.”

#12 Pablo Alvarez-Maldonado
#10 Pablo Gaston-Alvarez

(Imagined) Argentina National Team 2014

Figure 9 Imagined Argentine National Team, a photo by Pablo G. Alvarez
Chapter 3, Part 2

In this chapter I pull from various memories that may be distinctive, some even emerge in diverse timescales and stages, and by way of singular mechanisms and media, but they all accommodate to the many contexts of our practices of remembering. This story begins at one of the biggest individual and collective “memory makers” spectacles in the world, the World Cup. While reflecting on various accounts of these embodied memories, I explore their context-dependent meanings and conceptualizations as they pertain to family, Argentinidad, and Latinidad (Tulving & Thompson 1971, Smith & Vela 2001). Argentina is a country obsessed with balls, as reflected in the words, which best represent, its national character, “Boludo” (Crettaz 2013). Not to be outdone by its cousin, “Pelotudo.” Despite their popularity within the Argentine vernacular, the vulgar origins of these words speak to a national tendency to determine worth by simply having balls and strength, by an inability to dominate them (on and off the field.)

Maradona played his infamous “hand of God goal” against the English at the Aztec stadium in Mexico City in 1986 (Reyes 2013). If you were alive at the time, family memories were made watching this event that provided “joy” (entertainment) in the midst of significant sadness in the world. Jimmy Burns writes that Maradona claims that he was “born into and to play for the people,” though he grew up to believe that he “was God and suffered as a result” (Burns 2010: xi). Galeano argues that soccer heroes are born. They cannot be made which is what in fact separates a mere mortal player from an idol. He writes that, “From the moment he learns to walk, he knows how to play…the ball seeks him out, knows him, needs him.”

The soccer ball is conceptualized as a “woman” that needs to be dominated therefore situating the relationship between player and ball as one of desire, seduction, and passion. He writes that he, “caresses her and makes her speak,” while proving his ability to be in control of
her with each pass he makes and with every shot he takes (Galeano 2013:5). For this reason, he (the player) can also make you cry, hate, or love him. This is because you, *el hincha* (soccer fanatic), are his mistress. Like most *machista* lovers, passion can also turn violent when faced with an old rival (enemy.) Some challengers deserve a “thrashing,” especially when they have done wrong. Both lovers compete to achieve the ultimate expression of embodied pleasure, a goal.

Maradona’s two goals during the 1986 World Cup match against England, solidified his career and uplifted him to a godly status amongst his devotees (the Argentine people.) Even his biggest adversaries, could not help but be seduced. It was Oxford University (the English) that gave him the honorary title of “Inspirer of Dreams,” despite also remembering him as a “cheater” (Burns 2010:xvi). Many *fútbol* fans and worshipers include this event as an integral memory to their identity and it is Maradona’s that enables this for Argentines. Jimmy Burns writes that, “in Argentina…a whole national identity, for better or for worse, is tied up with the boy from the shanty town who claimed the title as one of the best footballers of all times,” despite his moral shortcomings. This distorted sense of self is also doesn’t allow him take personal responsibility, “he blames it (his addiction) on the pressures that others built up around him” (Burns 2010:205). He embodies many contradictions that mirror *Argentinidad*.

Many of my own family members often retell the experience of watching the game with watery eyes. Pablo remembers most his father, who has since passed. There is not a soccer memory in which he is not present. Pablo and his brothers are often forced to take pauses in order to “collect” themselves when they speak of this day, because in this memory his father still lives. Maradona allows him to also keep him alive. In many ways Maradona played the clearest expression of Argentine identity. He showed an extraordinary ability to think through his choices while demonstrating skills, habits, and embodied movement capacities with ease. Most
individuals cannot do this and allow the pressure of the match up to derail their quest for glory on the pitch (ask Gonzalo “Pipita” Higuain).61

Maradona provided Argentines redemption against England and also offered them a space to “take back” what they had lost during the Malvinas war, a sense of dignity and pride. Argentina had an advantage in this battlefield, their David, was Maradona. He believes wholeheartedly that he “owes his existence to football.” When he played in Boca Juniors in 1996, while playing in the Argentine cup, he kicked five penalties in seven games. He missed each of them. However, he never allowed anyone else to kick them, which is uncommon. Missing even one penalty can bring the “best” to their knees. However, Maradona demonstrated that even when he does not win, it is his determination to do that makes him the best. In this way, he represents a champion attitude, even when he loses. It can be argued, that this is why he is loved and hated by fans and haters alike. This penalty record is used not to downgrade his status, but instead to elevate it as evidenced in the popular saying about this performance. The saying goes, “You know who misses penalties? The one who has the balls to kick them.” He draws directly on “that strength of will that has given him the commitment and the determination to succeed in the past…” (Burns 2010:20). This is why when he was attempting to treat his addiction, he did not opt for psychoanalysis, but instead he sought to return to the game which made him great in a country that historically has been more accepted to Eurocentric and elite representations of itself as seen in its literary and musical traditions.

The 1986 World Cup encounter between Argentina and England (Maradona and the world) was the only one that really mattered at the time to “the people.” Coincidently, Jorge Luis Borges, Argentina’s loudest expositor of the Argentina character, passed in the same year, leaving a void within the Argentine soul. In the previous World Cup, he delivered a lecture on “immortality” at the same exact moment Argentina was playing. Many of the country’s
intellectuals felt benched in comparison to Maradona’s appeal. According to them fútbol appealed to Argentina’s barbaric tendencies. They believed that it was, “precisely the superstition people deserve...possessed by the ball, working stiffs think with their feed, which is entirely appropriate, and fulfill their dreams in primitive ecstasy” (36). The performance tapped into their most feared emotions, which might reveal defenselessness against its enemies.

In Brian Bilston’s poem, “America is a Gun,” he lists symbols that represent various national identities. In it he writes that Argentina is in fact, “Maradona’s hand.” Maradona is equal with God, and therefore an interchangeable referent to the reader. While England remains “a cup of tea.” From the onset of Maradona’s rise to fame his physical and mental ability when “tricking” the opponent was extraordinary. Arguably, within Argentina’s style of playing soccer, these aptitudes are inextricably tied to creole style and the national character, per the “gambeta.” Until this day, Maradona is distinguished as the ultimate, gambetero. He is Argentina’s golden boy (pibe de oro) who dreamed of one day playing for the national team, and eventually became a D10s (god) in his own right.62 In order to further understand Maradona or Argentine culture, the signification of a gambeta must be clarified. The word originates in the movement made by an ostrich as expressed within gauchesque literature.63

Literally, a Gambeta is a soccer move but it is also part of the Argentine vernacular and is frequently used to explain what can be considered a quintessential national trait that is embodied in this move. Facundo Manes and Mateo Niro clarify this in their assessment of the Argentina brain explaining that culture shapes our identity in profound ways that become hardwired and shared. They write that Argentinidad influences the way they “see the world, in the way we (Argentines) approach our problems, and how we (Argentines) resolve them. In all of this the relationship with the past and the future, morality and emotions, and the interactions with “the other”, reveals a lot about the way “Argentines understand and search for happiness.” All of
these behaviors and aptitudes are learned through “repetition” and familiar settings” (Manes and Niro 2016: 31-32). Fútbol and its myths create a space for the acculturation of Argentinidad within the family, against an ever-growing Latinidad. The Argentine way of playing also was adapted from how they learned it. It is juxtaposed against the English “collective” style of playing, which is, “industrial,” and a direct result of the sum of its parts/players, which are likened to a “machine.” While the “criollo (creole) “style adapted from that of the English is individual, unpredictable, and dramatic to say the least” (Archetti 1999:60).

Soccer: Religion and Ritual

“It was Sunday and my son, Pablito, had woken up extra early to prepare for his soccer training. At eight, his biggest concerns consisted of being part of the starting line-up and getting extra playing time. At his age, I felt the weight of the world on my shoulders. It was difficult to manage original sin and constantly defeat the devil and his squad. I would have rather face opponents that were my age and who played in my division. The field was never equalized. By the time he turned two years old, we had already stopped attending church. We were called, “descarriados” which means, that we had veered off of the straight and narrow. My fear of Pablito repeating my childhood and turning into an anxious adult is still on my top three reasons I still lose sleep. I have learned to turn down the volume in my head. I can remember suffering from insomnia since I can remember.”

“Maradona is typically Argentine...He has been both a show and an anti-power advocate. He can stand on both sides of the fence at the same time.”– Jorge Lanata
At night is when I remember the most and am able to best dream and scheme my memories into stories, which I write in my head. I put myself to sleep revising and deleting the same memories over and over again until it “feels right.” I take up the same one the next night and it no longer feels the same. I then begin my nocturnal ritual of editing the past in order to feel at ease to face my morning. If the emotions are too intense, there have been days that I have been unable to function. I detail can keep me up all night. I have dark circles under my eyes in every elementary school picture. However, I did not know that there was another way to embody the world. I did not want to inherit this natural state of angst to Pablito. I constantly discern if he was “really, really” Ok. One time we were flipping through the channels and on came the Passion of the Christ (2004). He was confused and asked, “Why is Papa Dios (God the father) doing on planet Earth?” He could have not been older than three, because he still spoke and sounded “like a child.” I felt like I was “winning.”

Pablo and I decided to raise Pablito completely secular in order to minimize the shame, stigma, and prejudices that had made me so scared of the world. I still wanted him to find awe in ritual and have a sense of spirituality. I also did not want him to believe that hell was a burning lake, that homophobia was a Christian virtue, that women came from a rib, and much less that he was a sinner. As I have already expressed, I still struggle with the spiritual trauma and psychological wounds that these ideas left on my psyche as a queer feminist anthropologist. When I see my son make the sign of the cross when he goes out to the pitch or when he celebrates a goal by pointing to the sky, or when he simulates praying on the field when the match ends, he learned from his idols like Lionel Messi (Argentina) or Diego Maradona. Imitation remains (especially in soccer) the highest form of flattery. Yet, any spectator would reasonably think due to his religious body language that he was Catholic. He would not be the first player to praise God on the field. However, I thought about what soccer players do while
playing the game, which does not make them gods, but it certainly does set them apart from the ordinary.

Considering this intellectual trajectory, Galeano asks, “How is soccer like God?” He concludes that it has to do with what each makes individuals feel. He proclaims, “Each inspires devotion among believers and distrust among intellectuals?” (Galeano 2010:36). I can understand how there could be a false sense of superiority if one believes that ability on the field is solely contingent on the body’s work. It is “incredible” to believe that the fútbol player is an intellectual as well as an athlete? Intellectuals believe the game represents a battle between nature (animal instinct) and human reason (intellect), and for this reason fail to appreciate the uncertainty that comes with the game that must be “outsmarted” with their bodies. An injury can disappear the memory of your success and fame is fleeting for a soccer player. How many child soccer fans know of Gabriel “el Batigol” Batistuta? Messi just recently passed his record (ESPN 2016).

If you consider the most basic of adult soccer games, they consist of an hour and a half of gameplay. It is divided into 45 minute halves in which the time does not stop when the ball is out of play. The break between the two halves is just fifteen minutes, which leaves no time for rest or a half-time show. So each player must have the stamina to endure such a long run. If you want to be successful in the game, you have to consecrate your body to it through the holy trinity of discipline, dedication, and determination. He also has to be willing to be a cara dura (hard face) and be “willing to suffer insults, jeers, stones, and damnation just to be there in that sacred green space where the ball floats and glides” (Galeano 2013:11). Sacrifice of other bodily pleasure is necessary in order to play professionally. Even the best player in the world today has to diet every now and then (Critchley 2016).

The question of religious identity is often complicated by the expectations of national
identity. For this reason, Mark Joseph Stern directly interrogated if “religion,” as understood with in the United States was “good for children?” In a comparative study between the views and life experiences of religious vs. secular children he found that, “Secular kids generally understand that any story featuring magic could not take place in they world they inhabit” (Stern 2014). In the same way we did not want to impose religion on our son, Pablo and I made a pact that we would let Pablito explore all other aspects of his identity on his terms. Neither of us had ever experienced childhood in this way. Pablo had a severe speech impediment as a kid and was always “nervous.” This was not an optimal condition for him to babysit his two younger brothers, while still being a child himself. However, some decisions are made for you. His mother told me that when she returned home from work and he could barely talk, she knew he had a “rough day.” This is also why when I don’t hear him singing or if he is not telling me a story I worry. Not a coincidence that we are both storytellers who explore the same themes.

Social psychologists note that beliefs are formed as a result of a variety of contingencies such as environmental forces, upbringing, and culture. Research demonstrates that genes are factors, but even the most neuroscientist writers on the topic, consider that identity is not so cut and dry. Manes and Niro write how this relationship manifests in Argentinidad through crisis. He writes, “it seems like our extraordinary providence is tied to a permanent crisis with few moments of rest, that are only meant to give us time to remember the previous crisis with agony in order to prepare with anxiety for the imminent one, that is nearing, that is about to explode” (Manes and Niro 2016:111). You hear it. You see it. You know it. You smell it. Can you avoid it?

**We are not Borderless**

The odds that Pablo would feel closer to his Argentine identity were high. I knew that in the 1980s there was a school where Argentine culture was taught to children. Parents would send
their children there to dress up like gauchos and to recite San Martin. However, that school no longer exists and therefore, I wondered how would Pablito learn about being Argentine. I was a *Colombi-Rican* living in the Lower East Side, and across the street from my parents. Pablo’s family was in Miami and in Argentina. This past Christmas, for the first time since we married, we spent the holidays with Pablo’s family. This was Pablito’s first time vacationing with his paternal cousins. They instantly bonded. Juanita (which is the only girl) bossed him around with ease and he let her. He told me he wanted to “protect her.” He did not let her play soccer with him for this reason. It is really true, that “la sangre (the blood) calls (llama?)” What does it mean for blood to be accepted as, “thicker than water?” How does this kinship tie structure responsibilities and relationships?

After having lived in Argentina and Miami, I could not help but feel closer to Argentina in ways that went beyond the bonds formed through traditional ethnographic research. Part of my “family,” was now Argentine, and so was I. Even though I had biological family members who lived in Argentina, they never identify as Argentines. They go by “Colombians living in Argentina.” This meant that official citizenship (passports) did not influence their identity in the way I thought that it would after years of living in the Pampas. This made more sense after I saw *The Sins of my Father* (2010). This story centers on Pablo’s Escobar’s son, who resettled in Argentina after his father’s death. It was the only country in the region that was willing to take them in after he professed he wanted vengeance for his father’s killing. I heard him talk and immediately noticed that he sounded “so Colombian.” Despite having lived in Argentina for so many years, his mannerisms and accent were unchanged. Even after he completely “established a new identity,” Sebastián Marroquín, still looked and talked like his father (Goldstein 2010).

This consideration presented a curious dilemma regarding the ways in which Colombians and Argentines are often represented within the media. What narratives and identities get
manipulated and for what purpose? I am lead to think about Michael Bay’s film, *Pain & Gain* (2013). It based on a true story about the Sun Gym Gang in Miami. (Alvarado 2013) The film depicts Victor Kerscaw as a Colombian. When in reality, his character is based on Marc Schiller who was born in Argentina (Alvarado 2013). The details surrounding the “real life” case in relation to its Hollywood depiction are troubling. I question what motivated this national swap?

**Controlling Desires**

The last time I thought about this it was due to the polemics surrounding the Colombian pop star Shakira’s public relationships. The one that first garnered a lot of media attention was with the Puerto Rican actor Osvaldo Rios. Colombia’s national newspaper, *El Espectador*, called Ríos, “el caballero golpeador” (woman-beating gentleman) due to the multiple domestic violence accusations that have marred his career and public image. The same story also mentions that Shakira’s parents were very much against the relationship and that thanks to the prayers of a priest, they broke up (Ochoa 2012). Then, she dated former Argentine president Fernando de la Rúa’s son, Antonio.

The first son of Argentina was a very desired bachelor, despite his father’s terrible presidency. Their breakup troubled many because of how de la Rúa was presented as being a “busca” (which means gold-digger.)

Antonio (who was from Córdoba like his father) was also her manager and the press often implicated that he controlled her (career.) Shakira met Gerard Pique (Barcelona FC’s defender) at the 2010 South African World Cup, and soon thereafter, de la Rúa and Shakira, were (publically) done. The media coverage had interesting implications. Seem like a stretch? Due to Pique’s public support of Barcelona’s secession from Spain, a group of Espanyol fans held a sign that read, “Antonio de la Rúa, it all started with you” during the match which the couple attended together. *Clarín* reported that many Spaniards believe Pique’s support of
Barcelona’s independence indicates that he does not deserve to “wear the national jersey” anymore (Clarín 2016).

This presents an interesting avenue to consider how Latina women are represented in the media and hence, I would like to reference Isabel Molina Guzman’s discussion on the relationship between JLo, Ben Affleck, and the media. She argues that as trite as intellectuals can think celebrity tabloid culture can be, tabloids actually constitute an informative resource for this type of analytical exercise concerning Latina identities. She writes that, “public discourses about celebrity bodies also function as a space of cultural contestation, especially for marginalized ethnic, racial, and gendered groups (Guzman 2009:52). Beltran writes that, “Star images serve as definers of power and identity for a society.” Additionally, elaborating on the racial implications, she highlights that,“Nonwhite stars have a particular salience in this regard given that social and racial hierarchies are both reflected and reinforced by a nation’s system of stardom” (Beltran 2007:276).

The severance of their business relationship took a legal turn because Shakira would accuse de la Rúa of taking a few millions without her “permission.” She filed a lawsuit in New York City in order to protect her “interests.” In many ways, Shakira presents to the public an “idealized transnational citizen.” She performs many contradictions that became familiar to young girls who seek to claim a Latina identity around being, “a rock chick.” What could she (and her image) possibly divulge about the expectations of Colombianidad in relation to Argentinidad?

Writing on Shakira’s cultural quandary, Cepeda observes that, “the process of identity-formation does not depend solely on the individual: for Latin(o) American immigrants and their US-born offspring,” it rests instead, “engaging in a perpetual dialectics of negotiation with long-standing beliefs regarding belonging and the national body…” This can often present challenges
within the “national family” of Latinos who represent a “social identity” in addition to a “marketing tool” (Cepeda 2013:230). Shakira’s brand of Latinidad crosses over into many territories in which ethnic authenticity is also commoditized (Dávila 2001). Cynthia Fuchs notes that she in fact, performs her nationality on a global stage, using familiar and not so familiar representations. According to Fuchs, she is “family-oriented, hardworking” while also, seducing an American market with, “sexy innuendos and exoticism.” She also refers to de la Rúa as a “good boy” (Fuchs 2003:171). However, this article was published before his bad boy ways became public (cheating).

However, Shakira’s current relationship is even more critical, especially when it comes to the game of soccer. For a long time, both denied that they were in a relationship especially because of the timing. Pique declared that he was not “the cause” of the break up when talking to the Spanish press. He said they were “just friends” (L. Hernandez 2011). Shakira told the New York Daily News that because Pique has his “own world” (soccer), they can have a lasting “healthy” romance. She admitted that she was “not feeling the love,” year’s prior to their relationship but when they met, “the sun came out.” This subtle reference to her prior relationship with de la Rúa is telling, especially because she referred to it very differently on her website when they announced their split (Rivera 2013). According to the press release, their years together were “the best” ones of her life.

When Colombia advanced farther than Spain during the 2014 World Cup, the internet exploded with memes hinting Shakira move on to, fellow countryman James Rodriguez, arguably the tournament’s breakout star. She admitted during an interview on the “news” show Al Rojo Vivo that she felt “torn” about who to cheer for during the World Cup. The article I quote also refers to her as a strong contender for the unofficial WAG tournament also taking place at the event. She admitted that her heart was “divided,” but eventually conceded that she has to
“go and support Spain,” maintaining that if not, she would be “kicked out of the house!” In the same interview, she also upheld that she had to support the Colombian team because, “it is a very important time for us Colombians” (Cordero 2014).

Shakira has been photographed wearing the Barcelona FC jersey along with her sons Sasha and Milan on many occasions. She has also been snapped cheering her partner on at the stadium. This did not sit well with some of her Latino fan base. Not only did she “look” Spanish, she also sounded like one. Shakira was recently accused of “using a fake Spanish accent” when she visited her hometown Barranquilla, Colombia. Disregarding that she has lived in Barcelona since 2012, the media had a field day insinuating that she had “chosen” to adopt the Spanish cadence. How could she dilute her Colombianidad in this way? This view predicates that her national identity is tied to her accent (and not the language.) She was ridiculed throughout social media for being a “sell out.” Latina magazine pointed out that she did the same thing when she dated de la Rúa, and picked up his “Argentine accent” (Frantangelo 2016). While her “hips don’t lie,” her authenticity is constantly challenged. Some media outlets have gone so far as to blame her for Pique’s bad performances on the field and request that she not attend the games. However, it is Pique that has jurisdiction over her and she has publically stated that she “likes” his authoritative demands.

Shakira confessed that Pique “banned her,” from appearing in “raunchy” videos with men. She gloated that, “he’s very territorial…I like that he protects his turf and he values me…” (Daily Mail 2014). Her public appreciation of him “marking his territory” by controlling over her body would suggest that she associates love with the vendible narrative of dominance. While de la Rúa controlled her finances, Pique is in charge of her body. That’s what she said.

Back to the Pitch: The sins of his Father

Waiting for the colectivo (bus), I overhead a father and son debate over Maradona and
Messi. Who was the better of the two? The duo was returning to Lomas de Zamora from Capital Federal. We were heading in the same direction back to Provincia. I knew that they both worked selling panchos (hotdogs) because I had purchased one from them an hour before near Plaza Italia. The father recognized me and smiled. The son however, was too invested in the debate to stop his train of thought. We boarded and I took the seat behind them. I had my headphones on but lowered the music enough to overhear their conversation. I wanted to catch their final judgment, without appearing nosey. The father declared again, “Messi is no Maradona.” To which the son replied that at least Messi had never been involved in a drug scandal. He tapped his nose contemptuously to reference Maradona’s cocaine habit. His problems with addiction are common knowledge. His cocaine overdoses landed him to the hospital numerous times (Panetta 2007). The father laughed, “Yes, but Maradona always paid his taxes. What Messi did to Spain made us (Argentines) look terrible. He bit the hand that fed him.”

Not once did they deliberate who was a better player. The dispute between the merits of each player was around who was a better person, and henceforth, a better Argentine. Both soccer figures are weighed down by this controversy in regard to their public persona. The issue can be reduced to one of loyalty (patriotism.) Then, suddenly, the father believed he had scored the winning goal against his son, “How many crowns has Messi won for Argentina?” This is Messi’s cross to bear.

Soccer’s essence in Argentina remains tied to “freedom,” which speaks to its liberating appeal during times (personal and national) of crisis. Soccer offers an escape. However, when players from the national team (la selección) also play in Europe, this causes a lot of public angst concerning their allegiance. Is it possible to “play for both teams” with equal passion? It is worth noting that Messi could have played for Spain, if he had wanted to. He was offered the opportunity to become part of the Spanish squad before choosing Argentina. (No player can ever
play for two national teams, even if at different moments in their career.) Plenty players on the
Argentine national team hold dual citizenship because of their grandparents such as *Italoargentino* players Angel di María and Javier Mascherano. They both benefit from the advantages of playing as European citizens, but pledge their allegiance to Argentina.

It is not uncommon to hear Argentine soccer fans question Messi’s aptitude when he plays for Barcelona. This is a point of contention when comparing Messi’s illustrious wins and titles, to his performance in the *selección*, which are considered lackluster. The father reminded his son that Messi is “owned by Barcelona.” For this reason, he pointed out; “Messi has won for them, and never for us.” I thought about this especially during the 2016 Copa America final.

Given the growing tensions because of high unemployment and President Macri’s decision to take away public subsidies, people in Argentina are angry and hungry. A popular slogan attributed to Macri’s presidency is “*Macri es hambre*,” which means “Macri is hunger.”
“Macri para hoy, hambre para mañana.”

“Macri for today, hunger for tomorrow.”

Lomas de Zamora, Argentina
May 20, 2016
I felt that Argentina truly needed alegria (joy) given the rapid decline in the quality of life throughout the country. A win for Argentina could uplift the national morale, and even if momentarily, make people forget about the mounting struggles to put food on their tables and into their stomachs. However, in déjà vu style, Argentina lost the game and their optimism once more. They were no celebrations at the Obelisk. The final was played less than an hour from my house in New York City (Met Life Stadium.) My friends from Miami had made the pilgrimage up to New York in order to cheer their team on. I found myself in Buenos Aires mourning the lost, which made me feel even more homesick, anxious, and depressed. I felt shackled by the national mourning that overwhelmed Buenos Aires.

Salvador Antonio, in his autobiography, Malvinas, brief stories and feelings (2014) decided to take on the Argentine state and its impulse to forget the natural sin of the Malvinas war. His son Alejandro died as a result of this war, though he did not die in combat. Antonio recounts that his son, who had just turned 20, died in search of food and heating supplies that could be of use to his fellow soldiers who were all on the “brink of starvation.” It is important to note that the veterans from the Malvinas were also ignored and forgotten upon their return, which created great problems for their reintegration into Argentine society, which ignored their service, sacrifice, and trauma within national displays of remembrance. This is at the heart of why many groups and platforms have called on Argentines to no longer wear the British flag as a symbol devoid of this particular history.

Alejandro stepped on a mine with three of his fellow soldiers. This is why he died. This mine was intended to blow the enemy’s tank therefore it remains confusing as to how could an emaciated soldier’s body be sufficiently heavy to detonate it (26). After the war, many parents were left with the pain, anger, and resentment that would eventually forge a bond between them in which they mourned together for their children and a bond that put them against Argentina.
Antonio reflects that, “Disgrace had reached us and our common pain kept us united” (51). Alejandro’s death was heroic; although it was not commemorated by the nation. His father believes it was more than likely it was his son’s idea to lead the expedition for resources that eventually killed him. I vividly recall when I believed that turning twenty represented the epitome of adult liberation and maturity. My son has given me sufficient perspective to understand how Alejandro was and remains his father’s “child.” Even though your role as a parent evolves with time, it is an immutable expectation that a parent (like the nation) is to supposed to protect and defend against outside forces.

It occurred to me while reading Antonio’s story, that bereavement is a reappearing theme within the story Argentina and within the relationship between the state and the countless families it fails to protect. There is also an understandable anger that echoes throughout these memories that are reminiscent of the families of the disappeared and also of the families of those who migrated after the crisis. The state continues to disappear many “loved ones” by economic, international, and political forces, which leave family members with very little “choices.” Families are then left with a void because their children perform what they believe to be their “duties” to family and nation.

While the Malvinas war could be summed up as one of “futile attacks, accidents and absolute inefficiency,” it should not be forgotten as one where the lives of innocent boys were sacrificed. This memory is what maintains the resentment towards Chile alive and present in many ways too (56). In Juan Campanella’s film Cuento Chino (2011), part of the film’s backstory highlights the tortured lives of the veterans from this war who had trouble feeling secure and peace upon returning and reintegrating into a newly "democratic" Argentina. As adults, they denied themselves pleasure almost implying as if they did not deserve it since they had not “won” and instead, survived the war. It shows how when they were soldiers, were
brutalized significantly more by the lack of supplies and food when going off to fight a better-equipped and stronger enemy. They lost before they could even start the battle, because they were small and weak compared to the British armed forced. This raises the question as to what motivated this conflict, was the decision to go into war a result of the dictatorship’s delusions of grandeur or was it a means to an end for forgetting the previous war, the dirty one. The film interestingly depicts that when the boys returned to Argentina, they were not immediately sent back home because they first had to gain weight and look healthier. Their poor and frail appearance would convey how unprotected they were by the Argentine state (in and outside of the battle field.) Is this war what explains Argentina’s national resentment towards Chile and why their futbol match ups in 2014 and 2015 meant more than the average fan or spectator could understand?

Ezequiel Fernandez Moores writes, “Argentine soccer is very rich in this discussion, ‘how should we win” which suggests that more attention is paid to how the game is played, and less on the final results (Gilbert 2016). However, some defeats are too hard to bear. When Argentina lost (again) to Chile, Messi said he would no longer play for the national team. I did not believe it but many did. He claimed, “the choice for me is over, it is a decision. I tried many times (to be champion) but did not.” However, after a very public campaign (#notevayaslio) begging him to stay and after President Macri personally reached out to him, Messi reconsidered his decision. He decided to continue playing international soccer.

Messi shared, “my love for my country and this shirt is too great” (FoxNews 2016). Is it? Independently of his love, there would have been a high price to pay had he not returned. Guillermo Tofoni highlighted the implicated costs, “Today, you negotiate contracts on the basis of whether Messi is or isn’t on the team. The Football federation could stand to lose 50 percent of its revenue from contracts set to be negotiated” (Martinez and Panja 2016). Messi chose to
break his two million dollar deal with Gillete razors in order to grow his red beard in time for the bi centennial games. He claimed it was a “cábala,” so the national team could break their losing streak and win the trophy. Argentine basketball sensation Manu Ginobili is known to practice superstitious rituals like these too, as he publicized during the Rio Olympics with the infamous #elsello (Cerviño 2016).

Messi said that his teammates would not “let him” shave until they won the Cup. Nonetheless, his recent tax evasion sentencing in Spain might have influenced his return. He was found guilty and sentenced to compensate the Spanish government in the form of a corrective payment for the amount he defrauded along with his father. He agreed to pay back 5 million euros (BBC 2016). There’s no win, without a fight. There is no crown, without thorns. There is no Argentine national team, without Messi.

Claiming Children

When I realized that I was fighting to claim Pablito’s national identity as Colombian, against Pablo (Argentina), I became aware of how similar this dynamic was to that of my mother and father. Some battles are fought only in one’s head. Given that we both had “tensions” with our families on this matter, I felt this was personal. At least this is how I took it (like most things.) I personalize even the ozone layer. Pablo did not understand to the extent I felt this was a high stakes clash. To him, Pablito was “American,” which allowed room for both of our cultural traditions. Days after Pablito was born, my late father-in-law, shipped us a tiny San Lorenzo soccer jersey from Miami. He was un hincha of San Lorenzo, like another great man, the Pope. For years his family believed that I did not accept it because it was returned to them. Eventually
we learned that they had shipped it to the wrong address. My mother got him a Colombia jersey. My mother was not particularly a soccer fan prior to Pablito playing, but she reminded me that Pablito was actually, “Colombian with an Argentine father.” This is why she took great issue with him wearing the *albiceleste* jersey at first. I conveyed to her that wearing the colors did not mean he was Argentine. I pointed to my TOMs shoes (*alpargatas*).

TOMS (the feel good footwear) used the Argentine flag in their corporate logo. Their business model is buy one, give one. You buy a pair of TOMS, and they give a pair to a “child in need.” This is actually interesting given that the shoes retail for well over fifty dollars, despite only costing a few to make. I went on a scavenger hunt of sorts to find a paid during my last trip. However, I only found one pair. I asked the guy who was in his twenties where he had purchased them. He proceeded to tell me that his sister sent them to him from Miami. He claimed that they were not “very practical” or professional. He also shared that he could find an even better pair at any *feria* if he wanted to. He could not understand the appeal of these shoes that he wore when he was a child. “I am not a gaucho,” he teased. He believes his sister wanted him to think that she was still “proud” to be Argentine, “you know, cause of the flag.” He was however baffled as to why she would to send him these shoes. I did not have the heart to tell him that TOMS actually did not connect to Argentina despite its branding. In fact, TOMS is a quintessential American brand (K. Butler 2012).

While these family struggles are usually not the focus of anthropological studies on nationalism, I have to say that these are incredibly telling when thinking about transnationalism, identity, and even genetics (DeAngelis 2004). Eventually Pablo and I pledged to let Pablito make his own decisions and for us to stay neutral. We would not influence his choice of religion or anything else that could potentially matter. As long as he was not a bigot, we were fine. Yet, I have always suspected that Pablo cheated on his vow.
In an effort to counter what Pablo called my mother’s “overbearing Colombian indoctrination,” he started to YouTube Maradona for Pablito as he was teaching him how to dribble the soccer ball. Technology enabled father and son to share Maradona’s memorable games in real time. I can affirably say that the “hand of God goal” and the one that followed soon thereafter made Pablito a believer in the “fantastic.” From that moment on fútbol became “sacred” in our home. According to Pablito, this is how he became “Argentine.”

Fútbol Mami and the Hinchada

“My mother smiled as people who know souls well usually smile...” - Alfonsina Storni

In the electro-tango band, Bajo Fondo’s album, “Bajo Fondo Tango Club,” a commentary was included that explained what this code of ethics involves as it pertains to Argentine identity.

They explain:

Código de barra translated means bar code. As we know bar code is that thing attached to almost every product that we buy. But also, “bar” in itself means two things. Barra for us (Argentines) like bar, where you can drink and also it means a group who could be sympathizers of a soccer team, or a gang, that’s a barra. So you have the different neighborhoods that have different barras, so código de barras and bar codes is a play with words. The word of the product and the codes all these people have when they belong to this particular group (2002).

A fútbol mami has her own code of ethics that she subscribes to because she is an integral part of her son’s hinchada or barra brava. She is not the typical soccer mom, which cheers all of the children alike. A fútbol mami’s responsibilities do not revolve around car-pooling and snack duties. Throughout the course of my fieldwork, I have become one. I do not drive a mini-van, instead I ride a bike. I do not live in the suburbs. I am not a housewife. I am a perpetual graduate student/artist who packs my son’s lunch, shin guards, and goalie gloves to every game, while also taking along my ethnographic notebook, tape recorder, and camera as well. These are just some of the reasons being called a “soccer mom,” did not necessarily paint a full picture of my
role as the mother of a goalie, who was also writing a dissertation on Argentine identity.

Going to the field was part of my work as an anthropologist but also as a fútbol mami. I was the only mother who was present at every game. My mother was also with me at the games. We have been asked to “tone it down,” whenever we cheered for Pablito or against the rival team. I wish I could say I knew how to show restraint at games, but I have very little impulse control when it comes to most things related to my son and sports. I am a professional trash talker too, which I get is not the most appropriate skill to show off at a child’s game. My mother? She has no restraint either. She has walked over to the referee to challenge calls. A fútbol mama (that is what he calls my mother and what I called hers…mama) is worthy of a separate thesis. The popular image of a soccer mom did not fully convey the tensions that derived from the cultural differences between soccer vs. fútbol.
In 2006, The Washington Post published a story entitled “In Argentina, they’ve got a beef” by Silvina Frydlewsky. The piece discussed President Nestor Kirchner’s plea to the Argentine people. He asked them to “slow their beef consumption,” in an effort to counter inflation. The piece shares how some people would rather “starve,” than give up meat. In Argentina, people eat more beef than in any other country. She writes, “A juicy slab of marbled steak is more than a meal for many of Argentina’s 39 million citizens, it’s part of their national identity.”

I was a vegetarian for most of my adult life and was allergic to the sulfates found in red wine. The operative word is “was.” I knew I would have to adjust my diet and adapt my body if I wanted to tell this story which many times took place around a table. Sunday is a day for Asado, wine, and soccer.
The Diaz family is Bostera

Pablito become my most reliable research assistant and most important subject throughout my fieldwork. Since he knew that we were going to the Diaz’s family home for an Asado (Argentine BBQ) after practice, he made sure to bring his Boca Juniors jersey since they were “bosteros” (of the Boca Junior’s club.) As he took a bite of his sandwich, Pablito smiled and said, “Sundays and soccer go together like: peanut butter and jelly.” As I prepared for the very long day, I thought, “at least it is not cereal.” I was running late and had overslept. I then hear from the kitchen Pablo’s interjection, “…like asado and Malbec.” As usual, he chimed in, feeding me “vital footnote material.” He essentially foreshadowed the rest of our Sunday.

Pablito went on to explain that sure they’re people who eat them (peanut butter and jelly) separately, but once you try them together you know that they are “a perfect fit…” In his usual circuitous speech, Pablito continued, “…Unless of course, you have a peanut allergy…”

In Argentina, Pablo grew up with soccer on Sundays. That was his church service. This was one of the distinctions Argentina made to the game when they made it their own. The English played on Saturdays. Introducing this ritual to Pablito made Pablo like he was passing on part of his heritage to him, to us. My hybridization of the ritual was a form of rebellion. Prior to soccer, Sundays consisted of an ill-fated balancing act between brunch, leisure, and church.

Juan was the patriarch of the Diaz family. He eagerly anticipated telling me about his memories of June 22, 1986. This was the purpose of our congregation on this day of rest. He first sat down in front of his computer. Even though Argentina was not playing today, the entire family was wearing their Argentina Jerseys because of the World Cup. Franco, Juan’s second son, let me know that he did not launder his jersey. As he set the table, he explained that this was his cábala, and therefore he did not want to bring the team bad luck by washing it. I pointed to Pablito, who was very proud of partaking in the same custom. I personally disliked it. The fusion
of smells between the odorous jerseys, the *asado*, and the Malbec infused breaths certainly felt like we were back in Lomas de Zamora on any given Sunday. However, we were not. Pablito immediately ran to the back of the apartment to continue playing his soccer match with Juan’s grandson, Nico. Immune to the sounds and risks of indoor soccer, we were unbothered by the thumping ball and took turns yelling out when it stopped. “Did you break something?” I had lost track of the score since their game started weeks ago, when I first started to take the trip out to Queens, New York to visit with them. We knew each other from when I lived in Miami. Pablo worked in the same restaurant as Juan’s eldest son, Tony. However, given our New York City schedules, we had fallen out of touch for some time. The family moved to New York about a year after I returned. Juan’s wife, Rosario, preferred the anonymity of New York. She rationalized that, “With so many Argentines now in Miami, they (ICE) must suspect that not all of us have papers (a legal immigration status.) Especially if you are older like we are, it is tough to blend. It was too stressful. Look at what happened to the Kalama brothers.”

Pouring his second glass of Malbec, Juan started to become nostalgic. He recalled:

I remember watching the game with my boys. My father was watching the game back in Mendoza and I was in Córdoba. I called him and my brothers to celebrate the first goal. My brothers were at my parent’s house. My brother-in-law who was drafted to the Malvinas war was also in the house and when the hand goal was allowed, he started crying. He literally started crying. I was crying too from seeing him cry. I could not believe my eyes. It was amazing.

I watched as his sons watched him retell the story. I noticed that Tony appeared to be mouthing in syncopation with his father’s words. He knew each one by heart because it was etched in his memory, the same way this memory was engraved in Juan’s heart. I had already heard this same story but this time, I had purposely requested to hear it again in order to take down notes. Tony, the primogenitor, looks like a younger version of his father. He became
emotional from watching his father reminisce. I was unable to discern if it was because of the
goal or because he knew that sometime soon, Juan would no longer be around to retell this and
other stories. I believed it was a mixture of both reasons. Juan had been diagnosed with cancer
last spring and so the family faithfully gathered on Sundays for soccer and *asado*.

Since the cancer had spread to most of Juan’s body, it was only a matter of time. This
waiting game had no winners. We accepted that this would be the last World Cup they would
experience as a family. Rosario had personally called me after our first interview session, and
asked me to please come and spend time with them on Sundays. She shared, “Juan starts talking
about all of his memories with you and since you are recording them, that means you will make
sure that we cannot forget them.” This is when I realized that my ethnographic endeavor had
personal value to my subjects as well. Franco interrupted, “That was when you put me on your
shoulders?” Juan chuckled and went to look for the photographs.

Pablo, Tony, and I had shared many after work shenanigans when we lived in Miami. All
three of us worked on Lincoln Road, and would meet at the pub for drinks after to share the
horrors of serving them to tourists. Tony is the flashiest of the Diaz brothers and
indistinguishable from most hipsters: beard, big glasses, and skinny jeans. His wife, who was
Brazilian, was also there. She was not allowed to wear her Brazil jersey when she visited. Living
in the age of selfies, it is not uncommon to take a photo of everything to post on social media.
However, to hold a Polaroid in my hand felt strangely moving. Here we were, all in this tiny
apartment in Astoria, and I was holding a photo that captured the family’s emotions on this
historic day. In the picture, Juan looked young and strong, and the entire clan was hugging each
other.

Tony turned to me, “You see, I had my jersey on already.” The photo showed a younger
Juan holding an even younger Tony. Rosario then entered with a plate of *picadas*. I asked her if
she remembered this match. She replied, “Not really. I remember what we were celebrating and how it felt to see everyone so excited, but I did not really watch the match. I remember the celebration after it.” And like that, she went back into the kitchen. Out came Leo, Juan’s youngest, he was working on the *asado*. He announced, “An indoor grill is not the same thing, I can’t wait to one day have a real *asador*. (Asadores are backyard grills that are often built out of brick and mortar.)” Immediately it grew quiet. Leo was slated to return with his father to Argentina at the end of the month. Sadly, because he was undocumented, we knew that he would not be returning to New York anytime soon. At least, not for another decade, as this is the standard penalty for overstaying a tourist visa. He was returning to an Argentina he barely knew and that was incredibly different from when he left it.

Leo was the last to join the brothers in Miami. He came when his parents settled right before the visa waiver program was suspended. He was barely a teen when he first arrived. However, as the youngest, and because he was not married, he had no real reason to stay in New York. He was returning in order to spend his father’s last days and to ensure that his mother would not be alone when Juan was no longer around to accompany her in the suburbs of Buenos Aires. Juan had chosen to die in Argentina near his “family and people.” This family had a difficult time accepting his decision because the elder boys could not return with him. They had already started new families in the States and currently were in the process of adjusting their immigration status. They were planting their roots here with their own businesses, families, and dreams. Rosario described Leo as “less Argentine” than his brothers. What would that make him when he got to Argentina, “more American?”

Juan turned on the computer to sign onto YouTube. As he typed each letter with his index finger, he lowered the background music that was playing. He declared, “You see this YouTube, it is amazing. Look at what I can do.” On came the voice of God, Argentina’s Morgan Freeman,
Victor Hugo. He narrated the goal of the century.73 Opening his arms, Juan asked, “Come, let’s watch it all together again. It is just beautiful.” Juan also called out to Pablito and Nico so that they could join the rest of the family around the computer. We could time travel together as Juan took us to church. We could hear, Victor Hugo’s exclamatory question to Maradona, “What planet are you from?” Victor Hugo Morales would go on to say that his narration would outlive him, “When I am nothing more than bones or dust, someone will listen to this goal (Markham 2014).

All of a sudden, five generations of Diaz’s and myself collectively felt all of the emotions that come with soccer: passion, nostalgia, hope, and melancholy. Simultaneously. It was a bittersweet moment for many reasons. We shared the emotions as a family and I felt very much a part of it. I put my notebook away at this point because I knew I would be able to close my eyes and forever remember this moment no matter what. I tried to come to grips with the fact that the next time I would see them together would be under very different circumstances. As soon as we see Maradona score, like a choir we chanted, “woooooowwwwww!!” I was mesmerized that no matter how many times I watched this goal, I felt the same awe each time I witnessing this miraculous moment for Argentina. Juan yelled, “Qué grande! (How great!) That is what (Lio) Messi lacks…he plays too European!” I went to scribble the question, “What does playing Argentine mean?” Next to it, I wrote, “Diego, how great thou art.”74

Religion is a Sport: Sing my Soul

I immediately took to watching soccer on Sundays upon starting this project. It became our family religion but also served as a space for Pablito to explore his identity and for me to witness it. However, this transpired by happenstance. David Chidester expounds that; religion is a generic term for describing “ways of being a human person in a human place.” For this reason soccer can be as meaningful and powerful as Christianity given the fanaticism, passion, and
devotion that come from being un hincha (Chidester 2009: vii). Time Magazine explained that fútbol is “Argentina’s unofficial religion, while Diego Maradona is the “appointed deity.” He rightfully earned this title after the 1986 World Cup (Oni 2009).

I was a soccer fan before this project, but as a result of my own connection to fútbol and learning what it can mean in the context of my family, I became an “hinchas.” To hinchar, literally means, “to inflate”. Another interesting use of the term is to “hinchar las bolas,” which translates into, “to fill one’s balls” and means, “to annoy.” One more example of Argentina’s obsession with (all) balls, as evidenced in their vernacular.

An hincha is tasked with “inflating” (uplifting) their team. They must motivate them (alentar.) They must be loyal. They must follow them. An hincha is not just a fan. A fan is content with watching their favorite team on the small screen. An hincha will spend an entire week’s paycheck to travel to see their team play in another State. An hincha is like a fútbol mami—devoted with their mind, body, and finances to the sport. An hincha shows up, even when their team does not. An hincha suffers and rejoices intensely and completely. An hincha only knows how to express ardent affection or severe disgust. An hincha believes that within fútbol, all things are possible.

David Chidester conceptualizes that, “If religion is about human identity and orientation, about what it is to be a human person in a human place, even if that place is undergoing dramatic globalizing changes, then cross-cultural business has been doing a kind of religious work through the symbolic material negotiations over the ownership of the sacred terms and conditions of being human in a human place” (Chidester 2005:149). He focuses on the operative function of religion, which enables conceiving soccer as one. This point reveals the importance of soccer jerseys as a national referent for Argentines, and why it is believed to be “sacred.” Since jerseys are purchased, and cannot be made at home, this makes them special but also desirable. They are
“fetishized,” in this way.

Soccer jerseys teeter between a commodity, an identity card, and a sacred relic.

Chidester’s conclusions extend the practice of religious work outside the church. This suggests that soccer, in a similar fashion to that of other industries, feeds our desire for mythos over logos while creating a sense of the (American or in this case the Argentine) family. Yet soccer differentiates itself from other industries in two profound ways. The fast food chain, for example, which has become synonymous with America, is visibly allocating a market fantasy where money can yield community and where buying power is akin to the most severe mystical experience. We can see this in MacDonald’s recent campaign of “pay in love” (North 2015). Nevertheless, fútbol remains divinely human.

In my application of soccer as religion, I build on Talal Asad’s critique of Clifford Geertz’s notion of religion as found in Anthropology of the Secular (2003). Exploring soccer as a religion with its rituals and values contributes to rethinking the contextual and subjective boundaries between national identity and embodied practice. Asad’s argument functions on two levels: firstly, he contends that defining religion as a transnational, transcultural and trans-historical phenomenon is ill-advised since its fundamental components and relations are historically specific.

Secondly, Asad presents a meta-argument, illustrating the ways in which attempts to theorize religion universally are in fact iniquitous (Asad 2003:22-66). His primary intervention is to historicize both, the epistemology and ontology of religion, which I employ in my analysis. He seeks “to problematize the idea of an anthropological definition of religion by assigning that endeavor to a particular history of knowledge and power out of which the modern world has been constructed” (54). In this light, Asad’s definition of “religion” affords a more creative, nuanced and meaningful approach to particular groups of people than traditional conceptions,
which homogenize it into a basic “cultural system.”

Peter Berger comments from a theological perspective, “Religion is the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established. Put differently, religion is the cosmization in a sacred mode” (Berger 1990:25). As a “human enterprise,” religion is then prone to being created differently according to class and economic value. But, he notes, “On a deeper level, however, the sacred has another opposed category, that of chaos. The sacred cosmos emerges out of chaos and continues to confront the latter as its terrible contrary” (26). This is a key statement because it purports that the oppositional force to the sacred is indeed chaos or, as he would state, “nomy.”

For an individual to live in the eternal cosmos is to then live in an eternal nomos (a mirror image of the patterns of nature). But while the nomos is fortified with the introduction of a deity, it also has immense power in designating certain behaviors as unnatural, or under the lens of the deity, sinful. Therefore, when considering the religious prowess of Diego Maradona as a quasi-deity to the nation, one who has resurrected his career over and over again, after surviving numerous heart attacks, and run-ins with the law. It becomes clearer how Maradona can be revered by Argentina. He is loved because he is seen by Argentines as a “triumphant hero” and a “luckless martyr” (Goni 2009).
We saw the flag from a far but when we got closer we could not believe it. What were the chances that Los Andes Flag (the local club of Lomas de Zamora, Argentina) was was at this game? We are in DC and Lomas is present! So cold, Pablo gave me his socks. Under no other circumstances would I have allowed that to happen. I am writing it down because this is something I won’t forget.

-Fieldwork notes
March 28, 2015

“I dream about one day being able to go and see our team.....I want to follow them all over the world. I want to cheer them on. I believe in them. I know that this dream is very big but no one can stop me. Maybe one day they will call me to play. I have time to get better...I know I will at least play for Los Andes. Who knows? You got to dream. When we stop dreaming, we are doomed. The system wins.”

-Luis, 12
Lomas de Zamora

Figure 12 Dreaming Big, a photo by Melissa Maldonado-Salcedo
Gambeta: Noun & Verb (Performative Identities)

In the song “El Baile de la Gambeta,” Bersuit shared that knowing how to gambetear (to practice gambetas) can “change your fate” (Bersuit 2004). A gambeta can convert a handicap into an asset, thus turning luck around. How does this work? What does this ability look like? Feel like? It is often explained as a soccer move, “another kind of tango,” that is deeply embedded within Argentinidad and gives pleasure in its practice. The gambeta’s deviating twists and diverging turns have two elements that merit further consideration. They are:

The first is skill to show that I, with my foot, have the skill to do anything -- this gives a person dignity. The second is deceit. You have to fool the defender into believing exactly the opposite of what you are actually going to do. This taste for deceit is also very Argentinian. When you combine these two traits, then you have the most celebrated football move in Argentina, the Gambeta (Pendleton 2006).

Maradona is the ultimate gambetero. His origin myth rivals that of Jesus Christ. Also, both men were “idolized and crucified” by the people they served. Maradona is the most legendary exporter of Argentine soccer. His personal stories include familiar tropes of rags to riches, falls from grace, rebellion, resurrection, redemption, socialism, and the unwavering global devotion of his worshipers. Needless to say, Maradona has his very own religion and congregation in Argentina, la Iglesia Maradoneana. It is complete with its Ten Commandments that situate the soccer field and ball as sacred (Vickery 2002). The bible is Maradona’s memoir, Yo soy Diego (2002).

Reporting on the 1986 England vs. Argentina showdown, the German press detailed that his (Maradona’s) first goal was the “scandal of the century,” while the second was the “goal of the century” (Shumanov 2014). When asked about the controversial hand goal, often
described as a divine assist, Maradona testifies, “It was Diego’s (my) hand.” Depending on your allegiance, you remember the goal either as an infraction or a golazo (Johnson 2014). One of Argentina’s most celebrated national memories is of this particular game. It holds great symbolic resonance with Argentinidad because it showcased Maradona’s (natural) ability to gambetear and win (for Argentina.) Veteran soccer journalist, Brian Glanville describes this remembrance as, “astounding, a goal so unusual, almost romantic, that it might have been scored by some schoolboy hero, or some remote Corinthian, from the days when dribbling was the vogue” (Markham 2014). It was a memory-maker indeed.
Figure 13 Argentina Style, a photo by Melissa Maldonado-Salcedo
Sam Markham writes that, “The iconic images of that day, whether still or moving, are fixed in the memory of all soccer fans who were alive 27 years ago and even in generations who weren’t yet born” (Markham 2014). The memory is even more vivid, if you saw the goal up close and personal. Technology has also enabled preserving it, without the limits of memory distorting it. Jorge Valdano, a striker and Maradona’s teammate on the national squad, noted that it was his viveza that was put on the global stage and which showcased Argentinidad. He remembers:

For us this was just another way of playing. For the Argentinian it is viveza…I want you to understand that I am not telling you this with any sort of personal pride. Perhaps many of the social and economic problems we've had in Argentina would have been solved if we could understand that what we call viveza is in other countries regarded as crime. Viveza is deeply rooted in the average Argentinean, and when you get away with it, you celebrate: you are the 'smartest' compared to others (Pendleton 2006).

This viveza criolla (native cunning) encompasses many aspects of Argentine history, people, culture, and more importantly, its politics (Merco Press 2014). The Economist recently noted that said viveza has gotten in the way of Argentina overcoming the economic crisis that continues to unfold. This report affirms that “the notion that Argentina could play by its own rules, than by those of economics or of the rest of the world…” is in fact the reason it continues to implode (Bell 2014). Luis Borges described this viveza simply as an interchangeable synonym for “dishonesty.”

A Country on its Knees
Sociologist Juan Corradi once told me after watching Juan J. Campanella’s film, *Nueve Reinas* (2000) that if I wanted to understand present day Argentina, I needed to go and, “watch the film.” The movie unfolds as one immense psychological *gambeta*. I believe most scholars of Argentine New Cinema would agree that filmic representations of Argentine society served to document changes. Cinema functions as “a collector of indexical marks, a means of observing and investigating the social worlds of the present,” which until the second half of the 1990s was not at all visible or possible (Anderman 2012: xxii).

This functional purpose also supports Philippa Gates’ assertion concerning filmic depictions of this type. She argues that they provide their audiences a “fantasy in which social and personal problems can be raised” but while also seeking to “resolve—problems that cannot be so readily resolved in reality” (Gates 2006:49). Especially when reality bites. The lack of a resolution is exactly what has characterized the genre of Argentine New Cinema. It offers no happy or tragic ending, but instead takes you through a journey into the mind of what makes Argentina repeat the same sagas of crisis and the lives of people who have to survive within it.

The neoliberal economic policies that caused Argentina’s government to implode have been revived by President Mauricio Macri’s conservative administration. Maradona shared his views on the current state of affairs in Argentina with his longtime friend, Victor Hugo Morales. Maradona said that the country’s mood is that, “everyone wants to go shopping, but they can’t.” Hence, according to him, he declared that, “Argentina is on its knees.” In his view, the country is praying, begging, and pleasing its (familiar) tormentor at the expense of their suffering. The country’s inflation has recently hit the highest rate since 2002, public subsidies and policies are abysmal, and the administration has resorted to censorship as a way of controlling information and them.

Maradona called Macri’s sacking of Telesur, “shameful.” This amalgam of proceedings
can never and has never been a good sign of things to come in Argentina. I watched this interview that took place on the 30th anniversary of the “symbolic revenge” served by the hand of Maradona against the Colonial power, England. The interview commemorated the vengeance served for the brief but “bloody” Malvinas war (Telesur 2016). Argentina has yet to resolve the territorial dispute, but on the field, D10s (god) took matters into his own hand(s.) Maradona finally settled the score. Dieeeeeeego, Dieeeeeeego.77

**Macri is a Millionaire**

I thought to myself, only Maradona understood and loved the country “enough” to see and say how he feels about the changes brought about by Macri’s presidency in such a short time. Under Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner’s administration, her and husband’s supporters are known as “Ks.” One of the first questions I was asked in Argentina, when I sat down at the family table in May 2016 was: Are you a “Pro” (*Macrista*) or a “K?” While in the United States we have our own national issues with “Ks” (Kardashians), the number of people who identify as “K” in Argentina, are growing because it has come to mean, “Anti-Macri.” Just a few months earlier, people were “relieved” that Macri would bring “changes.” They were right, but these changes were not the ones that they could have imagined.

I met up again with the Diaz family for dinner while in Argentina. It was only Juan, Rosario, and Leo. Leo brought his girlfriend over to meet us (Pablo, Pablito, and I.) Diana was Paraguayan and lived on the outskirts of Lomas de Zamora in a “*casa tomada*” (usuapped house.) I only learned this because Rosario whispered it as Diana was setting up the table. She introduced herself to me as a “*bostera*.” She then assumed I did not know what one was, so she was going to explain it to me until Leo stopped her. He told her, “Don’t try to act like you know anything, Meli watches more soccer than you and I put together.”

I did not know if Leo meant that I watched more soccer because I had more leisure time
on my hands than they did, or if he was trying to legitimize me as a “fan” and did not need explanations about the game. Both? Maybe she wanted to help me with my work, although I had not asked her a question. Either, the next time she went to speak, he flat out told her to “shut up” and to take the beer down from the freezer before the bottles burst. She obeyed and I looked at Pablo who had already warned me to stop “preaching feminism.” I had already said “too many” inappropriate comments at his family’s dinner table. However, I explained, “I cannot help reacting. I am severely allergic to machismo and bullshit.” I took the next best thing to an eppipen and filled my cup.

Leo worked painting houses and other off jobs. Despite his fluency in English, he felt that he did not want to work at a call center. He was telling me about how he was in a windowless office, in cubicle, rerouting calls to each other in order to service the customer. Or as, he explained, “we just wear them out by giving them the run around.” This explained a lot, “Is this where my call goes to whenever I ask to speak to the manager?” We laughed but it was true. He told me, “there is no such thing as a manager, it is just the next person in the next cubicle, and we pass it to each other “like a ball.”

Leo and Diana met at a call center. When he quit being “a call center rat,” she quit too. I asked her about her day and she told me that she got up, smoked a joint and did the laundry, shopping, and cleaned the house whenever she could not go with Leo to do an odd job. Rosario would later explain that, “she had to earn her weight in the house because she could not stand her laziness. They wanted people to always take care of them. She used to sleep in and just stay in bed watching television.” Rosario worked in a movie theater. They had opened up a few positions for the late shows and reserved them for “older” people. She passed the training and was offered a contract. However, she sometimes gets home really late and she made sure that if Diana was going to stay in the house, she had to have dinner made by the time she got home.
Leo claims he has a steady income working in this business. He explained that in Argentina, people no longer replaced things. He remembered, “In New York, whenever I lost a phone or iPod, I went out and bought another one. Here, we go get it fixed. The heal of our shoe falls off, we get it fixed.” He also shared with me how he also worked in construction with Diana’s father. He put up his hands. I could still see the traces of cement on them. I was aware that sometimes soap did not wash it off so easily. I used to sculpt until the fumes of the cement forced me out of my studio. I thought about how we both worked with the same material, however the relationship to it was very different. If you had put my hands next to his, side by side, from when I worked in with cement, they would look similar. I did not ask about the fumes, because unlike me, he did not have the privilege to stop working with this material.

Leo pointed to the bags of cement that were by the door. He told me how he was going to build on top of their house. Leo explained that this is what his friends have done. They build additional rooms on top of their homes instead of renting or buying separately from their family. He told me that he was going to make “an upstairs for Diana and him and however many kids got sent.” Since Leo works in the informal center it is near impossible to get credit or any financing options in order to leave his parent’s home.

I was curious why Leo disliked Buenos Aires and preferred to stay in Chaco Chico. My question was more about work, and less about where he resided. I live in NYCHA and my apartment is where my father lived with my grandparents when he came to New York City from Puerto Rico. People repeatedly ask me why I love my neighborhood (my place) so much. I understand having sentimental attachment to a place outsiders can pass judgment on, especially when comparing it to “other” living options. I clarified, “Why did you not like working in Capital?” If you are employed in the formal sector, while living in the suburbs, you probably take the train into Constitución. When Leo worked in the call centers in Capital, he told me he
was let go before the standard three-month trial period finished. In this way, the company did not have to pay him benefits.

Leo then showed me a notification from his last “real job,” as he called it. It was sent to him letting him know; his services were no longer needed because he was not “rindiendo” (meeting their expectations.) Indignant and frustrated, he left without waiting for the contract to end because he felt he “owed them nothing,” after such a “bogus termination.” Leo’s anecdote is an all too common one in present day Argentina. While I sat in the Plaza near my mother-in-law’s house, I heard a few young families talking about this new employment problem created by Macri. I read graffiti throughout Buenos Aires asking the politicians and general public to support La Cámpora.

The Cámpora is a political youth movement that was started in 2003 by Máximo Kirchner, the son of Nestor and Cristina, former presidents Argentina. The group’s motto is “la fuerza de la juventud, la fuerza de un pueblo” (the strength of youth, the strength of the people)” (Lacampora.org). Ideologically, they seek to vindicate the montoneros, the left-wing youth group that was violently targeted during the Dirty War. They took on the name of Argentina’s ex-president, Hector J. Cámpora, who supported the Peronist organization. In practice, they work as a political movement that seeks to defend human rights and they resonate most with young people who live in the Provinces of Buenos Aires and who identify as “Ks” (Kirchneristas.) Their offices have recently been attacked numerous times by Molotov cocktails and gunshots.

Pablo’s cousin Lilly told me how grateful she was with Cristina (Kirchner.) According to Lilly, because of her, she was able to “get her tits done.” She grabbed on to them in order to prove her point (and dramatic effect.) Apparently, Lilly was able to finance them with ease due to a layaway plan, which she attributed to Kirchner’s policies. Lilly was a member of La Cámpora.

It is important to recognize that many of these young people who identify with La
Cámpora were the “savage victims” of the neoliberal 1990s. Delia Rocco Mario writes that this youth group shows an unprecedented commitment to political participation. They actively partake in the sociopolitical transformations throughout the country, militantly joining the “central politics of the state and even on matters with regard to individual and social rights that can change the everyday of the Argentina’s citizens” (Rocca Mario 2014:49). A taxi driver explained La Cámpora to me, when complaining he was forced to take a longer way back to Palermo (where I lived) in order to bypass La Avenida de Mayo. The Cámpora youth group was holding a protest in front of the Pink House. They are known for “cutting” traffic and “blocking” roads. They organize and march against the neoliberal policies that are clipping “Argentina’s future.”

People want to work, but the “system,” does not allow them to do so with “dignity.” I heard a group of men discuss their current litigations against their former employers while sitting in La Plaza. They were forced to hire lawyers in order to gain severance pay, and also in order to challenge their unjust dismissals. All four of them had experienced similar experiences although at different jobs. Countless lawyers preyed on the recently unemployed offering them their services. They file the lawsuit and represent their clients in court for a percentage of the payout. These socioeconomic conditions and political factors compelled the legislature to push a bi-partisan legal mechanism in order to abate this epidemic. The general public supported this legal effort, while the few that were unphased by the current system and its injustices, preferred to criticize and blame La Cámpora. It was their fault that there was growing civil unrest throughout the City. La Cámpora blamed the Pros (Macri and his supporters) for the growing unemployment rates. However, some issues in Argentina remain above the law, and borderline, criminal.
"I received this telegram that notified me that they would no longer need me at the job. I worked hard and I knew that I did my job well. So I keep it on my wall with a note I wrote on it........"

"DO NOT FORGET THE SYSTEM BECAUSE IT WILL SYSTEMATICALLY FORGET YOU."

-Agustin Alvarez, 27
Lomas de Zamora, Argentina
2016
In March 2016 Macri vetoed the law referred to as “anti-firing” (anti-despido.) The Ley de Emergencia Ocupacional passed all of the necessary lawmaking entities with a majority voting in favor of its adoption. This is a nearly impossible feat within an increasingly polarized legislature. Yet, this was the first executive action Macri signed, a right afforded to him by the constitution. He claimed that he was confident that in a year’s time, everyone would “reap the benefits” of his decision. Macri also personalized the approval of this law while accusing the lawmakers who supported it, of not wanting his administration to succeed. They were against “progress” and change.

This law prohibited employers from terminating a worker before the 180 days of their initial employment and would have duplicated severance payments. This would have protected the worker, and not the business. Speaking against the Ks and their supporters, whom Macri attributed this legislation to; he proclaimed that in the last five years, no new jobs were generated in Argentina. He went on to justify his decision by saying that this law was “against Argentines.” Leo described why he “detested” Macri: “Before, if you did not make ends meet, you had room to breathe because of the subsidies. From one day to another, utilities are up 300% from the previous bill?” He then said, “Can you believe that Macri was the president of Boca? He might as well be a gallina, cause he sure is acting like a millionaire.”78 One thing that I did notice was how fast conversations became political in Buenos Aires, especially among young people from all sides of the political spectrum.

Relative Problems

Juan had e-mailed me that Leo had great difficulty adapting to Argentina and that he was concerned. His brothers were also worried and frustrated Leo was not financially contributing as much as he could. Leo was a source of stress for his father, whose health started to deteriorate.
However, Leo started to “calm down, since meeting Diana.” Juan called her a “desgracia con suerte” which translates into “a curse with luck,” but means, “a blessing in disguise.” One more example of how things get turned on their head in El Sur. Rosario had told me over the phone that she did not like Diana’s “lack of initiative,” because she was young and could “do something.” Also, she believed that she did not push Leo and she was very lazy…which is to be expected. I asked her what she meant by “to be expected,” and she asked me how many Paraguayan people I knew? I changed the subject and asked her if they had seen the film, “7 Boxes” (2007). I knew they had a Netflix account that they shared with Tony because we put together a list of movies on the cue for Leo to watch.

Leo shared with me how much he hated working in Buenos Aires capital because he felt that people were “pretentious.” I noticed that he had gained a considerable amount of weight since I had last seen him in New York City. One of the first things he told me was, “I know, I know, I look different,” as he put his hands on his protruding stomach. I told him that he looked, “great.” Because, what else do you say in this situation? I was happy to see him but he did look haggard. I met with his brothers just a week before traveling back to Argentina and they gave me chocolates, two cellphones, and a perfume to smuggle to their family. His older brothers looked younger than the Leo, who was before me.

After living in Chaco Chico for two years, it certainly appeared that the entire Diaz family was different. They had a flag of Los Andres hanging in front of their door. Los Andres is the soccer club of Lomas de Zamora, Argentina. Their barra brava is known for being notoriously violent (Grabia 2014). Chaco Chico is a neighborhood where predominantly provincial immigrants from El Gran Chaco have settled into. They were from the same Chaco that Gastón Gordillo writes about in Landscapes of the Devil (2004). Many resettled in Lomas de Zamora in search of economic opportunities. At first, I was excited to visit the neighborhood. It
wasn’t necessarily a tourist destination. You only went if you were visiting family, a friend, or lived there. The rumor was that even the cops would not enter due to the high crime. I knew of Chaco Chico but did not know anyone who lived there before the Díaz family moved back to Argentina. I thought I was going to be able to see the same people Gordillo wrote about, but alas this was not the case. My anthropological enthusiasm along with my naivety every now and then gets the best of me.

The Díaz family had returned to Rosario’s mother’s house. I learned that while they were in New York the grandmother sold and gifted all of their personal belongings. They had left them behind for practical reasons, but not because they wanted to part with them. They figured that she had storage space and scrupulousness. Since travelers are only allowed two valises during international travels, those who entered the United States with a tourist visa could not enter bringing belongings that would suggest they planned to overstay their visa. If you bring more than two suitcases, you conceivably run the risk of not “passing” for a tourist. The grandmother did not think they would ever return, at least not to live with her again. She hoped they would eventually visit, at most. I noticed that I found their living room appeared even smaller than the one in Astoria, even though it was substantially twice the size.

Juan had outlived the doctor’s prognosis. However, in recent weeks, he had become progressively weaker. Rosario would call me to give me status updates on Juan’s health and her frustrations with Programa de Atención Médica Integral (PAMI). The people who worked making appointments for Juan’s doctor’s visit would often give her the run around knowing that she had to travel about an hour and a half each way in order to get to and from their offices. This was their way of taking out their frustrations and feeling “powerful.” Rosario said that she had one of the shortest commutes compared to other people who were also waiting. With cancer, time and resources are of the essence. Juan no longer was able to stand without assistance. He
required a few extensive naps throughout the day. He was much thinner from the last time I hugged him. I thought about how Leo had grown-up. He sounded more and more like an “bitter old man” instead of an optimistic young person He also resented life and people. He started and finished his sentences with an expletive. In the United States, if you are a young college student, you can face many challenges such as student loans and living wage matters. However, there is an understanding that young people can eventually change their circumstances during adulthood. The struggle is supposed to be “just a phase.” Obama’s presidency gave young people at least this “hope,” though it’s dwindling more and more. Leo told me, he did not “allow himself to dream.” He could not handle another disappointment, especially because the biggest one has yet to come (Juan’s passing.) His long hair and beard affirmed he was not looking for a job in the formal sector and he looked like the stereotypical representation of “un vago” (lazy guy.) He lacked, “buena presencia” (good presence) which is key when searching for employment prospects (Maldonado-Salcedo 2010).

Leo appeared as if he had not shaved since moving back to Argentina. Maybe that is an exaggeration on my end but the contrast between this Leo and his former self was jarring. As I got lost in my thoughts, I asked to use the restroom so that I could look in the mirror. I went on my phone to find a photo on Facebook to get a sense of what I looked like two years ago in comparison to now. Did Leo look at me and think the same thing? When I washed my hands I noticed that in the toiletry basket there was no razor. I wondered if he trimmed his beard with scissors instead. I put cold water on my face and stepped back outside. We sat down at the dinner table and Leo proceeded to braid his beard. I realized that it was a nervous tick because he was doing this by rote. I continued to talk, while trying not to look at him directly. Meanwhile, Diana looked on in admiration that her “bilingual day laborer,” as she called him, (albañil biligüe) was
speaking to me in English. Every so often she interjected and asked him to, “Say it again, it just sounds so beautiful.” When Leo stopped working at the call center, he only spoke Spanish. English had no use in his life anymore. I lost my appetite with the whole “braiding the facial hair at the dinner table thing.”

_Fútbol for Some_

The Boca Junior club won the most titles ever during Macri’s tenure. People admit that, “los sacó campeón” (he made them champions.) It was not an easy process but the club’s biggest ambassador has no love for Macri, and has very little faith in his ability to be a successful president. He said what he felt unapologetically and candidly, knowing full well that not everyone had the freedom to do so. The “people” casted their cares onto Maradona, trusting that he will sustain them during this difficult time, they believe in his moral judgment especially with regard to Macri (Psalms 55:22). His “truth telling” ability and authority comes from the people, and he does not want them to fear Macri. He does not want them to believe that he was “better than them” because he had money. Maradona said that Macri was in fact illiterate, and owed everything to his father’s money. This is a stark contrast to Maradona’s father, Don Diego, who he said would never inflate his eager, which then pushed him to be better. Victor Hugo teased Maradona and told him that he needed to “win the World Cup” in order to get his father’s approval.

Maradona shared, “I did two years of high school and I read better than Macri…he doesn’t know how to read.” The emperor cannot read? Maradona asked the public, “Have you heard him?” He pointed out that anybody could become President, “if their father brought them the elections.” But not everyone can become Maradona; money cannot buy the love and trust of the people. This is earned through sacrifice. This leads me to think about the way _fútbol_ becomes a way to treat the fretfulness of the people, and enables profound feelings of nationalism.
I would hardly call Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner “viva” (smart) but I feel comfortable in saying she has (allegedly) committed many crimes that are slowly coming to light. I stop short of calling her a criminal because I still have family who lives in Argentina. I am no Alberto Nisman, but I too am trying to tell a story based on evidence that will inevitably incriminate her twelve years of Kirchnerismo one way or another (Zraik 2015). However, the people (el pueblo) appeared to me “happier” when she was President, which I can only say because I have a point of reference with Macri’s government. People now ask if you are a K or Pro, with similar interest and implications as asking, “River or Boca?

Kirchner made people happy by giving them “fútbol,” with the national program called, “Fútbol para todos” (Fútbol for everyone.) In 2009 first division, fútbol matches played by the Argentine league were free and for “everyone” alike. No cable or extra fees were necessary in order to watch the most important games. She struck a deal with the devil himself, Julio Alberto Grondona. Maradona alleged that Grondona was the one who taught Joseph Blatter, FIFA’s disgraced former president, how to steal (La Nación 2016). The incompatible relationship between the state and the Federation of Argentine soccer (AFA) was tense, to say the least (Vazquez 2016). Talks concerning this program’s longevity with Macri were louder with each passing day. It is believed that he would rather make the games exclusively for paying customers, therefore only for some, and no longer for all.

If there is no fútbol, where will people find joy and forget (even if momentarily) about how hungry they are. Family dinners now required food rationing. As a way to curb the inflation, staple food items were stabilized by precios cuidados (protected prices). I was happy to learn that Fernet Branca was included in this list, because it started to become a staple during our outings, with Coca-Cola of course. Fernet con Coca is Córdoba’s preferred cocktail. However, I noticed that at most dinner tables the ratio between alcohol and food was unequal. Food became
the hottest comedy in such a short time. During our Christmas party I remember that we ate from
the scraps of beef for days. Now, whenever I reached to sneak my dog Max some food under the
table, I felt piercing eyes on me. It took a while for me to realize that every portion of food was
now calculated. If we were seven at the table, at most, we could expect two milanesas apiece (in
this case, a breaded and fried piece of meat.) Where as before, we would save the leftovers for a
midnight snack or breakfast. Now, food no longer was left over after dinner. Rosario brought a
tray of arroz con pollo (rice with chicken.) This is not a typical Argentine dish. With pride she
told me how cheap it cost her to make it, and that it was simply delicious. I did not want to tell
her that my paternal grandmother’s arroz con pollo was famous in Puerto Rico, that she made
her living cooking it, and that even my own mother admitted that it was better than hers. Then I
remembered I did not remember how it tasted but no matter how good Rosario’s was, I could
never call it “the best thing I ever ate.” During Cristina Kirchner’s reign, it felt easy to distrust
and repudiate her authority. Yet, people now miss her because she was the lesser of evils.

This does not mean that she is loved, but she is hated far less than she was before. Even
those who voted for Macri now say that they actually voted for his competitor, Daniel Scioli.
However, Maradona pointed, if this were true, Macri would not be president (Telesur 2016).
Popular mistrust of Cristina’s intentions is expected because she is a woman, and one of the
ambitious type. This makes her extra threatening within a patriarchal society, where femininity is
often associated with deceitfulness or weakness. Even in her black widow’s attire worn solely
after the death of her husband, she remains disarming and equally suspicious. Her fashion
choices caused a similar public reaction as Hillary’s pant suits do, albeit for different reasons.
Both women have been first ladies before stepping up to the plate for the presidency; both
women’s careers have been marred with significant criminal allegations and investigations.

On the other hand, Macri is just a different type of despotism that the country has already
lived with before. He is a product of his time and came of age when Argentina’s notion of masculinity was conflated with money. Carolina Rocha notes that, “Traditional roles for men changed after 1989, when Argentina adopted a neoliberal economic model that entailed a comprehensive transformation not only of the national State but also of the discourses that sustained it” (Rocha 2012:8). It appears that these traditional male role models, who express a deep-rooted sense of entitlement, are self-perpetuating. Macri and Menem, both are “cortados por las misma tijera” (cut by the same cloth) and both preach messianic messages of neoliberal salvation for Argentina by way of policies that favor employers and not the workers.

In many ways, I believe that Macri serves as a warning to the United States. Today’s Argentina is what a Trump presidency could look like tomorrow. Reasonably. The parallels are astounding too. Both men are billionaires’ who were professionally set up by their father’s wealth. Their successful businessmen personas are meticulously crafted on deception. They say what they think, which proves troublesome because of the nature of their thoughts. They speak with great confidence about things they do not know much about. In fact, Eric Trump, Donald’s own son, said it himself. He shared with the press, “my father is very similar to Macri.” He proceeded to explain his father’s political appeal stating, “In the United States, people are tired of politicians who read speeches from their notes and are reciting lectures…. there is no emotion.” He also clarified that his father’s issue is with “illegal immigrants,” and not with Latino Americans (Clarín 2016). They are practicing “presidential diplomacy,” fashioned after the relationship between Carlos Menem and George Bush. Exactly. There is also a treacherous backstory concerning Macri’s kidnapping in where allegations, which implicated Trump, have swirled (Perfil 2016). Apparently, they are old pals, belonging to the same boys club. Leo said, “Even after Macri shaved his mustache, I noticed he still looked like ‘them’ because of what is on the inside.” He is referencing the typical mustache worn by milicos like Jorge Rafael Videla.
and that became associated with military men of the era who were “bigotudos.” What gambeta is this before us?

**Cupping the World**

Most countries sensibly let real politics and economic self-interest guide their international relations, and therefore set aside emotional nationalism for World Cups and the Olympics. Argentina however is special. The unresolved issue of las Malvinas is ominous in the stadiums. Their most detested rival, England, gave them the sport that they so passionately love. For this reason, the World Cup stage is inherently political, and soccer becomes not only a metaphor for bilateral negotiations but also a guise to advance lucrative interests that might not necessarily benefit Argentina.

No greater example of this tendency exists than in the 1978 World Cup. A military general of the time recalls when Argentina won its first star. They earned it because of a historic win against Holland. He shared, “There was an explosion of ecstasy and hysteria. All the country was on the streets. Radicals embraced the Peronists, Catholics with Protestants, and with Jews, and all had only one flag: the flag of Argentina” (Kupper 2002). While on the surface it was a great win for Argentina, literally under the very stadium in which the match was played, the military housed cells of detainees who were tortured and later disappeared. This is the Argentine’s State playing a gambeta against the world. It deviated international attention from its (national) dirty war.

When Maradona faced the enemy and won (as cleanly as possible) at their (England’s) own game, Juan explains that Maradona did so “on his terms.” The media helped support this view as well, often highlighting how Argentina had surpassed its teacher in front of the World. Tomalinson and Young underscore how these global sport spectacles are performed and interpreted by different audiences making them polyvocal. They also advocate for deconstructing
the cultural import of sport as a media event. They highlight the merits in this endeavor stating that it enables engaging with a form of cultural history, along with an examination of the prevailing influence and power of ideas. Accordingly, this is what the “values and ideologies of sport” puts into focus in addition to the “performing sporting body” that embodies the nation (Tomalinison and Young 2006: 4).

This overview therefore supports the notion that the World Cup like the Olympics is no less of an international political event than that of the United Nations General Assembly. International sporting events offer an explicit structure for competition, with norms and rules, oversight, winners and competitors (not losers) who we all see compete. The athlete trained and sacrificed. The UN general assembly has diplomats that are not necessarily capable or competent to assume their roles. Nepotism, “the right connections,” and personal gains often lead to backdoor deals that have an impact on the communities they are paid to serve.

Yet, athletes in contrast, are ambassadors for their nations and are supposed to not have unfair advantages (doping) when competing. Even when the sport industrial complex that organizes the event is certifiably corrupt, the athlete’s body cannot be subject to unfair advantages. In order to be on the global sport stage, the individual competitor has proven their status through rigorous training, previous competitions, and international qualifying rounds that can uplift the nation with hard work, discipline, and sacrifices made by the individual and their families.

The spectacles appeal rests on these types of narratives. While each country (mission) can choose their diplomats, they are not obliged to be transparent about the process; the athlete’s body, however because it represents the nation, it is watched and tested. This does not mean that some athletes are not punished, targeted, and penalized. Athletes who are not “clean,” are then shamed and the nation is punished as seen in Maradona’s 1994 doping scandal.
Leo Diaz believes that Maradona’s 1994 scandal was a way to punish him for the 1986 hand of god. He is adamant that one way or another, FIFA wanted to admonish him because he outsmarted them. He shared, “He outsmarted the entities tasked with ensuring that the game is played fair, exposing that sports are never fair.” He gave it to “them” (se la puso.) He dreams that Maradona will one day head the national team again because he is “more honest than any politician.” He made another interesting point, “What Maradona has put in his body should have made him actually play worst. How many people can perform high and do it at Maradona’s level?” (Michael Irvin, Andre Agassi, Dwight Gooden?) Maradona did not test positive for cocaine, which was his vice.

The UN fosters (in theory) global and regional cooperation amongst its members to adopt recommendations in order to advance, profess and eliminate inequity. I have witnessed a few of these global spectacles up close and personal. Both are inherently political spectacles on the global stag. However, within sport, emotions create a sense of community, connect Diasporas and counters the forces of capitalism that divide people. This does not mean that in the world of politics or soccer, at least in the case of Argentina, is a space where honesty or “transparency” is ever feasible within the governing structures.

**Embodied Nationalism**

“If he does not jump, he’s English…”
Famous Argentine Soccer Chant

---

*Figure 15 Hincha Love, a photo by Melissa Maldonado-Salcedo*
For Maradona, scoring against the English by breaking the rules “was like also pick pocketing the English” (Diego). He scored a hand-goal, which the refs, to most Eurpean country’s chagrin, did not call. The triangular rivalry between England, Germany, and Argentina within soccer is part of the greater history that polarizes the English “gentleman” style of playing against Argentina’s “criollo” style, or “Latino.” Archetti notes, “the real Argentinean football, the creole way, was made by Italians, Spaniards and the male native population…” which was in contrast to the English way of playing, which was…in the very least, “honest” (Archetti 1999:52). Due to the mixing of the races that happened within Argentina, the creoles were thought to have created a style that debatably is racialized by design. Since Argentina and Germany have the most frequent final match ups within the history of the World Cup, they are historical rivals that divide supporters and opponents along regional lines that also become imbued with racism (Kupper 2002).

An interesting phenomenon that happens during International soccer Cup tournaments is the way regional alliances form. Juan explained, “I’d root for Uruguay before any other Latin American country because they are practically Argentine. They are practically a province of Argentina. But I won’t root for Chile, because they sided with the British against us and stole part of our land.” Leo, “I’d root for Colombia because I like the women. However, not if they play against Argentina.” He smirked at Pablo. Leo reminded, “I would never root for Peru. I would however remind them the 6-0.” During international tournaments, a time of emotional nationalism, regions tend to ally in accordance to their history and present day circumstances. I wondered if Pablo would be rooting for Colombia had I not been Colombian, especially given the 5-0 at the River Plate stadium match, which remains a sore issue.

The only fact I knew to be true was that neither he nor any other “good Argentine”
would root against Argentina; because if he did it would be, to list a few of the answers I have collected when posing this question:

_Disturbing...disgusting...treacherous...sacrilegious...treason...Kirchnerista...morbid...the end of Argentinidad as we know it...._

Pablito however was pretty conflicted, despite being born in the States. When Pablito asked me who should he root for I simply said, “Whoever your heart tells you too.” One night he confessed the following, “I don’t know why, but in my heart I feel like I am Argentine.” True to the chant, “…it is an unstoppable feeling.”[^82] I did not know how to process his confession, as a fútbol mami? An Anthropologist? A Colombian? Tommy had by far the most telling answer as the youngest Diaz in the United States, “I would root for Argentina…and then my second team is the United States.” Awkward silence.

Interestingly enough, Latin American teams often suspect that the Europeans, particularly the English and Germans are in “cahoots,” against them. Pendleton explains that soccer, “…provides a very satisfying way for the once oppressed or beaten to get some measure of revenge,” on an equal playing field (Pendleton 2006). Therefore, the relationship between soccer and national pride from the onset of the sport’s introduction to Argentina was indissoluble. _El Gráfico_ in 1923 noted that the reason soccer would become the “fundamental” sport in Argentina is because it would enable the national team to, in essence, convey the angsts of the nation. In order to form part of the team, they must have “developed a sense of the nation,” because they would have to set aside at moments their individual interests within clubs (Archetti 1999:61). This type of civic duty is unavailingy politicized. Tomilson and Yong note that, “In participatory terms, the World Cup…offer a platform to all nations, and most of all to small nations, of the world that is unrivaled by any other cultural or political body, even the United Nations (Tomilson and Young 2006).[^83] This makes the
soccer player a soldier.

This expectation of national sacrifice is very much still present in the mindset of the Argentine players. In the 2014 World Cup for example, mid-fielder Angel Di María was embroiled in controversy claiming that there was pressure from his coach at Real Madrid to not allow him to play the final due to his injury (acquired in the previous match against Holland.) It is reported that when Di María received the letter making this request by the Real Madrid coach, he allegedly, along with the late AFA president Julio Grondona, defiantly ripped the letter up. While he did not play in the final and after stating to the press he wanted to stay playing for Madrid, he was sold to the English team Manchester United during the next transfer window (Reuters 2014).

Part of what makes soccer so appealing to Argentines is its accessibility. My partner shared that, “In Argentina, if you can make a ball out of old socks, you can play soccer,” because a backyard, front porch, or the entire street you live on can potentially become an impromptu field. Therefore, the very best players can emerge from the most abject and socially marginalized places like Maradona who comes from the shantytown of Buenos Aires called Fiorito. Maradona’s rise to soccer stardom converted the slums into a zone of possibilities within the popular Argentine imaginary, a space where the have-nots can one day still have more. My brother-in-laws named their family restaurant in Miami Beach “Fiorito Shack,” in honor of Maradona’s home turf and struggle. Much like Maradona, they too had to work hard and sacrifice to obtain recognition for their craft in a foreign land where they were misjudged, mistreated, and misunderstood because of their provenance and identity (Codik 2013). Out of the Argentine slums many greats have followed Diego’s trajectory, take Carlos Tévez, who comes from one called “Fort Apache,” which is a direct reference to the Bronx.
ball on the field as in the case of Maradona and Tévez, but also have shown to play with
great “heart” and passion for the sport and people of Argentina.”

**Sunday Soccer Rituals: Balling**

“...the country is yearning for a dose of old-fashioned emotional nationalism to mollify the economic catastrophe. Nowadays though, those emotions are reserved for football.”- Simon Kupper

Soccer serves as a ritual in which the residuals of colonial relationships that have socially embedded ideas of racial superiority and patriarchy often play out. The late Argentine anthropologist Eduardo P. Archetti writes that it (soccer) serves to establish within Argentina “male cultural power,” and is a “powerful masculine expression of national capabilities and potentialities” that allows the Argentine to see himself and be seen simultaneously by “others” (Archetti 1999:17). One of the most controversial AFA Presidents, Javier Grondona (1979-2014), went on record stating that Jews had no place in soccer because they could not handle when things got rough adding that they also “did not like to work hard” (Griver 2014). His assertion was indicative of his prejudices against the Jewish community within Argentina that is consistent with ideas of the previous dictatorships which were hyper Christian, intolerant, and who unabatedly targeted Jews (1999).

Hate speech is not the only thing that Grondona has not been held accountable for. In fact, it is widely known and problematically accepted that his hands were stained with the blood of many victims that have died as a result of the violence engendered by soccer barras bravas (Teseoriere 2010). The fact that his actions and words are above the law is a historical problem within Argentina. When the State or any of the entities that make them profit commits crimes against the people, the standard practice is that the law will deflect,
ignore, or at most manipulate the facts. No greater example of this tendency exists than the exoneration of the *junta militar* (military junta) by the democratically elected president Raul Alfonsín.

For this reason soccer matches get easily reduced to a battle of “us” vs. “them” during the World Cup, and another sort of “us” vs. “them” during the Americas Cup. The only constant is that the “them,” is either English, German, or in some cases, Brazilian. For example, in 1966 when England and Argentina were facing each other in the quarterfinal at Wembley stadium, the German referee Kreitlein sent off Argentina’s captain, Antonio Rattín, “for the look on his face.” His body language and the interpretation of it, was suffice to be read as a “fault.” Rattín would later need to be escorted by police into the changing rooms because after refusing to leave the field, he trampled the royal carpet. Though England would win, the supervisor of referees Alf Ramsey would go on to describe the Argentine players as “animals,” barbaric if you will. In response, Argentines called out the slur as (typical) “British racism.” Rattín would later become a far-right politician; and refer to playing at Wembley as a “privilege” (Kupper 2002). Whether it was hindsight that changed his perception of the event or economic interests/political agendas, Rattín the soccer player and Rattín the politician, are very much one and the same, highly skilled in the sport of playing with popular emotions.

For Argentina, facing England on the soccer field was about settling a very old score and settling unfinished business. Maradona specified that this win was not against “a team,” but rather, against “ a nation.” In his autobiography, he describes, “Although we had said before the game that football had nothing to do with the Malvinas war, we knew they had killed a lot of Argentine boys there, killed them like little birds. And this was revenge” (Kupper 2002). For Argentina to win against England, under the circumstances, was
comparable to England going to war with Argentina over the Falkland Island. England had more military strength and training, while the Argentine State barely provided enough basic supplies and arms for its soldiers, who were more than anything trained for la *col-im-ba*, to run (*correr*), clean (*limpiar*), and sweep (*barrer.*)

England was Goliath (“muscular,”) but in this battle, Diego was David, “a tiny *criollo* individualist,” who simply wanted for his country to be “the best in the world.” After this historic and controversial win, Diego would soon thereafter establish himself as a (soccer) God, complete with his very own disciples, church, and rituals (*Iglesia Maradoneana*). After over a decade of silence concerning the hand goal, the ref and linesman proceeded to blame each other for failing to call the hand goal and cited incidental anomalies that explicated their lapse of judgment. For example, Nassir said that a hemorrhoid treatment compromised his eyesight and thus he could not see the ball. Independently of the controversy, Diego would simply remember them as his “*amigos*” (Shumanov 2014).

***

It was 1990 and surely a Sunday, not coincidently “the Lord’s day.” In my house, Sundays were fairly monotonous: Sunday school, lunch at home with an extended intermission, and Sunday night service. It frequently consisted of me mastering the art of falling asleep with my eyes open. But unlike every other Sunday, which was usually filled with hymns, prayers, and our very best church clothes, this one was special. For a newly minted soccer convert, this moment was everything. The previous World Cup had come down to a final between Argentina VS. Germany; much like four years prior when God affirmed his existence to Mario Benedetti and myself. The difference between five and nine years old is significant. By the age of nine I had abstract thought. I spoke in English but still dreamed in Spanish. I already felt like an outsider at home, school, and particularly church. I
still lacked the tools to look inside and express myself with confidence and certainty. At nine, my recollection of the previous World Cups felt like a dream…a “magisterial” one, where one of “our own” had won. From there on, it was like what the famous Ruben Blades song cites, “when Argentina goes against England, we are all Latinos” (Blades). The “we” for the first time in many minds included, at least on the soccer field, Argentina and excluded Europeans.90

The only casualty in this 1990 World Cup battle was pride, and for an Argentine, for better or for worse, “pride is everything.” After all, it is the essentialized trait of Argentinidad (Aguinis 2001). However, a lesson learned from the last win was that because Argentina was in South America, and they spoke Spanish, and technically it was closer to Colombia than Germany, we rooted for “them.” During the World Cup all prejudices and assumptions get briefly cast aside and the differences that divide Latino communities become trivial and inconsequential (unless we are matched up against each other. In that case, the differences deeply matter.) But for those moments when matched against a European country, if you speak Spanish, you are a “sudaca,” no matter if you’re from the northern tip of South America like Colombia or the most southern point, like Argentina (Mike Norrish 2011).91 In 1990 we were all expecting a repeat of the last cup’s triumphant win over Germany. Yet, in Argentine soccer, you can only really expect the unexpected on the field (Colombia’s 5-0 win at River Plate’s stadium), in the stadium (Puerta 12), and on the streets (salvemos el fútbol).92

The final win had come down to the very last minute. It was suspenseful as the last few minutes of a Telenovela. You want to watch but you have to look away, only to find yourself peeking just in case you are going to miss something spectacular. I recall my mother picking up her bible. I looked at the watch to make sure she was not trying to let us
know it was time to return to Church. “Why go back?” I thought. I was really praying.

Service was taking place in my living room. All of the Colombians and half-Colombians in my house (mother, aunt, my cousins Rosemary and Ingrid, my sister, and myself) were holding hands. We were mouthing under our breaths, prayers that more and more sounded like a chant…”Dios…Argentina.” I imagined, that even though we were probably the only family in my building to be doing this, I knew that we were not the only family in the world who were.

Soccer was not a “thing” for many in my neighborhood, which was predominantly made up of Puerto Rican and Dominican families. The boys in my neighborhood went to little league and played football or basketball. For the older generations though, Baseball was what the diaspora played and watched on their respective island and on this one too. Baseball, American’s imperialist gift to the islands, was their congregating ritual as it remains for many Americans (Chidester 2009).

Despite being born in the United States, at age ten, I was just learning what it meant to be Colombian and to live in the Lower East Side. I was Latina and not “fully” American. My dad, a Nuyorican, would listen to baseball on the radio because he was blind. He listened to everything on the radio. I’d join him to listen to boleros and Salsa, but never baseball. I could not visualize the game. For me, to fully appreciate soccer, all of your senses are invested in the experience. I will never forget the sound of the soccer fans chanting on the television. I would close my eyes to imagine I was seated right there. I remember the smell of burned toast and coffee. I remember I was wearing pink like most Sundays but had inked with markers the blue, white, and yellow on my arm. I was seated on the floor, front and center of the “devil’s box,” and I was rooting for Argentina. Yet, what I also remember feeling was that something just did not feel right. I did not know enough of the game’s rules,
Argentina, or even of West Germany to discern what it was.

And just like that, in the 89th minute, the ball went into the net. West Germany won and that meant, that Argentina lost. Diego started crying. It was an outer body experience for me. I bent over with tears streaming down my face. We hugged each other. I turned to my mother and said, “…it feels like if I was just kicked in the stomach.” Only years later would I learn that indeed there was a controversy in regard to the match. I remembered this scene so vividly because in 2014, I would relive it but this time, my son was nine years old. My family was also from Argentina now. I was secular. In America it is often said that there is “no crying in football.” Yet, for me, fútbol and tears are inextricable. They have always been and will always be. July 8, 1990, was the first of many times that I would “cry for Argentina.”
Intro for “Marado”

by Los Piojos⁹³

Dicen que se escapó de un
sueño en casi, su mejor
gambeta que ni los
sueños respeta

tan lleno va de
coraje sin
demasiado
ropaje y sin
ninguna careta.

Dicen que escapó este
mozo del sueño de los
sin jeta que a los
poderosos reta
y ataca a los mas
villanos sin mas
armas en la mano que
en un “diez” en la
camiseta.
Translation:

They say he escaped from a dream
in what perhaps is his best gambit
that doesn’t even respect dreams
it is so full of bravery
and he isn’t being fake.
They say that this guy escaped
from the dreams without a face
that even he challenges the most powerful
and attacks the villains
Without any weapons in his hand
Except the 10 on his jersey.
“My dream....to stand with them. To be one more.”

-Pablito

Figure 16 My Dream, a photo by Melissa Maldonado-Salcedo
Figure 17 Strategy Sketch, a photo by Melissa Maldonado-Salcedo
Chapter 3, PART 3:

“This is (Argentine) society’s problem, not football’s problem.”

“I can’t see, I can’t see. I am burning. This is not a war!” – Funes Mori, River Plate Defender

They burst into tears and embraced each other. Germany made the winning goal during extra time, which cost Argentina the 2014 World Cup. I wiped my eyes because I needed to take notes so I could somehow convey the intense emotions, which I noted felt like a “knot in my throat, a kick in the stomach, and vertigo.” They are children starving in the world I told myself, as a way of finding perspective at that this was “just a game.” Yet, was fully invested in seeing Argentina obtain a third star. My notes from that match read, “Maradona was right!!” I thought to myself, you would have to be blind or bribed to ignore the questionable calls made throughout the tournament. Hence, it was no surprise that FIFA’s corruption scandal exploded soon thereafter (Reuters 2015). I rooted for Argentina during the final without guilt, shame, or restraint along with my mother and aunt. Our shared disappointment and grief connected me to this project and family in a way that no amount of alcohol or red meat consumption could have ever done.

I recall the first time I stepped foot in Ezeiza airport in Buenos Aires in 2001. I was wearing a Colombian soccer jersey. I will admit that I arrived with some prejudice against Argentines that came from stereotypes and my limited interactions with Argentines prior to moving there during the crisis. Gilman writes that these stereotypes about other groups often emerge when self-identification is threatened (Gilman 1985:18). I realize now that my choice
of attire was a way to claim my outsider status, in opposition to the dominant group. It felt like when you play at “an away game.” Anahi discusses her account on how she discovered “was Latina,” while studying in New York City from Argentina. She reflected on this process of becoming and belonging, “…traveling alone to study in a new country pushed my own frontiers to discover new selves within myself, now deprived of their protective shields” (Viladrich 2011:34). I had a similar experience of “oppositional consciousness” while in Argentina because of the vulnerability that comes with crossing borders. However, self-discovery is life changing.
“Welcome to my (Soccer) club, religion and family.”

“She does not want to be a friend to a guy from this pueblo....” – No llores por mí, Argentina, Charly García
As an anthropologist, I am forced to interrogate at what point do any of my identities create filters that obscure or elucidate my questions? At what point do any of these debates create opportunities and constraints for expressing national identity? I traveled to Washington DC to go and cheer the Argentine national team in Fed Ex Stadium during a friendly match against El Salvador in 2004. On the bus down to Washington DC, I imagined that was going to be filled with people who were going down to do the same game. We were all heading to the stadium. I thought that we will be chanting and marching all together in a flood of albiceleste jerseys. I had Pablo and Pablito’s jersey tamped with Álvarez on the back (just in case.)

Pablito had You-Tubed soccer chants so that he could sing along and feel membership into the hinchada. In my mind, this was going to be the climactic turn in my fieldwork. Pablito had become even more fluent in Spanish because of soccer. Though a heritage speaker, we only allowed him to watch and read about soccer in Spanish so then he could talk to the rest of his family. The official language between all of us is Spanglish.

Even though I had visited DC prior to this game, I somehow had overlooked that there is a significant El Salvadorian community in Washington DC. It is home to the largest Salvadoran communities in the United States, and it was expected that they would outnumber Argentinean fans. This was an understatement. We were ostensibly the minority. Not withstanding, the El Salvadorian fans became increasingly tense when the wrong national anthem was played for their team. Before the match even started, the fans were angry (Steinberg 2015). Many of the Salvadorian fans also wore Barcelona FC jerseys with Messi’s name. They were also there to “see him too.” Kummel further argues that Sport anthropology research has long indicated that these local processes of appropriation are key constituents of global sport flows. There is another interesting question to consider, “to what extent does the
reinforcement of national identity through sport (as manifested in fervent nationalistic discourses and partisanship) constitute a paradox in the present phase of globalization? Or are globalization and emphasis on national affiliation via sport in reality intertwined and mutually dependent?” (Kummels 2013:14).

I was seated next to a Salvadoran father, who told me had brought his son to see Messi play. Messi triumphantly walked on to the field and straight to the bench. He stayed there for the entire first half as fans held out for a miracle. Rumor had it that Messi had been injured during training. This match was a “friendly,” and therefore it was too much of a risk to make him play. The gossip and accusations spread like a wave, everyone murmured and insulted “Tata” Martino (the Argentina Coach) for not bringing on the one man every one had paid to see. The crowd praised and spurned Messi simultaneously. When he walked off the field during half time, he never once raised his head.

Although outnumbered, the Argentine fans were extremely vocal about Messi not playing. “Tata Martino, you are a bitch for not playing Messi! He only wants to play for Barcelona!” One woman turned around and told her boyfriend, “you should not speak like that. It is vulgar.” Noticeably annoyed and drunk he replied, “I knew you should not come with me. You know nothing about fútbol…I mean, you’re from Guatemala. What do you know about fútbol?” I turned around and realized, it was time to start taking notes…again. Geertz shows how competitions are rooted in a drive that supersedes greed, but rather it is a moral imperative. Additionally, in his analysis of the cock-fight, he also shows that the society retains cohesion through the shared emotions experienced and constructed by the individual participants of the events, “the thrill of risk, the despair of loss, and the pleasure of triumph” (Kummels 2013:20). He additionally is able to show the sport is a post-colonial legacy of political and cultural Western imperialism” whose discourse remains pronounced even within the most private of
conversations (Geertz 1972:83).

**Where did you come from?**

“Don’t forget that in 1990 they (Germany) made me and everybody cry. Remember that.” – Diego Maradona (Daily Mail 2006)

The advent of the 2015 *Copa America* was especially welcomed because it allowed the Argentine *hinchada* to redirect their hope towards another win. It took an entire year to go through the seven stages of grief. Fans now sounded more optimistic. Many believed that, “Argentina is clearly the best team in Latin America.” Unlike the World Cup, this tournament felt like it happened as fast as a thief in the night. This Cup gave bragging rights to the winner within Latino communities. When Argentina made it to the finals against Chile, it came down to a penalty shootout, which added to the dramatic effect. The lost detonated desperation for answers. The national allegiance of the Argentine national squad’s captain, Lionel Messi, came under attack. An online campaign asked fans to use the hashtag #yobancoaMessi (I stand with Messi) to stand with him, since his *hinchada* started to become fragmented.

Diego Maradona joined (lead) the interrogation bandwagon and asked Messi, “dammit, are you Argentinian or are you Swedish?” He insisted however that (Messi) was still “the best player in the world,” despite not “touching the ball” while playing for Argentina. Maradona therefore enforced that no one doubt Messi’s skill, instead, they expect him to be like Maradona. Maradona claimed that this reproaching was necessary for Messi; he needed to feel the pressure so it can motivate him. Argentina’s tough love is often expressed through criticism. According to Maradona, this is the only way Messi learn and “improve” his performance for Argentina (C. Davis 2015).

***

I waited for Tomasa in an Argentine café in New York City. We were going to have
coffee. Tomasa is Juan Diaz’s sister. She was visiting from Argentina and wanted to sightsee in New York City. I offered to take her on a tour of my neighborhood, which had the New Museum and the Tenement museum, in addition to gardens and diverse eating options. However, she mapped out the tour she wanted to take and it only consisted of St. Patrick’s Cathedral and the Statue of Liberty. Also, she requested to eat at an Argentine restaurant. She called out to me half a block down, “querida!” We immediately started to talk about fútbol. Tomasa stirred the artificial sweetener into her espresso and assured me, “Messi is the greatest so we should win. It isn’t like Jorge Luis Borges ever won a Nobel Prize, and we all know he is by far the best Latin American writer ever.” She opens her bag and passes me a book of Borges’s poems but told me that it was for Pablo, since he is “the writer.”

The Argentine comedian Hernán Casciari writes about “Los Hinchas de Borges,” stating that they do not lend books rather, they “gift them.” He contrasts them directly with the Spanish who cannot handle when they win the Euro cup because they become delusional to believe that Cervantes is better than Borges, and that the World Cup can be there’s. According to him, the World Cup will in fact be representative of the Argentine colors, Albiceleste. Spain lost in many ways against Argentina (Casciari 2007:138). Could I tell her I was an hincha of Borges? I took the book and thanked her. “So he is the best writer in the world you say?” She affirmed, “Of course, querida.”

I bit my tongue. García Marquez? It felt impossible to diverge the conversation fútbol because the entire restaurant was decorated with shrines to Pope Francis and soccer jerseys with the Argentine flag and Argentine clubs. I asked her if she was happy with the new Pope. I shared that when he was chosen everyone in my building was yelling because they were so happy that the Pope was Latino. She grimaced, “Actually, he is more Italian than he is Latino querida.” Again, I bit my tongue.
I mentioned to her how he was able to laugh at himself, and that this was a good virtue to have…humility. Pope Francis recently said in an interview, “Being Argentine, they thought I would call myself Jesus II…Do you know how an Argentine kills himself? He climbs down on his ego, and then throws himself down!” She laughed like it was the first time she ever heard that joke. Only Tomasa’s accent makes her identifiable from the province, but only to the ears of a fellow Argentine. Our waiter asked her about Mendoza, which I thought was “close enough” of a guess because these two cities (San Juan and Mendoza) were practically a few vineyards away from each other. She waved down the other waiter and asked him if he was going to school here in New York. Her tone suggested: why else would they be waiting tables? She asked him what year he came to New York City, “2000.” She looked at both of them; “You guys left when things started to get bad, right?”

Tomasa was dressed like a real (older) Housewife of New York. I recently saw Argentina’s version of this show, “Lucky Ladies,” and they did not fit the bill that is often characteristic of the popular franchise in the United States. However, they do resemble the Mexican and Brazilian versions of this show that preceded this Argentine version. Despite this, they tried to build a similar narrative about wealth and class. The show points out issues concerning the way in which class is synonymous with whiteness in Argentina, which shifts or obscures discussions about race. These six ladies resemble a simulacrum of “class,” that money can buy you. Fox describes the lady and their show as “exclusive” and also “polemic.” They are all closely associated with Polo, and less so with soccer. Polo is described as “part of universal privilege…which is played by kings, aristocrats, and millionaires,” and anyone else who wants to “fit into this world” (El País 2016). Interestingly, another reality show in the United States where Polo is a central depiction of wealth is Bravo TV’s Southern Charm, which is filmed in Charleston, South Carolina and who interacts in other (problematic) ways with the
Argentine show. These “lucky” ladies are all the daughter or wives of someone famous. The
ladies dress with American styles and brands, and also wear a very popular brand in Argentina whose logo is the Confederate flag, John L. Cook. Tacky, right?

Mimi Dwyer reports that this Cook brand is very much like Abercrombie and Fitch in terms of their target clientele and brand, “same blonde models.” Their marketing is all about targeting people with, “an elevated buying power.” This is consistent with Argentina’s historical understanding of whiteness. She also points out that the Cook brand posts daily inspirational messages that include quotes from Maya Angelou, Abraham Lincoln, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., however with the flag directly underneath. The brand only publicizes in English. The political issues surrounding the flag in the United States have not resonated with Argentina who sees it as merely a logo. Dwyer highlights that Argentines first recognized the flag as part of the decal on the Dukes of Hazard car, as if the logo stands devoid of racism. Then when it reappeared in the film Selma, some started to question if Cook would address the use of this symbol, especially after the Charleston massacre at a historically black church. However, Dwyer complicates the relevance of the brand as just a “logo.” According to her, it in fact resonates as a white supremacist symptom with Argentina.

Dwyer explains that at the heart of white supremacy is the assumption that they are right, whether it is to believe that the flag only means “heritage” or by speaking to your customers in a foreign language that they do not understand. White supremacist flags have always flown supporting racist ideologies. However, to conceive the flag as a logo misses the point. Dwyer writes that, “it becomes an upscale mall label that sells the desirability of white bodies and the domination of the United States… Symbols shift in meaning and context. But even in translation, white supremacy thrives” (Dwyer 2015). I had difficult seeing this flag whenever I went out in Buenos Aires. I told the table next to us one night, “Don’t wear this if you ever visit the States.” You can imagine my reaction when I saw this brand.
On September 25, 2015 the New York Post ran a story about Pope Francis’s personal chef while in town. They mentioned that he owned an East Village restaurant called “Buenos Aires.” The Post pointed out that Chef Ismael Alba, who “specializes in Argentinean Cuisine”, wanted to serve the Pope steak, but apparently he was “dieting.” When asked about their conversations, he replied, “We talked soccer and what he is doing for the Planet” (Bain, Fasick and Tacopino 2015). Martín Caparrós in an Op-ed piece for the New York Times explained that most Argentines certainly believe that “God is Argentine.” He shares that, “most of the evidence we have used to support this suspicion has come from soccer” (Caparrós 2013). While Tomasa did not necessarily claim to understand the importance of soccer, she certainly made something very clear. Messi’s need to win had more to do with national pride, and less about soccer. However, it was soccer that allowed for the gambits that characterize Argentinidad to manifest outside of the field.

Tomasa explained, “Now more than ever, we need to feel as if we still are who we once were…the best.” While it may be difficult to not equate that statement with the prevailing stereotypes and jokes about Argentines, in that moment I knew what she expressed did not come from a yearning to look down at others, but more from a desire to be transcendent. These two things may sound the same, but they do not fulfill the same goal. She pointed to a jersey of San Lorenzo, and said, “That’s my club!”

*Hincha* identity formation provides an opportunity to actively participate in a disintegrating public sphere, while also socializing into said identity within the private sphere. Within Argentina your local club is usually familial, though they are exceptions. In *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity* (1994), Craig Calhoun explains how identity formation actually “prepares one for entrance into the public arena.” Therefore one’s Club conveys understood alliances and established rivalries to the world. Calhoun adds:
It gives one individual strength and individual opinions. Conversely, the public sphere calls on one to put to the side the differences of class, ethnicity, and gender in order to speak as equals. And it thereby makes it all but impossible to thematitize those very differences as the objects of politics instead as of obstacles to be overcome before rational political formation of the collective will” (Calhoun 1994:3).

This makes the development of identity most productive within interactive arenas that connect individuals within virtual, national, and transnational social life. “Hinchas” form an “imagined community” that transcends the divisions/borders that in real life divide individuals by the manipulation of symbols, stories, spaces, and times (Anderson 1993). Hinchas identity can also be the basis for local disconnections as well. During the “super clásico” of May 2015, in a Copa Libertadores match, the River Plate team suffered an attack by the Boca fans. They used homemade pepper spray on the players as they waited to come on to the field for the second half of the game. These actions were sensationalized and taken as symptomatic of the (Argentine) hooligan’s disposition for violence. Yet Spaaji explains, “self-confessed hooligans construct their own meanings in rather flexible ways that often contradict popular perceptions of hooliganism” (Spaaji 2008:370). As Juan often said, “Some of Argentina’s biggest criminals actually live in the Pink House and in gated communities. They steal and kill for profit not survival.”

I understood exactly where he was coming from knowing that the white Bankers of Wall Street were free, while many black and brown men sit in jail for months for carrying “a little bit of weed.” These thoughts on injustice brought me back to Freud, who writes that it is critical to impart justice because if not, this threatens individual and social life and endangers the viability of civilized nations (Freud 1962:41). Was Borges’s belief that soccer was “primitive,” actually originate in Argentina’s pervasive problem with justice (or lack of it?)

This act of violence at the Bombonera stadium was attributed first to the Bostero identity,
which is conflated with being criminal, “negros” if you will, in relation to the River plate club fans. However, highlighting that these were not the actions of “negros” in the “traditional” sense of the word (presumably because of their purchasing power), Argentine sports lawyer Ariel Reck told CNN, “Those fans throwing things to the players at the end, when they were to leave the pitch, are not hooligans, these are the most expensive seats at the stadium” (Sinnott and McGowan 2015). So who were they, since they did not align with the popular perception of bosteros? The statement ignores or “denies” the corruption that is embedded within the cultural milieu of soccer where “hard masculinity” is inextricable from displays of violence. Said “denial of “identity” is a reflex that is direct consequence of the series of “political, economic, and moral crises” Argentina has encountered in the last half of the century. This would explain perhaps why Macri could be a Bostero too.

Sociologist Sergio Levinsky explains that, “These days, one set of fans will insult the other by saying ‘you don’t exist, you don’t even exist. This is what the military dictatorship did with the ‘disappeared’. It imposed a certain way of looking at others, of not even recognizing another person’s right to exist” (Rogers 2009). Yet, when the Argentine national squad plays, these rivalries, albeit briefly, do not matter because if you do not “aguantar” (support) the national team, you are “other.” Spaaji observes that within Arginine soccer discourse, it is through aguante (endurance, hanging on) that male football fans can distinguish themselves from the no-machos, who are denominated hijos (little boys) and putos (homosexuals) or sons of bitches (Spaaji 2008). When the national team plays, River and Boca fans sing together, “Let’s go Argentina…We’re going to win…for these raucous supporters, won’t stop cheering for you!” This chant appropriately had its zenith during the 1978 World Cup, which was played in Argentina in the midst of the dictatorship.
We sit at the Argentine Consulate in New York and it feels like we are literally in Argentina. Technically we are. Javier Auyero explains how it is through the waiting process that citizenship is experienced for Argentines after the crisis. He explains, “Citizenship is always multi-scalar. Citizens are made not only at the national level through constitutions and elections, but also in their day-to-day engagements with the local state” (Auyero 2012: 11). We all sat and waited to see if the wizard would reveal himself to us or rather, the Consul. I was familiar with the Consulate because of Argentine cultural events that included film screenings, artist talks, and national holiday celebrations. While Pablo had picked up his passport, Pablito wanted to inquire about obtaining his Argentine citizenship.

After thirty minutes a quintessential intern called out our number. He looked at Pablito who had a Barcelona shirt and asked him if he played. “Who do you want to play for?” Pablito looked at me and then at the floor. His chest went up and without hesitation he confessed for the first time, “Ar-shen-tina.”

Revenge and Mourning

“*I see a ship in the harbor. I can and shall obey. But if it wasn’t for your misfortune, I’d be a heavenly person today ...Tell me, how do I feel. Tell me now, should I feel.*”-Blue Monday, New Order

Argentina became “the team to beat” early on in the 2014 World Cup and the 2015 Copa América tournaments, in part because on both occasions it was lead by Argentina’s messianic figure, Lionel Messi. No other persona since Maradona had uplifted Argentina’s global profile as “the very best.” The Argentine national squad was compromised of a constellation of players that played in the best European leagues and teams. Arguably Argentina’s lost to Germany at the World Cup final, while disappointing, was not surprising and all too familiar (Powell 2014).
Tony Diaz explained to me, “at least it was not England.” Yet, to lose against Chile during the America’s cup final in a penalty shootout was a particularly devastating blow to Argentina for reasons that preceded the actual match.

In Miami Beach, at a bar on Lincoln road, two men walk in. They get into a scuffle over the results of the final match. One is Chilean; the other is from Argentina…both are busboys engaging in a high-stakes bar bet. The winner was supposed to pay the loser a thousand dollars, which constitutes a full week of work. Cash. Both cry when Alexis Sanchez (Chile) makes the winning goal, though for different reasons. I hear a chant that gets louder and louder. “Chi-chi-chi, le-le-le, en el mapa no se ve! (Chi-chi-chi-le-le-le, you don’t see them on the map!)” In Miami Beach, Argentines outnumber Chileans or at least this is what you are lead to be believe given the amount of Argentine owned, run, and managed businesses and residences. This could very well change given that Chile currently is part of the Visa-Waiver program with the United States. In 2012, the New York Times ran a story, highlighting that Argentines had become “the most active group from Latin America” buying property in Miami, beating out Brazilians. This circumstance was attributed in part due to the economic crisis and the subsequent “uncertainties” that make up “Argentine risk…a weakened peso…25 percent inflation” and more importantly, a need to “gambetear-la.” Ms. Sanchez, a leading Miami based real estate agent, declared, “The desperation of the Argentine people has taken over and they are now market leaders here” (Barrionuevo 2012). Needless to say, Miami was becoming a “small Argentina” and well, “Argentina is a great country.”

What truly delineates Miami and South Beach is the distinction between the most prevalent accents (Maldonado-Salcedo 2004). It felt surreal; the Argentine chants sounded victorious, celebratory, and then things got…really contentious. A group of discernably Chilean fans entered chanting, “Argentines, gays, they took the Falklands off you because you are
cowards.” In a matter of minutes insults and punches were thrown in the name of national pride and a thousand dollars. The manager, a short Italian man started to shout that he was going to call the cops. Once the police came, only the two bus boys were left and they were still disputing payment. Crowds in Miami can instantly dissipate with the mention of the magic word, “police.”

The officer spoke to both bus boys as if he had received training for these specific types of conflict resolution scenarios. “This type of stuff can’t be done here.” He pointed to the ground, confirming in fact that they were both standing in Miami and not wherever he assumed they came from. The Chilean busboy got up from his stool and he shook the officers hand. He left with empty pockets and calmly telling his adversary, “this doesn’t stay like this.” Smirking, “Of course not, we’ll see if you can win outside of Chile. We can double the bet for next year.” After refusing to pay for his defeat, he was willing to wager it all against next year’s win.

Typical (I thought.) I wonder what is the status of this debt, was it “paid in full?”

I went back to my notes and ordered another beer as I waited for Pablo to pick me up. I looked to see who had scooped up my empty bottle(s.) I had taken a break to process the aftermath of the showdown at the game and in the bar. Apron tied and with great speed, it was the “other” busboy. He had changed into his work T-shirt that flashed the bar’s logo where the two stars laid on his Argentina jersey a few hours before. “You got away with it, right? I guess you won.” He laughed. I watched him restock at the bar and noticed a few familiar faces had returned to the bar. Back at my table, I had just finished face timing with my former neighbor in Buenos Aires, Raúl. He kept mentioning “Karma” and filled me in how Chile had many advantages play in their favor during the tournament. Raúl was prone to conspiracy theories. He once had come to my door in the middle of the night to ask me if I had noticed that the elevator was breaking down more frequently on his floor. He thought it could “mean something” or in some way was a “clue.” Raúl also only face-timed in the privacy of his apartment because he did
not want anyone to know he had an I-phone. He would use a flip phone when he left his house, which looked like he retrieved it from a 1990s time capsule. This was part of Raúl’s charm and why after nearly a decade, we were still good friends.

Raúl emphatically argued that Argentina got to the final without any assists from the referees or Messi. It is safe to say that the world was stunned by Messi’s performance, and by in large called it “lackluster.” I could not help but be easily swayed by Raúl’s arguments. Throughout the tournament, I found issue with a few calls in relation to specifically Chile. Raúl tallied them up. He cited the match against Uruguay. He told me that as a “gay man,” he found that spectacle to be “especially disgusting.” Edison Cavani received a red card after fighting off Gonzalo Jara’s assault. Jara literally, “stuck his finger up Edinson Cavani’s butt” (The Associated Press 2015). Another gripe, no less scandalous, was Arturo Vidal’s right to play despite having been arrested for a DUI on July 5, 2015. His driver’s license was suspended after crashing a Ferrari, but he was given the green light to play for the final match. Raúl said that he was not going to entertain the homoeroticism of the violation but rather stated the obvious. Had this act occurred between a woman and a man, it would have been sanctioned accordingly. My immediate response was, “why would a woman and a man be playing against each other?” To his point, that was not the issue.

In the midst of such deep discussions about queer theory and soccer, it hit me who was now seated at the bar. The officer. He was in civilian clothes but I not only recognized his pinky ring but also I could smell his cologne at my table. He was drinking a beer with the manager, the
short Italian man. Before he could finish it, the busboy served him another cold one. All I could think was, “What an empty win!”

**The Son and the Father**

Messi’s performance and inability to win (thus far) a title for Argentina became the focus of great scorn and debate after back to back up performances that did not achieve a win. In an effort to silence the masses, Messi’s father was compelled to defend his son against national scorn:

Lionel grew, and grows up in a family like any other in Argentina, where everything is achieved with sacrifice and respect. Our culture, our country, is like this: everything is achieved through sacrifice and that will forge your values. He never did anything mischievous when he was young because he was a good boy. Naughty, yes, but never difficult! It was hard for him to leave (Argentina for Barcelona at 13) but that has to do with what I have been seeing: We are a family that has managed to do things thanks to sacrifice (Fox Sports 2015).

The mantra of crisis and glory is a familiar one for Argentine people, places, and things. An example of this rise and fall from grace narrative is read in Ian Mount’s historical work on the Malbec wineries within Argentina. Mount quotes the 2003 book by Gustavo Choren, *El gran libro del Malbec Argentino* in order to demonstrate how the story of the Malbec’s success in Argentina came after significant sacrifices, immigration, and crisis. He notes that this is why Malbec would eventually establish its place in the world as one of the best wines. Choren writes, “A vine condemned to eradication and obscurity in its native France, Malbec, found its place more than 6,000 miles away. But not before passing through 150 years of crisis and glory in its new home.” Mount concludes at the end of his epilogue that, “For Malbec, as for all of Argentina, it has been a long trip” to the top (Mount 2012). Given the parallels between Argentina’s national squad and the Malbec’s story, one can only expect that Messi eventually, as all of his hinchas affirm, will bring Argentina to glory because he will not stop trying. What hincha can’t toast to that?
Chapter 3, PART 4: Giving and Taking it (through the) Back

A clear example of how “giving it back” plays out, I will recount my experience in Ezeiza Airport in Buenos Aires, Argentina during a 2010 family visit. I was charged the equivalent of 300 dollars to enter the country. I had never heard of this so-called “reciprocity tax.” Macri recently lifted it, which is disconcerting. I had entered Argentina many times before free(ly.) So I went to the counter with my Pablos. I understand that my questions could have been construed as an entitled Gringa but my tone was more like a broke graduate student. “What is this reciprocity tax?” Surely, countries do not make arbitrary laws to profit from people entering their country. With a smirk on his face the official who was collecting my money explained, “You remember how we used to be able to enter your country without a visa?” How could I forget? But what did this have to do with this fee?

“You fucked us, so now it is reciprocal,” all this while making a vulgar hand motion. I looked at Pablo, who could not help but smile as my eyes widened. The official later pointed to me, “You get your Argentine papers.” Then he turned to Pablo, “and your kid is Argentine so you get that fixed.” He then turned to my son, Pablito, “you need your papers because then you can’t be called to play for la selección.” As we walked away with our newly stamped passports he called out, “Welcome to Argentina.”

It’s not personal, it’s fútbol

Tony Diaz called me to tell me that he was upset with Chile’s win because, “his uncle fought in Las Malvinas.” The distinction between soldier and player became murky within discussions of past and present tensions between the two neighboring countries. I was compelled to reexamine the relationship between nationalism and soccer within contemporary Argentina. However, I want to first also ruminate how memory can be reshaped due to emotions such as resentment, vengeance, and betrayal. False memories are a real thing because they feel real,
despite not being based on actual experience. Julia Shaw wrote on a blog for *Scientific American* on the topic, stating that the best way to avoid false memories is by recognizing that they exist and that memories are also malleable; a point that is underscored through this entire dissertation and is my partner’s most notable theme in his first book, “flexible memories.”

She also cites Chris French, an expert on the science of false memories, sharing that, “When we construct a memory, errors can occur. We can typically film in gaps in our memories with what we think we must have experienced, not necessarily what we actually did experience. We may include misinformation we encountered after the event” (Shaw 2016). Often, this happens without an explicit awareness or intention to do this. This can in many ways apply to how soccer memories (and dreams) shape *Argentinidad*.

Eduardo Archetti reflects on the origins of the tendency to overlook the import of sport within anthropological studies on nationalism, stating that because the discipline by in large evaluates the “the non-modern and primitive’, sport was correctly understood as a “central feature of modernity.” In part, sport was “key in the development of the civilizing process of European states in the early Seventeenth Century” (Archetti, *The Meaning of Sport in Anthropology: A View from Latin America* 1998:91). The only gendered equivalent that I could reference that displays such a metacommentary about national ideas of difference is the Miss Universe Beauty Pageant. However, that is a ritual for the purposes of objectifying and displaying women for their feminine beauty and (questionable) talent, while soccer exalts the (socially assumed) masculine virtues of skill and strength. For this reason a soccer match can become a war zone, with casualties and sacrifices made in honor of the nation.

Therefore when two countries are matched against each other, the spectacle is filtered through the lens of history, gender, and popular ideas that are deeply embedded in (emotional) expressions of nationalism and in memory. Krauss states that in conversations between
“anthropologists and informants” he realized that there was no boundary that delineated their ideas. He only became aware of this when as a German anthropologist, the stereotypes of Hitler and Nazi Germany emerged. He reflects, “…the semantics of football are shared across borders, with national identities being negotiated, asserted, and assigned in the specific idiom of football.” He found himself, “categorized in terms of perpetually recurring stereotypes, both in the world, as a human being and in concrete situations” (Dyck and Archetti 2003: 97). Thus, fútbol offers insight into prevailing ideas of not only citizenship, but more importantly it distills discourses of nationalism that also “others.”

For this reason, chants are never “politically correct.” In fact, they are often purposefully offensive. Bridger notes that, “while football has seen a great deal of unruly, hysterical behavior by fans, it has probably done more than any other social measure to prevent violent anti-social action by testosterone-driven young men. It is not unreasonable to believe that the world is a safer place and better place as a result of competitive sports being played” (Bridger 2013:127). Oh, the irony. However, this also begs the question that if national memory is a construction, do the exact details of the events matter (Shaw 2016). I don’t think Argentines are reacting to the “gist” of what happened in the Malvinas war. Instead, they are responding to the details that are circulated bout an event that is present. I recently read a T-shirt that called for Argentines to not wear the British flag for fashion, and to desist because of respect. The shirt lists the following reasons “649 deaths in combat, 1200 wounded in combat, 700 suicides post-war.” I do not doubt that these numbers have meaning, but is it likely that these were rounded up numbers. Does this matter in terms of “truth telling?”

The contempt towards Chile, at least for Tony and those who lived during the Malvinas war, is a result of Chile’s alliance with England during the Malvinas war. The extent of Margaret Thatcher and Agusto Pinochet’s alliance was not highly publicized to the world. However, in
2014 an ex-official of the *Real Fuerza Aerea Británica* (RAF) revealed in the Chilean magazine *Qué Pasa* that, “…the help we received from Chile was absolutely crucial. Without it, we would have lost the war.” While Chile adopted (publically) a position of neutrality, it was revealed in 2012, with the release of the official archives, that they provided logistic support for England. This confirmed what was already a popular (and rational) belief amongst Argentines concerning Chile’s role in the war (*La Nación* 2014).

Before hanging up Tony reminded me, “Tell Nahuel that I say hi and I send him a kiss.” Tony knew Nahuel because he worked with Juan in an Irish Pub in Miami. I realize that since I watched so much soccer with Juan, now that he was no longer is with us in the States, Tony takes his place every time there’s an important match. He calls me to ask “Todo bien?” and then to ask me if I wanted to “know something.” He was one of the few people that knew I struggled picking up the phone so he took it upon himself to check in. I realize that when I enlisted Juan as an informant, I became part of his family. The day Pope Francis was elected, I felt Juan and my father-in-law had something to do with it. Because as Tony reminded me, “they’re both San Lorenzo’s hinchas…like the Pope.” And after all, God is Argentine” (Caparrós 2013).

***

Nahuel is the father of two sons. He married his high school sweetheart Susana in Córdoba, Argentina. In 2000, he came to Miami with her, his son Matías, and his younger brother who we affectionately call “el Oso” (the bear.) Mati, was barely three years old. He does not remember Córdoba. I tried not to ask too many questions when I interviewed because scientific research shows that, “stories told in response to free-call prompts are much more accurate than stories told in response to a series of closed questions” (Shaw 2016).
Nahuel’s mother suggested that he go first to Miami instead of New York because, “there are a lot of Cordobeses” there, and for this reason it would be an easy transition to the United States. Lourdes was a maid with “cama adentro” in New York, which basically means she lived at her place of employment. Since Nahuel now had his own family, he had to be strategic. It would be harder for Nahuel to adjust to New York City because he “had a bad temper” and the rents were impossible. I had met Lourdes for coffee just a few weeks prior at a café on 5th Avenue by my school’s library. She explained that, “In Miami, everyone speaks Spanish and it is easier to blend amongst the vast amount of Argentines. Mati also blends with the gringos.” Mati looks like Nahuel but don’t sound like him. It would have been easy to think that Lourdes was mean, but she was just “honest,” and realistic.

Mati entered with his skateboard in hand. He had returned from his morning swim at the beach. He shouts, “Do you know where my shirt is?” Nahuel was showing me Oso’s son, Luka, on Facebook. Oso had returned to Argentina a few years ago because he could not “adapt.” Luka was only a few weeks apart from Sebastián, Nahuel’s youngest American born son.

“Your mother washed them and they’re on the bed,” shouted Nahuel. Mati ran back to get his jersey, and came with Sebastián’s and Nahuel’s in hand. “Do you remember when I fit into Seba’s?” The age difference between both boys worked well because Mati was “a younger-father/older brother type,” as Mati explained the dynamic. He started to measure his brother’s shirt against his own. Nahuel passed me the Mate (tea). “When I was his age, I thought that Margaret Thatcher was a pirate. Can you believe that, my father used to tell me that if I did not behave, she would come and take me away.”? Thatcher was his cuco. While I grew up fearing God, the devil, and “el cuco,” I couldn’t imagine fearing a female political figure that was in a different continent. I guess that is the difference. Growing in the 1980s in NYC, I learned to fear “the monster,” which was AIDs because that was what would disappear young people in my
neighborhood. Nahuel grew up in the 1970s in Córdoba, Argentina. “I used to be so scared that she would come at night on her ship.” Both were relatively real to us.

“Look at this,” Nahuel showed me a twitter feed with the announcement of Margaret Thatcher’s death. Many of the tweets included photos of her with a pirate eye patch on the cover of several national papers from Argentina. “So this was how most people would refer to her?” Many of the tweets read with glee and anger…all resentful. They were sent from popular figures and strangers alike. “This is what I like about twitter, it doesn’t matter who you are or where you are from, you have something to say, you share it so everyone can read it.” Adding, “If you have access to the internet of course.” I giggled because when I had met with Lourdes I went with her to purchase an I-phone so she could “facetime” with Nahuel and Mati. For a full week, our meetings and phone calls consisted of tutorials. She was thinking of sending el Oso an I-phone but said, “He could get killed for it.”

Nahuel read the tweets out loud as a means to explain the pirate association. I thought he probably thought I could think he was weak for fearing Thatcher. Pablo had already told me a similar story. Though, Pablo thought she was a “witch with an eye patch.” It was logical to fear a witch. The page Nahuel was showing me prefaced the tweets by noting that Thatcher was responsible for the sinking of the Argentine Navy ship Belgrano…ship that carried a total of 1052 Argentine soldiers. The tweets were all referencing the Malvinas war:

- We sent a bunch of kids to a sure death!"
- “One son of a bitch less, pirate!”
- “She died in April which is the same month that she was going to drop an atomic bomb on Córdoba” (24con.com 2013)!

The hatred towards Thatcher read fresh. When British forces sank the Navy Ship Belgrano, the BBC ran a story quoting British commander John Mott, “The General Belgrano was a threat to our men and therefore it is quite correct that it was attacked by our submarines” (BBC News 1982). The ship was named after Manuel Belgrano who fought in the Argentine Wars of
independence and created the flag. There is a queering relationship that happens between the traditional feminization of ships and Belgrano. This event was the most controversial during the span of the Malvinas war, and continues to be deemed a crime of war because of its unusual and unjustifiable use of force (Prentice 1994). A film on Belgrano’s life was produced for the Argentinean Bicentennial in 2010 and premiered at the National Flag Memorial in Rosario, Argentina. It offered an interpretation of his life for popular audiences and a revival of his ideas for a new generation (Pivotto 2010). I noticed also that in Argentina, books have gotten increasingly expensive since Macri’s presidency. However, the public television channels play constant historical and literature studies concerning Argentina. I wonder if this is to compensate and shape memory, because to read now is becoming a luxury.

The United Kingdom continues to justify its actions against Argentina and shows itself unrepentant of their actions. The Daily Mail ran a story with the following headline in 2011, “Britain WAS right to sink the Belgrano: Newly released intelligence proves the Argentina ship had been ordered to attack our Task Force” (Walters 2011). This evidence is highly questionable because independently of what direction the ship was sailing, the soldiers were on a sinking ship already. They all lacked physical strength to be able to fight. President Cristina Kirchner responded in 2012 by reaffirming that the Belgrano was indeed “a war crime” (El Tributo 2012).

“Mati, tell Meli what happened when you tried to wear the British Flag?”

Mati asked for me to pass him the mate and sat down to appease his father’s request.

“Can you believe my girlfriend had bought me a Ben Sherman shirt for the high school dance and I opened it at my birthday dinner while we were all eating together.”

I looked confused. I did not immediately pinpoint the brand Ben Sherman.

“Ben Sherman...his brand has a British flag. He’s British.”

“And what happened?”
“Dad got up from the table and walked away.”

“What did you do?”

“I explained to her why he got up.”

“Do you know why he was upset?”

“I would never wear the English flag or Jersey. That would be dishonorable.”

“So what did she do?”

“She brought me a pair or Tom’s shoes.”

“Those that have the Argentine flag?”

“Yeah but it isn’t an Argentine brand. However, that was a much better gift.”

“Did you like the shirt?”

“That is not relevant. Just because I am in Miami it doesn’t mean that I am not Argentine. In fact, I am more Argentine because I have to make an effort to learn these things. Belgrano was never mentioned in my history books. Actually, a lot of things are not mentioned in the American textbooks about Argentina.”

Fatherly Dribbling

One of Argentina’s founding fathers, Juan Buatista Alberdi wrote in *The Crime of War* (1913) that, “war is the crime of the sovereign, those in charge of exercising the right of the State to judge its conflicts with another State.” The Malvinas represents a national wound that has yet to heal because the *Junta Militar’s* decision to go into war with England was criminally negligent and against the best of interest of Argentina, but they controlled the “monopolies of power” at the time. Officials, neither side had declared war on each other. The Argentine soldiers lacked basic resources to survive the terrain and had subpar military equipment and training to attack.

This was not the battlefield young men wanted to fight on but were compulsively enlisted
nonetheless. Nahuel told me about his uncle, Emilio. He was enlisted and about to head out for battle when the war ended. However, his grandmother would send bags of candy, which he would then use like currency within the barracks to make the plight less sufferable. Though as Mercedes explains to Nahuel, as he imitated her Cordobés accent, “As soon as he returned from war he got married to Elena. I still don’t know which was worst, because the war is over but he is still married to her.”

While on the surface it can appear intellectually trite to question who harbors the most resentment about a war that happened over two decades ago, it matters. Argentine hinchas certainly do keep this memory alive for new generations to inherit it as a feature of Argentinidad. Meikl explains why and how this happens in terms of identity formation which is never singular, “but always multiply, constructed in different contexts, which in turn, is intertwined with the prevalence of difference over sameness, and in their meaning leaves unresolved the question of how we can understand the value of identity and how we may explain the emergence of interest in identities in recent history” (Meikl 2008:174). Meikl point compelled me to think how sometimes identity is directly about opposing another one. Take the infamous 2015 Copa América soccer chant:

Chile, tell me what it feels like, to know that the ocean is going to cover you. I swear that even if the ocean covers you, we will never let help you. Because you are a traitor, a sell-out and snitch, you sold us out in the war like cowards. Don’t come through here again, I hope the sea does cover you, let the English help you swim.

The Chant references the Chilean 2010 earthquake that triggered a Tsunami. From an Argentine perspective the song evokes a clearer history of an event that is filled with obscurity with regard to Chile’s involvement. It challenges Chile’s professed position of neutrality and reveals its “unholy” alliance with Britain’s imperialist war. However, when is a chant just a chant?

Only recently has the issue of soccer chants become relatively problematic in the United States. On June 9, 2015 the Orlando Weekly published a petition to “stop Orlando City Soccer
fan from chanting the word Retarded” (Wolf 2015). Due to the fact that soccer chants were mimicking fútbol, obscenities started to emerge in ways that are considered hostile. Fox Latino questioned if “soccer chants would take hold in the United States,” and cited Eamonn Macdonough, a translator who is based in Buenos Aires for Fox News Latino. He confirmed that chants are “a basic part of the (soccer) culture.” He explained that (the chants) are a type of free speech that is not necessarily experienced or practiced outside of the stadium gates for decades. Therefore “political correctness” has very little relevance for chants. When describing the chants in Argentina, he noted that “The themes are usually very basic: We are real men; We have balls, you don't; We support our team, no matter what, you don't and are fickle; We are Argentines, real Argentines” (Evansky 2015).

This view sustains Archetti’s assessment that soccer is inherently hyper masculine, which is also an expression of Argentinidad (Archetti 1999:15). Sometimes it is even toxic. In his theorizations about the history of soccer chants, Marshall notes that “in all societies exists degrees of racism, sexism, homophobia, and anti-Semitism” and in situations where you have strength in numbers, you can sometimes get away with expressing it” (Evansky 2014). This intimates another feature in a chant’s power…it is a collective voice.

Enzo, a fellow anthropologist who lives in Rosario, (Argentina) went to my comments section days after Argentina lost to Chile during the final shootout to clarify, “it (the chant) just said that like Chile, they (Argentina) won’t intervene to save them (the Chileans) if they were drowning. They (Chile) helped drown our boys. They got their first win but we will come back stronger next year.” I thanked him for defending me, sharing how we understood the chant. He felt the need to explain why two anthropologists would shrewdly read ethnocentric because of said chants. He also sent a link to a news story, with the comment “fact.” The story headline read, “Without the help of Chile, we would have lost the war in the Malvinas, admitted an ex-
British official” (La Nación 2014). One has to wonder about the timing of this story’s release. I once more saw the line between anthropologist and fan blur, and the one between Argentine and Colombian as well.

**It’s NOT the End: 3 years in a Row**

“Not again, no God, not again.” All three of us were lined on our knees in front of the television in Lomas de Zamora, Argentina. It was the 2016 bicentennial Copa América final, and it was being played an hour away from my apartment in New York (Met Life Stadium.) I was watching it from afar and so intensely at the same time. When Messi fell to his knees, we knew it was over. It happened, again.

On my layover stop in Santiago, Chile, I sulked. The airport had the paraphernalia celebrating the “winners” everywhere. We started to talk about the game as we waited in an airport lounge with an airline employee. He explained this to me about how he saw the final match, “The First Cup we (Chileans) won, the second one, you (Argentines) lost.” I could live with this. I respected this. I did not fully agree with it. So I conceded, “Wait until Russia.”
Figure 18 El Papa es de San Lorenzo, a photo by Melissa Maldonado-Salcedo
CHAPTER 4: DISORIENTING MOVEMENTS

I would like to start this chapter off by borrowing the words of Bajo Fondo when they introduce their concept for the album *Presente* (2003). I believe that their words speak directly to my intention with this particular chapter, which is written to emulate the tango, and shares an approach very much like this album. They share:

*It is a voyage. So even if there’s not really a linear story—somehow the album pretends through the sequence of pieces to take you on a trip. It is at the same time, an extremely visual album, and least that is what we try to convey.*

I hope this chapter feels like moves like a tango.

***

I signed up for a tango class through a Groupon that offered a limited monthly pass for dance classes. Out of my ballroom options, I chose a tango class. I impulsively supposed that I could find an underground tango community that would lead me to discover “something” relevant to my work. This particular Groupon, as opposed to the countless other ones I had purchased in the past, would compel a breakthrough of great anthropological important. (So I thought.) Yet, this discounted tango class did no such thing. I was seeking rebels who challenged patriarchy and political oppression by dancing the night away like in *Dirty Dancing* (1987), *Foot Loose* (1984, 2011), or my childhood bedroom (1980-1997.) However, I was left (sensibly) disappointed by the experience. I was primarily interested in learning to dance tango, because of two texts that I will apprehend for the purposes of developing my theorizations on embodied liberation, identity, and social oppression, *Paper Tangos* by Julie Taylor (1998) and the film *Tango* (1998).
I spent a significant amount of my childhood and adolescence within a Church of denomination Christian Fundamentalist. Their version of Pentecostalism then was adapted by Latino leaders who were also preaching machismo, homophobia, and Jesus’s teaching without establishing a clear delineation between the literal interpretation and their own interpretation, which was significantly more hostile to the idea of female independence. However, as a youth, I was not especially conflicted about the experience because I was driven by a higher calling to rebel against the teachings, which I never thought it made sense. We were allowed to dance but only to worship music and preferably, dancing in the spirit. I attended their church camp when I was in my pre-teen years. Looking back, it was actually pretty fun. It was not how the documentary depicted Jesus Camp (2006.) At those church camps depicted in the film, the children prayed all day and night, while seeking to dance in the Holy Ghost. My experience was much more about sneaking out at night to meet up with the boys we were not allowed to talk to during the day. We even went skinny-dipping one night in the pool. It was the first time a whole bunch of repressed kids were able to congregate outside of the gaze of our parents. A lot of us were also musicians, so we would enjoy playing Christian hymns we would adapt into merengue and salsa. We also dance to it, but every now and then interject with a “hallelujah” and an “amen.”

Julie Taylor, unlike myself, is a formally trained dancer. However her professional expertise is not privileged to my “natural abilities” in the telling of this story. I identified with her because like me, she too is a survivor of multiple traumas, in which childhood trauma is exceptionally significant. I will say that her “ethnographic honesty” and vulnerability has been especially influential to me in my formation as an anthropologist, especially when writing. I figured if she was able to speak to me or rather, if I was able to see myself in her, then I too had something to say about my life and wanted to express through the tools of my discipline. Taylor
positions her body at the center of her ethnographic exploration and thus is able to tap into the embodied violence that tango speaks to, personally and structurally. She does this concisely by focusing on the violent experiences resulting from the dictatorship, living in exile, and her gender, which concurrently confronts, negotiates, and (fleetingly) resolves through this dance and by way of her research.

Taylor reflects that, “Tangos are encoded messages between two people with the same acute awareness that this message may—even probably will be—read by a third” (72). Central pieces of Taylor’s identity as an ethnographer, dancer, exile (immigrant), and woman are made whole for us as readers, spectators, and audience alike as it is deliberated through Tango. I wanted to gain greater insight by learning to maneuver my body in a similar fashion. I expected to open up new spaces of inquiry and to chart new grounds in my quest to test the precision and imagination of Argentinidad. I believe in some way my decision to explore this route was inspired by the cinematic treasure, Tango (1998) and maybe, a lesser appreciated nugget, Shall We Dance (2004.) Though I will not confirm this, I only suggest it. That scene between Richard Gere and Jennifer Lopez dancing to Gotan Project and Bajo Fondo’s Santa Maria (del Buen Aire) made me feel a lot of emotions about Argentina, and the deep and tumultuous love affair I was having with it in my life (research.) “Ay, milonga de amor.”
Tango Bi Men, For Men: Panic and Inversion

“The ability to dance tango was viewed as sign of masculinity, a macho credential” - Azzi

“The coexistence in tango of different moral codes provides, in many ways, alternative definitions of manhood.” - Eduardo Archetti

Originating in the 1880s, Tango was deemed “…the epitome of degradation” and “not the essence of elegance, which Hollywood often portrays” (J.M Taylor 1976). Tango emerges from the mixing of cultures, circumstances, and gender identities that characterized this era. Responding to the rapid changes happening at the end of the century in Buenos Aires, its lyrics are filled with melancholy and nostalgia, the pain of personal abandonment and migration, and the frustrations of boundaries to which sexual desire was fundamental. The Argentine philosopher and musician Gustavo Varela explains that since its origin, tango is the soundtrack of the modern Argentine nation. Its sonic and lyrical components chronicle the processes of transformation witnessed and shaped by Argentina. In his view, the story of this genre, tango with the story of how a national identity is invented (Varela 2008). According to historian Jorge Luis Romero, the soul of the Argentine nation is an “enigma” and it is haunted by male insecurity. Donald Castro explains that this “insecurity” appears first within the Tango and is personified in the image of Carlos Gardel (D.S Castro 1990:78).

Foucault in The History of Sexuality (1978) writes that in the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was imperative to voice sexual concerns in conjunction with the regulation of social institutions. In Buenos Aires, this was especially true. The urgency of “social hygiene” was of particular import, because of the need of overcoming what was viewed as the “social disorder of the immediate past (Foster 2001:446). Homosexual was a social problem, despite sodomy being
decriminalized in the 1886 penal code (Berco 2002:422). Donna Guy writes, as cited by Nesvig that, “laws may have allowed prostitution, but other laws criminalized scandal and indecency on a broad scale” (Nesvig 2001:714). Here lies the irony of the legal status of homosexuality as a social practice. Homosexual was indecent and thus criminal because sodomy did not reproduce Argentine citizens. Within a new nation, reproduction was imperative to consolidation and continuity. Hence, engaging in non-reproductive sex was indecent and scandalous, thus criminal (Berco 2002).

The decriminalization of homosexuality, with the modernizing projects of Argentina, meant, that the heterosexual family, the foundation of the nation, was in need of protection (434). Salessi discusses the implications of tango on sexuality during this time. In his view, it threatened the nation. He comments that tango, “is a cultural expression with significant homoerotic and homosexual connotations that today are deeply embedded in the imagined national identity…” He offers the strongest argument that presents this dance as predominantly a male-male dance (Salessi 1997:161). This resulted from the mass migration of Europeans into Buenos Aires, which was disproportionally male. Also, the Southern districts in which it was first danced, was densely populated by men, who lived in close quarters to each other (Collier 1986:38). This spatial circumstance engendered an intimate one, where men proved and displayed their masculinity to each other. The lascivious choreography of tango was executed by “pairs of men,” who “really” simulated the act of sex…with each other (Salessi 1991:47, Baudrillard 1995).

Salessi exposes, that at the time, there was a “homosexual panic” resulting from the circumstances of a new “inverted culture.” By examining official records of criminologists, hygienists and psychiatrists, he reveals the pervasiveness of this panic. He writes this culture inverted traditional gender roles, women were “masculine” and men were “feminine” (Salessi
This led the ruling elite to legalize prostitution, providing marginal women employment opportunities, and men the opportunity to pimp them (Salessi 1999:45). The Catholic Church regarded prostitution as healthy and necessary. They believed that if prostitution were made illegal, this could lead to “homosexual practices,” (Guy 1991:13). This reshaped the economic and cultural productions of the time, further leading to what was perceived as gender inversion.

The Archival Body

The film Tango by Carlos Saura works to problematize the boundaries between fact and fiction, and the relationship between immigration and democracy and it is traced within in distinct dance sequences. In Cinema and Counter-history (2015), Marcia Landy, writes that this film presents a “multilayered history as an intersection between past and present” through the exploration of tango’s “history” and “aesthetics” as chronicled within multiple stages (Landy 2015:153). This cinematic strategy is purposeful in also centering memory as the lens by which the present is understood for example memories of the Spanish Civil War inform how dictatorial Argentina is not only experienced but also depicted. The unsettledness deriving from the residuals of history during the dictatorship is particularly telling of tango and Argentina’s strong capacity to move through violent and erotic gambits and its predilection to “counter historicize” (152).116

In the film one man asks defiantly, “Why bring up something that has been forgotten?” Borges’s elucidation about the role of history, especially when there is an imperative to forget, informs the grounding of Tango as “memory.” Saura explains that, Tango lends itself to “making a story about emotions, which is part of the Tango itself.” Memory lives, it is proven “indestructible” because the past, “sooner or later things turn up again” (156). Everything returns.117
“I want to Dance with Somebody”¹¹⁸

I watched MTV music videos religiously (and in secret) in the hopes of being able to learn the latest dance moves and fashion. I wanted to grow up and become a dancer in order to pirouette my way out the Pentecostal church. I took out numerous library books on ballet in order to instruct myself how to be graceful and light on my feet. In an attempt to perform a jump in my confined hallway, I actually broke my pinky toe when it banged into the edge of the sofa. I suffered in silence because I knew that there was nothing that could be done to “fix” it except pray and wait. I did not want to confess to my mother what I was doing when it broke. Dancing to me always felt like freedom, whether in front of a mirror or in a cage (as I briefly did while in Barcelona, Spain.) Lawrence Grossberg writes that music is what indeed moves the body, but also it is a particular type of identity formation that happens as a result of dancing, “Dancing not only inserts the music into the space of the body, it also inserts it into the body of space…it produces itself in space by producing its own space” (Grossberg 1997:87). I never did receive formal instruction but there was not a dance floor in New York, Miami, Madrid, and Barcelona that I had not attempted explore.

Helena Wulff contemplates through the case of Irish river dance how dance (inherently) has the capacity to mobilize, transform, and reimagine national identity as well. She discusses the power of dance to, “unleash strong emotions, often as an erotic nature, that are normally back in daily life.” She adds that, “despite the common assumption that dance is a marginal social practice, dance is in fact, and has often been perceived as, so prominent and disturbing as to call for control both on political and religious grounds.” By additionally citing the case of the Kalela dances as explored within anthropology, she is able to highlight how it functions not only as a “form of ethnic resistance to dictatorial national,” predominantly within Colonial contexts, but it functions as a “component of nation-building” that restructures social life (Wulff 2003:180).
Both texts motivated the effort to learn Tango but also lead me to consider the role and importance of dance in my identity as an ethnographer, woman, and survivor of violence.

**Shall we Dance? Familiar Sounds.**

“You have turned for me my mourning into dancingly you have put my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness” - Psalms

I thought the dance studio smelled like stale chips and desperation. Within the first fifteen minutes, I was hit on by an extensive amount of “gentlemen” who I suspected were either married or going through a midlife crisis. Tan lines on ring fingers and constant reminders of wealth informed my conclusions and the film, *Shall We Dance?* (2004). I do not mention this to suggest that I am “irresistible” to the opposite sex, but instead insinuate that there was something about the social space that seemed to trigger aggressive and pitiful displays of machismo. One guy spoke to me with an exaggerated Porteño accent and would ever so often pull out a pocket mirror to check his hair and teeth. He later admitted that he had gone to study abroad in Buenos Aires during his twenties (which was discernably well over two decades ago) and was now taking the class to “reconnect” with his youth. The Thirteen men in the class refused to “practice” with each other and instead took turns waiting for the five other woman students to be passed around.

I made the mistake of going by myself. I learned from Pablo’s grandmother that his grandfather was infamous for his Tango skills. This was the only aspect of him she did not bash. For this reason, I did not want to run the risk of confirming on the dance floor that he had indeed inherited this physical aptitude. I was intimately familiar with his capacity to verbally maneuver himself out of tight situations. I had seen him talk his way out of parking tickets and he knew how to convince me to do things that I thought were outside of my character. All with equal ease, equivocation, and elegance. I teased him that I also did not like the idea of “being lead” by him
or any man for that matter. I told him I would feel probably more comfortable dancing with a “woman,” because it would allow me to not think about “patriarchy.” I referenced the scene between two women dancers in Tango. They stare each other in the eye with defiance and
determination. I told him it was feminist, empowering, and desirable. His response was typical of him and a testament to what attracted me to him, “Do you ever stop thinking about the patriarchy?”

The tango instructor was enthusiastic and had a familiar accent. I could not immediately identify it though. I thought that he was the only saving grace to this class, which felt longer and longer with each basic step. The instructions were hypnotizing, “Slow, slow, quick, quick, slow.” My mind unsurprisingly started to wander and I thought about what other classes I could take at this studio, if any. They also offered Bachata and Reggaeton, which intrigued me. Then I had this brief moment of “supremacy.” I thought, “Who can teach me about salsa or merengue?” Then the smell of my partner’s breath, which reeked of ketchup and cheap wine, startled me back into the present. Tango requires the closeness of two bodies and they are to move in syncopation. This was not going to be achieved today or any other day for that matter. Why did I ever think that this would be a good idea? Like so many anthropologists in the field I thought, what am I doing here?” I clearly and rightfully had real issues with “personal space.” If I ever returned to break even on my Groupon, I would first need to secure a trusted and tolerable partner. His hands would need to firmly stay way above my waist and he should not ask me (personal) questions. These were my requirements I thought, as I continued to push further away my current dance partner.

My body language had conveyed to my instructor that I was growing increasingly displeased with the experience. If he does not want me to “Yelp” him I thought, he needs to do something real soon. Before I could roll my eyes again, he intercepted and pulled me in to continue moving with him. “I saw you were having a hard time.” I thought, maybe he is the most “authentic” Argentine here, since up until that point within the student body was not one. I had heard him speak Spanish before so I was confident in my assumption. “What part of Argentina
are you from?” Maybe Córdoba I thought since he sounded so familiar. “I am not Argentine, I am from Colombia.” That was unexpected I thought. “My husband is from Argentina.” All I could think was, do I sound like that?

**The language of Desire: It takes two (Men) to Tango**

> “Language is a skin: I rub my language against the other. It is if I had words instead of fingers, or fingers at the tip of my words. My language trembles with desire.” – Roland Barthes, A Lover’s Discourse.

According to Bech, the modern city provides the actuality of intense sexualization because of affect: loneliness, being an outsider, etc. (Bech 1997:118). This affect, coupled with social marginalization, permeated all spaces of the Buenos Aires ghettos. Thus it is conceivable that on the outskirts of Southern Buenos Aires, in the Arrabal (*bajo mundo*/underworld), the brothels would flourish. These zones of encounters produced a “special masculinity” that would later be considered just *porteños* (82). The brothel became the home of tango and the dissenting space where transgressive categories and roles were invented. Jorge Salessi highlights the homoerotism of Tango by affirming that the prostitutes whom Argentine (official) historians rely on to dilute tango’s queer origins, were actually men in drag. Even the prostitutes, who were women, were considered “masculine” by contemporary hygienists definitions of (Salessi 1997:161). This speaks to how masculinity at this time, was a spectacle of national importance. Foster observes, “Since masculinity is an assumed identity, it must be sustainably exercised in order not to fall away…Masculinity…must be constantly affirmed in a masculine society (Foster 1999:67). The idea that Argentine men innately had a “rampant sexuality that drives them towards sex,” an idea that they themselves fomented, legitimized the brothel as a indispensable component to a functioning (sale) society. In the brothel, men competed for sexualized power through Tango.
(Guy 1991:13). Through Tango, the nation became masculine.

Tango in the Bachtinean sense, was a carnival that celebrated “temporary liberation from the prevailing truth of the established order…the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal (Bachtin 1968:14). Tango was originally danced between men. The “official” reasons for the him-and-him dance are varied. They range from a lack of access to women, to men wanting to “practice” and “perfect” the dance (with each other), to its immoral implications. Tango was the rage in Europe in the early 1990s, attracting the attention and acorn from religious figures such as the pope. For the better part of 1914-1916, the New York Times was filled with religious leaders denouncing the tango, and calling it the “shame of our days” (very tango 2010). Brothels were later banned in 1919, allowing for the Tango to move “uptown” where a sanitized version, with clearly defined gender roles would be in vogue. With the advent of the “golden age,” Tango no longer was synonymous with lower-class immigrants and delinquents, the heteronormatization of the tango, was what enabled it to be exported and distorted as “macho” and debatably, misogynist. Tango is Latin America’s “original” forbidden dance. In 1916 a law passed within the City of Buenos Aires, banning men from dancing with each other at public establishments (very tango 2010). Nesvig writes that “the idea of homosexuality” or what could be perceived as homosexual is rooted in the body politics. The widespread fear among those concerned with crime and urban dysfunction, straightened out Tango (Nesvig 2001:714). Judith Butler asserts that, “…a function of decidedly public and social discourse, is the public regulation of fantasy through the surface politics of the body…” (Butler 1990:136). Thus, heterosexuality became “embedded” in the Tango (Warner 2002). Sedgwick’s understanding of homosociality to connote a heterosexual formation is productive in understanding this gender shift, “the paths of male entitlement, especially in the nineteenth century, required certain intense male bonds that were not readily distinguishable from the most
reprobated bonds...male homosexual panic became the normal condition of male heterosexual entitlement” (Sedgwick 1985:186). This claim casts light on how the different shifts and uses of what constitutes deviancy and masculinity were used to tame Tango.

In contemporary Tango, homosociality is expressed in the “display of women” rather than the “exchange of women” (Tobin 1998:90). Corroborating this observation, Savillano argues, “Tangos are male because their intimate confessions are mediated through the exposure of female bodies” (Savigliano 1995:61). Yet, female bodies were not (publically) permissible in the tango, until the closing of the brothels. Lacan would identify the female partner, in this sense and context, a “phallic display of his desire” (Lacan 1985:84, 48). Argentina is quite fervent about phallic displays to show power, masculinity, and the nation. Tango would migrate from the brothels to the international arena, much in the same way that Carlos Gardel would leave the arrabal (the underworld or ghetto) and become an international Latino icon. Through tango, he transformed from a compadrito to a porteño gentlemen, from queer to macho, and from a person to a national essence.
“A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance” - Ecclesiastes 3:4

Figure 19 Ni Un Trabajo Digno, a photo by Melissa Maldonado-Salcedo
Growing up Pentecostal, I was prohibited from dancing to “secular” music; we were only allowed to dance “in the spirit.” Accepted and subversive dancing created (real and imagined) areas in my life where I was able to express my identity, publically and/or privately. Each dance had very different implications on liberation. Heike Weischiolek writes that dance can enable a sense of (ephemeral) liberation, “dance can constitute a ‘free’ zone that is not an object of official and/or civic control like other public spheres” (Weischiolek 2003:117). Eduardo Archetti supports this allegation on the body’s movements when examining the spectacles of soccer and tango in Argentina. He synthesized these national embodied movements purposely, “permit the articulation of languages and practices than can challenge an official and puritanical public domain” (Archetti 1999:18). Both theorizations intimate that the movement of the body and the space in which it moves (through) constitute multiple meaning(s) through its encounter.

I truthfully cannot say that I have ever “danced” in the Spirit despite intense and long-drawn-out prayer, fasting, and “worship” sessions. I concluded early on in my life that it was probably because I did not meet the requirements to do so, per the teachings of my Church. I did not necessarily measure up. I did not “live a holy life” nor did I intend to because I did not fully accept that “pleasure” was in anyway a problem. My mother told me that once after one Sunday school I told her that if heaven was filled with everyone from my Church I was choosing hell because it would “feel” like heaven. I do not recall telling her this but probably because it was on one of my most popular counterarguments to my family’s evangelizing efforts. Until this day I use this argument whenever I am warned about “hell.” Hell, I fear a worse fate.
This response worked to subdue their evangelizing energies (briefly.) It has never been clear to me if this argument works because it is so offensive (to them) or because it has (much to their detriment) some merit. Growing up, I showed a preference in asking for forgiveness over asking for permission, which actually made my monochromatic life interesting. I was drawn to rock and roll for this reason. Grossberg explains that, “rock and roll’s relation to desire and pleasure deserves to mark a difference, to inscribe on the surface of social reality a boundary between “them” and “us” (Grossberg 1984:234). For this reason, I refused to sit out on important coming of age rituals: drinking 40s in the staircase, puking my guts out because I overdrank, going to work dressed from the night before, and my first walk of shame. While most people arguably spend a great deal of their lives learning to own to their mistakes, I had no problem in confessing to (most) transgressions. The truth did “set you free,” or at least, diminished the punishment. My mother would say, “If I find out you are lying, I am going to be even more angry.” While this logic did not make sense because I thought, how did she know the limits of her anger and was she certain that it had the capacity to duplicate? If she found out that I lied about going somewhere I was not supposed to, would it be equal to telling the truth about drinking? In terms of punishments I learned from a young age that I was best following the “spirit of the law” than the “letter of the law.” Again, rules never really were my forte because I overthink them or impulsively challenge their relevance. I manifested from a young age trouble conforming to disciplinary conventions and structures (and clearly still do.) I was always in that sense, Rock and Roll.

However, rock and roll is a direct consequence of oppression, which becomes authenticated and reimagined as a form of resistance, an “oppositional counter-culture” which responds to “national or conservative” culture. The Pentecostal Church and my family were the authoritarian regimes I was rebelling against. Motti Regev explains this phenomenon using the
case of rock nacional, but also rock culture within Russia in order to draw parallels about this relationship, “This has been the case particularly under totalitarian regimes, where the local rock scene declared itself to be a site for the preservation of national artistic freedom. Producing original music, including lyrics in the local language, supports such claims and helps making them in a cultural reality—despite the music itself being an ‘imitation’ of Anglo-American rock sub-styles” (Regev 2013:295). While I have never been arrested (knock on wood), I certainly lived my life at times as if I was above the laws of the government, my family, and God (no specific details necessary.) The other possibility for not ever “dancing in the spirit,” was much more practical in my view, everyone who did it was “faking it.” I figured that like orgasms, dancing in the spirit was the ultimate reward for one’s “good deeds” and precision in similar ways in which Eduardo Galeano likens orgasms to goals. All are far and few within these modern times.

In my youth, I had (strategically) “faked it” a couple of times. I remember that when I did so it was in order to gain approval from my mother, specifically. We recently talked about my quest and tactics. She laughed recounting how determined I was to disregard most rules, a far cry from the many times she cried about it imploring for me to change, “to be like everyone else.” She tells me that she knew that I was “faking it” because I would be “overly dramatic” about the movements, and that they tended to be in syncopation with the gospel music that was playing during the service. She later told me that she thought that it was inconceivable to speak in tongues with the amount of cursing and foul language I used on a daily basis. She thinks differently now and even is able to laugh about it. She overstates the nature of my embellished movements though never once did she challenge its authenticity. My “holy ghost” performance was decisive because it proved to her (and the rest of the congregation) that despite my rebellious disposition, God “blessed me.”
If I recall correctly the few times that I had “faked” dancing in the spirit were coincidently during the times I was expelled from school. At the time, I believe my mother did not think me capable of doing such a thing, simulating, because the bible clearly stated that “blasphemy” is unforgivable. In fact, it is the only commandment that God does not forget about (apparently.) For this reason my mother suggesting or questioning the authenticity of my dancing “in the spirit,” would affirm that she was judgmental which is “unchristian” in nature. According to the dogmas within my childhood Church which are consistent with most Christian fundamentalist traditions, a “holy life” involved abstaining from a wide array of pleasurable acts that include but are not limited to cursing, dancing, the consumption of controlled substances, and premarital sex. My life growing up in this culture was a cross between "Little House on the Prairie" and the Duggars as seen in the show "19 Kids and Counting" aired on the TLC network. Great emphasis was placed on these because they were revelatory. It was relatively easy to “prove” when these rules were broken (you could hear it or see it for the most part.) No real “spirit of discernment” is exactly required, despite popular opinion. To my best recollection the first two have been constant in my life, while the later were only steady between the years of 1997 to 2004.

Latino Pentecostals in the late 1970s and 1980s took their performative and spiritual cues from the Christian Fundamentalist movement where Jimmy Swaggart and Billy Graham were gods. In my house, the television was not turned on Sundays except to watch the televangelists as we prepared to spend a total of five hours in Church. I frequently attempted to feign illness until my mother caught on and would say, “If you’re sick you cannot watch television.” However because it was my father who would stay home to care for me, I did not give up on my attempts to stay home from Sunday school and service. He never subscribed to what he dubbed “arbitrary” child rearing principles, despite never out rightfully challenging them. My dad was a
renegade from the Church and ever so often he would permit me to “break the rules.” He let me listen to secular music, watch music videos, and indiscriminately curse. All he cared about and still holds me accountable to is very simple. Do not steal, lie, or kill (without just cause.) Sundays at church were an all day affair. I did not fully understand the concept of a weekend for a great part of my life. I only started to sleep in and enjoy brunch, religiously, after I moved to Miami in 2004 to live with Pablo. Only then did feel I had sufficient distance between my personal life and my mother’s control. Alas I was far away from the grips of my church.

The Status Quo will be Televised

“If you’re happy and you know it, that’s a sin (slap, slap.)” - The Simpsons

Even though my mother had limited English proficiency, this was not an impediment to her feeling “God’s power” right through the television any given Sunday. She said that these morning messages “warmed her up.” One of my mother’s closest friends, Molina, while watching Jimmy Swaggart on television, “gave his life to Christ, “according to his testimony. He soon thereafter gave up drinking and dancing and concentrated his life’s exertions in the pursuit of God’s will. This conversion impressed on him the need to marry a woman, so he could procreate, an undertaking that proved strenuous. His union would eventually end in adultery and divorce (due to her indiscretions.) He regularly testified that he was “moved” by Swaggart's message of redemption and new beginnings at a time when he was a recently arrived immigrant with very little protections and provisions. Molina finally pastored a congregation in Barranquilla Colombia and would even annex a school that taught “Christian values” in addition to reading, writing, and math. (Science was not a prominent subject in the curriculum.)

When I was in my early twenties, I visited Molina’s church. My mother’s brother was dying from a cancer that spread rapidly through his body due to neglect. I accompanied to church
so she could find visit Molina but also to seek “God’s healing power” for her brother’s sickness. I was struck by the (ironic) sermon. I had recently discovered Marx’s appeal in College, and so would ever so often look around and think, “opiate.” However, in hindsight it was pretty stunning to see a congregation who by in large lived in great poverty, who lacked basic necessities, rejoice so deeply. They professed an absolute trust in God’s providence, something I (to a certain) extent still envy. My anxiety did not allow my mind to ever “rest.” As a child I worried about hell with the same intensity I worried about missing my beloved afterschool specials. I tried to “cast on to him” all of my anxieties, but I was born in capable (Peter 5:7). When I learned that this was a “condition”, I was resentful towards God who allowed me to have anxiety and my mother for inheriting it to me. Science and faith yielded parallel results in my life.

The crux of the sermon that Sunday explained America’s “success” as a direct result of the literally imprint of “In God we trust” on the (almighty) dollar. I recalled my Grandfather’s apprehensions concerning falling prey to the not so trivial pursuits of the church. The inextricability of money and faith, morality and hypocrisy, and colonialism and Christianity intersected in unexpected domains that were at work with and against each other. After all, the Catholic Church is the biggest conglomerate and real estate owner in the world; while the Pentecostal church is Hollywood’s greatest export continuously reaching new and foreign markets. Each visibly allocate a market fantasy where money can yield community and where buying power is akin to the most profound mystical experience. Chidester concludes, “In this long history of American political rhetoric, blood and money often seem to be interchangeable terms in a symbolic economy”(Chidester 2005:7). I would argue that thanks to globalization and the growth of organizations like the IMF and World Bank, this symbolic economy stretches across the Americas and globe with great fervor like that of the soccer industrial complex.
I remember that Molina frequently conducted missionary work in New York, every time he needed to raise funds for the Church or his bakery in Colombia. I later learned that he would also allow undocumented immigrants to work under his identity while he was in Colombia. He did not charge for this service (though this has yet to be proven.) He would however visit New York in April to file his taxes and claim his taxes. This scheme was before the accessibility and efficiency of online filing. He eventually retired in Colombia while receiving a United States pension for work he did not “technically” do. I later reasoned that while his generosity did provide an undocumented worker a (false) sense of “security” in the workplace, Molina did nevertheless break the law. However, there is a history of selective enforcement of values within Christianity. For example, ministers, missionaries, and members of the Christian church, irrespective of their denomination, habitually practiced slavery, which is the epitome of oppression. Catholics and Protestants enslaved people just the same, while preaching liberation. If a law set by a government is deemed immoral, impractical, or discriminatory what informs the impulse or decision to break it? It is ignorance? Entitlement? Profit? For instance, can Dr. Martin Luther King and Kate Davis be conceivably motivated by the same conviction? Can Donald Trump and Pope Francis realistically share some interests, given their substantial real estate assets?

**In the Privacy of the Pulpit**

On February 21, 1988, I witnessed Jimmy Swaggart publically confess to having committed an unspecified “moral failing”. He appeared on television drenched in tears, speaking in tongues, and asking for forgiveness from his pulpit. My mother watched confused as she brushed my unusually long hair almost in rote as the spectacle unfolded. It was her birthday but this felt like a gift to me. I had never liked him. Before I had even formed abstract thought or claimed a queer identity, he made me feel angry and resentful. His God, in my childhood
opinion, was pettier than the god of my grandmother who had no issue sending a child to a burning lake of fire. As I watched his emotional breakdown in real-time, I attempted to simultaneously interpret Swaggart's message to my mother. My interpretation was even more dramatic than the real thing; I did always have a way with words. Nothing was lost in translation; instead it was amplified and laden with condescending particulars (an established characteristic in my storytelling.)

I had detected that this Sunday’s sermon was not going to be uplifting despite his sporadic bouts of glossolalia (speaking in ‘tongues.’) Guliano explains that glossolalia is a “form of undiscovered prayer in an unintelligible language, from which a linguistic viewpoint is meaningless but phonetically structured” (Guliano 1999:68-69). His confession of having engaged in (illegal) sexual trysts, in classic adultery, ended with a declaration of his “humanity.” While many Sundays before he spoke with “God-given” authority over private and public life, this time, he was admitting he was merely human (and thus, humble.) He was “sorry,” about what he did, but I suspect that he was actually sorrier about being “caught.” Right before this scandal, he had called rival televangelist Jim Baker a “sissy,” after his illicit relationship with the Church secretary went public. His son Donny came out stating that, “if there is no forgiveness for Jimmy Swaggart, there’s no forgiveness for you either.” In his view, Swaggart's forgiveness was a nonnegotiable. Swaggart reaffirmed his “humanity” and recited Psalm 51, “In sin did my mother conceive me.” According to this logic, he was no different than all of us who are “sinful on account of being born” (Tell, Confessional Crises and Cultural Politics in Twentieth-Century America 2012:145).
Later discussing Swaggart's “fall” from grace, as a result of his solicitation of prostitutes and a professed addiction to pornography. People magazine suggested that despite his prosperity, “he had been “fighting all along a secret war with Satan—it is now clear he was losing it” (Kaufman 1988). However, it probably was easier to forgive Swaggart's transgression because this “moral failing,” speaks to his inability to repress his (heterosexual) “carnal” desires. Many women supporters expressed great pity for him, even after being pulled over by a patrol office three years later with a sex worker. Nothing runs (or drives) faster than a lie. As Karma would have it, he never completely regained his “credibility” or viewship. 121

My aunt lamented in regard to Swaggart's public disgrace that, “Men, they are weak. Like Adam. Pobrecito (poor man.)” She felt compassion for him and for his wife, but she did not immediately feel offended by his adultery. This struck me as odd, even many years after this happening. Her comments were redolent of a battered wife who defends and feels compassion for her abuser. My mother on the hand sounded like a scorned lover, wishing his wife had divorced him and “cleaned” him out. However, what of this dichotomy? Punt states:

> Traditional gender paradigms encourage male dominance, authoritarian notions of power, and a sharp distinction between the private family and the public arena (perceived to be the “outside world.”) Yet those same factors are associated with wife and child beating and the sexual abuse of children. Obviously, there is some relationship between traditional hierarchal notions of gender and male violence (Punt 2013:230).

After putting Swaggart on a pedestal, I figure my mother came to the realization that later realized she had held him to a standard that conflated his moral authority over public life with his authority over private matters. At one point in time, he undeniably asserted great control over her decisions about the things that mattered to her most: God and family.

> If he divorced, she admitted, than maybe it would be easier for many of her abused and (very) Christian sisters to reason doing the same. Four out of her six sisters endured abusive interpersonal relationships, with only death liberating two from their unions. Sufficient clinical and pastoral experience attest that not only is domestic violence prevalent within Christianity but
that women often remain in abusive situations longer than secular abused woman. This comes from women being that by not “submitting” to their husband’s women, they (justifiably) bring violence on to themselves. And not even violence, according to many prominent Christian leaders such as Rick Warren, does not merit grounds for divorce (Joyce 2009).

It is not coincidental that misogynists are homophobic. Both practices constitute diagnosable symptoms of a “sick” mind that point to an even “sicker” social worldview. Unfortunately Christianity upholds these tenets. Pharr notes that, homophobia is “a source of stress, and sickness so great it can lead to suicide—is homophobia, that societal disease that places such negative messages, condemnation, and violence…” Swaggart is a public proponent of the popular “sin theory” which is rooted in a total of eight decontextualized and incorrect readings of the Bible that are used to condemn homosexuality. Yet, the mandate to “redistribute wealth” justly as it appears in the Bible is conveniently ignored by the very same leaders who are motivated by a “desire to dominate and control,” the personal and if possible, the national and international as well (Pharr 1997:2, 7). Pastors and military men both seek to lead and indoctrinate “soldiers” for Christ and/or the State so they could engage in spiritual and territorial warfare. However, these leaders are not necessarily “good teachers,” because they do not “exude authority” but instead resort to “authoritarianism” which could be brutal to the body but also the psyche.

Jimmy Swaggart along with his colleagues, frequently propagates the belief that female sexual liberation and homosexual orientations are not only sinful, but also criminal and therefore necessitate or justify violence. The American Psychological Association declared that homosexuality was no more “abnormal” than being left handed, though that too was cause for persecution by the Church at one point in time and also demanded “correction” and “conformity” (Smits 2012).
I find great similarities between the oppression inflicted by the military and the Catholic Church on young people during the dictatorship when thinking about my own experiences growing up Pentecostal and Latina. Where as the military sought to disappear bodies that did not conform, I can say with full certainty that the Church was invested in also disappearing (or exorcising) all that was deemed “pleasurable.”

Pleasure was something always criminal or sinful, but definitely prohibited, especially as a woman. I would like to now contextualize why these experiences exist and attribute it as a direct result of patriarchy, which makes pleasure only available to those who could inflict oppression. I would like to also highlight how this produces queer subjectivity. This history perhaps explains why issues of women’s rights and queer identity seduced me within academia.

The LGBT movement in Argentina offers a significant contribute the study of social movements in Latin America, yet it remains surprisingly understudied within dominant social theories (Drucker 1996:92). In fact, most literature on social theory tends to gloss over the role of sexual identity in mobilizing individuals (Warner 1993:ix). In Stephen Brown’s article on the Gay and Lesbian movement in Argentina he explains how writing on Latin American social movements minimize the importance of how sexual orientation and identity help organize around national issues (Brown 2002). Daniel Balderston and Donna J. Guy acknowledge that early Latin Americanists were not interested in exploring the ways in which sex and gender became spaces of conflict due to the region’s “uneven modernity.” This silence has been productive for scholars who are interested in turning this ambivalence into “something else” – and making it the starting point of all historical questions, which seek to explain the present (Andaluzua 1987:74).
humbly attach myself to this great endeavor.

Political homophobia still overwhelms Argentina because of the unequal gender roles inherited and perpetuated through...“Tradition” This political homophobia, has been taken up as a postcolonial residual from which problematic masculinities emerge as nationalistic (Boellstorff 2004). It is underscored by the belief that, “men and women should be equal, should play roles incompatible with each other and should be confined in hierarchy where the form dominates the latter” (Ottosson 2009). Latino gender roles of machismo and Marianismo speak to this belief, where a woman’s excessive/aggressive masculinity is often constituted by its “other,” a passive, subservient woman. These rigid gender roles are believed to be biologically determined. They then become privately and publically polices through multiple institutions, which are charged with defining citizenship. Heterosexuality remains the biggest attribute of model citizenship (Htun 2001). Patriotic duty, since the invention of Argentina is performed in the reproduction of more citizens within the institution of marriage and the ability to serve the nation in the army.

Today, as fissures are opened up by differences related to race, ethnicity, class, and religion, the cultural construct of sex and gender proves revelatory of the ways in which desire and the nation are shaped by the ideal of the Christian Family (Guy 1997:3). Therefore, it is impossible to discuss Latin America, and for the specific purposes of this paper Argentina, without first and foremost recognizing how sex and sexuality are experienced differently in the region than in other parts of the world. My intention is not to homogenize the region, nor do I plan to conflate the gay experience in Argentina. Homosexual identity in Argentina was an invention, crafted, and ambiguous as is nationalism.”

**The History of the Battle: Organizing for Pleasure in Argentina**

In 1969, *Grupo Nuestro Mundo* became the first gay political organization to originate in Argentina. In fact, it was the first of its kind in all of Latin America. Two years later, in the midst
of the dictatorship, they merged with other under-group, which included left-wing University students, religious associations, and anarchists. The groups were predominantly comprised of male membership that lived on the fringe of society (Brown 2002). Together they formed, the Frente Liberación Homosexual (FLH) and allied with national and international worker struggles and feminists movements. The solidarity between these socially marginalized groups was rooted in their unwavering resistance to cultural oppression. In this alliance, homosexual’s resisted compulsory heteronormativity, women resisted patriarchy, workers fought against exploitation, and students fought for freedom of expression. Together they mobilized against a common enemy and fear, the violent repression of subversive identity. They were considered a direct threat to the family, which within Argentina until today remains the professed foundation of the nation. This is why they reasoned that the nation demanded their protection against such potentially “insurgent citizens.”

In ‘Children of Death,’ AIDS activist Marta Dillon shares the earliest memories of her mother. She was a member of the infamous montoneros, a guerilla group who opposed the regime and subsequently was disappeared. The military deliberately targeted the montoneros because of their political ideology but also for how (erotically) disruptive they were to traditional (gendered) values. Dillon explains how eroticism and activism within Argentina are inextricable from the fight for social justice:

> I think my interest in eroticism comes from my mom; for activism was very tied to her erotic awakening. She went from being a mom to being a sexual person, separated from me from her kids. My mother had this great seductive power that she knew how to use…the right to pleasure remains to be won. We have to work so that people discover their capacity for pleasure. It hasn’t been uncovered yet. When a man and a woman discover that ability, it belongs only to them, and it is not likely that anything can be imposed on them (Dillon and Moreno 2002:542).

The eroticism exhibited by Dillon’s mother was directly against the Catholic norms of Argentine motherhood, which originated in the late-nineteenth century. Donna J. Guy writes that this maternal ideal was socially and politically constructed as a result of gender, economic, social,
political, and religious factors. Guy further accentuates the role of religion in considerations of mothering because of the church’s powerful cultural and legal force in Argentina. The modern (traditional) mother placed devotion to children above devotion to spouse (D.J Guy 1996:158). As a result, a mother who placed a cause before maternal obligations to rear her children, on her lap, was an enemy of the state and Church in similar ways as the homosexual.

Based on this creed, a mother should only experience the pleasure of submission and self-abnegation, for the divine purposes of reproducing Argentine citizens (156). Underlining this ideal is that motherhood is gender-specific and heteronormative. These values may read dated; however, they continue to influence social policies. For example, within various institutional domains, sexual intercourse is still viewed as, “a curse brought upon humans with no other objective or justification than the preservation of the human species” (Sofía Kamentzsky 2001). The incompatibility between pleasure and reproduction resonated in a lot of the Church’s discourse on same-sex marriage. Homosexual relationships are in their view, rooted solely in bodily pleasure and therefore sinful because same-sex intercourse cannot biologically reproduce citizens.

In this vein, the homosexual was constructed as the most threatening figure against Argentina’s foundational values, Catholicism and Machismo—both embodied in the military regime. After Juan Domingo Peron died in 1973, right-wing paramilitary groups started to explicitly target homosexuals, causing a drastic decrease in the FLH’s membership. The 1976 coup’ d’état marked the (official) beginning of the Proceso de Reorganización Nacional. From there on after, being homosexual (or presumed) was more than criminal. It became categorically unpatriotic. The newly created Department of Public Morality opted to disappear gay culture, by eliminating gender non-confirmative bodies and behaviors from the public sphere (Opus Gay).
Poisonous Convictions, Violent Acts

“Why can snakes slither? Can people slither too?” – Pablito
“Yes, they’re called snakes.”– Pablo
“Explain.”– Pablito

Pentecostals are notorious for handling snakes as part of their worship services. The Church of God was especially taken to the ritual. Though I myself never witnessed this in the Pentecostal church, it is widely known though I only learned of this ritual when I testified to being “Pentecostal,” to a colleague. He asked if I “handled snakes,” and I thought that he was being inappropriate. It is still considered an important custom within certain Pentecostal congregations, especially (way) South of the Mason Dixon line. In 2014, a pastor died from a poisonous snakebite after refusing medical treatment. On the National Geographic reality show, “Snake Salvation”, Pastor Jamie Coots noted that, “he believed that a passage in the Bible suggests poisonous snakebites will not harm believers as long as they are anointed by God.” The practice is illegal in most States, though practiced by in large in the rural South (Fantz 2014). He had been bitten ten times prior to the fatal one, always refusing medical treatment because he believed that God would inoculate him against the venom. The tenth bite was (tragically) the charm.

My mother is deathly scared of snakes because her eldest brother died from a snakebite. He was on a mountain working the land when he told his brother to switch places with him, and almost immediately after he did, he was bit. This took place at a time in history when antidotes were scarcer to a poor rural family than they are today. My mother recalls when they brought his body back; he was wrapped up in a hammock with drops of blood creating a trail of crumbs to my grandparent’s home. Only the Via Dolorosa rivaled this path, and even it paled in comparison to my grandmother’s grief. My mother, and all of her ten remaining brothers and
sisters confirm that when he died, she never again was happy. When her twin sons died (one from electrocution and the other from cancer) I still remember her grieving for all three sons simultaneously when she prayed, questioning why “he took the good ones.” Her other remaining sons are notoriously irresponsible and violent towards their wives and children.

I am confident that if the missionaries who went to Colombia and evangelized my mother had handled snakes instead of copious amounts of dollars and “servants,” my entire family would have rejected the religion. However, I wonder if this were the case, how different my life would be. Would I claim feminism as my religion, and my family as the “rock of my salvation.”

In a world where masculinity is unequivocally guised with strict disciplining Christian measures against the body, it becomes a site of rebellion too. Growing up not having control of how one’s body moves, even in the most private of spaces, speaks to the relative unsafely and disenfranchisement it can experience due to one’s identity. Correa and Petchesky note that, “the right to security in and control of one’s body, lies in the core of reproductive and sexual freedom…this principle is embedded in the historical development of the ideas of the self and citizenship in Western political culture” (Correa and Petchesky 2013:139). I would like to consider Latin America’s “forbidden” dance in order to consider its claims and contradictions to masculinity, heterosexuality, and desire. This is what makes dancing especially criminal and dangerous.

As an anthropologist perhaps my explicit bias towards Christian patriarchy inevitably raises concerns about my ability to objectively discuss the oppression of the body in the context of democracy. While I did not live through a State dictatorship, I will say that not having control of how and when your body moves and having such a high price for violating moral codes (such as eternal damnation and disownment), knowing how unequally enforced they are definitely taps into an internalized rage that cannot be divorced from this project in particular.
If the normalization of abuse and violence within Christianity is prominent within the United States, it is debatably more entrenched within Latin American culture and society as evident in contemporary policies, laws, and social norms. Latin America is a region that “became” as a result of Colonialism. Thus the entire region embodies the sordid relationship between Christianity, violence, and gender. Franz Fanon theorized that, violence is the “natural state” of Colonialism and that it is not, for all sense and purposes, “a body endowed with reasoning faculties” (Fanon 2005:32). Therefore it is feasible to contend that violence is an expression of barbarism and the definite need to conquer and subjugate an individual, a territory, or spirit is plainly savage. One can look at “divorce “as an example of this circumstance.

Chile, for example, that currently represents a Latin American exemplar of “modernity” and “democratic values,” more since Argentina’s rapid economic decline and social unrest. Divorce only became legal in 2004 (Ross 2004). This was the first significant change in its Family Laws since 1884. This demonstrates that despite its gradual emergence as the perfect balance between “very modern people” and “very old fashioned people,” Chile’s old world values on the body remain characteristic of the region (Tsonopoulus 2015).

No greater example of this exists than in Chile’s State’s approach to health and illness and the importance it places on cultural competency. A New York Times 2015 feature on Chile’s evolving health care system highlights how public health services are now offered in rukas, which are traditional Mapuche (indigenous) huts. In them a spiritual or healer treats patients registered in the municipal public health system for free. Seemingly visually examining urine,
reading palms, and tears have rendered positive health results. Additionally, the herbal infusions prepared from 150 “plants, roots, and tree barks” by Mapuche women after the healer excavates “into his patient’s personal history” have effectively treated patients who have turned away from “Western-style healthcare” (Bonnefoy 2015). Arguably, the social and scientific progresses these advances represent have no direct impact on destabilizing Latin American traditions and social norms.

My aunt Juanita married her brutally abusive husband on her deathbed, against her will, so no one would claim that she was not “saved.” Aside from frequently beating her, he did not “permit” her to obtain a mastectomy when her breast cancer was diagnosed. He said that he did not want a “mutilated woman,” and so by not sacrificing her breast she did not lose the protections afforded to her children by him. He was only good for, questionably, a roof and food. When she died, on her deathbed she became defiant and angry. She did not allow him to come close to her, and in her final moments, she literally said, “I am finally at peace.” Perhaps this is why I never thought that weddings and happiness were mutually exclusive, at least not for many women. Despite having endured a lifetime of hell beside her abuser, my aunt, was forced to marry him in order to save her from eternal damnation. I blame the religion (and my family.) I never understood how she had four brothers, two sons, and countless other men in her life who allowed this to happen. The only woman who stood up to him was my mother, who soon after she died told him that it was a shame that evil lived forever and that he was lucky to be an old decrepit man, because she would “kick his ass.”

**Screwed by the Church**

During the dictatorship, the homosexual was constructed as the “other” of the Catholic military male figure. This was not because the homosexual desired other men, but because of his (unpatriotic) feminization. Queer theorists such as M. Jaqui Alexander, V. Spike Peters, Lauren
Berlent and Michael Warner have all addressed the ways in which nation and citizenship are strategically constructed along heteronormative lines, making the homosexual by contrast a terrorist. Jaspir Puar, building on their work, writes, “The Nation becomes the defining factor in desegregating between upright, un-domesticable queerness’s that mimic and recenter liberal subjection, and out-of-control untetherable queerness (Puar 2007:47). Thus, in times of national crisis, these trends are embedded within State policies geared towards crafting clear boundaries of national belonging. In Argentina the dictatorial residual still exists independently of what now appears to be gay-friendly social sphere. Corrales and Pecheney note that Argentina, in contrast to its neighbors, has high levels of urbanization and schooling…a vibrant constellation of civic organizations…a ruling party that sees itself oft of center…and a super gay-friendly main city” (Corrales and Pecheney 2010). So what of this paradox?

I would like to further draw on Serena Nanda’s work on gender diversity in Brazil to attempt to apprehend the dichotomy of modernity and traditionalism that shadows Argentine identity. I do this in order to further explain how this affects gender and sexuality in times of national crisis. Both countries endured brutal military regimes obsessed with spectacles of masculine (violent) power over its feminized citizenry. In Brazil, the government exported the images of sexual freedom in order to equate with democratic freedom. While in Argentina, sexuality was exceptionally clamped down on. This was done in order to show Catholic order (in which everyone performs their national obligation through heteronormative gender roles.) I use Nanda’s elucidations because both countries subscribe to similar models of masculinity, which are divided alone the lines of the active (masculine penetrator) and the passive (feminized) penetrated.

Nanda propounds that, “penetration symbolically expresses the hierarchal power relations of the heart of the patriarchal gender system…it is the central symbol of sexual relations and
indeed, symbolically, all gender differences” (Nanda 20000:44-45). Women, who opposed the regime, were masculine through military propaganda and penalized for not submitting to authority figures, albeit from the Church or State, since they were one in the same (Taylor, Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina’s Dirty War 1997:82). The homosexual and the masculine woman were subject to similar fates: penetration, torture, and death. Women were often raped, and men were treated as “non-men” through the use of homoerotic methods of torture. This leads me to believe that the voyeurism involved gratified not only the military’s nationalist ego, but also their individual fleshly desires. After all, such a spectacle could only pleasure he who finds sexual gratification with violence.

Diana Taylor’s Disappearing Acts (1996) stresses that the junta military was driven by misogyny, in addition to homophobia. However, I believe that misogyny is a gendered manifestation of this particular type of homophobia, which for all purposes was obsessed with performing masculinity through the violation of bodies. Her overemphasis on misogyny obscures the great deal, the aggressive and focused attacks on the LGBT identity, which inflected onto the entire population (irrespective of gender.) During this time, State insurgency was defined by one’s nonconformity to the gender roles prescribed by the Church. This is why if you a man, with long hair or a girl, with short hair- both were branded as “subversives.” Argentine expressions of nationalism were hyper-masculinity, and constituted through its other, the non-man...that could be male or female (Taylor, Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina’s Dirty War 1997:74). Therefore, based on this context, homophobia is what deeply motivated the dictatorship while misogyny, based on the Catholic Church’s gender roles existed and were institutionalized prior to the dictatorship. This is at the core of what reproduces vulnerability for women, children, and the poor in Argentina and beyond.
“I wish people stopped to drink mate more. Not like tea time, but to just sit and regroup. My mother calls me every now and then to ask if I am still drinking it (mate) or if I now drink coffee. She tells me she saw all of the movies of New Yorkers who walk around with coffee cups in their hands. I did not drink mate until I came to United States. I did not like the taste because my mother used so much peppermint. I drink it now. The thing is that here, it just is my way to feel like I am in Argentina. I used to live alone in Buenos Aires. Here I feel alone a lot. It has been over fifteen years here. I still feel homesick when I smell meat grilling or hear Charly García. Other times, when I see the news, I am glad to not be there anymore. I would be doing the same thing I was doing before I left, cutting clothes. Then I remember my family is still there and so then I feel guilty. When I get up to go to work, I drink mate. It also helps me not be so hungry too. It suppresses my appetite so I don’t pack on the pounds. I gained so much weight when I came to New York because I thought I could eat like I did back in Argentina but I had to eat cheap. The other day, the bombilla (straw) was tight and so I needed a new one. I was able to get one shipped from Amazon. I have a Uruguayan girl I work with at the restaurant and when we take a break, she takes out the thermos and we pass it around. Actually, the rest of my coworkers drink with us now too. They like mate because it makes them less jittery. Then this gringo asked me to drink Budweiser so I could have a taste of his culture, I told him I am not that Americanized yet. I still have Argentine standards.” - Lola, 43, New York
CHAPTER 6: THE REPRODUCTION OF VULNERABILITY

In this chapter, I feel it is important to consider various instances where women negotiate and find meaning within their reproductive bodies in relation to democracy, migration, and violence, and against the embodied residuals of Colonialism and Imperialism. I would also like to cast a spotlight on how women resist these systems, structures, and institutions that discriminate or inflict violence on them in order to exercise control over their bodies and its ability to reproduce. I use a reproductive justice framework to guide me in the exploration of the emerging issues in these stories.

Practicing Feminism, Here and There

I met Betty while (unofficially) working in Jackson Heights, Queens at a non-profit for immigrant women. I created and got funded services that sought to prevent HIV and violence against vulnerable immigrant women throughout Western Queens. She never actually sought services from the organization but would map out where we would leave free condoms. I helped structure and redesign a community mobilization campaign that would leave free condoms (male and female) at various businesses along Roosevelt Avenue. One day, while eating lunch I saw that Betty had pocketed many of these free condoms. She then sat down and ordered a few pastries. She took out a thermos and started to prepare mate. That was my clue, I figured she could either be Uruguayan or Argentine. It is not every day that you see a woman who is probably a senior citizen seek condoms, though I sure thought it was a great sight to see given the recent numbers about senior citizens and HIV. She turned to me and said, “Do you know that condoms are not free in Argentina?” I nodded.

I hoped that she was not selling them because that was where my thoughts immediately went to, but gladly, she was not. “I saw you were looking at me take them. They are not for me.”
She needed to clarify. I nonchalantly replied, “Even if they were, that’s not my business. They are there so you or anyone can take them.” She asked me if I wanted mate, almost as if we were to finish up on conversation we never really had. I will note, Colombians by in large can be “asquientos.” This can loosely translate culturally to “germophobic.” I am not sure if this is a Colombian cultural trait but my mother and all of her sisters, aunts, and cousins manifest the same condition. While exalting their superior hygiene practices, and simultaneously throwing insult at Argentines, they would often say, “Argentineans don’t bathe everyday.” I cannot posit for certain if their disorder is more a learned behavior adopted by contagion. I never fully understood where that stereotype came from of Argentines as “unclean” and suspect it probably has French roots. You know, because of their “French pedigree” (Vergarabat 2004). In 2012 a poll revealed that twenty percent of French people admitted to not washing everyday, upholding what Time Magazine called a “decades old Anglais claim…” that the “French don’t bathe.” They historically situated the stereotype of the smelly French noting that, “That malodorous reputation took root in the ancient French preference for dousing themselves with perfume or cologne rather than with soap and water then body smell began putting a hurt on the nose” (Crumley 2012).

In response to this stereotype, I present the fact that most Argentine homes have a bidet as a standard bathroom feature (like in most Southern European countries.) In fact, it is considered a “sacred” and a “national symbol,” despite its “unsanitary” nature (Jurado 2013). One theory alleges that they originate in French brothels, and thus were associated with “immorality.” Personally, I cannot help but consider that over all, bidets offer, a “drastically superior cleaning experience” (Today I Found Out: Feed Your Brain 2014).

I remember the first time I was offered Mate in Buenos Aires, I could not get over the fact that we all shared and sipped from the same bombilla (metal straw.) The communal aspect
of drinking mate equally put off all my Colombian friends and family living in Buenos Aires. Yet, if you are offered and refuse to drink, I soon learned, you are also rejecting (in a strange way) the offer to “connect” to the culture. I deeply know coffee rituals (I have drank it since the age of three) but mate was something I had to experience in order to acculturate to its etiquette. And appreciate it. Miguel Vivas, a long-time mate drinker is cited in a Los Angeles Times piece comparing mate directly to coffee (which read to me like one of the countless Argentina versus Colombia comparisons I hear or make at home.) He affirms, “Mate far excels coffee as a social glue. Coffee just doesn’t entertain like mate does” (Cormier 2005).

I accepted this insight, but it took a concerted effort to enjoy the contributions drinking mate made to my research and over all my life. For starters, it has an incredible amount of nutritional value. My body has probably built up a tolerance for coffee. I can drink a full cup, and directly return to bed (as I have done so many times during my attempts to write this dissertation.) Test tube studies revealed that, “the herb and its components reduce oxidative stress on heart and liver cells, protect DNA from damage in yeast cells and kills human liver cancer cells.” Additionally, mate provides its consumers “a caffeine high without the shakes and crash that sometimes follow” (Conis 2009). It has become a staple to my diet, given the many roles I undertake on any given day that require an intense amount of physical and mental energy (mother, student, instructor, New Yorker.) While it does not replace the sentimental value that coffee has, it has supplanted my third and fourth daily cups. Not withstanding, drinking mate was also instrumental in enabling me to connect and cultivate relationships in the field, in similar ways as Malbec and beer did (just in a healthier way.)

When gravitating towards Betty, I was not sure if I was motivated by anthropological inquiry, a need to refuel, or straight up nosiness. Drinking mate affirms and directly contributes (arguably) to Argentinidad. The French Society Hygiene noted in 1909 that, “Yerba mates raises
morale, sustains the muscular system, augments strength and allows one to endure privations”(Smith 1998). I slowly started to lower the volume of the voice in my head, which sounded a lot like my mother. I thought to myself, if this were a joint and not a bombilla, would I have the same type of apprehensions? My interest in learning about this woman’s need for so many condoms won over my initial trepidation to take the bombilla. “Dale, I said.” She could very well be my mother I thought. I went and sat at her table with my empanadas.

“My name is Betty. I work cleaning houses.” She pulled out her business card, which included a small photo of her, and all the ways that I could find her to book an appointment: social media, e mail, cellphone, and my favorite, popular app, Whatsapp. I smiled in admiration and thought I should make a card. “My son made them for me,” she said with motherly pride. In Hondagneu-Sotelo’s groundbreaking work on domésticas she highlighted that, “Domestic works who are working without papers clearly face extra burdens and risks: criminalization of employment, denial of social entitlement, and status as outlaws anywhere in the nation” (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001:13). In my first encounter with Betty, she did not strike me as someone who was limited; she was more like a rebel. I asked her where she was from, “I’m from Mendoza. Do you know Mendoza?” I felt a slight pain in my heart that was where my late father-in-law was from. “Yes, that is where my father in law was from.” She smiled, “Where is he now?” I did not really want to talk about him anymore. “Heaven.” And she got the message.

“Do you know what I do with these condoms?” She opened her bag and exposed me that she had clearly gathered more condoms from other sites. “I send them to Argentina.” Was she trafficking condoms? “What do you mean, you send them to Argentina?” She told me that she had two daughters who currently go to the University in Buenos Aires. She figured it would be
easier to help them if she came here with her son to work. She did not want them to marry, and be dependent on a husband. She confessed that one of her daughters had contracted a Sexually Transmitted Disease, which left her infertile. Nothing in my research methods course prepared me to formulate a follow up question. “I saw that here condoms are free. My daughter gives them out to her friends and they know to go to her if they want condoms. Men and women go to her.” I asked her how she got the idea to do this, “In Argentina you pay for these, and women rarely dare to buy them. Men can sometimes not prioritize them. You ask a young guy who barely makes enough to eat and live, to choose between buying condoms or a beer, what do you think he is going to prefer? Protection or pleasure?”

**Exclusionary Democracy: Argentina**

On March 22, 2016, on the last leg of President Obama’s “let’s put the Cold War in the past” tour, he visited newly elected President Mauricio Macri in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Obama thanked Macri for his “contributions to the defense of human rights in the region.” Mauricio Macri was the mayor of the City of Buenos Aires when the legalization of gay marriage and adoption occurred, and was publically in support of “this reality.” Though it did cause a riff with then Archbishop Bergoglio in 2009, Macri did not appeal this legislation when he was the mayor of Buenos Aires, as he had wanted. The Vatican teachings insist that “marriage is between a man and a woman,” which cannot be divorced from the social premium assigned to heterosexual reproduction (Associated Press 2016). However, his patriarchal view on sexual and reproductive rights brings into question his understanding of democracy. He brought his view to the forefront on Social Media soon after his political strategist Jaime Duran Barba intimated that his party, Let’s Change (*Cambiemos*), would attempt to amend the current legislation, which only grants abortion under strict circumstances. Barba did this in an effort to signal the progressive transformations that would further secularize the Argentine State with Macri’s
(potential) presidency. He said in relation to his party, “We’re in favor of people’s freedom…if a woman wanted to have an abortion, so be it.” Macri then used social media to say that Barba had misspoke, and expressed his own position on this issue on Twitter, “The Statements made by Jaime Duran Barba are in a personal capacity and they do not reflect my thinking nor that of the party that I lead. I have deep respect and admiration for Pope Francis, and personally, I am in favor of life” (Buenos Aires Herald 2015).

Currently, Macri maintains a comfortable relationship with Pope Francis, and he has not attempted to downplay this rapport in the press, publicizing his numerous meetings with him. In fact, in February 2016 both men, one now holding the highest office in Argentina and the other holding the highest position within the Catholic Church met in what was dubbed a “cordial” meeting. Francis gave Macri a “medial depicting a two-braced olive tree,” which is supposed to symbolize “unity” (Associated Press 2016). The unity between these two men represents the existing relationship between the Catholic Church and the nation of Argentina, which is rather tired. Macri elaborated, “I have deep respect and admiration for Pope Francis and personally, I am in favor of life,” which means that he is anti-choice for women (The Buenos Aires Herald 2015). The previous administration headed by Cristina Kirchner was not necessarily progressive in regard to women’s rights either. A 2010 report from Human Rights Watch noted that her mandate, “has not improved women’s ability to exercise their reproductive and health rights, and even reversed some gains” (McKirdy 2015).

Kirchner’s public image as a mother, wife, and widow did not deviate (too far) from traditional notions of femininity within Argentina. In fact, her role as President correlates with mothering, “Cristina Kirchner presents herself as the defender of Argentine Nation’s dignity and honor but in danger by opponent parties and media, big companies as well as world powers such as the United States or Great Britain” (Women in International Politics 2015). It is not difficult to
qualify her mothering style, during the tenure, as a narcissistic one. Some characteristics that support this diagnosis rest on the embodied contradictions found in her public image. She is self-sacrificing and highly manicured, described as a “sort of Latin-American Mother Teresa and the devil wearing Prada.” She professes devotion to Argentina, but also manifests a blatant disconnection from its people, once saying, “To be a good politician, I don’t need to disguise as a poor person.” Another trait that speaks to her self-importance can be seen in her predilection for totalitarian control of public and private life in Argentina. She declared, “You only have to fear God, and me a little bit, at least while you are staff that depends on me.” In many ways behaves like a stage mom but instead of only demanding preferential treatment of her child (Argentina), she also expects preferential treatment for herself first and foremost, as the mother of Argentina.

I cannot help but suggest that one would think that after three wives, Macri would understand the import of a woman’s right to choose a family with a bit more nuance. Yet, in 2013 he vetoed a law that “regulates access to non-punishable abortions” that was passed by the City Legislature. Judge Roberto Gallardo noted upon overturning said Veto that Macri’s use of “executive power alters the democracy principles” and as such uses “dangerous political practices” (Boudarene 2013). It became painfully clear that Macri’s personal position indeed informed this action (despite heavily denying he would impose his personal views into public policies.) Macri however, is very much a product of a patriarchal (traditionalist) cultural norm and his views on what would be deemed progressive and secular values affirms this. He sounds like a modern day milico (military man) who has swapped the military uniform for European custom-made suits and who has replaced Catholicism with Neoliberalism as his religion of choice. Nevertheless, his positions echoed the very ideas that engendered systemic violence during Argentina’s political crisis. I will use his own words to explicate my concerns for Argentina’s future.
That’s what HE said

The following represent a selection of President Maurico Macri’s 2015 statements on a variety of social and political issues that reflect unimaginative ideas of “change.”

On women:

“Deep down, all women like to receive pick up lines. Those who say no, and who get offended, I don’t believe them at all. All (women) like catcalls no matter how rude the comment is, like ‘what a great ass you have.’ But it’s all good.”

On sexism:

“I come from a machista family, there, a woman does not have any other destiny but to educate her children. I do not see her in any (political) cabinet (office.)”

On homosexuality:

“It is a sickness, (the homosexual) is not a fully healthy person.”

On blacks:

“Take the photo with flash because if no, the blacks don’t appear.”

On torture (alluding to his support of it as a truth-telling method):

“When you dream that a police officer has to ask a thief to please confess, reality demonstrates that it is not likely for him to confess.”

On Politics:

“If you are not bored by a session in Congress, you’re abnormal.”
Choice and Democracy: (Abnormal) Considerations for Argentina

Currently, Argentina’s civil code only permits abortions in cases of “rape, incest, or endangerment of the mother’s health” and the last situation is incredibly ambiguous and open to interpretation. The government published a report in 2010 stating that a woman’s “mental health” was sufficient “fair grounds to access safe abortion procedures at any public facility.” However, a medical practitioner can abstain from performing the “medical procedure” by merely citing “moral grounds” (McKirdy 2015). This certainly places women who wish to terminate a pregnancy in a vulnerable predicament in which violence is inevitable. I would like to consider how reproductive rights couldn’t be explored without considering the history of gender violence in Argentina. Also, while currently activists throughout the world prefer the term “reproductive justice,” in Argentina the relationship between gender violence and reproductive rights is still considered a fundamental human rights issue and therefore the “choice” of language matters.

I choose to use the language preferred by Argentine feminist anthropologists in order to highlight the relationship between, the various “structural and strategic connections between reproductive governance, equity, and justice” in Argentina and in the minds of its people. I look at the dictatorship’s gendered violence in order to argue that women have yet to fully experience democracy. Also I consider the limitations when using a human rights framework, because anti-choice groups have also claimed a “rights” agenda to fight for the “rights” of the family and fetus. Lyn M. Morgan stresses the critical importance of using “rights-based claims” in present-day Argentina because it resonates with the right for democracy. While she also underscores the contributions of Argentine feminist anthropologists to these issues because they have long been aware on the relationship between intersecting systems of oppression (social class, migration, racism) and reproduction.

Despite these polarizing truths, “the full scope of women’s rights” remains excluded from
the human rights agenda of post-dictatorial Argentina (Morgan 2015). This reads dangerous because again, this reveals an incomplete democracy. However, when I explore the value of “justice” to this discussion, I am also including other aspects of this deeply personal struggle that gets lost in the “1990s human rights” discourse such as machismo and the knotting of immigration, religion, and violence (Gandsman 2012:200, Piscopo 2014). The residuals of the military’s obsession with machismo, violence, and the church appear to mingle with President Mauricio Macri’s vision for Argentina. Perhaps Macri’s desire for “change,” can be seen as a “return to the bad old days” (Chillier and Deman 2016).

**Buenos Aires**

Betty asked me to bring her daughters smart phones and each a pair of sneakers she had purchased on Roosevelt Avenue. I had filled my suitcases with many “gifts” I had promised to bring my family members and the family members of my subjects. I did not mind because on my return, I expected to make use of the additional space with my own “gifts” to my family and other goods I had promised my subjects such as Mate, Alfajores, and Fernet. Granted, I know full well that many of the products I would bring back could actually be purchased in the United States; there is something about the “Made in Argentina” label that authenticated the product as “better.” For example, while you can purchase Fernet Branca in the United States, Dario and Agustin swear “on the Holy Bible” that they are able to taste the difference between Fernet from Argentina and Fernet in the United States. My husband, Pablo, “El Cordobés” says that he does not know if he no longer could tell the difference because he has lived in New York for so long but that there is something “special” about Fernet and Coca in Argentina. When I pointed out that the Coca-Cola in the United States is made with high-fructose corn Syrup as opposed to the real sugar used in Argentina, and that this could be the reason for such differential tastes, he assured me, “it is the Fernet.”
I asked Betty’s daughters to come visit me in my apartment in Palermo, Buenos Aires. I figured I would offer them mate and the pastries (facturas) I had purchased at the local bakery that morning. Our apartment was a fairly typical one; within one of Buenos Aires’s trendiest neighborhood, it was small. As a Manhattani, it felt very much like home. Argentine neurosis is often attributed to small apartments. In the critically acclaimed Argentine film, Sidewalls, a “romantic comedy about life in the shoe box apartments in Buenos Aires,” the protagonist Martin provides his own theorization on the impact of the City’s architecture on the psyche of its residents. He claims, “Apathy, depression, suicide, neuroses, panic attacks, obesity, fear of heights, muscular tension, insecurity, hypochondria, sedentary behavior—all are the fault of architects and construction entrepreneurs” (Romero 2012). He lives in a high-rise building that looks interestingly enough like a typical New York City Public Housing Authority building on the Lower East Side. Martin’s apartment looks very much like mine, and both are in fact located in prime real estate locations (Hughes 2015). Is it a coincidence that Argentina’s most popular professions are psychiatrist and architects (Romero 2012)? Can what is identified as this “Argentine Neurosis” appeal to me because of shared traits (or symptoms?)

I asked the Pablos to go and kick the ball around at the park so we could fit comfortably and talk freely. When the doorbell rang, I opened and saw younger versions of Betty in front of me. Their faces were sufficient proof that she was their mother. Betty had also asked me to take condoms to her daughters but as much as I supported her cause, I thought that with my luck I would get my bag checked and asked all kinds of questions that would leave me “fucked.” It sounded like the beginnings of an Argentine detective film, and I had watched enough to know that it could turn out unfavorably for me given Argentina’s dubious relationship with “justice” and problematic popular notions of masculinities (Rocha 2012). The story of a girl with a suitcase full of condoms could never end well in Argentina (so I thought.) I would probably be
labeled either a prostitute or trafficker, and as a Colombian, I had already undergone that type of scrutiny before by TSA agents and that was in the absence of condoms or any other suspicious substance for that matter.

Alba and Natalia were both University students and very talkative, just like their mother. They were excited to meet me and asked me about their mother and her life in New York. I took out the thermos and started to prepare the first mate. Alba asked without hesitation, “what has my mother told you about us?” I wondered if this was a trick question. “That she loves you,” I responded. They looked at each other and laughed. “Do you know why we ask her to send us condoms?” She extended her hand to receive the mate, “Seriously, what does she say?” Apparently, they imagined their mother had made up a outrageous reason and they were intrigued to know what exactly she had said given the strangeness of her remittances. I explained to them how I had met their mother and why I thought what she was doing was very subversive and radical, all of the things that my feminist heart loved. They asked me if I had heard about Ireland’s “condom trains,” making reference to their mother’s work as part of “condom planes.” The “contraceptive train” references the work of the Irish Women’s Liberation Movement that left Connolly Station on May 22, 1971 en-route to Belfast, there they purchased “contraceptives, bringing armfuls of spermicidal jelly and condoms” and brought them back the Free State,” where contraception was banned and “sex was very costly” (McTeiran 2015). What a great historical feminist intervention against the State and Church that shared meaning with Betty’s family business.

I went online in order to prove to them that I was invested (personally) in their cause. I showed her on YouTube the video tutorial that I had produced for women in Spanish on how to
put on a female condom. They were fascinated first because they thought that female condoms were revolutionary and empowered women when negotiating protection. They, “won’t have to ask men permission” because they are virtually undetectable. I went back into the room and brought back five female condoms I had brought with me in my purse. I brought them with the intention to give it to them if we established enough affinity for me to gift them. I honestly did not know if they were available in Argentina because they were scarcely known throughout Western Queens, where I offered them as part of my work at a violence and HIV prevention service agency. We talked about possible ways to have Betty send her some and they planned to show the video at one of their club meetings on campus. At that moment I felt connected to them and to their mission in a very real way.

“You know why we started doing this, right? It was after I got pregnant,” shared Alba. I had omitted to them the details that Betty shared as to why they started giving out condoms. Betty had told me that one of the daughters had contracted an STD and made no mention of the pregnancy. I did not feel that it was my place to ask her to clarify the inconsistency in her mother’s story. Noticing my discomfort, “she told you that I was pregnant, right?” They would not let up. They continued to press me for details and information. “She told me that you had gotten sick due to unprotected sex,” I blurted. I figured Betty did not intentionally lie to me. Alba and Natalia looked at each other and then at me. Natalia calmly explained, “What type of sickness did she say Alba had?” I felt so uncomfortable at that point because I did not know how to respond and thought to myself, how did I get here? I poured another Mate, while looking at the Fernet bottle that was sitting on the kitchen counter. Alba broke the uncomfortable silence, “Did she say that I got an STD?” I let out a sigh of relief. “That’s what she called my pregnancy.” I choked on my mate. “What?” Oh Betty, I thought, what an ugly side of you.125

Natalia told me that Betty used to call her pregnancy an STD because she hated her
boyfriend. Alba had been forthcoming about wanting to terminate the pregnancy and Betty did not find issue with her choice. She told me that she had gotten pregnant one night when she had drunk too much. I did not want to get into the issue of asking if she had given consent, but that was my first thought. I was trained to think like this I thought, as I tried to soothe my guilt for sounding judgmental. That was truly irrelevant to her story (at least that was what she conveyed to me in how she told it.) I asked Alba, “So you can still have babies?” I felt the mood change swiftly; she shook her head to indicate “no.” Natalia explained the events that lead to Alba’s infertility. She had gone to a friend of a friend’s uncle to get the procedure done. He ended up causing her a hemorrhage that almost cost her life because he had never even gone to medical school. She later found out that he worked as a lab technician in a private clinic. Due to this botched procedure, Alba was now infertile. “I could never carry my own kid.” What I noticed was that she surprisingly did not sound bitter. “That does not mean I cannot be a mother, it just means that this country fucked me over when they did not legalize abortion.” She took out a cigarette from her bag and motioned to pass her the ashtray. I thought about how much perspective she had to not blame herself and to channel her anger at the true culprit, the State. The denial of a woman’s reproductive rights is cause for rage and rage, as they showed me, had to translate into action in order to heal.

Given the forthcoming nature of our discussions, I asked her why she thought Betty told me that the reason of her infertility was due to an STD and not due to a botched abortion. Alba responded, “Does it make a difference? She understands and explains however she needs to. Don’t forget, my mother is of another generation and abortion to her is still sinful even if she does not think it is criminal.”

**One More Time: Chiara Paz**

The campaign #NiUnaMenos found resonance on the soccer fields, where most national
commentaries about gender, race, and sexuality unfold within Argentina.

Pablo is an avid fan of his local fútbol team Club Atlético Belgrano, from Córdoba. He follows them on Facebook as a means to stay up to date on their progress. In May of 2015, my son asked me to take a photo of him holding a sign that read, “#NiUnaMenos.” I was confused by his request but then he showed me how his father’s club on Facebook was using this hashtag and taking these types of photos. He did not know what the slogan meant. I was provided an opportunity to explain this connection between fútbol, social media, and women’s rights in Argentina. Albeit, in one of the most “feminist” moments of my motherhood experience, I was left feeling troubled by the deviating impact of this campaign from another issue that is inextricable from gender violence, reproductive rights.

Mauricio Macri galvanized with a campaign of hundreds of thousand of individuals to resurrect the issue of femicide into “Argentina’s political consciousness” under the hashtag #NiUnaMenos or “not one less.”126 This campaign sought to stand up for each woman’s “right to life in an effort to eliminate gender-based killings in a society where a femicide takes place every thirty hours” (Florsheim and Caivano 2015). The platform of “right to life” was used to highlight a “woman’s life” and how it should not be lost as a result of inter-personal violence (more specifically) which was becoming domestically a public health epidemic. However no mention of the booming maternal morality rates due to the clandestine abortion clinics, which force women to terminate unwanted pregnancies under precarious conditions was made in this campaign. The issue of illegal abortions urgently needed to be addressed in this campaign because of its relationship to reproductive justice. One survivor of this type of risky procedures, Alexa García Avellaneda, recalled the “traumatizing” experience of having gotten an abortion at 16 on a kitchen table. She affirmed that the abortion was more the consequence of various violations, “I am and I was the victim of lack of information (on reproduction health) and the
lack of access to contraception as an adolescent.” Does this not constitute state-inflicted violence on to women?

Doctor Cardoso, a gynecologist, explains his reason for opening up in 2010 an abortion clinic in Boedo, a working-class Buenos Aires neighborhood, “There was a strong demand (in the capital) because there are a lot of clandestine people, who aren’t doctors, and who perform abortions in awful places.” Despite having his office raided and his phones tapped, he remains determined to provide what he calls a “public service,” to women (Lahrichi 2015). Women in particular need this type of service because the State refuses to recognize the importance of sexual and reproductive rights, and much less are able to truly grapple with the consequences of this on the society as a whole.

María Eugenia Miranda reported for the international feminist organization ISIS (named after the goddess and not the terrorist group) the following: AIDS remains the number one cause of death for women between the ages of 15 to 44 in the City of Buenos Aires and the number two in the provinces. Additionally, she notes that after the worsening of the economy in 2001, which thrust half of the country’s population to below the poverty line, now many cannot afford health insurance and are at the behest of the public hospitals. Even though the National Parliament adopted a National Law of Reproductive Health and Responsible Procreation in the National Territory, allowing minors to seek reproductive health services without the accompaniment of an adult, the legislation can only be as strong as the agencies that enforce them (because Argentina is a Federation and Catholic-ish.) Public hospitals have a history in Argentina of profiting of poor women.127

The implications concerning reproductive rights related to the death of Chiara Paez need to be contemplated. Ada Beatriz, the head of a local women’s rights group, The Meeting House, noted that, “The deplorable case of this young girl has triggered a reaction in society and has
raised awareness about femicides in Argentina. People are saying that’s enough, not one more femicide” (Reuters 2015). However, what is underplayed significantly was the state in which Chiara was prior to her murder. She was fourteen and pregnant. To be pregnant at any age in a country where abortions are still illegal limits the choices a woman has in regard to family planning and her future in general. Not to mention, because birth control is also highly stigmatized and not free of charge it creates additional barriers for minors. As this case shows, price paid for having unprotected sex can be life.

I “googled” her name. That is what I first do when I am introduced to new people either virtually or in person. This is a reflex that originates in wanting to confirm if a person’s virtual identity is consistent with what I already know of them. Also, at times I do it to learn about any telling detail that could influence the direction or substance of my (potential) relationship. For example, when I learned that my “very Christian” cousin was a (virtual) member of a “family values” Facebook page, I immediately un-friended her. I did so virtually and in real life. Family Values” is code word for anti-woman and anti-gay, which I have a zero-tolerance policy for in my (personal) life. These types of clues into a persona’s “real” self can help ensure that I do not invest time and effort into a relationship that is doomed from the very beginning. Once you know there is no (sustainable) common ground, shared DNA becomes less and less a reason to remain “friends.” However, there is something that feels wrong about “googling” a deceased minor. I mean, what could I possibly find out about Chiara?

When I typed in her name, the first result was her Facebook page, which was still open to the public. I clicked on the link, and almost immediately regretted it. There she was smiling, with her friends, and full of life. Her page said she lived in Hollywood and she went to school at a Catholic high school. I did too at her age. My heart sunk because she was there on my screen, but in actuality I knew she was buried, along with her hopes and dreams for her future self. The
comments of her page confirmed that she was loved, appreciated, and deeply missed by people who knew her and people who knew of her alike. The world is a sadder place when you realize a life full of potential and dreams is lost in such a tragic way. I imagine that for her family, putting down her Facebook page would in some way sever one more tie to her memory. At least, this is what I thought because every now and then, I still visit my father’s in-law’s page. I even leave messages on holidays or his birthday. Somewhere in the back of my mind, I think that surely there is Wi-Fi in the afterlife.

The sequence of events that lead to Paez’s death are still murky but enough evidence has been gathered and compared with her boyfriend’s confession, some details independently are indisputable. Chiara Paez had been out to dinner with her friends before going to meet her boyfriend, Mauricio Clavero, age sixteen, shortly after midnight. The crime was committed in Rufino, which is in the Province of Santa Fe. Clavero claimed that they had sexual relations and soon thereafter got into an argument concerning her pregnancy. He confessed that he did not want to be a father, and an autopsy revealed that she had traces in her blood of an illegal drug that induced abortions. He then claimed that he threw a slipper at her and that she fell and hit her head and that this was the cause of her death. However, when her body was excavated in his backyard, it was filled with bruises and contusions all over her face and head that confirmed that she was brutally beaten. He buried her in his backyard, the same place where he would have an asado the following day. After confessing to his biological father, he was turned in to the police. Rumors spread that his mother was more than likely an accomplice with her boyfriend, both were pegged as “bad people” within their neighborhood (La Gaceta 2015).

When they found her body, reports stated that Chiara was in the fetal position when they excavated her body. This detail is haunting. Could this tragedy have been avoided? Did it matter if Chiara wanted to keep the baby? That we will never know but I feel confident in asserting that
it did matter that in Argentina abortion is illegal and contraception a commodity most available to the privileged. Or was it inevitable given that, as Beatriz explains, “…It’s a cultural issue. The aggressor feels a woman belongs to him and he can do what he wants with her. We’re talking about machismo that sees a woman as an object, as inferior, and somehow has to be obeyed. If she doesn’t, disobedience is punished with beatings and even death” (Reuters 2015)
Chapter 6, Part 2: Choosing Yourself

Miami, Florida

“The cure for everything is saltwater: sweat, tears, or the sea.” - Isak Dinesan

We sat on the sand, and talked to each other while looking out at the ocean like we had so many nights before. Except now, we were older, a bit wider, heavier, and I was now a mother to a son. Something we both concluded was “unimaginable” when “we were young.” Abruptly, she took a deep breath, “I had to get an abortion.” I was unable to absolve her of what she thought, deep down, was unforgivable. I knew how she felt, that is what brought me to feminism, realizing I had nothing to feel sorry about when I chose to terminate my pregnancy at twenty-two. I completely understood her need to get it out. It was one of those rare nights where I did not have my notebook or family near me in Miami. I knew if I did, it would become awkward. I had cleared up my day to make sure I could spend it with Luna right into the night. I felt that if the stars were in my favor, I would be able to see the sunrise like the good old days. However, I had already received a text from Pablito who was telling me he would wait up for me.

I met Luna when I lived in Miami and she used to date a really good friend of mine, Axel. Axel however had been deported a few months prior because he was arrested on his way home from work. He was speeding and they found a gram of cocaine in his car when he was pulled over. He had prior warrants out for his arrest for unpaid parking tickets and one thing led to another. He was now in Buenos Aires, working in construction and Luna said he was, “building luxury apartments he would never be able to buy.” He left Luna with half of the money he had saved but in part because he thought she would also return to Argentina with him.

Since they had recently found out that she was pregnant, he never considered she would want to stay in Miami. She paid also for a private lawyer who had led her to believe he could get
Axel out but no amount of money could have freed him from the detention center. Luna eventually refused to go back to Argentina. While Axel was one of the most hard-working individuals I had ever met, she did not see a future with him in Argentina anymore. He worked during the day as a waiter, by night as a food-runner, and on his days off he would try to pick up extra shifts. He would wash dishes if the dishwasher needed to be covered. I used to call him a “machine.” We were neighbors, and remained in touch even after I moved back to New York. We followed each other’s social media feeds. We’d like each other’s photos as a way of maintaining a connection; this is how we stayed up to date on important life events and new looks. We were known for documenting it all (gratuitous selfies.)

One day, Luna called me and I could barely understand her on the other end of the line. She called me soon after she had the abortion, and I just stayed on the line with her as she sobbed, and I listened. I remember I had called her when I had miscarried a few years before. For a moment I realized that abortion and miscarriage were the same word in Spanish, “aborto.” There was no real distinction in the words, although I knew they were very different experiences, both had a mourning component. I knew that I was going to Miami soon and so I wanted to make sure we got a chance to connect again without the distraction of fieldwork or family. It was never my intention to include her in my research however; she wanted me to tell her story so “it could mean something.” I found that Barbara Sutton’s study of women post the economic crisis in Argentina could be extended to Argentine women who were forced to leave, in their attempt to heal from the scars inflicted by neoliberal policies. She asserts that, “Women with disparate economic conditions had to transform aspects of their lifestyles with repercussion on their bodies…The bodily grievances that women expressed encompassed not only distress about their reduced access to critical resources to sustain the maternal body (e.g. good quality good and healthcare), but also concerns about physical appearance and beauty” (Sutton 2010:43). Luna
had told me that another reason she thought about the importance of terminating her pregnancy was because in a very beauty-conscious Miami, she would be limited in where she could find work. She stated, “Have you seen a fat girl working as a hostess, serving drinks, or bottles on Lincoln Road?” It was one of those anomalies that was accompanied by a rationalization, “she must be related to the owners.”

Luna was from Rosario, Argentina and I knew she had no other family but Axel. They never married because they never saw a need to since they were both undocumented and that would limit their chances of one day adjusting their status. They never planned on finding life partners outside of each other, but the possibility of marrying someone else was something that they needed to consider. She worked as a hostess by day and went to school at night to learn English. We had been days drinking and talking about everything from when I almost burned my apartment making French toast to the time she and I went to get our noses pierced. That night I had a terrible table at the restaurant and I went to cry in the kitchen. When she gave me a tissue, I blew my nose and out came my earing. I laughed-cried about it when it happened, and laugh-cried when we remembered. We were sitting at the beach and for a moment, I found the nerve to ask her about Axel but I did not want to ask about the pregnancy. That felt too invasive, and I knew that her choice was more than likely not an easy one because it never really is.

Luna told me that on the day she found out she was pregnant, she cried with happiness when she told Axel. Apparently, a year before they decided to leave to Miami, she had gotten an illegal abortion in Argentina. She said it was traumatic, shameful, and expensive. Her mother “knew a girl” who worked in an OB/GYN office that doubled as a clandestine abortion clinic. She knew that if she did not want to have complications, it was probably best to get the procedure done in this office when compared to the other options, which were cheaper but significantly more dangerous. They were working to save enough money to buy tickets to come
to Miami, Florida where a few of Axel’s friends were already living and working. They were surprised by this unplanned pregnancy and opted to terminate it. Axel assured her, “we can have more children” and she felt it was “not the right time.” The financial strain of a pregnancy would inevitably derail their ability to migrate.

Sutton contextualizes this circumstance, “Among the bodily problems that poor and working-class women mentioned where difficulty taking care of contraceptive needs, poor diets, inadequate medical attention in public hospitals, physical overwork, little time to rest, and exhaustion from the combination of unpaid work and income generating activities in a social milieu in which women are still expected to do most the care and household work” (44). I knew that Axel cooked most of the meals, but it took both of them working to ensure that they would be able to eat. For this reason theirs immediate plans did not include having a child. Luna was an only child and did not only wanted to have a child one day, she wanted to have a few so they could grow up feeling like they were “part of a family.”

Luna was working in a hospital in Rosario, when she met Axel. He had come into the emergency room with an injury he got from playing soccer barefoot in the plaza. Her eyes watered as she recalled how he made her laugh in the waiting room. Each time he would retell the story, the stakes got higher and his opponents greater. She said he even would refer to himself in the third person. “Axel takes the ball, goes through, slips it through his legs, and Axel looks at the net…” She laughed, “You would think he was Maradona.” Axel later confessed that he was actually playing with his little cousins and that he had actually tripped on his own feet. The ball was nowhere near him when he hit the ground, which she found endearing. After five years living together, they knew they wanted to start a family but they could not do so in Rosario because they barely were able to pay for their studio apartment. Though they had no desire to relocate to Buenos Aires, it was inevitable if they wanted to make more money to move north.
They left together to Buenos Aires and stayed there until they made enough to go to Miami where they quickly found work within restaurants. Axel wanted to eventually open up a small café and Luna wanted to be a nurse. She said she wanted to be able to serve in another way.

On the day Axel was arrested, he had been complaining of headaches. Luna had told him that it probably had to do with the fact that he was working so much and that maybe he should take a few days to rest. She told him that she did not want to go on a vacation, but instead they could just stay in, watch movies, and above all sleep. She had long worried about his health because she said that he lived on a diet of red bull and weed. I asked her about the cocaine. I knew that it is not uncommon when you work in the restaurant industry to be exposed to these types of drugs that give you “more energy.” Luna told me that he had tried it before and said that it would help him just get through. However, given that he had just found out that they were going to be parents, he promised her he would not do it again. However, he wanted to pick up even extra shifts because he wanted to give his child “everything.” Luna knew that eventually she would have to stop working because once her belly would be pronounced, she would not be suited to “serve drinks” or even “seat people” who were going to drink. Luna laments, “somehow, we thought it was time. We could afford a child and that would make sure that Miami would become our home. That was the first time we thought, this was going to be our place.”

Once the lawyer told Luna that Axel’s order of deportation was absolute, they were left with very little options (or so it seemed.) “Each time I realized that I had nothing to go back to in Argentina except Axel, I did not want to go back to that life in Buenos Aires. I go back and if I changed my mind, I’m stuck.” Life in Argentina was particularly stressful for poor and working-class women because the limitations were heavy where as in the United States, Luna felt that a poor and working-class immigrant woman in Miami had even more possibilities than most
privileged women in Argentina who still had to negotiate the prevailing machismo in public life. “Look at Cristina (Kirchner) she is the President of Argentina and still has to conform to tradition. She still only wears black!” Luna was referencing Cristina’s public persona as a widow in mourning. However, holding the highest office in Argentina did not “cure” the pervasive sexism embedded within the culture. Argentina remains a society in which “men have to be macho, and women have to do as they are told” (BBC World Service 2015).

Luna told me that when she was in her tenth week; she decided to stay. “I knew that I could figure something out but not while being a mother. I want my child to have a father and since that would not be possible, I thought it was important to make a decision that made sense.” She told me that the process to terminate the pregnancy was different than what she had previously experienced in Buenos Aires though she paid for both in cash. She also told me that there were Christian protestors when she went to the clinic telling her “not to do it because God was watching.” Luna told me that at that moment she thanked God she was an atheist. Axel threatened her that if she terminated the pregnancy, he did not “want to be with her anymore.” The sad thing was that, the distance brought her to a similar conclusion; he no longer was “with her” (literally too.)

At that point I noticed that Luna sounded even older to me because of her foresight. She said, “I knew that I would never forgive him for forcing me to keep the child and when I realized he could not make the choice for me, I did it for me.” This coincides with the time that Axel went dark on social media. She started to cry, “I feel alone now but I don’t regret it. I can be someone here…” In the absence of Axel, documentation, and a stable job Luna felt determined to stay in Miami. I put my arm around her and we both cried…together. “Time to drink, right?” And then again, we started to laugh knowing we would cry again soon. The night was young and I had gotten a text that Pablito had fallen asleep so I was not going to rush home.
Reproducing Injustices

“We do not think of the power stolen from us and the power withheld from us in the name of the institution of motherhood” - Adrienne Rich

I would like to consider the relationship between the “business of medicine” and its ability to violate vulnerable bodies and examine this through the prism of reproductive justice throughout the Americas. I do this in order to accentuate the way in which a shared Colonial history engenders similar disadvantages and vulnerabilities for women. In order to support this claim, I consider Argentina’s reproductive injustice in relation to that of Puerto Rico and Guatemala, which identifies as Pentecostal. I also wish to examine how the blurry demarcation between the nation and the Christian Church exacerbate the vulnerability of poor women. Patriarchal Christianity, I argue, becomes the weapon of choice used by the State against defenseless women and children within public and private life. The need to control reproduction is also an embedded feature of imperialism, as I argue within the case of Puerto Rico and its relationship with the United States.

Reproductive justice, according to “Sistersong,” a collective of US women of color, felt that reproductive rights excluded from its platform the concerns of “immigrants and women of color,” thus highlights that these differences mattered greatly. Additionally, by using a framework that was inclusive of “social justice,” this allowed focus to be paid to “the right to have children, not have children, and to parent children in safe and healthy environments.” The term reproductive justice expanded the scope of women’s rights and their struggles to not rest solely their bodies. By decentering abortion and contraception (though never fully), the reproductive justice framework also considers the affect of “incarceration, immigration, racism, housing, and abortions policies—the effect on personal and social reproduction.” This approach
expands the host of factors that contribute to the challenges and multiple barriers to health that “the most marginalized face” because of profit driven health practices and projects, which can be emboldened by imperialism (Morgan 2015, Briggs 2003).

Consider the case of Puerto Rico, where sterilization rates are said to be the highest compared to other parts of the world. The United States has a history and present-day tendency to have class and race inform reproductive policies and legislations, to which men and women of color are particularly disadvantaged. Iris Lopez highlights that the economies of both Puerto Rico and the United States was not only a result of emigration but also of “sterilization.” She thinks that while it is impossible to accurately account for all of the sterilizations, because the Puerto Rican government still denies that this was ever an sanctioned policy, “by 1974, 200,000 or 35 percent, of women in Puerto Rico had been sterilized…Doctors approved it as a way to control Puerto Rico’s overpopulation problem,” which was determined a cause of its poverty (Lopez 2008:8). Addressing the conditions that predisposed women to this type of violence, Parrot and Cummings argue that, “The high number of sterilizations performed on Puerto Rican women was motivated not by an educated choice for personal and sexual freedom but rather by patriarchal and capitalist ideologies of Puerto Rican culture and United States federal policies” (Parrot and Cummings 2006:49)

My father told me that his cousin had been sterilized without her consent during the sterilization campaign in Puerto Rico. He is a very colorful storyteller, in fact, my absolute favorite in the world. His version of the events were simple, “she went in to get her tonsils
removed, and came out with a hysterectomy.” I had to reason to believe the accuracy of his version. This is the same man who told my sister when she was in second grade that he had built the George Washington Bridge by himself. He had also told me that “Maldonado” was the Spanish translation to “Kennedy.” So I grew up believing I was, “technically,” a Kennedy (which explained my family’s overall predisposition to addiction, politics, and crime.) Yet, he had no reason to make this story given its implications. He came from a rural and poor socioeconomic background in Puerto Rico, so he inhabited the same social world as many of the women who were sterilized without their “full” consent. No matter how doubtful I could be about how “ingenuous” she was to the procedure, the fact was that 35 percent of Puerto Rican women in the name of addressing poverty were sterilized. I needed to look past the numbers though. Because of this, I felt it was important to resolve how I felt about my own choice to “become a mother” within the context of my own body, profession, and identity.

The Body, Choice, and Violence: Colonial Residuals

“The Body is not a thing, it is a situation: it is our grasp on the world and our sketch of our project.” – Simone De Beauvoir, The Second Sex, 1949

“Let us study and prepare our generation for the future struggles that draw closer…” – Luisa Capetillo, Puerto Rican Anarchist and Feminist

In 2010 I read a testimony by Irene Vilar that changed my understanding of what it means to use one’s body as a form of resistance and simultaneously understood it as a site of individual and collective trauma, Impossible Motherhood: Testimony of an Abortion Addict (2009). The memoir chronicles not only Vilar’s relationship and marriage with her (Argentine) professor (who was 23 years her senior) but also her (complex) “addiction” to abortions. Her brutal awe in her reproductive capability tested the limits of what she deemed an “impossible
motherhood.” Her narrative was especially telling of a history of Colonialism and Imperialism in Puerto Rico.

I wish to consider the value of testimony in exploring the issue of reproductive justice and violence, particularly in this chapter and building on the previous ones as well. Parrot and Cummings further address the value of using testimonies claiming they have “routinely been the voices of those who have been silenced, excluded, and marginalized by their societies.”

Furthering this claim, they argue that, “Personal narratives illuminate the oppressive conditions that exist for women (conditions that have yet to be fully realized)” and accordingly testimonials serve to, “acknowledge the circumstances in which the stories emerged and fully account for those conditions.” In an effort to account for these conditions, I have to consider that, “the contextualized, lived experience of individuals and the meaningfulness that results is central to understand the human experience,” and imperative to understand the violence women face because of the internalization and the practice of patriarchy (Parrot and Cummings 2006:16).

I adopted Vilar’s memoire in 2011 while teaching a “Latina Woman” course because I wanted to emphasize the importance of “truth telling” for Latinas who have to negotiate their individual and social identity against what we concluded was “a history of silences and erasures.” Many of us had learned through our discussions that we did not know our family histories passed our grandmothers and what we knew was always filled with missing information and a lack of accurate timelines and details. A lot of this is a result of circumstances that are out of an individual’s control. For example, my maternal grandfather registered three of his twelve kids at the town’s City Hall with the same birth day years. Meaning, three of his kids who were born by the same mother and as a result of different pregnancies, were born in the same year. This is not only scientifically impossible, but something that has been made “official” and part of our family history. While other omissions or faulty details is a concerted “choice” to hide what
can be thought of as a “shameful secret.”

For example, my mother used to tell me that her employer raped my aunt and that this was the reason that she was a single mother. I would learn later in life that she did not want to admit to me that my aunt had actually engaged with in an extra-marital affair and was a fully consenting adult when she conceived my cousin. However, I later considered how much “choice” could there be when the person you are engaging with in a sexual relationship is also the same person to whom you sell your labor? Maybe it was not rape, but it arguably was not fully consensual. My mother did not want me to think that my aunt “chose” to have an affair because that would make her (in her mind) “an adulteress,” but in my mind, she became at that point relatable. My aunt, like many women, myself included, did not make the “best” decisions about which partner she would share her body with. However, this is part of life, reality, and much more valuable than thinking that reproduction comes only out of an Immaculate Conception or violence. One of my former students, Claudia O’Brien reflected on Vilar’s account in a blog that was created for the class. She thought, “While she (Vilar) recognizes the man that tormented her life was toxic for her, she largely blames herself for her ‘addiction.’ To me this is an internalized oppression, a colonized mind.” Reading this review of Vilar’s testimony highlighted “shame” as a direct residual of “colonialism.” She affirmed, “This is the legacy that the US government has left for Puerto Rican women. Positive motherhood is defined by white women, while negative motherhood that needs to be controlled is defined by women of color” (O’Brien 2001). This is just one example of the countless times my students have “schooled” me.

Vilar is the granddaughter of Lolita Lebrón, who is “technically the first Puerto Rican Woman in Congress.” I worked for Congresswoman Velazquez (2004-2006.) I was the community coordinator for her district office in the Lower East Side and Chinatown. Rep. Nydia
Velazquez was the first elected Puerto Rican woman to Congress; every time she heard the Lolita Lebrón joke she (visibly) did not find it in the least amusing. Or if she did, she never let on with a smile. Based on my discernments, she did not find humor or pleasure in many things that did not center on her sacrifices. She often shared with her staff how she suffered from stomach problems, lack of sleep, and had very little time for “anything but work.” This (self) perception does not necessarily match the current public perception of Congress as hard working and efficient. Nydia did not have children of her own, arguably due to the constraints of her political career and later in life marriage. I had eloped almost two months after starting my job with her office, and was pregnant two months after that. (It was a brutal winter that year.)

When I informed my Chief of Staff that I was pregnant, his exact words were, “I guess I should say congratulations, but I hope this is not an excuse to work.” I worked well into my ninth month because I was not told immediately that my maternity leave would be approved. By the first few months I had worked enough hours to account for 12 months of full-time work, but that did not count “on paper.” I was an exempt employee so while I was paid for a forty-hour workweek, it was expected that I would additionally attend events at night and on the weekends. Fed up one day in the district office, I told the Congresswoman that I was fine if they “let me go.” I just wanted them to be explicit about their reason, that it was not incompetence but because “I had gotten pregnant.” I was very detailed in my weekly reports and had sufficient non-solicited press to attest to my competence. Pregnancy hormones often work like alcohol; it
provides a social lubricant that does not mix well with “bullshit” and so the prospect of being fired did not intimidate me.

As a Federal employee, I was ineligible to receive State benefits (disability) which rushed me back to work after six-weeks (despite having had a C-section. My OB GYN was furious about signing my “fit to return to work” papers. But, I begged her to do it because I needed to start getting paid again.) It was at Congresswoman Velazquez’s “discretion” to offer me paid maternity leave, but she decided against it or rather, never really considered it. I remember that one time, during my early pregnancy and before my announcement, she started to ask me about my private life in a way that felt very similar to an intrusive mother. Until this day, I regret not telling her (politely) to “mind her business,” something I could never tell my own mother but ever so often shout with my inside voice to her. She asked me, “What does Pablo work in?” Pablo had told me that she had come into the restaurant he was busing tables at and though they locked eyes, she did not say anything to him. She ignored him though she had already met him numerous times before. I had sufficiently engaged with her at that point to know he was not exaggerating, also I had confirmed with her schedule (which is public) that she was indeed where Pablo worked, at the time of his shift. I wanted to give her the benefit of the doubt that maybe it was not her, and also wanted to figure out a way to prove this story when I shared it (publically.)

I told her, that he was “a busboy” and was going to school to “learn English.” She continued to press me for more information and I told her that though we had just married, he was “undocumented.” She then told me to not let anyone know that she knew that he was “illegal” because “as a Federal agent, she was supposed to report him.” It was not at all surprising that she was not very clear on how Immigration laws worked nor did she really care to learn. On July 4, 2006 she held an immigration forum in conjunction with Congresswoman Serrano of the Bronx. We the staffers really did not have a “choice” to be there. I had raised the
issue of “timing.” Most of the people who would benefit from the forum were probably working (since it is a holiday) in industries that do not close such as restaurants and bars. Also, if they did close, this holiday was probably one of the few that they would be able to spend with their families and friends. So on a day with very little public transportation options, July 4th did not seem like a “right fit” for an immigration forum. However, I suspect that she thought it would make a great headline.130

My resignation from the United States House of Representatives was a “choice” that I was able to make because I felt accountable to my family and did not want a “career” which would create any sort of distance from them. I had to weigh what mattered more to me—saving a historical building from demolition or saving my family from what I foresaw as an inevitable disintegration (Ferguson 2006). While some feminists might consider that I should not feel “guilt” for working outside of the home, I would like to highlight that by exercising my “choice” I am articulating a power that many women who are “forced” to stay at home lack. However, in order for me not to feel “guilt,” I would have to rewire my brain or be born again in another culture. Guilt was my mother’s preferred child rearing practice, and the preferred one by her mother, and so on. On the first day after I returned from maternity leave, I had a community meeting after a full day at the office, which forced me to get home at nine at night. Both husband and child had eaten dinner, and I was too tired to talk. I remember I cried so much because I felt so sad and yes, remorseful. This was a standard routine for many weeks before deciding that I was more than professionally unfilled, but personally frustrated. I was suffering from an acute case of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) on my family.

I knew enough about the Congresswoman to know that it would be misguided on my part to expect the implementation of “family friend” work policies. I had become accustomed to attending community meetings, events, and fundraisers as part of my work. It was great before I
actually became pregnant because I would attend all of these events where there was a copious amount of free food and alcohol. As a newlywed who was paid once a month, working after hours had to also double as “date-night” for Pablo and I. However, once I became pregnant, I not only wanted more time to rest, but I physically needed it. Also, it was not a fair arrangement because for every minute that I was not compensated for (with money or time), I was directly taking it away from my family. At least this is how I increasingly felt. Our office did not remunerate in any form “overtime” which was a direct lost of time. How could I expect the Congresswoman to empathize with my anxiety about “providing” financially, emotionally, and intensely for a newborn? This is not to say that one needs be a feminist to do so, but what I am saying is that her disconnect from these work/life balance dilemmas revealed a lot about her own (personal) ideas about family. I say this because as a mother, I find it important to empathize with other mothers. This is why I allow my students to take their children to class if they lack child-care and I allow for extra time to complete assignments and for them to keep their cellphones on during class. Why? I get it and don’t forget it.

I tend to learn more by example than theory. I concluded that I had gotten an intimate look into the perils of being a woman politician, or rather, the melees of working for one who did not support (openly) a politic of maternal empowerment (in the work place.) O’Reilly notes that, “mothers are accorded agency to affect social change through childbearing or activism but little attention is paid to what this agency does or means for the mother herself in the context of her own life” (O’Reilly 2012:62). In my professional experience, I learned that within politics and diplomacy, what you say has to sound good on paper, even if impossible in practice. It is interesting that she voted in 2007 No on prohibiting job discrimination based on sexual orientation, HR3685: Employment Non-Discrimination Act. Rep. Hastings reasoned that “it was not the place of the Federal government to legislate how each and ever workplace operates,”
which Congresswoman Velazquez supported. This move seems to run counter to protecting the rights of a worker, especially a pregnant one that the United States Federal government defines as “temporarily disabled.” My relationship with my employer was literally one with the State and in many ways harbored historical dynamics around notions of a woman’s place. I was to be either home or at the service of the House of Representatives. I can say that it felt oppressive not being able to mother the way I wanted to, revealing in fact how my public life was deeply entangled with family relationships that are also, “implicated in patriarchy and patriarchal relationships” (Hallstein 2012:242). However, knowing that I had a “choice,” definitely liberated me from my own guilt when I exercised it.

O’Reilly, a motherhood scholar, posits in an introduction to an anthology on maternal empowerment in the 21st Century that, “…the category of mother is distinct from the category of woman, and that many of the problems mothers face (socially, economically, politically, culturally, and psychologically and so forth) are specific to women’s roles and identity as mothers. Indeed, mothers are oppressed under patriarchy as women and as mothers.” She notes that despite forty (plus) years of the feminist movement, mothers remain “disempowered” and underrepresented as the object of analysis within research and activist movements, thus necessitating not only visibility but also sustained “maternal” empowerment (O’Reilly 2011:16-17). While O’Reilly’s contribution reveals is that even though the lived experiences of mothers throughout the world varies, they are all a direct result, despite the assorted manifestations, of (internalized and blatant) “patriarchy.”

I eventually came to terms that I was unwilling to sacrifice who I wanted to be as a mother with who I did not want to be as a professional. I resigned and returned to academia but not without letting my Chief of Staff know that I would (eventually) write about the issues I faced as a mother and Congressional Aide during my tenure. This experience, even while in a
privileged position in comparison to many other mothers, did compel to question my understanding on the value of motherhood in my own life and how it could clash with public expectations. While I am no Hillary Clinton, I can say with all honesty these experiences are all chronicled in “the e-mails.” I printed out every one on my last day and have saved them since (just in case.)

O’Reilly takes up the issue of maternal empowerment from a feminist lens, while also expanding a framework to look at the various institutions that need to comprehensively value the work of mothers inside and outside of the home, but also consider the various ways in which within patriarchal societies, it can be oppressive. She highlights that, “motherhood, as it is currently perceived and practiced in patriarchal societies, is disempowering if not oppressive for a multitude of reasons; among them are the societal devaluation of mother work, the endless tasks of privatized mothering, and the impossible standards of idealized motherhood.” She asks us to “rethink received or accepted notions of how and why motherhood functions as an oppressive institution for women” (O’Reilly 2012:63). I offer my own considerations about “choice” in order to reflect on the premium patriarchy places on motherhood. I would like to also interject a new reading to Carol Hanich’s essay, “The Personal is Political” as a result of my testimony and how I undertake "choice" in various contexts. I offer diverse but related examples of how women share the burden of these choices that manifest in the body or in its surveillance. By placing these examples in conversation, I seek to show how, “personal problems are political problems” that within Latino culture, these problems are inextricable from the Church.

**The Need to Exhale and Bleed**

Vilar notes that, “the language of choice” is problematic when thinking about the body and nationalism. She expands on the various meanings it can have throughout her memoire, while highlighting that it implies a free will that is based on individual freedom. This inference
can then obscure the dynamics between social constraints and human activity and the way choice is determined by larger institutional structures and ideological messages. I find this to be true in the most micro and macro sense and application of the word “choice.” Can our physical body ever find meaning outside of the social one? Vilar deeply reflects that, “My body remained part of a fragile landscape with no passport of its own, stuck within a hesitant country, and island adrift between Old World empires to the east and their independent colonies to the west, and between the new empire to the north that I lived in and the nationalist grandmother to the south I couldn’t stop thinking of” (Vilar 2009). Throughout the Americas, women have been conceived as engines of reproduction and therefore her duties within public and private life are imbued with Christian and national values in which motherhood becomes the ultimate form of citizenship and obstructing it becomes an important part of the way in which “monopolies of power’s” control society. Carolina explains that:

Monopolies of physical power are, then as seen as a resource for groups to establish their own brand of leadership in a given society…even within these monopolies of physical power that represent a civilized stage in the development of societies, those who resort to physical violence either have the support of authorities, or have to be punished for their acts. In other words, in civilized societies, every violent action demands a response from authorities: either perpetrators act with the implicit support of the authorities, or they are penalized for their criminal actions. Consequently, if central authorities exercising the monopoly of physical force cannot fully eradicate acts of violence, they have to maintain their legitimacy by rejecting those acts that defy the rule of law” (Rocha 2012:138).

Vilar roots the tensions of Puerto Rico’s violent relationship with the United States in her own (reproductive) body, which adds another dimension when thinking about challenging the monopolies of power. Vilar recounts her addiction to abortion (having had fifteen in a span of 12 years) as a performance that conceivably challenged Puerto Rican’s history of forced sterilization, by her exercising (and questionably abusing) her “right to choose.” However, her choice could not be construed outside of what her husband called, “the burden of freedom.” He told her that not only did he prefer women “uninformed” and “untouched” but also that, “if you are with me, you have to ensure the burden of freedom and (that) requires, in part, remaining
childless…I will not be a victim of your displacement.” Later she realizes that there was a problem in her decision making, because as soon as becoming pregnant, she would “choose him (her husband) over the baby,” despite knowing about the ensuing “self-hatred, repulsion, and shame” that engulfed her soon thereafter the procedures (Palmer 2010).

I would like to also consider as a mirror to Vilar’s abortion the performance piece, “Mientras ellos siguen libres? (While they remain free?)”, by the Guatemalan performance artist Regina Jose Galindo. In this work, Galindo has her hands and legs tied to a bed with umbilical cords which is meant to reference abortion (which is illegal in Guatemala, a country that overwhelmingly identifies as evangelical.) In Kevin Lewis O’Neill’s ethnographic case for Christian citizenship within Guatemala’s Pentecostal community he notes that, “Christian citizens in Guatemala, I found, are more likely to pray for Guatemala than pay their taxes; they tend to speak in tongues for the soul of the nation rather than vote in general elections; and organize prayer campaigns to fight crime rather than organize their communities against the same threat” (xxi). He argues that, “neo-Pentecostals are actually doing things as Christian citizens, that their efforts at prayer, fasting, and exorcisms have an effect not just on the individual but also on Guatemalan society and its struggling democracy” (xvi). My question is how a society that is so invested in following God’s mandate and living sanctimonious lives still struggle with gender-based violence that is reaching epidemic levels (Guinan 2015)?

In response to this query Parrot and Cummings note that, “When countries are faced with political turmoil, the cultural instability is reflected by what happens with the family structure. Women’s safety within a community may be determined by what that community is facing in a political context” (Parrot and Cummings 2006:25). Therefore during times of social and economic transformations, women become even more vulnerable to the angst this engenders in men who feel that they are losing control. In the performance, Galindo is really (visibly)
pregnant, placing her own condition as a crucial part of the spectacle. She also alludes in this way to rape and femicide, which are part of Guatemala’s history.131

My Puerto Rican grandfather, Clemente Maldonado was part of the Puerto Rican Independence movement. He came from a middle-class family but due to his alcoholism, his family would eventually disown him. He met my grandmother, Librada Rivera (her first name literally translates to the Liberated one) a black single-mother who worked “cooking for rich people” while he was homeless. She was poor and had to provide for my aunt Tonia, but despite this would manage to bring my grandfather food everyday and check on him. He slept on the streets due to nights of reckless and endless drinking. Eventually, out of persistence or circumstance, they fell in love and he became sober and politically active. I am not sure on what came first in his life, love for my grandmother, his sons, himself, or Puerto Rico. He made no “distinctions” in how he talked about them. My earliest memories are of his strong critiques of religion and particularly, the evangelical church. He warned me about how they (the Church) would “try to control everything.” He also explained that when they (the Americans) sent missionaries to Puerto Rico what they really wanted to do was Colonize Puerto Rico like the Catholic Church did with all of Latin America. The oral history I acquired from him and my father still illuminates my understanding of the relationship between Church and State. Their contributions to my professional formation were deeply personal. Di Leonardo argues that, “the historical value of the narrated life experiences of those who, through lack of economic resources, education, and political power, have not produced the documents and memories upon which more conventionally oriented historians rely in representing the past” (Di Leonardo 1987:4). They were the first ethnographers I encountered.

Another complaint my grandfather had about the Church was pretty radical. He said that they “ellos” (the Church and the United States) “did not care about women.” He told me that
they both attacked my “independence.” While I was seven when he would share these viewpoints, at thirty-five and countless academic and personal research, I can say I fully agree. He is not the first person to think about the relationship between womanhood, colonization, and Puerto Rico. However, he is the first person to expose me to it. Lopez notes that the Catholic Church and the Puerto Rican Nationalist Parties (the *Independentistas*) both were, “opposed to birth control and sterilization on national, religious, and cultural grounds.” In fact, she claims they feared that “birth control would eliminate Puerto Rican cultural values by wiping out Puerto Ricans.”

I found this view on the relationship between reproduction and national identity exceptionally relevant because it represents the inextricability of liberation and the body. The Church and the State both adopted “patriarchal attitude towards motherhood and gender,” seeing women as not only “weak and defenseless,” but also as “easily fooled and manipulated” (10). The quest to control their own reproduction could not be divorced from the collective quest for national independence, intersecting nationalist and feminist projects. (Briggs 2003). I have a profound respect for my grandfather because his ideology was especially influential in the formation of my own political consciousness and devotion to personal and communal liberation projects. I have worked as a community activist for a considerable part of my adult life on a variety of social justice issues which include anti-racism, women’s rights, immigration reform, and community empowerment (Chang 2012, Ferguson 2006, Anderson 2006, Álvarez and Maldonado-Salcedo 2011). However, like all of us, my grandfather was not a perfect man. My father told me that when he used to drink, he would have to run and hide with his mother and sister to a neighbor’s house because he would become violent. Until one day, my grandmother, who was six feet tall, fought back and knocked him out with a branch. She let him know, rather definitively that “things were going to change.” That was the last time my father recalls my
grandfather ever drank. Instead of drinking, he became active with the Puerto Rican independence movement.

I inherited from my grandfather, not only my eyes, apartment, and nervous twitches, he also passed on to me a commitment to social justice, a critical mind, and more importantly a disposition for “convictions, over profit.” Due to his own principles, he was blacklisted and unemployable as a sugar cane cutter once it became known that he was in favor of a “Puerto Rico libre” (Free Puerto Rico.) This is also why he opted to move to New York, though, he really had no more options if he wanted to survive.

**Buenos Aires**

Axel texted me that he was running late, but five minutes later he was already walking through the door with the same haste that made him such a great waiter. I was waiting for him at the bar around the corner from my apartment. I was initially hesitant to meet up with him because I knew that there was bad blood between him and Luna however she urged me to do so. She had sent him a pair of Beats headphone, which I had kept in my bag. The waiter had asked me if I was OK because I was already on my second cup of coffee, and had gulped the soda water, which usually accompanies the coffee like a shot of tequila. I was nervous. Axel walked over to my table with arms wide open and when he hugged me, I tried to hold back tears.

The last time I saw him he looked differently. He now had dark circles under his eyes, he had gained weight, and his face looked swollen. I suspected this was due to heavy drinking, lack of exercise, and depression. In Miami, if you want to keep your job, if you work as a waiter you work out. You work out because you are constantly in motion taking orders, setting tables, and moving from the kitchen to the front of the house. However, on your leisure time, it is an investment to go to the gym or go for a run, it will make you “look” better but more than anything, also keep you from slowing down. Axel did not look like I remembered him anymore.
“And…how are you, petisa?” (Petisa means shorty.) I hugged him and felt that he somehow was smaller than what I remembered. We sat and did that thing that you do when you haven’t seen someone in a long time; you look at each other in silence, shake your head in disbelief, and smile. All of a sudden I felt as if the air conditioner had been shut down. I felt no breeze or was it that my heart was pounding faster because I did not know how to start a conversation. However, Axel took control. “I know you know her version of what happened.” I extended Luna’s gift in a bag with the same type of angst and discomfort one would feel knowing that there was contraband in the bag. Instead of looking inside the bag he took it and put it to the side. He was expecting an answer, a reaction, or both.

I tried to keep my cool but I am not very good at keeping my thoughts to myself and much less at keeping secrets of this sort. Granted, Luna had not asked me to keep anything from Axel, but I was obligated my girl-code to not let him know what she was going through, unless he was going to do something about it, I thought. But, he could not do much. I mean, even if he wanted to, he was here. With the intention of interrupting my thoughts, he startled me, “I hate her.”

I wanted to take back the gift bag. I did not want to be his friend I thought; I was Luna’s friend. Butt, why was I taking sides? I always side with a woman. That wasn’t fair. I knew how much Luna must have worked and saved in order to buy him something that he did not need. I remember how much I had to save to get me my own pair, after I had already bought one for each Pablo. I felt guilty for spending so much money on a pair of headphones. Luna wanted to send him the best one she could and she was still using the air piece that comes with your IPhone, those white ones. I cannot imagine going to serve and smile for customers, when you feel as sad as Luna felt. I felt that hate was a harsh word. I thought, maybe was going to sell the beats, to get back at her, for like a beer or a box of cigarettes. People can be that bitter, I thought.
My aunt told my mother that she wanted her part of the family inheritance (which was from the sell of her parent’s cement and mud house.) She said even if it was to use it to buy a plate of cassava and no more. My aunt was bitter because of an entire childhood full of disappointments, deprivations, and violence. Axel, how did he get so bitter? “What do you mean you hate her?” I was struggling to keep my cool because I had not even asked me how was she doing, how was she feeling.

“I hate her. I never want to see her again. I’m happy I’m here because I could just kill her if I see her.” I pushed back my chair a bit, crossed my head, and snapped my neck to the left.

“Really? Is that how you feel?” His face started to get red. “Yes, it’s how I feel. You know what she did, how can I forgive her?” Forgiveness is a beautiful thing when it is given for transgressions, wrongdoings, and mistakes, none of the things I felt Luna did. She did not ask for it, and he did not need to offer it. However, at this point, I knew I had to bite my tongue. I remember once when a therapist told me, “there is nothing wrong with putting yourself first.” I then crossed a boundary. “Well, you don’t need to forgive her because she did not do anything wrong.” Just fast as the words left my mouth, I started to think about all of the peer-review comments on how this anthropologist did not remain “objective” and showed a “biased” and that it “most certainly obscured her observations.” Oh no, I thought.

There goes the stereotype of the over emotional “spitfire” Latina. I did not mind (every now and then) the “bombshell” stereotype, even if I knew how detrimental it was in the everyday lives of Latinas. But on those days that I had very little sleep and had put even less effort into putting myself together, I could soothe my anxiety by reminding myself that I was naturally, “the bomb.” I know there is no such thing but I pick my battles based on how strong I feel at that moment. I tilted my neck again; I got Luna’s back I thought. “I’m serious, she did nothing wrong.”
“Really? Is that what you think?” I then realized it was not my place. “I’m sorry Axel, I shouldn’t have said that. It really isn’t none of my business, I just wanted to see you and give you what you sent you.” “Did you forget we were friends too he asked?” He had a valid point. Axel and I would get off at the same time, and he since he worked near by he would walk with me home. He actually was a really great guy I thought, from what I remember him but Luna’s story made me feel a certain kind of way about her choice, because I did not want to even engage in a conversation that would suggest otherwise. I was not willing to validate how he felt. I got up and said, “Loco, I’m out. I’m just a bit emotional, you know the change of climate, I have a lot of people around, I just am cranky.”

I gave him a hug, a proper way of saying hello after a long time, given with sincerity and happiness for reconnecting. “How have you been?” He broke down. We stood in the middle of the bar, hugging, and him trying to fight back tears with his head on my shoulder. He managed to say, “No one has asked me that.” I felt like tonight was not the night to talk any except the good memories we shared of living in Miami. I texted Pablo to meet us since I knew we were just going to really, informally and unofficially, catch up.

Axel texted me the next morning to make sure I did not have a raging hangover. We had closed out the bar and walked back to my apartment with the sun already out. By the plaza there was a group of kids singing songs by Los Piojos offering us a memorable backdrop. It felt like a typical summer morning in Buenos Aires. We walked proudly laughing and making plans for our next outing. We parted ways with the promise to reunite Sunday for an asado. My apartment did
not have a *Quincho* so I told him to meet us at my mother-in-law’s house in Lomas. I thought, we would get together, eat, drink, and catch up…again. I also felt that he would feel more comfortable if they were more people around, so my questions could feel less like an interrogation and more like a casual conversation. I was more Luna’s friend than his, and he knew this. He also knew about my project and had agreed to be interviewed again. However, I needed to make sure he felt the same way given all that had transpired. When he arrived to Lomas de Zamora, his taxi stopped and out he came with two bottles of Fernet Branca. It was certainly going to be a long night.

It was barely noon, but we knew we had to call it an early night anyway so we figured it was best to start the night as early as possible. I was wondering how did I bring up “informed consent” again, and as he was passing to greet Pablo who was lighting the fire in the back, he winked at me, “Petisa, I’m ready to talk today Ok, so you can interview me but do it before I start drinking because I don’t want to sound too gay.” I rolled my eyes, naturally he meant like a woman. I went and sat in the front of the house to smoke a cigarette with him. I picked back up many bad habits when I was in Buenos Aires. I had enough self-control in New York City to quit them again, but I feared it would get harder each time to do so. There was something about the angst I felt in Buenos Aires that normalized smoking and other behaviors that made bad choices appear like they were not “that bad,” comparatively speaking. This is why I objectively made countless bad choices using this logic. He asked me, “What do you want to know?”

I wanted to know why Axel said he hated Luna. I wanted to know why he had cocaine on him, was he using? I wasn’t going to be judgmental about. I would share with him Freud’s relationship with cocaine and how he used it to “open up.” In Markel’s work on Freud when discussing his cocaine use, he explains who in Freud’s infamous work on the matter, “he incorporates his own feelings, sensations and experiences in his scientific observations.” He then
writes, that in comparing this study with his previous works, a reader cannot help but be struck by the vast transition and feelings” (Markel 2011). Bowie and Maradona both battled and recovered from cocaine addiction. I was not going to berate him on it; even “the greatest” can fall short. When did he start using? I wanted to know if Axel planned to return to the United States.

I tried to keep it cool. “What do you plan to do here?” I thought that this question was broad enough, and sufficiently specific to how he saw himself now in relation to his future. “Live.” Maybe I needed to be more specific after all. “What do you plan to do here? What do you want to do here? You know what I mean.” I was not going to try to lead him to where I wanted him to go, I needed to spare each other the banter. “Live, that’s all I could do. Everyday here is the same thing. I have nothing to look forward to it and to plan. I hate her for taking that away from me.”

“You wanted to keep the baby? Or did you want her to come back to Argentina?” He did not hesitate to elucidate this dilemma. “I wanted her to keep the baby if she wanted to keep it because that is her choice. But because she did not want to keep it that already let me know how she felt about me and then she did not want to come back.” He shrugged his shoulders. He sounded hurt, heartbroken, but because he felt Luna did not love him anymore. “I would be happy with her anywhere. Here, there, as long as we have each other.” This was a difficult realization to hear. I empathized with him. The day I told my mother that Congresswoman Velazquez had mentioned “reporting Pablo,” I told her, “Imagine, I would have to move to Argentina.” My mother was shocked. “You would move?” I remember telling her, “Of course. We are a family, and we need to be together.” We were newly weds, I was significantly more idealistic, and younger. However, facing a similar situation today, I will follow him (ever since he touched my hand, I knew.) However, I was not in the same circumstance as Luna. I also
did not fully understand what it was to live with the limitations that Luna had. She did not want to return to Argentina especially because she knew that these limitations would be greater and virtually insurmountable. While Axel saw his life has a monochromatic existence, Luna, despite her uncertainty, she felt that she had opportunities and a future she could shape.

“I started to think about returning so I can work. Maybe I will meet someone. Maybe then we could get married.” I asked him how he thought he could return because if he crossed through the border, which was an arduous uncertain, and very dangerous route, he would not have legal status upon arrival. “I thought about trying to claim my Spanish citizenship. My grandfather was from Asturias, so I think there is a way.” That was a bureaucratic path that was just as prolonged and unreliable as crossing the Rio Bravo, especially given the recent trends of Argentines trying to claim European citizenship after the economic crisis and the current refugee crisis in Europe. It would be near impossible but I found comfort in knowing that he was thinking about a future, but it became sad to know that he could only envision one outside of Argentina.

“I still love her.” I knew he did. Hate and love sometimes feel the same or at least you confuse them. “I know.” He then said, “I wish I had someone that was both ours. Even if I would not be able to see her or him everyday, at least I would feel like I had a reason to get up and try harder, I would do more. That was all I ever wanted even if I did not make the right choices for her.” A group of kids passed in front of the house kicking a ball, barefoot and laughing. The door behind us burst open and out came running Pablito. It was as if he was sitting on the bench just waiting to hear them pass so he could come out. “I’ll be back before the sun comes down.” He was going to the plaza, which was less than a block away. He did not wait for my response. I yelled back, “I’ll go in a bit to watch.” Without turning his back he responded, “take your phone so you can take photos and send to mama and papa (my parents.)” Axel laughed, and looked as I watched over Pablito. I was so proud of him and how much he loved Lomas de Zamora. I felt
proud of myself because he spoke Spanish fluently and could integrate though with the way he played soccer, I knew he would be fine. Then Alex took me out of my thoughts, “You see, Meli, I want that.” He gestured to the boys and then to me. Then Pablo came out running to catch up to Pablito, and he winks at us. “I am scared I will never have that because I can’t be with Luna, and Luna doesn’t want to be with me.”

At that moment, looking towards my family in the plaza and turning to Axel who stood right next to me, I thought about how sometimes and for some people, yeah, love can just “stink.” No theory could fully capture the sentiment we both shared at that moment knowing that on the topic of love, migration, and family when it came down to “choice,” it was not always a give in, and that was Ok too.
On December 25, 2016 we walked over to the plaza at 5am. The sun had just come out and was shining bright. In front of the local church, a group of young people were gathered. They called us over so we can sing together. Lalo was singing with a guitar and my brother-in-law was on his saxophone. They are bandmates. Lalo sang the Argentine folkloric song, “Las Manos de mi Madre.” (My mother’s hands.)

“I was just in the plaza waiting to sober up. I was bothering no one. We have cameras around but they don’t care. They had me on the floor and his knees were pressed against my ribs. They just kept punching me. The other one just stood there, watching. This is all Macri’s fault. He extended into the provinces these security guards with guns. The local police are basically manga de bigotes con palos para abollar ideología (a group of mustaches with sticks to beat ideology).

All of them have to do is go for a training where they are paid for six weeks the minimum. They finish and get a gun and patrol looking to beat someone up. They make as much as police officers now and that is why they are hated by them too. My mother is collecting signatures so we can hold them accountable. The neighbors taped it on their cellphone. We have all this proof that they were basically beat me up while I was down. But I am here, standing on my feet and this won’t stay like this.”

-Lalo, 23
Singer and Guitarist
Lomas de Zamora, Argentina
June 6, 2016

“Las manos de mi madre me representan un cielo abierto y un recuerdo añorado trapos calientes en los inviernos

Ellas se brindan calidades nobles, sinceras, limpias de todo ¿cómo serán las manos del que las mueve gracias al odio?”

“My mother’s hands present me an open sky and a dear memory of warm rags in the winter. They offer themselves warmly, nobly, sincerely, clean of everything. I wonder how are the hands of those that move them thanks to hate?”

“Las Manos de mi Madre” by Peteco Carabajal and Jacinto Pierdra

Figure 21 Lalo y Las Manos de Su Madre, a photo by Melissa Maldonado-Salcedo
Dear Neighbors of Lomas de Zamora:

The purpose of this petition is to repudiate the institutional violence exercised by the Local Police. They are criminalizing and stigmatizing our young people in public places. They are abusing their power, utilizing physical and verbal violence with total impunity. We should be conscious that this can happen to any member of our families.

In response to the events of May 6, 2016, in the plaza of Barrio la Prida (at the intersection of the streets Rivera and Chopin) where two young people were attacked. They were complying. We demand that the authorities take responsibility, so that the security forces can protect the community instead of making their rights vulnerable.

Figure 22 Petition, a photo by Melissa Maldonado-Salcedo
CHAPTER 5: Racism and the Bettering the Race

My landlady Judy despised la Cámara. She was a Macrista. I rented an apartment in her house, where she had five separate ones that were illegally sublet. I learned this when I offered to pay my rent with a direct wire transfer to her bank account. She adamantly refused payment through any means that could be traced back to her. She did not want to pay taxes on this money. Also, Judy told me that during the Kirchner era, money transfers of all sorts were heavily surveilled. When large sums of money were noticed in the bank or if it moved around, her “cronies” would knock on your door and investigate its provenience. Hence, she only accepted payment in cash.

Judy spoke only negatively about the Peronist sympathizers. She asserted, “I bet if they had jobs they would not be wasting their time protesting.” I agreed, but the problem she failed to see was that no jobs were available to them. Judy saw their mobilizations as a threat to the country. She divulged, “Those negros are just lazy, subversives, and you know the best way to take care of those type of people.” I had suspected that she was a supporter of the dictatorship because when she complained to me about her previous tenants, she told me what she wanted to do to them… “fucilarlos” (put them before a firing squad.) I heard these words articulated before by milicos (military men) in filmic depictions of the Dirty War. I had never met anyone before her who sympathized with Macri and the dictatorship, though looking back; her right-wing inclinations make absolute sense. Her disgust for these “negros,” in her mind was legitimized by similar arguments used against the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States.

I was not shocked to learn that Judy became Pentecostal. One time, I entered her apartment and noticed that she had a huge flat screen where she was able to see the images recorded from the many cameras she had in front, inside, and behind the building. She (with God) was watching us, her tenants, but for real. I got into a huge fight with her and eventually
left the apartment with the Pablos. She pushed Pablito as he held our dog in his arms and was heading downstairs. I called her a *Farisea* (Pharisee: an evangelical insult.) She told me, “you will get what you deserve,” and without much thought I replied, “apparently you already have: Four husbands and you are still alone.” Our neighbor stepped in when he heard the commotion. He was returning back to Colombia that night. He started to fling insults at her, as he helped us bring down our suitcases. She yelled that this was why, “she did not ever rent to Argentines.” Pablo asked her, “What are you?” As we shouted obscenities back and forth to each other, she went on and on, as I tried to get Pablito out of the building. She did not want to unlock the door until gave her more cash since we were leaving. My neighbor Jacob then hit the last blow and called her a, “negra de mierda.” (A black person that comes from shit.)

Jacob had just finished his University studies in Buenos Aires, and so he had adopted a lot of the *Porteño* lingo that he claims he “learned” to use whenever “he needed to.” Judy had blonde hair and blue eyes. However, he was not talking about a racial category, but instead, a “social status.” After everything that was said to her in a span of minutes, this apparently was the only thing that truly stung. She turned around and put her hand on her chest as it holding on to the dagger that went through her heart, “Negra?”

***

There is a fundamental question at the beginning of Sarmiento’s historical text, which so poignantly dramatizes Argentina’s national experience with racial identity. He asks:

- Are we European?—so many copper-colored faces prove us wrong!
- Are we indigenous?—The disdainful smiles of our blond ladies may gives us only answer.
- Of mixed race?—No wants to be that, and there are millions who would not wish to be called either American or Argentine.
- Are we a nation?—A nation without a blending of accumulated materials, with neither tightening nor foundation.
- Argentines?—Until when and since when, we better became aware of it” (Goodrich 1996:109).
The question remains, what is an Argentine?

I eloped with Pablo a few days after my mother first met him in New York City. Her initial reaction after introducing him was to turn around and say to me, “You found the darkest and shortest Argentine out there?” All she knew about him prior to their first encounter was that he was Argentine, undocumented, and had lived in Miami for five years before meeting me. While I am (mildly) used to my mother’s inappropriate commentary, despite being endearing and other times excruciating, it truly never ceases to surprise me. It compels me to think…anthropologically. Where did “that” (comment) come from? My mother’s ideas about race explicably derive straight out of Colombia.

Christopher Dennis writes about Afro- Colombian identity and the prevailing ideas about blackness within the culture, mentioning that “…racial categories continue to be ordered in hierarchies in which phenotypic traits are superimposed with meanings and attributes of social status, in which, on one extreme, white usually signifies beauty, wealth, purity, and sophistication, while, on the other extreme, black denotes ugliness, poverty, impurity, and primitiveness” (Dennis 2012:80). In Colombia, negritude or “blackness” is visually perceptible because of skin color whereas in Argentina, it is more of a performance, an “embodied practice” that offers “a way of knowing” about the nation and its values as result of the relationship between the “performance” and the “audience” (Taylor 2003:3).

I taught the course “Latina Women” for a few years during my early doctoral studies. I often shared the story about my mother’s initial reaction to the news I had married Pablo in order to emphasize that even though in the United States it is not socially acceptable to admit that our families can be racist, their racism manifests through colorism…especially when you bring home someone who they were not expecting. My mother had a preconceived idea about what Pablo was supposed to look like if he was Argentine and was surprised, and slightly confused that he
was darker, shorter, and to her, “sounded” different. This often stirred a productive discussion filled with personal anecdotes of similar experiences amongst my students who by in large identified as Latina women. In that regard, I know for a fact my mother is not unique and is direct product of her cultural ethos.

Carlos Pozzi writes that, “In the Latino culture the selection of marriage partners determines the color of the skin of your children and their social status. Marriage is often seen as an opportunity to erase blackness…. when one marries “white,” they are “mejorando la raza” (Pozzi 2007: 56). I stressed to my students that while these stories of racial and class transgressions may be a common trope within Telenovelas, they are not far removed from historical notions concerning the relationship between marriage and social mobility. In fact, these types of narratives originate within early nationalist literature that by way of a “romance” centered “reproduction” or “family” as the locus of where national tensions concerning race, gender, and sexuality were worked in/out. Doris Sommer also explains that for this reason it is not a coincidence that the “fathers of the nation” were also “romance writers.” They inscribed social ideals that were “grounded in the natural selection of the family,” within their fictions therefore making the correlation between history, literature, and politics indivisible within the greater Latin American/Latino culture (Sommer 1989: 111).

In actuality, these longstanding views about race and marriage never fully disappear but instead are revised by new circumstances and social worlds. For example, in the United States social mobility is inextricable from citizenship. My mother’s reaction revealed an all too common concern that is part of her own Colonial baggage, one that I refused to lug. I still wonder if her crying had more to do with the fact that it would be highly unlikely that she would one day have a (biological) grandchild with blue eyes or the fact that at the time Pablo worked as a busboy and was undocumented while I was working as a Congressional liaison and had just
finished my first Masters at the New School in International Affairs. Perhaps the truth lies within the node of these scientific and social “truths.” Either way I suspect that there was more to her ostensible “grief” and “melancholy,” after all, as Anne Anlin Cheng explains, “racial ideals continue to drive those most oppressed by it” (Cheng 2001:6). My own (personal) romance indeed forced me to consider what it would mean to now have a Colombian-Argentine family. My subsequent observations and reflections on this moment inspired this chapter.

The Ruins of Argentine Exceptionality

“There’s no work in Argentina, so people are desperate to leave…”-Anibal Constanso

In the recent anthology edited by Paulina L. Alberto and Eduardo Elena, *Rethinking Race in Modern Argentina* (2016), a selection of scholars on and/or from Argentina seek to revise contemporary understandings of race within Argentina after the economic crisis of 2001. The undercurrent within these texts is to consider through the lens of race why and how Argentina suffers from an all too familiar “image problem.” This scholarly endeavor starts off by questioning Argentina’s representation as a “racial outlier” as evidenced within popular and academic discourses and to this, challenging why this (mis) representation has been a constant throughout the last century (Alberto and Elena 2014:1). However, what is the critical import of reevaluating the contemporary manifestation of race at this particular juncture? Joanne Page realizes that the economic crisis inherently promoted “changes in the imagined space of the nation,” because of the consolidating effect of a “shared experience of crisis” amongst a “historically fragmented nation” (Page 2009:111). It may well be that the international acceptance of Argentina’s “exceptionalism” has been advantageous in the face of racist ideas of Latinos within the United States. Arguably, Argentines are considered “comfortably exotic” and
simultaneously, “sufficiently white.” However, these designations are mostly in relation to their regional neighbors that presume less Euro-centricity due to the immediate discernibility of African roots within their national popular cultures. It was only in 2010 that a national campaign sought to count “Afro-Argentines” in the national census for the first time in over a Century (Luongo 2014).  

Argentina was “invented” as a European “other” within Latin America and it has maintained as a national project to quell its “barbaric tendencies” through the systematic institutionalization of European “civilizing” projects (Schumway 1991). For example, the Article 25 of the Argentine constitution still privileges European migration stating that, “The Federal Government will encourage European migration; and will not restrict, limit, nor tax the entry of any foreigner who comes with the goal of working the land, bettering industry, or teaching sciences or the arts.”  

Juan B. Alberdi, the father of the Argentine constitution of 1853, at the time singled out Italians, Spanish, and the Jews as “undesirable.” He viewed France and England as the ideal catalyst to Argentine modernity, because he saw Hispanic, Catholic, and Christian traditions as hindrances to progress. He infamously noted that, “All that is civilized is European, at the very least in origin, but not all that is European is civilized…”  

Alberdi wanted to have French be the national language of Argentina. This would have ensured in the least a linguistic demarcation from its neighbors whom he called “savages” (Alberdi 1879). Part of Argentina’s national underpinnings originate in the desire to differentiate itself as a nation from the rest of Latin America in the way it looks, sounds, and moves. Yet, the spirit of Alberdi’s ideologies remains embedded within the Argentine imaginary and beyond. The recent economic crisis challenged Argentina’s “exceptionalism” on the global stage in various arenas—economic, political, religion, and in sports. For instance, during the 2014 World Cup the lack of black soccer players on the national squad stood out and raised questions that
forced the public to revisit Argentina’s dark past. The Huffington Post posited that due to Argentina’s aspirations of becoming “South America’s whitest country,” it went on to implement national projects that served to essentially disappear an African presence from their socio-historical landscape, records, and conscience, while engaging in the resulting “ethnic cleansing and genocide” (Huffington Post, “Why are their no Black men on Argentina’s Roster?” 2014). All the “things” that could be consumed, (on credit) once obfuscated these historical truths. The Menem years seemingly accelerated Argentina’s path to “the first world” with the “dollarization” of its national currency. This then enabled Argentina to “pass” within the global arena, albeit momentarily, as a simulacrum of modernity by way of Buenos Aires as a “cultured, first World capital set apart from the troubles of the rest of the country.”

This *Porteño* image of Argentina as an “exception” was shattered rapidly by the “effects of the crisis” which Page connotes as having accentuated “the deep divisions that had always existed between city and country and between barrio and villa in Argentina, making visible the enormity of the chasm between the nation’s richest and its poorest” (Page 2009:111). These divisions ran deep and inevitably elucidated the racial identities that in part explain Argentina’s volatile national identity.

In the ruins of its modern structures, the City of Buenos Aires reveals the consequences of its distorted sense of self brought about by problematic ideas and policies of “progress” exacerbated during the Menem years. Currently, European facades on building structures crumble before uneven sidewalks whose elegant light fixtures no longer cast light because it has been stripped of its electrical wiring because that is the only thing that has “real value” because it can be sold off in the black-market. Pothole laden roads today lead to shopping centers where window-shopping is the activity of circumstance (and not choice.)
The Cost of Modernity: “Its My Money and I Need it Now”

“To be an Argentine in the fighting days of our founding was most certainly not a happy thing: It was a mission. It was a need to create a fatherland, a beautiful risk that contained for being risk, an element of pride.” - Jorge Luis Borges

Many of my the families I interviewed during my fieldwork remember the day President Fernando De La Rúa flew away on a helicopter over the Pink House as vividly as they remember when Argentina won the first World Cup in 1978. Both were transformational national spectacles and both events tested Argentina’s reputation as the Latin American “exception.” One taxi driver in Buenos Aires told me recently that, “To watch the President of your country literally fly away on a helicopter (referring to De La Rúa) while the country is going to shit is as spectacular and ominous as it was going to the ATM the next day, being told that the three thousand dollars you saved your whole life is now only one thousand pesos, and they could not be disbursed. There is no money because the bank no longer exists.” I lived in Buenos Aires during the summer of 2003 and I vividly recall a similar lament from many taxi drivers. One in particular I recollect telling me he had just graduated as an architect. He was now working as a taxi driver because it was the only job that he could do at the moment, although given the state of Argentina, he also said he did not really know if working as an architect would be a feasible possibility (ever.)

This taxi driver, who mentioned he was also a psychiatrist, told me this story because he was driving me around Buenos Aires to find an ATM with money. After going to the third bank and having spit every expletive I knew in English, Spanish, and in Porteño, he wanted me to know that, “At least you know your money exists. The ATM has no money but you still have your money. It exists and you can use it.” At that moment the backseat morphed into a couch. I forgot about being an anthropologist and felt more like an entitled graduate student confronted
with “third world problems.” I imagine that this is not an uncommon reflection during fieldwork but I had to reconcile, that I was not foreign to “Third World Problems.” Heck, I grew up going to Colombia to visit family that had no running water, electricity, or doors in their home. However, I felt completely overwhelmed with angst each time the ATM reminded me that it had no money to dispense. In part a significant amount of this anxiety came from the fact that up until that moment, I did not really “know” this part of Argentina first-hand. Can I admit that this moment of uncomfortable self-reflexivity was especially informative to my work? The cab driver had certainly guilted me to calm down and put my situation into perspective.

After Argentina defaulted on its IMF loans and as a result of the social upheaval of the subsequent protests, looting, and escraches, it became clear that Argentina now struggled with unemployment, crime, and inflation on a similar level as the rest of the continent (Tobar 2001). Each time I attempted to talk about the crisis and situate it as a direct result of the Argentinazo, I was often challenged because many of the families I interviewed made clear that the crisis did not happen when the media paid attention or when academics said it did. One of their central claims was to show how (Cultural) ideas about crisis and modernity are a causal historical force in their own right; they can engender change and are not merely epiphenomena of more "real" social structures. For this reason, it is important to affirm in my work that the 2001 crisis was the “culmination of a longer period of economic troubles and civil unrest,” and therefore it is important to not emphasize nor perpetuate “artificial distinctions” between before and after the crisis. Instead I seek to highlight the ways in which the experiences of “capitalism, neoliberalism, and the economic crisis” complicated existing ideas of race and brought to the surface nuanced (more inclusive) ones.

The symbols and leaders of the previous political crisis such as the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo who protested the disappearance of their children by the military dictatorships, started to
reclaim the streets after the *Argentinazo* and the Plaza de Mayo specifically to protest the disappearance of the “peoples’” money, work, and future. In 2013 President Obama cited Argentina as an exemplar of inequality in his official remarks on economic mobility, alongside Jamaica (Whitehouse 2013). This referencing of Argentina was telling because it revealed a greater similitude with Jamaica than with the United States. Hence “*El Pueblo Argentino*” was now imagined contrarily to its Eurocentric founding, and as a result would ultimately “look” very differently to the world. These “identity affirming experiences” for example lead even to a “rediscovery” and “celebration” of Argentina’s African ancestry (Luongo 2014). The question remains, what exactly differentiates Argentina from its Southern neighbors? This forced me to consider how ideas of race continue to play a formative role in shaping dominant social relationships between Buenos Aires and the rest of Argentina. Rather, these personal accounts, opened up a space for me to think relationally between putatively separate spheres between my work and life and to focus on the often buried, if formative, linkages between them.

**To Beef or Not to Beef**

On a field in downtown Manhattan’s Chinatown neighborhood, I met Darío waiting for my son’s soccer league’s practice to start. His accent was straightaway familiar to me. I observed during the Spring and Summer season Darío while on the side line with a group of other players who all communicated to each other in English and hand motions, because only a few shared a common language. The squads were made up of players from China, various countries within Latin America, the West Indies, India, Pakistan, and several Eastern European countries. The players would change out of their soccer clothes into slacks, aprons, and button down shirts after their Friday night game. I would learn that most were off to work in restaurants for the weekend rush, which explained their speedy transformation from players to workers.

One Friday, in the midst of the 2014 World Cup, Darío was changing out of an Argentina
Jersey and before putting it in his bag he kissed it. Before I knew it, the Pablos (husband and son) rushed to talk to him. It was as if that was the final clue, “You’re from Córdoba?” And just like that, we were invited to an Asado on a Williamsburg rooftop. Apparently, after just a few minutes of conversation on the field, Pablo found out that they both used to work at the same mall, Galería Rex back in Córdoba. He also learned that Darío currently worked at a Brazilian steak house during the week that turned into a lounge at night and a popular Manhattan nightclub during the weekend. I immediately thought about how Darío could fit into my research, but Pablo was just excited to connect with another Cordobés. I winked and said, “Small World, right?” As Pablito geared up for his own training, Pablo turned around and proclaimed, “Actually, Córdoba is just that grande.”

That following Sunday, on our way to the Asado Pablo assured me, “I knew I recognized him. Darío told me he came here a year before I did. He’s from los del 2000. I found that during many of my interviews and observations at these intimate gatherings the conversation started with an explanation as to what prompted them to migrate. I often did not need to even ask. Their explanations sounded more like justifications for leaving, when it reality, according to them there was really “no choice to be made.” Darío explained that when you are unable to find steady work in Buenos Aires, as a young able bodied-man, your future starts to instantly look “darker and darker.” He shared that when he was a kid back in Córdoba, his mother sent him to buy the daily ration of bread, milk, and wine to the local store. He was sent always with exact change. (He clarified that the exactitude of money was so he would not use the change for candy.) However, he was often short. He would go back home and ask for more because he no longer had enough to buy the same goods he had purchased the day before with the same amount of money. He recalled that this is why he knew from an early age the meaning of the word “inflation”. He said, “I remember knowing that things would always get more expensive
as time passed and that it had to do with ‘inflación.’ Imagine being seven and knowing what inflation means because it directly relates to how much you can eat? It could never mean something good if it was the reason you go to bed hungry two nights of the week.” That kind of critical reasoning can only come from embodied knowledge. No amount of economic theory could explain inflation and crisis more succinctly than that memory.

I went to Buenos Aires in 2015 to conduct follow up interviews with family members who were living in Buenos Aires. This is when I met Dario’s mother Sandra, who elaborated these memories. She described, “We always lived in crisis. You would go buy meat for an Asado and the next day it would be a completely different price.” This disclosed to me that the crisis was “felt” and “lived” initially in the Provinces of Argentina before reaching its apex and culminating in Buenos Aires. These ethnographic stories in many ways undermine dominant Argentine narratives that ignored for so long the “internal divisions” that juxtapose the Provinces with Buenos Aires. Since Buenos Aires was positioned as a “heterogeneous space…set apart from the troubles of the rest of the country,” its current population in many ways embodies the tribulations of what Adrian Gorelik refers to as “la figura de las dos Argentinas” (Page 2009:111). Many Provincianos knew that they were living a reality that was symptomatic of crisis by their share presence in Buenos Aires. They then became so economically and socially disenfranchised because of the lack of work, that they no longer found a place within Buenos Aires where they were “secure” in every sense of the word. Many shared that they had moved to Buenos Aires from their Provinces first before heading to the United States almost as if they had already made peace with Buenos Aires being more of an extended layover and never a final destination. Not one family member in New York, Miami, or within the provinces of Buenos Aires ever expressed a sentiment of belonging within capital.

Once family members left their Provinces and settled in the suburbs of Buenos Aires,
many marked that after recognizing their ability to adapt (psychologically) to Porteño culture, they were able to imagine adapting to life anywhere outside of Argentina. The intrinsic apprehensions of moving to a new country no longer seemed insurmountable because many had thought of Buenos Aires as another world. Some shared that it was harder to leave their Provinces than to leave Argentina because within Buenos Aires they were already displaced. When it became painfully clear that it would be impossible to save money, build a future, and provide for a family in Buenos Aires, it was time to look outside of Argentina. Dario expounded that he “hated” Buenos Aires and could barely survive working sixty hours working as a stock boy in the garment district. At the end of every month Dario had no money left over to send to his mother in Cordoba. He remembers that it all went to paying rent for a room in Banfield, food (despite only eating two meals per day), transportation from Provincia to Capital, a cell phone, and faso (marijuana.) He made clear that if he did not have faso, he would have probably gone crazy because he was seriously depressed and therefore, “only spent money on my basic essentials, no luxuries whatsoever.” His tone and demeanor started to sound resentful, especially when he remembered that after a while, his mother also had to come to live with him in Banfield because she no longer could survive on her income and the remittances her sons sent her from the jobs in Buenos Aires. Now, living in Williamsburg, even if he worked just as many hours here as back in Buenos Aires, “at least I (he) have things to show for it.” In his view, he lived “here” as he pointed to his flat-screen, sleek bicycle, and Gibson guitar in “a dignified manner.” Dario has yet to adjust his legal status in the United States. He then emphasized, “I send my mother each month some money so she could save…because she works now in Buenos Aires as a nanny. I am hoping one day to bring her here with us,” he shared. He then told me that this was the only “real” reason he wanted to “become American.”

Like Mother, Like Sons
I had a friend request from Sandra waiting for me on Facebook as soon as I touched ground in Buenos Aires. Her message read, “It’s me, Darío’s mother. Come to my house in Banfield so we can have a mate and you can tell me about Darío’s life.” I knew that she wanted to know if the pictures he posted accurately depicted his life, if he ate enough, if he was dating somebody. These were expected maternal inquiries resulting from only having virtual clues to infer about your son’s private life. Darío had already warned me and explained that no matter how old he got or how far away he was, “she is my mother and will always see me as her youngest.” Since Darío had sent her a tablet with me, I had planned to reach out to her to deliver it as soon as I was acclimated. However, after letting her know that I was staying in the nearby, in Lomas de Zamora, she invited herself to meet me at my family’s house. She exclaimed, “I will go to you…we are practically family!” I thought about how many asados I had eaten in the past year with Darío, how many toasts we had made, and how many soccer games we watched together. She made a valid point. After all, Pablo did have an “emergency spare key” to Darío’s apartment (because we lived the closest of all of his friends.) Darío had slept on my couch many nights whenever his brother Agusto needed his own “privacy.” Sandra arrived bearing gifts and pan dulce (sweet bread.) As soon as she sat down she instructed me to boil water for the mate. My mother-in-law set up the table and before I knew it they were all talking about Córdoba and sharing stories of their sons abroad.

At first I thought, if they all loved Córdoba so much, why were they living and working in Buenos Aires, which according to all three of them “was not their place.” I then thought about a saying I had heard the night before at the dinner table, “If God exists, he only has an office in Buenos Aires.” Sandra told me that she did not return to Córdoba after Darío left because now that both her sons (Darío and Agusto) were no longer at home, she rather work and stay busy so she would not miss them. She talked about the children she nannied in Recoleta and how they
were so “disrespectful” and “spoiled,” but that job allowed her “to mother.”

Sandra reflected, “I would miss them (Darío and Agusto) too much in Córdoba because that is where we are from and that is where we celebrated our birthdays, holidays, vacations to the Sierra…” Also she said, almost as an afterthought, that there are not a lot of options to find work in Córdoba, especially for women like her, of a “certain age,” because she was now competing with Parguyas, Peruanas, and Bolivianas that sell their labor at a cheaper price despite being younger and stronger. I looked at Pablo’s grandmother who was turning eighty, and she was still working from her home, sewing and selling clothes. Sandra was sixty and worked selling intimate apparel at a store for “older women.” My mother-in-law and her bonded quickly because after all, their sons lived abroad and they lived off the nostalgia of when they were young and the optimism that they are now building futures up North. What struck me and seemed poetic is that many of their forefathers migrated to Argentina from Europe for similar reasons that compelled them generations later to head to “gringo-landia.” They too wanted “opportunities… a tomorrow… stability… purchasing power… ownership … things” (Baily 2004).

As Provincianos moved closer to capital, there was also a simultaneous influx of immigrants from the peripheral countries such as Perú and Bolivia, and countries as far away as Dominican Republic and Senegal (Valente 2011). These expanding and diversifying immigrant communities contribute additional racial categories to the existing hierarchies where Argentines rest on top. Sandra explained, “If it is bad in Argentina and they come here looking for work and opportunities, it has to be way worst where they come from. This is also why there is a lot of resentment, they now take away jobs from poor Argentines.” Where had I heard that argument before? The reaction to this “dimming” of Buenos Aires compelled anxious Porteños to conflate Provincianos, immigrants, the working class, and “negros.” However, that type of “blackness”
is not perceptible to the rest of the world (Alberto and Elena 2016:5).

“Rich like an Argentine”

Alberto and Elena argue that the term “negro” is utilized by middle and upper classes as not only an “insult” but also as means to delineate the working-class sectors and certain provincial populations. By deploying a racial slur imbued with class connotations against all these different “types of negros,” they shame and stigmatize their visibility (Alberto and Elena 2016:9). Also, rural and non-European immigrants within Argentina are also considered “negros,” because they are treated socially and legally as “undesired outsiders.” It could be argued that the discrimination that blacks experience in the United States is in many ways akin to that of rural Argentine immigrants and Peruvians, Bolivians, and Paraguayans in Buenos Aires. Although Provincianos are Argentine, nevertheless they are isolated from mainstream Porteño culture and are treated as a racialized “other.” There is a popular folkloric song entitled, “Provinciano in Buenos Aires” by the folkloric group the ChalChaleros. In this song they chronicle what it was like to come to Buenos Aires from the Province in search of work and be treated like an outsider.

Tus barrios nos vieron de noche y de día
Como forasteros de un mundo remoto
Arfentinzao, tus extranjeras laboriosas (Chalcherleros 1991).

The song features the sentiment of what it was like to be treated by your own countrymen as a foreigner because you look “poor” (which is often translated into humble in Spanish) and “darker skinned.” This is where the racial slur “cabeza” originates. The relationship between darkness and disenfranchisement is analogous to how racial formations function in the United States due to “pigmentocracy” more specifically.

“Pigmentocracy” is a term coined by the Chilean anthropologist Alejandro Lipschutz in order to show how in Latin America those who are on the lower end of income, education, and
employment opportunities are by in large people of a darker complexion or they are racialized as such. In the case of Argentina, for example, Provincianos are perceived to be “barbaric” because they are rural or rather, non-Porteños and thus branded a “blackhead” (Telles 2007). In the literal sense of the word, blackheads are blemishes that stain the face of Buenos Aires’s self-proclaimed Euro centricity.

The Inter-Press Service noted in a 2011 report that, “although Argentina’s immigration law is regarded as one of the most progressive in Latin America, xenophobia and discrimination persists, showing that progress is still more theoretical than practical.” The report goes on to list the numerous ways in which intersecting systems of oppression by way of the government run programs deny rights to those who are perceived as “foreigners,” despite “officially” recognizing “everyone’s right of free access to all public services.” For example, this discrimination manifests in children who are not enrolled in school or the sick who are denied healthcare (Valente 2011). This type of xenophobia and prejudice is not exclusive to Argentina but instead can be read against the post-911 rhetoric against immigrants that still galvanizes the Republican presidential platforms of the 2016 candidates. Nonetheless, the United States and Argentina pride themselves on being “a country of immigrants” despite its treatment of the “undesirable” ones who so happen to be “darker.”

**These Immigrants can be Models**

Dario expressed that he was treated “better” here in the United States than he was in Buenos Aires. This was not so difficult to understand because my immediate reference to this phenomenon of feeling oppressed in one’s native country was to consider how racial minorities are treated in the United States. Until this day most (not excluding myself) racial minorities experience a second-class citizenship in which one’s civil rights are constantly violated or challenged (Racial profiling.) This does not allow you to ever feel fully integrated into the
greater American society. He explained, “In Buenos Aires I am a negro, a cabeza.” He wanted to explain to me why in the United States it was an advantage to be an Argentine. “Even though I speak English with an accent when people find out that I am from Argentina, they say Maradona! Tango! Messi! The Pope! It is not like when you tell someone you are Colombian,” he explained. He then looked me in the eyes confident that I knew that he was not trying to sound ethnocentric or “like a racist.” Continuing, “You say Colombia, they think, drugs or Escobar.” I actually knew exactly what he meant but had another Colombian eavesdropped and heard that those same words could sound like “fighting words.”

I grew up in the 1980s in New York City. I had heard or been the butt of every Colombian drug joke you could think of in school, church, or the playground. The Colombian stereotype of being drug traffickers is still very much alive within popular culture, while I reminded Darío that the Argentine stereotype of being racist is too. During the 2014 World Cup, the New York Times asked in a piece by the same name, “Why do many World Cup Fans Dislike Argentina?” The article cited a YouGov/Upshot study of 19 countries that asked which country they are rooting against, with Argentina overwhelming “winning.” In an attempt to explain the wide disdain against Argentina, Christopher Gaffney, a scholar at the Fluminense University stated, “This has a lot to do with stereotypes on and off the field.” The Argentine “reputation for arrogance” throughout the Americas has garnered animosity from the world. However, Eduardo Gangi, a Buenos Aires shop owner cited in the same article claims that this resentment by Argentina’s neighbors’ stems from simple “jealousy.” In an “a matter of face” assertion he concludes, “We sent a queen to Holland and a Pope to the Vatican,” referring to the Argentine-born wife of King Willem-Alexander and Pope Francis. I could imagine him saying this because I had heard this before in my interviews by older Argentines who still professed nostalgia for the Menem years.
Inevitably, Argentines have projected “their perceptions of economic and cultural superiority in the region” and used their greatest embodied international referents as evidence of said preeminence within the region (Romero and Gilbert 2014). Explaining this Argentine reflex the writer Martín Caparrós recapitulates, “We are a society that turned to tennis once Guillermo Vilas won a Grand Slam in France; grew obsessed with basketball when Manu Ginobili made his mark in American N.B.A.; started raving about monarchy when an Argentine-born princess married the crown prince of the Netherlands; and has persisted in doubting Jorge Luis Borges’s value because he never won the international honor of a Nobel Prize” (Caparrós 2013). Do Argentines believe that they are “an exception” because of these international luminaries? If so, in what ways are these views informed by race or more specifically, racism?

**Argentine Exceptions are NOT Funny**

“...Being Argentine should be much more than a suppression or a spectacle. It should be a vocation.”- Jorge Luis Borges

I asked Darío, “To be clear, so you are no longer a ‘negro’ in the United States?” He paused. His silence conveyed that this was something that he had never really thought about especially because “negro” in the context of the United States is rooted in the 1-drop rule, dark skin, and the texture of your hair. You have to first “look” black in order to be treated like one. This is not necessarily the same in the context of Argentina, rather you have to “act” black either in the clothes you wear, how you speak, in your size, or where you live. The closest referent to how “negro” is used in Argentina is in the United States use of the N-word. Both of these derogatory words are historically rooted in the systematic enslavement of people of color but have been given new meaning in today’s social interactions. Context, contingency, and experience produce these new meanings, but never fully divorce the terms from its past. To
further explain this correlation, I would like to reference the Black comedian, Richard Pryor and his contributions to discourses on race.\textsuperscript{153}

There is this great moment in his stand-up routine from the 1974 album, “That Nigger’s Crazy” where Pryor discusses going to Africa and looking around and realizing that “they were no niggers here” (Pryor 1974). To him, the meaning of the N-word lost its credibility, it was devoid of its saliency in a new world where the weight of its social significance no longer had the ability to disempower. In this way I thought of the word “\textit{negro},” or “\textit{cabecita}” in the context of Latino-United States. The slur does not translate in meaning or context. I think about the numerous times that Pablo who was once branded a “\textit{cabecita}” in Argentina is confused for “white” or for an “undercover cop” in New York City. Dario for all sense and purposes no longer saw himself as a “\textit{cabeza}” but instead he was just now “Argentine.” \textit{Argentinidad} within the greater Latino community still supposes “whiteness” and as a result is bestowed with privileges not afforded to him in Buenos Aires.

Dario was blonde and had green eyes. The fact that he could “pass” in the United States as “white,” was certainly advantageous when thinking about racial profiling practices that systematically terrorize most undocumented immigrants as seen in Arizona’s “Show Me your Paper laws” or even New York City’s “Stop and Frisk.”\textsuperscript{154} In the United States, under the Fourth Amendment, law enforcement can “legally stop and detain when they have a reasonable suspicion that the person is committing, has committed, or is about to commit a crime” (Editorial Board 2013). In this way, racism was legalized because of the conflation of crime or criminality with people of color. The implicit bias of most Americans concerning race is “problematically” beneficial to Argentines who can capitalize on their “presumed whiteness.” To prove to me how he was now “white,” Dario told me that he was smoking a joint behind the restaurant he works at, and an officer asked him to turn it off, and that was it. No arrest was made or identification
requested. He was neither frisked nor afraid. This brings up how the Argentina’s President, Mauricio Macri, has supported a similar practice that will have probably a similar effect. Soon after coming into office, the highest court decreed, “police officers could demand identification from citizens there without probably cause, a ruling that gives a green light to harassment based on prejudice” (Chillier and Seman 2016). This is a move to legalize discrimination in the name of democracy and public safety.

I told Darío about the comedian Dave Chappelle’s story about being black and smoking weed with his white friend “Chip.” I was able to YouTube the clip in his routine where Chapelle contrasted his experience with that of Chip when interacting with law enforcement. Chip did not fear approaching an officer and letting him know that he was “lost” and “high.” To which the officer responded to Chip by simply telling him to, “get out of here.” Chappelle testifies how he watched in shock knowing that had he approached the officer and disclosed he was high, the story would have had a very different ending. Chapelle knew (first hand) how different “white” and “black” encounters with police could be in the United States. At the end of the clip Dario looked at me and said, “I’m Chip…but with an accent.” Darío assured me that he was well aware of the uniqueness of his Latino experiences in the United States, “In Buenos Aires, they know I am from Córdoba because of the way I speak so I get treated like an outsider. Here, I look like the type of immigrant that you want to take home, make part of your family. Imagine, you bring me home and prove to everyone that you are not a racist because I am a Latino immigrant, but I am also white.” He soon reminded me of how Georgina, a billionaire heiress and the daughter of former Mayor Bloomberg, was impregnated by the Argentine equestrian Ramiro Quintana. He then laughed, “Technically (using air quotes) Bloomberg’s grandson is ‘Latino.’” He turned the conversation back to me, “You know full well how the chamuyo works.” He then looked at Pablo who was talking to Darío’s brother and
roommate, Agusto. He pointed to them and then himself; “We talk a big game, so big we believe it ourselves.” Matín Caparrós sufficiently explained this “credulous” self-perception, “Perhaps 9 out of 10 of us believe in some God; most of us certainly believe that God is Argentine.” He concludes that for Argentines, no greater world proof supports this suspected “truth” than having an Argentine seated on the (papal) throne (Caparrós 2013).

Darío went on to offer his experiences working the nightlife scene in New York City. He currently works at one of the most exclusive nightclubs and boasts that he has the “best shifts.” If you ever worked the service industry in cities where you have a lot of tourism, only those who are “really good” at their job or really “good looking” get the “best shifts.” These are typically the weekends. It is a very superficial industry (depending on how exclusive the clientele are.) Having waited my fair share of tables in New York, South Beach, and Madrid, I knew immediately what he was trying to tell me with that insider detail. I also knew he brought home in one week what I made in a month of teaching one class. Cash. Darío went on to list a string of B and C list celebrities who “allegedly” had hit on him at work. He told me that he rejected them because they were not “on his level.” He told me that, “I am not looking for the mother of my children at the nightclub. I am there to work, I honestly don’t even notice anything but picking up the empty glasses and serving more drinks because that means I get more tips.” I reminded him that you never know whom you meet at “those places,” because I had met Pablo at an Irish pub.

I had gone to Darío’s job the week before to meet up with a group of friends who were visiting from Buenos Aires. They attended the University of Buenos Aires and like me, perpetual graduate students. When Darío saw me, he greeted me with a hug and moved my party and I to a better table with bottle service. My friends were very impressed by “my connections.” Darío had sent me a Whatsapp message that morning to let me know he was working that night and to stop
by because Pablo had told him about my “guests.” When I introduced Darío to them, their first reaction was “Bien Cordobés! Habla hasta ingles!” Darío laughed and said, “Et francais aussi. Et vous?” (And French too, how about you?) There was an awkward exchange of laughs and one of them said, “tell me a joke Cordobés!!” I got flashbacks of Pablo telling me stories about how when he moved to Lomas de Zamora, Buenos Aires from Córdoba. He said that as soon as they heard his accent in the classroom, his professors would ask him to tell a joke. One of the stereotypes about people from Córdoba is that they are humorous but there was nothing funny about requesting “jokes on demand.” Darío was working as a bartender, not as a comedian.

Darío then went to check on another table and I did not know what to tell my friends. In all honesty, they had no idea that what they were saying could potentially sound offensive. I did not want to start lecturing them about the meaning of microaggressions. No such term really exists within the Argentine language because the very language is filled with them. I knew that Darío probably read deeper into the interaction because he knew exactly what my research was about and this particular instance was definitely going to find itself in my notes. I could not have even planned it if I tried. Here we were in the middle of New York City’s Flatiron district and the complicated relationship between porteños and provincianos was unfolding between my subjects and friends (which were one in the same.) I went to the bar and apologized to Darío. My friends feasted off the complimentary wings he had sent over. Darío put his hand on my shoulder, “I’m not offended, and they are just trying to be comfortable like when they are in Buenos Aires.” After a while he went back to take their drink order, he looked at them and with what sounded like the heaviest Cordobés accent I had heard in a while, he said, “There is a drink minimum here.”

There it was, that look you get when you are trying to do a math equation in your head but feel that everyone is noticing so you try to play it cool. I recognized it immediately because I
had given it as a patron but more importantly, I had read it as a server. He continued, “We need to open a tab.” They started to look at each other and then at me. I knew that they had come with very little expendable cash. All four of them were sleeping in my living room. Smiling, “But given that you guys are friends of my friend,” he looked at me and winked, “I will take care of you tonight.” They all started to thank him and then he said, “I know what it is like to make Pesos. I have been there.” Before they could say anything else, I raised my glass, “to Argentina!” I figured it was up to me to break the ice.

The Blackening of Argentinidad

In recent history, Argentine citizens were allowed entry into the United States without the need to demonstrate that they “own a house, have credit cards and a long-standing job” (Hemlock and Benjiman 2002). Although the vestiges of whiteness that have characterized Argentina have become murky at best, nevertheless this “image problem” has had real life consequences not only on how Argentines see themselves, but on how they are seen by others (Alberto and Elena 2016:1-2). To use race as a social object of analysis, interrogates the very categories that have either been ignored or exhausted with regard to Argentina’s contrived “exceptionalism” (Alberto and Elena 2016:4) By putting into focus the “cabecitas negras” or “provincianos” in order to explore racial categorizations within and outside of Argentina, I seek to contribute to understanding the cultural significance of “blackness” and more importantly, Argentina’s “la negrada” (the blackening) within Latino United States. It is through these stories that I expect to highlight the ways in which national identity and racial categories are negotiated within identify-affirming spaces and moments as a result of crisis, migration, and contact.

“La negrada” amongst Argentines abroad refers to the mass migration of “cabezas” (blackheads). They migrated to the United States during the limited Visa-waiver program
between the United States and Argentina. They are said to (by other Argentines) have
“blackened” Argentina’s public image as a country made up predominantly of white, middle and
upper class European descendants. The Visa Waiver program launched in 1996 and saw a steady
number of Argentines, by in large from the provinces or suburbs of Buenos Aires entering the
United States as tourists. All came in passing as tourists but in actuality they were in pursuit of
“work” and “stability,” like many other Latin American immigrants. They did not have to
“prove” their intention for coming to the United States. Therefore many “overstayed” their
allotted 90-day vacation time and then “adjusted” their legal status by way of marriage.

In 2002 alone it was estimated that there was approximately 80,000 to 200,000 living
within Miami Beach, the first Argentine immigrant enclave in the United States called, “little
Buenos Aires.” (Known to Argentines as “Pequeña Argentina” or little Argentina.) When the
program abruptly ended, the State Department noted that it was the first time that a country was
“yanked” from the waiver list “because of serious economic problems” (Hemlock and Benjiman
2002).

There is a strained relationship between provincianos and Porteños. Rosano describes the
initial perception of Provincianos when they came to Buenos Aires during the Peronist era in the
following way:

This overwhelming feeling that the people from the suburbs, the fields, or from the Provinces
had invaded Buenos Aires was shared by the pertinent sectors within the Porteño middle and
upper classes, but also by the intellectual leftist classes that at the time had shown solidarity
with the shock of the “good people” of Buenos Aires and their attempt in preserving the
character of a cultured and aristocratic city, its spatial hierarchies and their territorial
properties (Rosano 2003:12).

That sentiment has remained constant and more complicated abroad. Porteños first treated
cabecitas like outsiders when they migrated to Buenos Aires, in ways similar to how Bolivians
and Peruvians are treated today throughout Argentina. (Or, in similar ways as most Latino
immigrants are treated when arriving to the United States.) Many rural migrants in Argentina
established themselves in the suburbs of Buenos Aires known as “provincias,” alongside the “other” migrant communities. It can be argued that this disenfranchisement prepared many psychologically to head north and confront what it means to be an undocumented Latino immigrant in the United States. When they felt the pressures of the imploding economy and knew that there was nowhere else to go (but up) again, the United States in their view could not be “more” hostile than Porteños.

It is important to contextualize the displacement and rejection felt by provincianos within Buenos Aires. The Argentine writer Pedro Orgambide notes that the Porteños racialized these rural migrants and that this reflected more accurately how they saw themselves in relation to them, “The disdain toward the cabecita negra (blackhead), the rejection by the small liberal and democratic bourgeoisie, shows how our extreme prejudices impregnates our racialization. To be different, to be “people”, to be good, means to not have something in common with the invaders who remind us of a humble origin, of work, of small daily humiliations in this fantasy…” He further this idea by suggesting that the small bourgeoisie distills its own oppression to the blackhead: the “other” who is “insolent, ignorant, or of little value…” (Orgambide 1967). However, with time the term, which already is laden with racist undertones, becomes synonymous with “negro” within the popular Argentine imaginary and vernacular. In Argentina, unlike American understandings of racial formations, you can be a “negro” who is white and has blonde hair and blue eyes.157

White Latinos, Black Argentines

Darío and I couldn’t stop laughing remembering that night at his job when I came with my “cheto” (boogie) friends. “It was a ‘La Tienes adentro’ type of moment?”158 He then tells me about a Marc Jacobs sample sale that we should go to. I asked him if he dressed to “fit in,” and he was startled by the question. Fearing that my question could have put my foot in my mouth, “I
mean, you look like a…hipster?” He did live in Williamsburg. He did wear skinny jeans. He did have a beard, tattoos, and piercings. He almost spit his drink out when I said the word “hipster,” He claimed, “that’s offensive.” Oh no I thought. “I am not a hipster!” He then yells out to his brother, “Agusto, am I hipster?” Agusto came over with the first cuts of meat that were ready from the *asado*. It is a very different experience to have an *asado* on a Williamsburg rooftop than in Lomas de Zamora or Córdoba, but it sure smells the same. “Isn’t that the first sign you are a hipster? To not recognize you are one?” Typical brothers I thought. Agusto was two years older than Darío. He had actually come first to Miami Beach and as soon as he could, he sent money to his brother so he could come to the United States and join him. Agusto recalls, “The day after I came here, I was working washing dishes.” Though it was actually Dario’s idea to come to New York City because he was always fascinated with New York’s “central park, Fifth Avenue, the streets of the Bronx.”

Agusto then went back to the grill but started to talk to me from across the rooftop. His words reverberated yet I felt we were having an intimate conversation. “I know that Darío looks like a hipster but he always dressed with the latest fashion. Remember, he worked in *La Galería Rex*…with this guy (pointing to Pablo.) They got that retail discount.” Darío gets up and tells Agusto to eat and that he will take care of the grill. Agusto sits and picks up his glass of Malbec, “You know I thought about it. The way people dress when they come here. You look a few blocks over and there is a lot of Mexicans.” The tone gets serious. “The younger ones dress also with the baggy jeans, big shirts, jeans. They adopt the Hip Hop clothes and I wonder if that has to do with them identifying more with how blacks are treated and so they adopt their way of dressing subconsciously.” It is not uncommon to have a regular conversation and for Freudian theory to somewhat emerge in it. Freud is right up there with Maradona within Argentine society and as Mariano Plotkin points out, Freud influenced many aspects of Argentine popular culture.
(Plotkin 2002).

To be honest, I had never thought about the performativity of marginality in that light. “So you have adopted the way of dressing from the non-oppressed? (I did not want to say white.)” Agusto also had green eyes but he had darker hair and a more olive skin tone. However, like Dario, both could “pass” as white. “No, I don’t think so. I dress how I like, and I like to dress like I am from New York. This is where I am from now. I am a Cordobés from New York.” This was my chance to ask the million-dollar question, the elephant in the room. “Do you both consider yourselves Latino?” I do not know why I thought that they would have to think about their response…deeply. Without hesitation and in unison, “Of course!”

At this point given their response, I thought my question was silly. Darío perhaps noticing that I had turned blushed stood up, “Also…it isn’t even about the clothes you wear, it is how you wear them.” He stood up to show me that he was wearing the T-shirt of the nightclub where he worked. He not pointed to the logo on his right breast, I would have not noticed. “The other day I was asked on the L train when I was coming home from work where I had purchased it.” He turned to Agusto who was nodding. “I was like they gave it to me.” Laughing, “He probably thought that it was a gift. I mean I guess it is a gift from my employer but he just makes me wear it every time I go to work.” Agusto, in typical big brother form corrected Darío, “No…it wasn’t a gift. Remember, they made us buy the extra ones.”

Darío smirked and said, “People think I am white but I am Latino…actually a negro de alma” which roughly translates to having a “blackened soul.” He did not mean “dark,” but a “negro” in the Argentinean sense. He then recalled his time working in the Hamptons a few summers ago, “There is a limit to my passing because at the end of the day I would drink beers with the kitchen staff because those were my friends not the older white ladies who were trying to take me home or buy me drinks at work.” I pictured a scenario like when Patrick Swayze
(Johnny) worked at the Kellerman’s Country Club in *Dirty Dancing* (1987). I laughed, “So you’re like Johnny from Dirty Dancing. Poor you!” He snickered and said, “I guess *Cuarteto* can be dirty.”

It is worth mentioning that *Cuarteto* is not known too much outside of Argentina except amongst the diaspora. It is the folkloric music of Cordoba and the genre of choice by the “lower social classes.” By dancing *Cuarteto*, “bodies perform (heteronormative) gender and joy” (Blazquez 2007). I will admit that I have grown fond of the genre as a result of this fieldwork. In most *asados*, this particular one being no different, we knew it was time for music. Once our
words become slurred and the room started to spin, we knew it was time to dance to *La Mona* Jimenez. After all, “you don’t listen to *Cuarteto*, you dance it” (Rodriguez 2012). Before I knew it, the sun had come out over Williamsburg and we were smoking cigarettes talking about meaningful nothings. For a brief instant I tried to take in the moment. I thought about how somewhere in the past year, we had become a family.

**White is Right**

It is critical to further complicate the historical relationship between race and socioeconomic status in the United States and Argentina. I will consider why these racial categories as they are embodied share patterns that manifest socially and with great consequence to the body. Given the political histories of both the United States and Argentina, it is evident that not all of its citizens are treated equally under the law until this day. The “marginality” this produces does not occur in a vacuum. On the contrary, multiple intersecting systems of oppression have been at work since the founding of these nations that account for the relationship between wealth and race (Sarmiento, 2004, Auyero 2012, Maskovsky 2013). The government then polices and regulates these marginalized groups to ensure that they conform to prevailing ideas of difference that explain the unequal distribution of resources that result in degradation, poverty, and disenfranchisement.

Residents of the South Bronx and those in shantytowns in Buenos Aires live in similar conditions, a correlation first made by the Argentine sociologist Javier Auyero. He describes this parallel as “living in harm’s way.” He explains that:

> Being in harm’s way (a harm that, residents believe, might come from others – whether they be young drug dealers and/or the police and/or a violent partner – or from a dangerous physical locale) is a preoccupation that, together with lack of sufficient income, pervades the lives of the inhabitants of marginalized barrios (Auyero 2012:2).

Marginality is a consequence, but also an excuse when it comes to forces that produce “social
isolation” and “abandonment.” In Argentina like in the United States your socioeconomic status is firstly defined by your provenance and wealth (or lack there of), and this tends to also correlate with your racial identity. For instance, it is not coincidental that provincianos, blacks, the poor, and the working class suffer from health disparities that are a direct result of environmental racism. (This happens over here and over there.) This occurrence is rooted in the same ideologies which affords advantages to those whom have purchasing power and denies them to those who do no. To further solidify this relationship, Auyero highlights how the Bronx, New York shares similar features and challenges with residents near the polluted Buenos Aires shantytown of Riachuelo.

Both realities as experienced by its residents implicate the middle and upper class in perpetuating this type of inequality that has real life health consequences on both the body and mind (Auyero 1999). In a previous article on the anorexia epidemic in Buenos Aires, I argue that after the economic crisis the anxiety of being perceived as part of Latin America and “less European” was internalized by women and policed by the fashion industry’s tiny sizes. I later relate this epidemic to that of the obesity epidemic in the United States which is often noted as a “first world problem.” In order to deviate attention from their economic problems, Argentina highlighted the booming beauty industry and the Buenos Aires legislative opted to “treat” the anorexia epidemic by adopting the Obesity Law. In this way the struggle to reclaim Argentina’s Euro-centricity became embodied in the bodies of the ultra-thin Porteñas (Maldonado-Salcedo 2010). With time, in Argentina bigger bodies are becoming more visible and socially accepted however, increasingly more racialized.

It is not uncommon for restaurants in Argentina to put signs on their door when they are looking for service staff. They usually read, “We solicit a waitress with ‘good presence.” What constitutes good presence is indelibly tied to the Eurocentric beauty ideal, which within Porteño
culture is desirable, marketable, and thus complicated. While sitting at a Buenos Aires café, I overhead the manager say that he was not going to hire a girl who had recently responded to the sign on the door. He told another waitress, “She does not have ‘good presence.’ I mean she is big. She looks like a negra de mierda… she probably even lives in the villa and is probably trying to work here so she can send her boyfriend to rob us.” I immediately asked for the check and shook my head in disapproval. However, I then remembered, it is really “chusma” (low-class) to eavesdrop but then I thought, I was simply conducting participant-observation. Technically speaking I was deploying the same method just calling it something “classier.”

**Do you sound American? Argentino and Latino, but never Gringo**

The post-colonialist theorist Rosemary George posits that the very “search for a location where one can feel at home, in spite of the obvious foreignness of the space” is what “propels the discourses engendered by the experience of immigration” (George 1992:79.) Therefore the premium to “pass” as a citizen, when one is an immigrant becomes tricky because you might not necessarily “speak American” even after acquiring English proficiency (MacNeil and Cran 2007). In the United States, not speaking English can be perceived as subversive or a justification for violence when encountering the xenophobic people or entities. There is also a relative violence that occurs when you are unable to understand your rights due to a linguistic barrier that leaves you vulnerable at the hands of “powerful” institutions. The thought of this type of helplessness can make anyone understandably anxious. However, if you are white you are not necessarily as vulnerable because you are not perceptively an “outsider” unless you “sound” like one. In 2013 for example, the Legal Services of New York City on behalf of five immigrants and the violence Intervention Program, which serves Latinas filed a lawsuit against the New York Police Department for not providing translators to these women. They recounted how the officers “mocked their language and arrested the abused in domestic violence calls
involving Spanish speaking victims” (Pearson 2013). The survivor’s inability to speak English made them especially defenseless at the hands of not only their abusers in the private sphere but also the individuals tasked to publically protect and serve them. It is not unusual to consider that the implications of this incident resonate with the old racist conviction that certain groups “deserve” violence. It is worth noting that the medical community has helped maintain this belief in various settings by “primordializing” Latino identity (Wilmsen 1996, Santiago-Irizarry 2001:4).

The idea that the English language is inherently American and a marker of citizenship is embedded in the products we consume, quite literally. After Coca-Cola released a Super Bowl commercial that featured a multiracial cast singing “American the Beautiful” in a variety of languages (Spanish included) a backlash within the twitter-verse exploded calling for the boycott of Coca-Cola and demanding they #SpeakAmerican. One cited the US Code section 1423 and others simply used racial slurs to profess their (political) anger, which included, “Coca Cola is the official soft drink of illegals crossing the border” (Gettys 2014). The misguided exceptionalism that construes America as the last Coca-Cola in the desert speaks to the fear of America’s browning. Language is just one aspect of assimilation, which is often a privileged tool that can be used as a weapon against discriminatory practices. Conversely, immigrants are not necessarily taught “American” social cues, which also leave them at a social disadvantage when interacting outside of the Spanish-speaking world. This lack of understanding of said cues is what might compel them to “say something” that is not necessarily criminal but definitely appalling.
Dario and Agusto told me that when they first worked in Miami Beach as busboys they learned “restaurant English,” which consists of directions or information relevant only to service. Phrases like “more water, get my waiter, the check” are all part of restaurant English 101. However, Agusto said that he used to get really nervous in the beginning when he had to seat a table. One day this “really old man” came in with a “really young” and “sexy woman.” He said that she was “probably Haitian, but definitely black.” He said that because it was his turn to seat the table, he started to get nervous when he noticed that the party was bigger than he first thought. The couple was accompanied by a group of friends. Agusto said that he greeted them and then turned to the woman and asked while extending his hand, “How much?” Understandably, she asked him. “How much? What do you mean?” Realizing what he inadvertently implied he said, “How much people with you?” This was a typical language mistake within beginner’s restaurant English, confusing ‘how many’ with ‘how much.’

Social cues tend to be learned through immersion or they are taught at home. They do not necessarily translate from culture to culture. Dario told me that after living in Buenos Aires he got used to greeting his guy friends with a kiss on the cheek. However, when he got here to New York and he leaned in by inertia to kiss on the cheek one of his non-Argentine co-workers. He immediately stopped him and told Dario that that “they don’t do that here…kissing on the cheek was not cool.”

Parents are usually tasked with teaching their children (assumed) universal cues such as: no burping in public, no elbows on the table, say please, do not stare, say thank you, etc. To learn “proper” English it might require time and resources that are not readily available to immigrants and so many learn what is considered “survival English.” So at times language mistakes may sound cute, but other times it can lead to a misinterpretation with real (unintended) consequences. For example, when my dad uses “mother-flower” as his expletive of choice, it is
funny. When he asks for directions and says, “What way up” when he means north, he could be sent anywhere (he is legally blind.) Other times your inability to pronounce a word can literally “cost you your life” or brand you as a “real” threat (Davis 2012, Chavez 2004:35-36). \[161\]

Currently in the United States, speaking Spanish and being brown can “trigger” xenophobic sentiments without warning. Who could forget the viral video of an elderly white woman at IHOP “berating Mrs. Vasquez,” and telling her to “return to Spain.” This incident with Ms. Velasquez who had emigrated from El Salvador over 30 year ago to Los Angeles, California highlighted the nuances between sounding American and speaking English. She noted, “I speak English. Not good, but I speak English.” This happening in the City of Los Angeles definitely was symptomatic of how Latinos are perceived, as a “threatening” force within the anxious white imaginary (Fox News Latino 2014). In other parts of the World speaking more than one language is an asset, where as in the United States, it depends on “who” is speaking the language and why. When a white business professional learns Spanish through Rosetta stone, it is applauded and rewarded by his employer perhaps with a promotion or even a raise. When you speak Spanish at home even when you are fluent in the dominant language, it can be construed as a sign of “resisting” Americanization or assimilation. These attitudes towards heritage speakers fuel the resurgence of birthright restrictions to citizenship in the United States” (Terkel 2014).

In the same vein, speaking Spanish while white can prove marketable, especially for Latinos who seek visibility and upward mobility. The Telenovela industry is a solid example on the intricacies of race and language in the United States in similar ways as the romance novels proved in the “imagining” of the Americas. Doris Sommer argues that they (romance novels) were fundamental to “nation building”. Historically, the Telenovelas industries throughout the Americas have centered their stories on white protagonists (Benavides 2008). In the United States, media companies such as Telemundo produce Spanish language Telenovelas, which is a
subsidiary of NBC networks. They too have “white” protagonists but they all live in Miami, where you can feasibly live an affluent lifestyle without necessarily speaking fluent English. Moreover, Spanish language *Telenovela* roles tend to forge a path to Hollywood and increase the chances of “crossover success,” as seen in the careers of such actors like William Levy, Salma Hayek, and Sofia Vergara. They started their careers on “*Telenovelas,*” but were able to maximize their marketability due to the fact that they “look white,” but retain a “sexy” accent that makes them exotic (spicy) enough for the American palate (Terrero 2013).

Anthropologist Arlene Dávila references Lionel Sosa’s 2006 *Grow Rich: A Latino Choice* in which he affirms that Latinos can indeed be successful but first they must shed, “the cultural baggage” that comes from our “roots.” Dávila explains that Latinos can be successful if they follow Hill’s suit explicating:

> Latinos can achieve success through Hill’s mantra but only after shedding their common cultural baggage derived from Catholicism, Spanish Colonization and their disposition to respect authority. It is these values that have led Latinos toward a path of shame, suffering, sweat, and sacrifice rather than toward a path that cultivates the Anglo American values of independence, and individuality…(Dávila 2008: 86)

While Dávila breaks down these popular assimilation tactics, she also points to how these designations are marketed, internalized, and perpetuated by Latinos themselves who then fuel greater stereotypes concerning immigration and the value of Euro-centricity. In this landscape, Argentines seem to have a competitive advantage.

Agusto can qualify as ethnically ambiguous. Although he is from Córdoba, he immediately took to hipster Brooklyn upon leaving Miami. He told me that, “Miami is great but you do not really feel like you are fully living out of *el Sur.* It is like a small town, where you work, everyone knows each other, they even know your family, there is no real privacy.” He now works as a line cook by day and waits tables at the same New York nightclub that Dario works in. They both share a beautiful loft in Williamsburg Brooklyn, which they “can afford.” Agusto
told me that when he moved to Buenos Aires from Córdoba, he was the first to leave because he wanted to help his mother and brother. He was going to “pave the way.” He first lived in a pension with a Brazilian dental student and he had Bolivian next-door neighbors. In order to prove he is better here in the States, and to show his upward mobility he noted that his current neighbors work at New York 1, the other is a group of NYU students, and the owner of the building is a famous artist who he every now and then has coffee with at the corner café.

Reminiscing, Agusto exclaimed, “I know I could pay a cheaper rent if I were to live in Jamaica or even Jackson Heights. But I feel like this is my place and even though I work a lot, I have something to show for it, which is impossible in Argentina. I don’t own it but it is mine.” Darío chimed in, “I rather be homeless at the doorstep of Disney than work sixty hours a week in el Once again and have to commute from Provincia everyday a total of four hours and on top of all that not have enough money at the end of the month to buy food.” This was a common sentiment that I found within my interviews amongst young Provincianos who independently of their documented status and the amount of hours they worked, they confidently conveyed the multiple ways in which they lived better in the United States than in Buenos Aires. Dario explained, “Here we can work to have things we want instead of having to work only for things that we need.” He said this and pulled out the latest I-phone and gestures to me as if saying, “see what I mean.”

Despite the tattoo, piercing, and beards when both of these brothers opened their mouths, an Argentine could identify them. At least this is what Agusto prided himself on being able to do, “he could spot the Argentine.” However, because he works in a kitchen in the morning, he said that he had to prove to his coworkers that he was not like “those Argentines.” He shared, “I know that porteños have given us a bad rap but I tell them, I am from Córdoba…we are different.” He detailed, “I know I speak English with an Argentine accent but it bothers me when
they think I am white.” He was discussing how at the night job he is often confused for being white but that there it did not bother him. In fact, it worked to his advantage. Even though Dario is of a lighter skin tone, he claimed he never really challenged this perception. According to Agusto, the kitchen staff would say things about the other waiters in Spanish and he would understand but not respond. He said that at first the kitchen staff barely spoke to him. He told me that he had to prove he did not think he was better than them because they would say things to insinuate he was “arrogant.” He resolved to make it clear that he was no different than them, “When I work in the kitchen I speak in Spanish because I don’t need to talk anyone in English except when the waiters get upset about a messed up order.” He told me, “I respond to them for the rest of my friends.”

I asked Agusto which job he preferred working in, the kitchen by day, or working in the front of the house by night. He hesitated, “If I made more money in my day job, I would like it more. I mean, I have fun in the back. We listen to the games on the radio and I actually consider them my friends.” He then reminded me that he makes a lot more money as a waiter at night but that he did not like the way the other waiters treated the kitchen staff. Insulted he said, “They don’t even look them (the kitchen staff) in the eyes. I know how that feels.” Since the place was so busy at night, he expressed regret that he did not have a chance to really talk to the kitchen staff more. When Agusto shared this situation he was visibly upset. I remember that at the time we were watching the previa (pre-game commentary) to an Argentina match. He shared his story with the same amount of intensity and emotion he had while rooting during the match. With noticeable bitterness in his voice he said, “The dishwater the other day was talking about how the wait staff were all full of shit and that most of them had never worked a day in their life. That only because we were pretty we made more money.” He then looks at me, “Am I pretty?” I shrugged. Pablo asked, “So what did you do?” Lighting a cigarette he shared, “I started talking
to them in Spanish. Actually, I started talking to them in Cordobés.” Pablo burst at laughing as he started to imitate him “Che culiado...bien ahi.”

Agusto turned serious and said, “And you know what happened?” There was more to this story? “The other waiter walks in and says, ‘I didn’t know you spoke Spanish Agu. Where did you learn to speak Spanish like that?” Putting his arm on Pablo’s shoulder, he looked at him in the eyes as if he would only know what he felt since he too worked in a kitchen, “I was offended.” He then told us he did not really know that waiter nor had he spoken to him but that he started to question if he didn’t “look” Argentine. “So I told him…I ain’t white!” And in his best “Bronx” accent he said, “Don’t get it twisted!” I almost spit my drink out. “I’m Argentino...Latino...not a fucking gringo.” I thought to myself, only an Argentine would be offended to be confused for not white, to be called “pretty,” or a “gringo.” We raised our glasses, “viva Argentina carajo!”

As soon as I put down my glass, Agusto reached over to fill it up. “I can’t help it. After so many years of being a waiter, I cannot fight the urge to refill glasses when I see them empty.” I certainly did not mind having an endless glass of Malbec. Darío blurted, “You also used to wash dishes, can you stand seeing a pile of dishes? If so…” He pointed to the kitchen downstairs. As if he just had an epiphany, Agusto concluded, “After leaving my beloved Cordoba, I figured there was no where in the world that could scare me or make me feel so out of place... not even Gringo-landia.”
“I learned to close the empanadas like my father. I never made them while in Argentina but I would always watch him. He patiently braided the ends. The other one is closed with the fork, like the way my mother would do it. This is faster and easier. However, these are a labor of love. When I made them for the first time, they did not come out so well. However, I kept trying until they became like the ones I remember from my childhood. Do you want the recipe of the filling? It is a family recipe.”- Bernardo, 42, Miami, Argentina

Bernardo’s Family Recipe for Empanada filling
from Mendoza, Argentina adapted for Miami, Argentina

1 pound ground beef
2 onion
1 1/2 tablespoons paprika
2 teaspoons cumin
8 manzanilla olives, pitted and cut into slices
2 hard-boiled eggs, cut into rounds
salt and pepper to taste
crushed red pepper, to taste
2 tablespoons butter

Step 1- Go buy the pre-made Empanada shells by Goya
They are in the frozen section.
Step 2- Mix everything up

“You know how to do it, right? Butter, then onions, throw the meat in, then everything else. When it starts smelling good, it’s ready. You let it cool. Stuff them. You can also make them shiny if you use egg wash but I like that they look more artisanal this way. Put them in the oven for like 20ish minutes. You pour yourself a glass while you wait. These go great with Malbec.”

Figure 23 Empanada, a photo by Melissa Maldonado-Salcedo
CHAPTER 6: A Healthy Sickness?

I would like to highlight two points that I feel merit some consideration in this story with regard to passing and the other in regard to immigration. The first consideration I pull from, “El Medio pelo en la Sociedad Srgentina of 1966” by Arturo Juareteche (this title roughly translates as Pretense and social claiming in Argentine society.) In it Juareteche holds that what has passed for high culture in Argentina is in fact, “all sham, mannerism, affection, posturing, and insecure arrogance.” (Schumway 1991:295). He explains that this is why the whitest woman can actually be a “negra,” or why the most macho man can actually be gay. However, he implicates that the sham in itself is what constitutes “realness” in the case of Argentina. This is what is real about Argentinidad, that is it performative. However, this also indicates a particular type of pathological behavior that has often been described as the “Argentine neurosis” or “the atrocious charm of being Argentina” (Aguinis 2001).

Rodriguez writes that this type of “agitation” which has characterized Argentines was first tied to discourses of immigration and progress. She writes that, “The rising number of observed mental disturbances and the related phenomenon of rising crime rates appeared to be linked to the arrival of huge numbers of immigrants and to the resulting urban overcrowding and political and labor unrest.” For this reason, “Many Argentines arrived at the dismal conclusion that mental illness and social decay or ‘degeneration’ were somehow bound to their nation’s progress” (Rodriguez 2003:28). Therefore what is considered normal, by default related to a “native” barbaric impulse that reflects a “lack of progress” or desire to “change.”
“I know that I am Argentine and you are Colombian, but because we were both raised in the Pentecostal circus, you get me. We share things that no one else can understand. We are queer. We both love Bowie. We will always stay friends. Actually, we are family. It isn’t about genetics, it is about love. In this life, we found each other. Let’s toast for that. We were meant to be together and to think, had I not left my country, we would not have all the memories....” - Sergio
For the Love of Rock and Roll, In the Name of Bowie

In this chapter, I use the “free associations” of various topics that build on history, ethnography, memories, rock and roll, and identity in order to construct ethnographically this story that rests on a series of memories about gender and “identity affirming spaces” in which it is challenged. I underscore many of these story elements in order to employ the “introspective process” throughout the chapter. While considering the value of using psychoanalytic methods within my ethnographic work, it is because given the culture(s) of Argentina, this approach made most sense to me because of the story I wanted to tell. Geoffrey Skill notes, “Even so, the kind of observation and analysis they (the ethnographer and the psychoanalyst) pursue bears resemblance to the psychoanalytic encounter” (Skill 2012:31).

Free associations are what Freud called “spontaneously produced and interconnected thoughts.” Henk de Berg explains free associations reveal that nothing is random, a point that I have revisited in my stories. This supports the importance of interpreting not only words, but also body language and silence. All should be construed as offering meaningful insights into the unconscious. He explains that interpreting these free associations can provide “hints” into the unconscious, while never fully giving a resolution to problems (Berg 2004:41-43). This essay is structured around not only my own free associations between interviews, memories, and embodied knowledge but it freely associates them with the story of Sergio.

Waiting for Real Time

“For your salvation I wait, O Lord” -
Genesis 49:18

“Could you believe this woman?” This was the first time I heard about Sonia Perez and her preventable death. Sergio and I looked over a Facebook post in one of the Argentina groups he formed part of online. As the story goes, a woman died due to a breast enhancement
procedure she conducted on herself and consequently botched. We were having brunch and as I
prepared arepas, we read out loud real-time news stories. We had watched the film Cuento
Chino (2011) together, and ever since, we would collect bizarre stories online in order to
comment/critique/gossip about them. We focused our interests on stories concerning Argentina.
In this way we did not feel like we were simply reading sensational stories, but instead we both
called this brunch ritual “research.” Facebook allowed us to learn more about Argentina and
Argentines than mainstream television news agencies.

In the United States, Spanish language television has to address issues relevant to the
entire Latino community but their audience is predominantly Mexican. For this reason, it is
conceivable that national and local issues concerning Argentina and Argentines receive less
attention throughout the daily Spanish language broadcasts. For instance, Univision, which is
the biggest Spanish language media agency in the United States, caters a significant amount of
their programming to the Mexican community. They devote a considerable amount of their
primetime programs to Telenovelas produced by Televisa and to coverage of the Liga Mexicana
games (fútbol.) This suggests that they have cornered the market for Mexican viewership, which
represents the biggest Latino community in the United States. In fact, the Mexican community
weighs heavily on even their business relationships; hence they cut their ties with Donald
Trump and the Miss Universe pageant amid his “insulting remarks” about Mexican immigrants
(James 2015). These actions reverberated throughout the entire Latino community.

Online communities organized around national identity enable Diasporas to find a
meeting ground to share (personally) meaningful and (collectively) relevant information and
issues. These communities can be intersectional but also very specifically organized. Hamid
Haficy claims that online communities enable a virtual reterritorialization. This is a place and
process that can be “temporary and moved” and also, “built, rebuilt, carried in memory, and by
acts of imagination” (Haficy 1999: 5-6). It is where one can be anchored culturally in meaningfully in a new context in order to “re-imagine” the past in order to move forward. Karina Nikunen argues that this phenomenon is rooted in a diaspora’s dynamic self-identity and a longing for community. She notes that the relationship between social media and identity is not conventional, “While virtual worlds may ease the sense of alienation of help to build new transnational communities of sharing, we must be cautious not to claim an overly deterministic or essentialist relationship between media and identity, which are complexly interconnected with, and shaped by, social and material factors” (Nikunen 2013).

Social media and online communities provide a space to explore another dimension of transnational identity formations and contestations while witnessing how they evolve and expand. For example, where as I may not necessarily “connect” to many of my own cousins who still live in Colombia, our membership in our family’s hometown page indicates a shared “home.” This is because our shared membership to the same family and online community. These communities can also help create feelings associated with family such as nostalgia, melancholy, and concern. Susanna Paasonen explains that, “If one defines home as a sense of belonging, online communities, home pages, and even family albums can be thought of as ‘homes’ in the sense that they provide images of people and places, past and present and offer a sense of continuity and community” (Paasonen 2005:89). “Here” and “there” becomes reconfigured as fluid formulations that are intimate and foreign at the same time.

Sergio started to use the Internet as part of his daily routine when he made peace with the fact that it was not a luxury in the United States. When you lack economic security, luxuries and necessities are constantly reevaluated. Given the “digital divides” that further isolate the disenfranchised, Internet access has become imperative to economic and social mobility within greater American life. For this reason Google opted to provide Fiber High-Speed Internet to
public housing residents in the same way water and electricity is provided, for free (Dicks 2016). The Internet makes life significantly more “efficient” in the United States. However, for the most part, this is not its purpose or function within Argentina. For instance in Buenos Aires, the Internet may be readily available for the Public in various free Wi-Fi zones throughout the Capital but computers, tablets, and smartphones remain luxury items that can make its owners targets. It is negligent and naïve to use an I-phone at a public park, at least, this would undoubtedly identify you as a tourist. In 2010 a travel guide blog geared towards Americans visiting Buenos Aires called Gringo in Buenos Aires warned that, “cell phones, especially expensive ones, are very common targets for thieves in Buenos Aires. If you insist on carrying an expensive phone, think twice about where you are and who can see you before pulling it out (Gringoinbuenosaires 2010). In recent years, with the proliferation of apple products as signifiers of wealth and cutting edge technology, there is a high demand for these products. Portable electronic devices (tablets, smartphones, and laptops) are hot commodities that cannot be used for public services and within public life.

In Argentina, only “in person” transactions with the State are valid and legitimate in order to provide services and rights afforded by citizenship. If you have wealth then you can “pay” to have someone stand in for you. You can manage your time in this way. When I went to get my dog’s medical clearance in Buenos Aires from SENASA (Servicio Nacional de Sanidad y Calidad Agroalimentaria) in order to return to New York, I waited hours to be “seen” by an agent. While waiting on line a young man started giving out cards with his information announcing his services at a nominal fee. He basically marketed saving you time by standing in your place with your papers. He sold his time, so you don’t have to give yours up. Time can become a commodity. However, if you are poor, waiting is an expected part of all exchanges and
transactions with public hospitals, schools, transportation, social services, housing, and restrooms. After the economic crisis, He suggests that the experience of poor people waiting in Argentina is very similar to that of the undocumented in the United States, because “uncertainty and arbitrariness plague both” (Auyero 2012:26). However if one is Internet proficient in the United States, using it can save time, resources, and energy while also offering access to new opportunities and possibilities for work, relationships, and participation.

In the United States you can pay most of your basic bills and supplies online with a debit/credit card, in the comfort of your home. You can even apply for welfare benefits online. In Argentina, it is by waiting that citizenship warps into a client/provider relationship that requires extraordinary patience and time. In this way it can be conceived that waiting is about controlling bodies in order to assert authority, take the Christian rapture. Followers are still waiting for the second coming of Christ in order to finally “live.” In fact, the whole purpose of one’s existence on Earth is to wait. Schwartz contends that this is because, “to be kept waiting an unusually long time, is to be the subject of an assentation that one’s own time (and therefore, one’s social worth) is less valuable than the time and worth of the one who imposes the wait” (Schwartz 1974:856). In these circumstances, patience becomes a divine virtue when a higher power makes you wait.

Facing Patriarchy

When Sergio discovered social media and particularly Facebook, it allowed him to “participate” in conversations and debates about his community in “real” ways that were never fully extended to him by virtue of his identity as a “un cabeza gay.” He is originally from Rosario, Argentina. Its children have overshadowed this historical ambiguity by claiming it to the world as the birthplace of various legends. It is often described as if greatness is indigenous to this land. Rosario gave birth to some of Argentina's biggest icons such as soccer star Lionel Messi, the revolutionary Ernesto “Che” Guevara, comedian Alberto Olmedo, pianist and rocker.
Fito Paez, and “The Sweetheart of the Americas,” Libertad LaMarque. Sergio would often share this list of Rosarinos whenever the shift manager would choose him as headwaiter for the night. He would then add himself to this list of luminaries with the same enthusiasm found in a soccer commentator’s voice as he announces a stellar squad. He would proclaim, “Messi, Che, Olmedo, Fito, Libertad…and who else?”

Sergio then would look around and point to his chest,164 “Me, the number one waiter in the world.” He then would lift his arms up in the air, imitating the stance of Cristiano Ronaldo, awaiting the applause, praise, and awe of teammates and fans alike. “What’s my name? Sergio, from the land of Rock and Roll.” The response was always the same, laughter, envy, and admiration. He out staged me, and at first, we did not click because of this. Until we realized, we worked better as a team than as rivals. The owner of the restaurant really liked him. He would say that Sergio “had the biggest balls for a waiter.” (Backhanded compliments are common and expected within the service industries.) If I were to describe him I would have to say he is highly skilled, rebellious, funny, talented, and dramatic. In summation, he’s just very rock and roll (to me.)

Sergio, from the Land of Rock and Roll

“Cada día es una oportunidad de salir a la calle y enfrentar al viento. Los sueños a veces se hacen realidad, dale tiempo al tiempo.” - Tiempo al Tiempo, Fito Páez

Sergio tells me that when he moved from Rosario to Buenos Aires, he was considered and treated like an outsider or “cabecita.” Even though Rosario is a three-hour bus ride from the Capital, he felt as if he was a traveling to another world. When he decided to purchase his one-way ticket, he remembers he felt a “frío en el pecho” (chill in his chest.) He was determined to move forward in his life, and that it is why he needed to be away from his hometown and family.
He made peace with the fact that if he wanted to pursue opportunities, the path to them would take him farther and farther away. He never met his father, but his mother and sister had no intention of ever leaving Rosario. He says that they live “a very comfortable life.” When I first met him, he disclosed that his mother had her own business in Rosario, and that it was more than likely that his sister would inherit it. Accepting such a fate was not typical (a primogenitor surrendering their inheritance.) I had surmised that he did not want to talk much about the details and so I did not I asked him if he thought would ever want his share, since technically, he should inherit some of it. He would only laugh and say, “Never. I want nothing to do with it.”

When Sergio purchased his ticket to Miami, he told me he was forced to buy a round-trip ticket. Although he knew that it was unlikely it would be used, he never threw it away. It was expired, worn, and hidden in a box he kept in his bedroom closet. This box is also where he kept pictures of his childhood and family. He saved photos of Miami and New York in frames and in albums. It was only after he moved to New York that he shared his private collection of memories with me. He told me that he “had to be ready.” Had it not been for the pictures, I would have never known that he had grown his hair down to his waist during his teens and that he used to wear very tight jeans. None of these fashion choices made him necessarily standout in his town because this was the style right up to the 1990s. Pablo sported the same look when Guns and Roses was in style. However, what did surprise me is that Sergio’s hair was really curly, kind of like Fito’s, kind of like mine. He had rulos (curls.) It suddenly made sense why he never liked to get his hair wet. We would just sit out in the sun whenever we went to the beach together in Miami. I did not know how to swim at the time so I would forego the water because I refused to stay at the shore, with the toddlers and their parents. I learned that he would flat iron his locks, and I teased him about it until he taught me how to straighten my own.

Unlike when Sergio arrived in Buenos Aires, he found that the network of Rosarinos in
Miami Beach were especially useful in helping him settle. Due to the speed and concentrated spaces of the capital, he was unable to establish meaningful relationship. He felt when he moved to Buenos Aires, it was as if he was simply setting up a tent at Ezeiza airport for an extended layover. From the moment Sergio saw Times Square, he says he knew New York would one day be his final destination. He said that he met many of his fellow Rosarinos in Flamingo Park, where most of the workers of the various service industries gathered to play. Sometimes the teams were formed in relation to nationality (like Argentina Vs. Honduras.) Sometimes it would be provincianos teams such as (Rosarinos Vs. Cordobeses) and when the teams were diverse, they tended to be formed in accordance to restaurants. Sergio says that he was wearing his Newell’s Old Boys soccer Jersey when a Rosarino introduced himself to him at the park. They would end up becoming roommates and eventually lovers. However, things turned sour when Sergio found out that he was (still) married in Argentina.

**When the Stars (Re) Align**

Sergio and I worked together in Miami briefly, but it was when we reconnected in New York that he became “like family.” I was recently as his emergency contact on his gym membership. Even though, we were very close as coworkers in Miami, outside of the restaurant we also had to manage numerous other personal relationships that were constantly in flux. Pablo and I had recently moved in to our first apartment and so I was also adjusting to becoming part of his family. Sergio was always working or partying. Miami was where he debuted as an “openly” gay man. This required that he focus his time, energy, and resources on this self-
discovery. He was a popular “nightlife enthusiast.” He told me that he needed to “quemar etapas” (burn stages) that he did not get the chance to in Buenos Aires. They were many weekends when he would return home after works only to shower and leave to an after party. We would often meet up with our coworkers and return out to patron the bars, lounges, and nightclubs we had served a few hours earlier. Despite the fact that New York is huge and lends itself to anonymity, when he headed up North, we made more of an effort to see each other and “do things.” Together, we learnt the joys of bottomless brunches and wondered why it was not “a thing” in Miami or Buenos Aires; we concluded that it would have saved us a lot of money. As time passed and we “matured” and became concerned with saving money, we calculated that it would be cheaper (and safer) to brunch at home.

Sergio said that because his socioeconomic status continued to sink while in Buenos Aires, he had no time to engage in activities that did not produce money or at least, in any that “wasted” it. He does not remember ever going out to eat at a restaurant in Buenos Aires. He learned to cook because he needed to save money but also did not want to deprive himself of “little pleasures.” He described that even on his days off he would search for ways to generate income, whether it was picking up extra shifts at the restaurant or selling things he felt were sellable, which included his dignity. He confessed that at one point he considered collecting cardboard. He recalls, “That is how desperate I felt. Imagine me, going through the garbage.” He said he had no issue doing it because it was an “honest” living, but it was engaging and competing with other cartoneros that left him doubtful about this activity. He wanted to supplement his income but he says that he was too “effeminate.” Sergio had tattoos of stars all down his arm, with one in particular in the colors of the rainbow.

“I did not want to have to get into fights” with ignorant villeros.”165 I know Sergio enough to know that he has never been one to shy away from a physical altercation if he feels
threatened or offended. One night went out to a nightclub in New York, and on our way home these heavily intoxicated men started to catcall me and tease him. It was David Bowie night at the club, and we were appropriately dressed for the occasion. It is worth noting that we were both serious fans. When Bowie passed away in January of 2016, I was in Argentina. Sergio sent me a text to call him but that to make sure I had a drink in hand when I did. When I called, I remember feeling disoriented by the news. We planned to mourn the lost of our idol when I returned. Sergio went to lay flowers in front of his home, which was walking distance from mine. Vogue magazine published that when the news of his untimely passing emerged, “Across the street, a healthy mound of bouquets was beginning to accumulate on the sidewalk.

“…Mourners trickled by, braving freezing temperatures, made timid by the overwhelming presence of media, reporters, scribbling descriptions of the scene…” (Felsenthal 2016). We were many miles away from each other and yet social media allowed me to feel as if I was there with him and in a way that would never have been possible without the Internet.

Sergio and I were both drawn to Bowie growing up because of his gender-bending approach to life. In a tribute article in Rolling Stone, he is described as the “grand patriarch of gentle gender ambiguity” and was also, “powerfully feminine” (Portwood 2016). The reason we initially became friends was because we serendipitously discovered that we both had tattoos of Bowie lyrics. When you grow in an evangelical home, you are taught that your body does not belong to you, it is the “temple of the Holy Spirit” and for this reason, if you tattoo it, you “desecrate” your body. One of the first ways to rebel and reclaim your body is to get a tattoo. To tattoo Bowie was a way to immortalize his presence in our identity formation. Tattoos are “inalienable objects.” Writing on their cultural import and embodied meaning, Daniel Miller notes that tattoos “establish the full possibilities of the inalienable. They ensure that memories of the best relationships can never be excised…” (Daniel Miller 2009:9). Once a tattoo on the body,
they cannot no longer form “part of exchange or be given away” (10). While this perhaps is not uncommon amongst his devotees, to get tattoo of Bowie words or symbols, we thought it was a “sign.”

It is worth also noting that tattoos are indicators of particular relationships that are laden with implications concerning power and identity. Therefore our interpretation, while somewhat infused with mystical connotations, was ascertained. Pasi Falk writes of tattooing:

The irreversible reshaping of the body and its permanent marking manifests the stable and static of character of relations in society. It also indicates a specific relationship to the body as raw material—clay to be molded and a surface to draw on. This does not imply contempt for the body nor does it express particular adoration of the “natural body” image. The body is an unfinished piece of art to be completed. It must be transformed from nature to culture (Falk 1995:99).

After the serendipitous sighting of our tattoos, we felt like “kindred spirits.” We had a shared experience of “spiritual trauma” that lead us to a common referent, Bowie. He spoke to us in very “spiritual” ways. I think that our need to fill void in our lives brought us to each after. He had a sister, but she was “very into” the Church and against his “lifestyle.” I had a brother, but he was a drug addict I did not see or communicate with him. I asked him once if he had social media so we could connect, and responded that he did not “understand or care” for any of that stuff. Sergio and I now, had each other.

She moves me.

Like me, Sergio moved out of his house as soon as he could which presented particular challenges because neither of us were legally adults when we first embarked on our quest into “the wild.” Pentecostals condemn and vilify “the world,” so you “reject” it along with all “fleshly” desires. John Stratton Hawley writes how this demand by Christian fundamentalist dogmas and doctrines, disproportionally impacts women (and suggests as a result that it is an even heightened concern for homosexuals.) He writes that we end up striking a “fearsome
bargain” which controls our bodies and mind. Hawley testifies, “We have chosen to deny and control the flesh. We have given up the contentment that is possible through the acceptance of our embodied selves, in order to preserve the appearance that we can master our world and contain our vulnerability” (Hawley 1994:189). This is why we thought we were emotionally immature at times; we were forced to grow up quickly and lacked at times guidance on a whole bunch of first times that were for the most part prohibited within our homes, churches, and sometimes, society as a whole.

When you are raised Pentecostal or Christian fundamentalist, you are forced to figure out a lot of things that could have been ameliorated by “a talk” instead of a “sermon.” This is why we also both turned to music for answers. I graduated in 1998 from High School and in my yearbook quote, I opted to not choose a bible versus as so many of my classmates did given that we were in a Catholic school. I quoted Bob Dylan, which while some nuns disapproved, I think it foreshadowed a great deal of my adult life and my search for answers.

Gender Rebels: Growing up Queer

Sergio and I spoke a great deal about our connection to Bowie growing up. We related to Bowie’s ease in being outside of the norm, a “rebel,” who often described himself as “from another planet.” The thing is that Sergio had grown up, like me, in an evangelical home. His mother was of Italian decent, and very entrepreneurial. She ended up starting a church. She at first held services in her backyard, but the congregation grew and she was able to eventually buy a church, a new home, and a vacation home in Punta del Este, Uruguay where she would go and “meditate” to “hear God’s voice.” Apparently, God’s reception was faulty in Argentina.
Sergio’s mother currently drove a brand new car as well as his sister who he says was her faithful apprentice. Sergio said that because his sister was not necessarily “attractive,” she was a very petty person. She was very popular and revered within the congregation for simply being the “pastor’s daughter,” a role she loved to assert. He said that she did ended up dropping out of college because she was smart. He said, “no one cared that she was the pastor’s daughter and that drove her crazy. She would remind her classmates, and they would look at her like she was delusional. Eventually she realized that she was going to make more money by assuming her mother’s throne.” He said that she had an endless stream of male suitors who were trying to get into the family business, and less into her pants. That was simply the price they would have to pay if ever they married her. He says that he only met two people in his life that compared to his mother and those were, Evita (actress and former President of Argentina) and his dog, “the other Evita.” His mother dyed her hair blonde and wore it in a bun, attempting to emulate her idol.

To me, it made sense that as “queer kids” we often felt alien from our familiar surroundings and family. When you realize that you are “different” from the rest before you actually develop abstract thought, “el mundo” (the world) can be scary. If every aspect of your identity needs to be repressed, how could you ever fully be free if you cannot live your truth? Despite the fact that we were born and raised in very different backdrops, we knew similar oppressions and fought the same demons that constantly judged us in our minds. After all, we both knew what it was like to be condemned to eternal damnation for minor moral infractions such as cursing and dancing. We were more than the black sheep in our families; we were sometimes considered the very “devil incarnate.” We swapped stories of the countless demons that were rebuked from out of our bodies by elders and family members alike.

Our physical bodies were constantly engaged in a spiritual warfare against our identity.

He laughed (and understood) why each time I saw a filmic depiction of exorcism or spirit
procession (whether at the movies or in an anthropology class), I would close my eyes and repeat, “in the name of Jesus.”

Did I really think that demonic spirits would travel from the screen directly into my body if my eyes remained open, like I had been taught (Ephesians 6:11)? Not in the slightest bit. But, I did feel great anxiety if I did not do this. Imagine, I sat in the front row of my introduction to anthropology course closing my eyes throughout the entire final scene of *Black Orpheus* (1959). It is one of the many compulsions that I do not know how to tame. One night we invented a drinking game called, “Drink if you are going to hell.” We took turns reading bible verses that inspired evangelical “dogmas” (our church rules), and we then took a shot if we had “committed the sin.” I remember that we both took shots for the first few, but after the fourth or so, the night became a blur. If the rapture were to have happened on that night, the following morning we concluded that at least God would have found our final moments on earth entertaining.

*Do not drink alcohol.* (1 Peter 5:8)…shot.

*Honor your father and mother*…(Exodus 20:12)…shot.

*Do not hate*…(Leviticus 19:17-18)…shot.

*Tattoos and Body piercings*…(Leviticus 19:28)…shot

*Dirty Dancing*…(Exodus 32:6, 18:25)…(double) shot.

**Out of this World Fates**

“Let’s dance put on your red shoes and dance the blues...” - David Bowie

“When the Spirit of the Lord comes up on my heart, I will dance like David danced.” -I Samuel 6:4

On that one fateful night, Sergio and I both had “dressed up” to go and “dance” the night away. We had diligently prepared for the spirit of Bowie to take procession of our bodies by
adorning and dressing it with the appropriate (gender-bending) garments. We knew it would be sacrilegious if we did not honor the music with the fashion. I had my face painted like Ziggy Stardust, and he was dressed in “drag.” I remember that for the first hour on the dance floor, I tried to limit my “sweat” by limiting my movements. Sergio told me that I was being rude to Bowie and the rest of the club by doing the “Pentecostal 2-step.” The “Pentecostal 2-step” consists of simply stepping side to side. It is only discernable to other Pentecostals (or former ones, like us.) This movement is the closest one can get to actually dancing in church (with exception to “dancing in the holy ghost.”) I feared resembling more Heath Ledger’s Joker from *Batman Returns* (2005) than my rock and roll “Hero.” I was wearing a ton of makeup, which I am still not used to doing. I have so many nervous ticks that involve me touching my face that by the second hour, I gave in. This mission, to restrict my dancing, was doomed from the moment the DJ played, “Fame.”166

It was early morning when we stepped back into reality. I suggested we walk home to sober up. I had fasted that morning in order to limit my caloric intake or more specifically, to compensate for (empty) liquid calories. The smell of New York City was making me dizzy. It was not a very smart decision, despite its practical intentions. A group of men who had stumbled out of the neighboring pub started to blow their cigarette smoke in our direction. They then started to harass us as we walked by them. I was not afraid. I knew that the guy who was walking with me was greater than the group of (intoxicated) men who stood before us. They continued to utter vile words in English *and* Spanish. There is only so much one is willing to endure while abiding by the law of God and man. Then one of them called Sergio a “puto” (faggot.)

Before I could fully ascertain what was happening, Sergio turned around and punched the guy in the face. I did not want to “blame it on the alcohol.” This guy was not expecting Sergio, who wore make-up and heels without trepidation, to hit him. When he hunched to touch his eye;
perhaps to check if it was still in his socket because that was a brutal hit. I started to panic and Sergio went to hold me up because my knees started to trembling. I saw blood. BLOOD! I was scared. Not for the guy, but for Sergio because if the cops were called, he had a lot to lose. Sergio had just received his employment authorization and therefore was subject to strict conditions in order to legalize his status. Fighting and public intoxication were certainly legal infractions that were hard to spin at this point. I do not condone violence, but I also knew I was not exactly neutral on this particularly incident. “Dude, you punched me.” Sergio may “look” like a lady, but he did not “act” like one.

“Puto,” this word triggered a lot of rage because despite being out and proud, Sergio found the label and its implications especially offensive. He heard it all too often within the Church, calling him this behind his back because he painted his fingernails black, pierced his ears, and worked out (religiously.) While they all worried about their spirits, Sergio focused on his body. “I’m not a puto... bitch.” As if the worst thing that one could tell a man, no matter his sexual orientation, is that he is a woman. I had no time to get into why I took more issue with what he said than what he did. Capitalizing on the shock that immobilized this guy or his friends to retaliate, I yelled for us to run. “Vámonos!” We flagged a cab as we hurried down the block and finally escaped. My anxiety started to kick in, and I thought that maybe he should leave us about seven blocks from my apartment. I figured that if any of the guys had taken down the taxis plate number, there was a possibility that we could be caught. However, I am extra paranoid
when I drink and even more when it comes to anything that can get me arrested. So we kept going though I can’t recall how I finally arrived. I thought about the possibility that surveillance cameras had captured the incident. However, I have learned that this has no weight on justice. Also these images without sound can decontextualize aggression, and present it as devoid of any explanation and reasoning. Sergio remained silent. I did not know if I wanted to pray, cry, or both. I called Pablo who was expecting me home at least an hour before. I asked him, “Can you wait for me downstairs in front of the building?” I was not used to being alone in these adventures.

In Latino culture, there is a presumed difference between passives and actives that are rooted in patriarchy. Erika Sanchez explains that, in Latino culture “puto” is associated with passive partners that are conceived as having, “abdicated their masculinity, while actives often still consider themselves to be straight” (Sanchez 2013). It took Sergio many years to come to terms with his sexual orientation, but he was “never going to accept being confused for a “passive.” He vulgarly explained, “My asshole is intact.” Later on, I will explain the cultural significant of “intact” assholes for the Argentinean State but for now, I would like to simply highlight how homosexual men are not exempt from the overbearing clutches of machismo. It is far too embedded in not only how masculine performances are perceived, but machismo configured how men relate to other men and women. I have no doubt that had this man directly attacked me (or my character), Sergio would have reacted the same way. After all, it was Sergio who would set aggressive customers “straight” anytime they tried to hit on me or were “jerks” to me when we worked the same shifts.

While I have no issues standing up for myself, at times, I knew that his interventions or rather, warnings resonated more efficiently because of his abilities. He was a black belt in Taekwondo, the most popular martial arts in Argentina (Adrogue 2008). Also, his mother had
enrolled him in a military academy growing up in the hopes that he would learn to protect his sister and eventually, have the “gay beat out of him.” However, in Argentina, while the military has a history of homophobic/homoerotic tendencies, it certainly emboldened his sense of machismo.

When Pablo saw me get out of the cab, he ran to hold me up. I figured that his was probably one of the last times I would be going out alone. I thought that Pablo later confirmed when he spoke with Sergio. I was stumbling because I was disoriented by the sequence of events that resulted in an escape and more unexpectedly, blood. “What happened?” Pablo and Sergio greeted each other; Pablo then realized my state was not a result of alcohol because I was mouthing “Thank you Jesus.” He looked concerned, “I thought you were going to take care of her?” We started to head towards the door, “I had to punch this guy…” Pablo then turned to me, “What did he do to you?” I started to shake my head. “No, he started with me… you’ll understand.” Pablo at that point saw that I started to look squeamish. “I made breakfast, chorizo, sunny-side eggs.” That was my trigger. I turned around and puked. I stood there and Sergio held my hair back as glamor or food left my body. I was still in disbelief at what transpired. Pablo laughed, “You feel better, right? Sometimes you got to just let it all out.”

**Detoxing from the Flesh**

Sergio recounts that in the months leading up to his move to Miami, he stopped eating meat and fueled himself with vegetables that the *verduleros* (seller of vegetables) were about to throw away. They would either sell it to him at an incredibly reduced rate or leave the box outside filled with the still “edible” eggplants and squashes. He would then wash it down with water or mate. He called it a forced 100 day “Daniel Fast.” The David Fast is a 10 to 21 abstention from “unclean foods” according to the Old Testament. I was familiar with it as a ritual many Latino Pentecostals in the United States perform at the end of the year, presumably after
consuming copious amounts of turkey and pork due to the holidays. For as long as I could remember, celebrating Jesus’s birthday involved eating a pork preparation (pernil, lechón, jamón…) In recent years, the Daniel Fast has been exalted for its physical and spiritual results. The 10-day fast has been sold to a mainstream market as a “healthy diet and detox plan.” Biblical scriptures (Daniel 1:15-16) and scientific literature within a “2500 year gap” were used to suggest that “mind (emotions), body and spirit” benefit from this detox plan (Bridgeman 2009). However, what I believe must be underscored is that fasting is a very powerful means to also convey political and social disconformity. Despite the economic benefits of abstaining from meat, Sergio’s use of the term fasting to demarcate this time has great symbolic resonance. He was fasting as a necessary means to obtain a change (in his life circumstances.)

I would like to briefly consider the relationship between the feminization of poverty (or the emasculating effect) it can have men and the relationship of women and food, per Sergio’s fast. Carole Counihan writes that “An absolutist, dualistic worldview” is what enables establishing a social context in which denying appetite (or matters of the flesh) is “meaningful” and imbued with divine implications. The incentive to “deny yours” is ultimately, eternal life within the Christian view (Mathew 16:24). She then contends that women, but in this case more appropriately we can include the poor or colonized, “Denial of food and appetite brings it practitioners moral worth, admiration, and the socially desires states of holiness, daintiness or thinness, ephemeral states that can involve the faster’s entire negation through death” (Counihan 1999:111). Some historical examples that gives a new reading to Sergio’s “fast,” include the hunger strikes of Marlon Dunlop (US Suffragettes), Bobby Sands against the removal of Special Category Status of Irish republican prisoners (Ireland), Gandhi (India) against caste separation, Cesar Chavez against pesticides on Farms in the “Fast for Life”, Tiananmen students (China) and the Saddam Hussein (against his trial in 2006). All of these examples use the body as a central
site to protest, even against its own need. Everybody has a body, so therefore it is an equally accessible tool to dissent. The experience shares no embodied difference between a fast that also is, “visceral, agonizing, and striking at a person’s most simple needs… Entirely reliant on how long the striker can hold out against his or her most basic instincts” (CBS News 2013). They prove to not live “by bread alone,” but rather, by a determination to abstain from all other forms of material nourishment in order to demand a change within the status quo.

For Sergio, abstaining from meat during this fast was a completely “demoralizing sacrifice.” He had to make it in order to secure sufficient money to leave the country. He saw migration as a form to protest the society. However, these fasts or hunger strikes are performatively complicated. My mother for example participate in this ritual during the month of January as a means of “cleansing the spirit” (and body) for the New Year. The rules and regulations are based on the biblical story of Daniel during his captivity. In an effort to remain “pure” and to avert being “defiled” by eating food offered to the King’s gods, he chose to live on a servant’s diet of vegetables and water (Daniel 1:8-14). When meat is a staple within your food culture, as it is within Argentina, its absence during meals becomes troubling. My mother is much more interested on the physical benefits that comes from a drastically reduced calorie diet. My mother’s participation in the Daniel fast is more akin to when I (attempt) to abstain from alcohol during the month of January. I do this in order to alleviate the burden alcohol has on my social life, bank accounts, and liver during the holiday season which is kicked off by my birthday in early November. In this light, our motives are less spiritual. However, in the case of Sergio, the duration of his fast did have profound transformative impacts on his identity as an Argentine, man, gay, and immigrant.

I was a practicing vegetarian for most of my teen and adult life right up until this fieldwork. I figured if I was going to conduct research on Argentine culture and family, there
was little that I wanted to abstain from. I never felt the need to recognize abstaining from meat as an extraordinary fete but consuming it (as I chose to do) triggered a deep inner struggle. Sergio and I compared our experiences because I told him that I often felt like I was in somehow compromising my values. And although I soon got over the moral dilemma, he told me that he felt something similar when he would eat vegetables. Like he was “denying” who he was. He would ask himself if it was worth it, leaving Argentina. He had to deny himself immediate gratification and focus on his life after Argentina. However, Sergio says that even when his mother had not yet “pegarla” (scored) with the church, he still ate meat everyday. The only times he did not was during the 29th of each month because that is when ñoquis (gnocchi) are eaten. It made him feel like he was “losing” an important part of his identity that he felt he recovered in Miami (no matter how distorted the context.) He recalls that when he waited with anticipation when McDonald’s ran the Wednesday specials where he was able to buy three burgers for 99 cents. He recalls, “They did not even have cheese but I did not feel guilty eating (at times) a total of six of them at a time.”

Sergio claims that he could never freely express himself within Argentina because he did not like being “judged” and according to him, “Argentines are prone to analyzing you regardless. I didn’t want my sexuality to be something else to read into.” Your mother, priests, and taxi drivers will all give you a psychoanalytical read without hesitation (Romero 2012). Psychoanalysis did religious work, in Argentina offering a “belief system that provided explanations for various sectors of social and political reality.” Even the Catholic Church used its terminology (Plotkin 2002:70). Freud and his theories flourished in the Pampas and as a result produced in Argentina a “psychoanalytic culture.” This is just one of many European influences on the formation of the Argentine “mind.” He did not want his sexual orientation to be condemned as sinful or criminal, and therefore did not feel the need to “confess” to a higher
power about whom he desired or slept with. He opted to never “talk about it” or any other matters that had to do with his “real” self.

**Mindful Considerations on the (Argentine) Self: The Gospel According to Freud**

It is worth considering Freud’s theoretical contributions in shaping Argentine social norms because it opens up more avenues to understand how religion and psychoanalysis can be embedded within deeper realms of Argentine culture. Also, it is important to interrogate why Freud would appeal and thrive within cultures that have tensions and ambiguities around the role of women and LGBT citizens. Some critics have claimed that Freudian theories were put at the service of “a conservative, restrictive ideology that sought to normalize sexual identities” (Gallo 2010:9). These critiques suggest that Freudian theories helped support (by way of a science) ideas that are consistent with Catholic values. Mariano Plotkin points out that in a country like Argentina where religion has problematic ties to the State and where crisis is part of its natural state, psychoanalysis has functioned reasonably as a “substitute for religion.” As Clifford Geertz explains and Plotkin references, religions are essentially “ordering systems that are concerned not with how to avoid suffering but how to ensure it, turning it into something bearable, understandable, and expressible” (Plotkin 2002:5).

For this reason in the first decades of the twentieth century in Argentina, psychoanalysis was deemed “more appropriate for artists than scientists (13). Artists are associated with creativity (not following rules) and emotions (irrationalism,) where as the scientist is supposed to have an objective, rational, and organized mind. However, with time psychoanalysis would eventually become part of the Argentine vernacular and point of view. Despite the economic crisis, it remains a “vital component of Argentine culture” (x). However, the questions remains, what is about Freud that resonated with Argentine culture and what motivated its diffusion?

Freud’s impact on Argentine culture shows up in unexpected places, such as Mexico.
Argentines also played a formidable role in diffusing psychoanalytic theory and culture outside of Argentina as well. Roberto Gall notes that:

The 1970s brought an influx of Argentinian analysts who arrived in Mexico after fleeing the military dictatorship, including Marie Langer who was born in Austria, emigrated to Argentina in the 1930s, and had become one of the most respected training analysts in Latin America by the time she arrived in Mexico City. Nestor Braunstein, another Argentinian, played a key role in the introduction of Lacanian thought, and remains on one of the most prolific authors of psychoanalytic works in Mexico (Gallo 2010:4).

Gallo points that soon thereafter psychoanalytic culture emerged with more resources and organized networks throughout Mexico City. However, it had problematic social consequences for socially marginalized groups. Gallo cites the concerns of Mexican intellectual Carlos Monsivais who believed that Psychoanalysis, “inherited the capacities to interpret and cure the soul that were earlier monopolized by the Catholic Church, and ultimately defined a new canon of mental health at the service of the bourgeoisie.” He grounds this suggestion by citing that as the discipline and culture developed, the “marginalization of women, gay men, and other minorities” grew. This phenomenon suggests that his ideas were also supporting preexisting ideas of traditional values. What Gallo does well is also examine the ways in which Freudian theories emerge within Mexican artistic and intellectual life such as in the paintings of Frida Kahlo and the critical essays by Octavio Paz, two of Mexican’s greatest national exponents of culture (Gallo 2010:9). Why does Freud resonate? Can it be due to the fact that within Mexico and Argentina, both countries have complicated histories with the Catholic Church, political corruption, and violence? Is it the intersection of these systems of oppression on the lives of women and LGBT communities that can help explicate Freud’s appeal?

While Argentina was the first country to legalize gay marriage and adoption within Latin America, Mexico City was the first city to enact the region’s first gay marriage law. It was a profitable venture given the fact that the LGBT community generates about $70 billion in travel within the United States alone. Alejandro Rojas, the city tourism secretary noted, “Mexico City
will become a center, where (gay) people from all over the world will be able to come and have their wedding, and then spend there honeymoon here”. At the time, an Argentine couple participated in the first gay wedding in Mexico City and there was no confirmation if the marriage would be recognized and protected within Argentina because at that time, the Marriage bill was halted within Congress (Stevenson 2009). This public spotlight on Mexico’s “progressive” and potentially “profitable” legislation certainly pressured Argentina to move on the bill and become the first country to step towards progress (in this realm.)

Freud comments in *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), “One has, I think, to reckon with the fact that there are present in all men destructive, and therefore anti-social and anti-cultural, trends and that in a great number of people these are strong enough to determine their behavior in society” (8). His words nod towards material wealth and the harnessing of material forces for private consumption. However, he insists, “masses are lazy and unintelligent; they have no love for instinctual renunciation, and they are not to be convinced by argument of its inevitability...” (8). Freud view’s the mass as lazy. How might this dichotomy play into the dictatorships hold on present day ideas of gender, work, and race post the economic crisis? If a mass is complacent and unmotivated, then it is easily controlled. The need to “control” originates in controlling our most primitive instincts (violence and sex.) If the masses are not controlled by the alliance between Church, State, and Medicine then civilization is more than likely doomed. This logic is supported by the ominous words of the Roman Catholic Cardinal Norberto Rivera, which is echoed throughout the world when it comes to affording gays the same protections under the institution of marriage. He stated, “the essence of the family is being attacked by making homosexual unions equivalent to matrimony between a man and a woman” (Stevenson 2009).

Freud compels us to ask that if wealth cannot solely, hold up civilization, then is it coercion our only alternative? Argentina and Mexico share a history of the State attacking
potential insurgency through violent means, particularly young people. For example, when I first read about the 2014 Iguala mass kidnapping of male students who were studying to be teachers in the Ayotzinapa (a south-western Guerrero state), I could not help but think about the detention of students by the *junta militar* in a scenario very much like that of *Night of the Pencils*. The government’s version of what happened is dubious because they claim that the students were detained by “corrupt” police officers who handed them over to members of a local gang. Their bodies were then burned, according to the Government because they were thought to be members of a rival gang. However, the Government refuses to question soldiers who could have played a role. Additionally, the Inter-American commission on Human Rights disputes these claims because there is no sufficient evidence to sustain them (BBC News 2015).

Freud says, “Alongside of wealth we now come upon the means by which civilization can be defended – measures of coercion and other measures that are intended to reconcile men to it and to recompense them for their sacrifices . . .” (Freud, Civilization and its Discontents 2002:12). If our instinctual wishes for cannibalism, killing and incest are present from birth, then how does one deal with not just the neurotic but also ourselves who “shrink from murder or incest but who do not deny . . . [our] sexual lusts, and who do not hesitate to injure other people by lies, Fraud . . .” (14). How does one rationalize these instinctual behaviors within modern day notions of liberation and democracy? Especially when Freud states, “My work is a good example of the strict isolation of the particular contribution which psycho-analytic discussion can make to the solution of the problem of religion... It is, of course, my duty to point out the connecting links... between the deeper and the manifest motives, between the father-complex and man's helplessness and need for protection.”(29).

Within this sea of man’s helplessness, how does one reconcile his argument that the existence of God is a projection of an infantile wish/desire for our parents’ protection from
suffering? What of agency? While Freud certainly does not stop to conceive religious doctrines as the only illusion (but also adds political regulation and relations between the sexes), he does not take up the argument of how political regulation might interact with the religious illusion (43). How could we connect those three realms, or at least place them in deeper discourse? The voice of the intellect may be soft, but can the persistence of intellect awaken religious (dis)illusion (68)?

Freud then remarks, “Civilization has little to fear from educated people and brainworkers. In them the replacement of religious motives for civilized behavior by other, secular motives would proceed unobtrusively; moreover, such people are to a large extent themselves vehicles of civilization. But it is another matter with the great mass of the uneducated and oppressed, who have every reason for being enemies of civilization.”(49) Is it fundamentally supporting the illusion, or even dangerous to place a dichotomy between the learned and the “enemies of civilization,” by sheer virtue of holding intellectual capital as the measuring touchstone? It is conceivable how the military identified gays “enemies of civilization,” along with women’s reproductive capability in Argentina? Mexico? “Where as in other countries, particularly in the United States, enthusiasm for Freud has receded and given way to an anti-Freudian backlash amongst the intelligentsia, in Argentina Freud’s are still gospel.” Thus, it “shows up in unexpected places” within most conceptions and performances of civilization and barbarism (Plotkin 2002:x).

***

Sergio tells me that when his mother saw his profile picture on Facebook, she told declared, “You look so civilized.” He is holding hands with his wife in front of City Hall. He told me that this was soon after he married Izabella. He wanted to show that he was in a “really committed” marriage, just in case Homeland Security checked his Facebook page. This was also
the same page that he used to connect with his sister, cousins, and other friends in Rosario. He created an alternate Facebook page with a different name for his “real” life in the United States. He told me in case homeland security ever would question his real page he would say he was “catfished.” He assured me, “it happens to so many people. You could run into anything on the Internet. “With this fake identity, he would make new friends and relationships online that connected to Argentina and whom he considered his “true self.” He had even started his own community where he was the moderator and determined who could join the group; it was for Gay Argentines abroad. He carried this community everywhere, on his Smartphone he was able to tap in. Sergio felt empowered to control information concerning his private life on such a public platform, even if it meant becoming someone else “technically.” He quickly learned each new advancement or adjustment to the privacy settings feature. To this day he has his mother and sister as Friends but they cannot view his pictures, tag him, or write on his wall even on his “real” page, the one that shows him with his wife. He says, “I came out first online fully, then in real life where I had to keep what I liked a very private matter. It isn’t about just liking men, it is about not liking the shit those repressed straight men like…. You know what I mean?” I was afraid so.

Real Men, no Man’s Land

“The act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene. Hence, gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script that survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again.” –Judith Butler

“We come to pray for all who have fallen, sons of the Homeland who went out to defend their mother, the Homeland, and to reclaim what is theirs, that is of the Homeland, and it was usurped”-Pope Francis (Doughty 2016).
Argentina’s Dirty War was characterized by political repression, disappearances, and a pervasive culture of fear in which machismo (or toxic patriarchy) played a key role (Mignone 1992, Archetti 1997). An occluded part of the Dirty War’s history is how homophobia contributed to the rationalization of political repression by the junta military and the Catholic Church. At this time, social practices and meaningful social relations were disrupted in order to ensure that the civilian population was immobilized and that the authoritarian regime remained in control of bodies and spaces. Those who did not subscribe to their mission were branded subversive. This was a particular dangerous identity if you were male, because it was a “gender deviant” category, which justified the Catholic Church’s condemnation. Taylor also asserts that, “the subversive body was associated with femininity—long hair and the frenzied manner conjured up the enemy as hysterical and effeminate…situated on the brink of mental disintegration” (Taylor 1996:106). For this reason it was important during dictatorial Argentina to pass as a “real man” which practiced heterosexuality, independently of sexual orientation. This was in fact key to survival.

In order to ensure civil society received a cohesive message about the dos and don’ts of gender scripts and sexual practices, the educational system institutionalized military propaganda that dictated norms of appropriate dress and behavior. These norms were in sync with Catholic morals (105). Young men were to “look like” the military figures that controlled the most intimate spaces. This is why mustaches started to become associated with authoritarian rule. This drag enabled them to pass as “good citizens.” The performance of these heteronormative gender roles supports Jargose’s claim that, “heterosexuality…is equally a construction whose meaning is dependent on changing cultural models” (Jargose 1996:2). Additionally, it is explained by Judith Butler’s assertion about how the reality of gender is constituted by performance itself is salient,
when applied to these “troubled” genders within dictatorial Argentina (Butler, Performative Acts and Gender Construction: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory 1990:278).

Heterosexuality was arguably a drag performance that when peeled away or taken off revealed how the body was “disciplined” to conform or disappeared because of power/

The Catholic Church believed that sexual liberation (pleasure) would spread a social epidemic of unpatriotic immorality. This is why Catholic leaders were compelled to support the efforts of the military regime. The Church condemned all identities and mobilizations, which challenged the authority of the State and its institutions, which included school and family in particular. Homosexuality at this point became more than ever a political category, in addition to being a sexual orientation both subject to physical and mental repressions. It is important to address that political repression seeks “to destroy the individual as a political being” while attacking identity (Salimovich, Lira, and Weinstein 1992:74). Homosexuality, in the junta’s assessment, was a social disease, which could spread and reproduce all sorts of national chaos. In fact, this view was consistent with many Argentine values rooted in toxic patriarchy. Fueling this belief, during the 1970s, members of the FLH assumed a provocative slogan, which was an adaptation of an earlier, call by the New York-based Gay Liberation Front. The called was to “Liberate the homosexual in everyone” (Brown 2002:119). This nurtured the dictatorship’s fear that homosexuality could be spread through contagion, and so the Catholic Church supported all efforts to eradicate this potential epidemic even if it implicated (indirectly) supporting its violent tactics in order to do so (Caparrós 2013).

One of the most chilling accounts of this moral complicity between the Church and the State during the dictatorship is noted within Horacio Verbitsky’s The Flight: Confessions of an Argentine Dirty Warrior (1996.) In it he documents the initial moral dilemma that a military soldier had after his first flight of death, where he tossed hooded and semi-incapacitated
detainees from a plane. He said that one of the chaplains comforted him, telling him that it was a “Christian” death. Though, it probably would be called a murder. He said:

I don’t think any human being takes pleasure in killing another...he was telling me that it was a Christian death, because they didn’t suffer, because it wasn’t traumatic, that they had to be eliminated, that war was war and that even the Bible provided for eliminating the weeds from the wheat field. He gave me comfort (30).

In 2007, Father Von Wernich was publically trailed for his complicity with the military during Argentina’s Dirty War. During this trail, which lasted nearly three month, testimonies further illustrated the deep ties the Church had with the military. Testimonies collected by the truth and reconciliation investigators revealed that priests visited detention centers to offer support to the torturers, as opposed to the tortured. Kenneth P. Serbin, Professor of history and author on many texts regarding the Catholic Church in Latin America explains that during this time, “Patriotism came to be associated with Catholicism...So it was almost natural for the Argentine clergy to come to the defense of the authoritarian regime” (Barrionuevo, Argentina Church Faces ‘Dirty War’ Past 2007). This historical past makes it difficult to forget that one of the priests who at the time gave out the Eucharist to these very murderers was the world’s beloved Pope Francis. Could democracy and time wash this (national) sin away? According to various sources, Pope Francis “did little to help who disappeared when the country was under right-wing military rule” and “too much to criticize the left-wing opponents of the general” Jorge Videla (Doughty 2013).173

Following the recent criminalization of high-ranking priests who collaborated with the dictatorship, the Church lost a significant amount of credibility within Argentina until Pope Francis’s assentation, ironically enough. He noted that within Argentina (especially):

Catholicism has never excelled at letting nonbelievers live as they believe they should. The right to legal abortion, for one, will be a ruthless field of that battle: “our” pope will surely never allow his own country, where legal abortion remains severely limited, to set a bad example. Here, as everywhere, the Vatican is a main lobbying force for conservative, even reactionary, issues.
Author Martín Caparrós warned about an Argentine Pope could dangerously bring “this power to unchartered heights,” surpassing even the dictatorship power (Caparrós 2013). A lot of the Church’s oppositionist rhetoric against same-sex marriage was in fact redolent of the dictatorship. Framing the legalization of gay marriage and adoption as a human rights issue was what enabled effectively challenging the Church. According to Corrales and Pecheny, the Church practically prided itself in being above the law, “Its discourse against LGBT folks became so aggressive and discriminatory that even those who were unsure about the morality of the bill were appalled by the extra-constitutionality of the Church’s position” (Corrales and Pecheny 2010).

At the time, countless posters around the City of Buenos Aires still read, “Join us! Children have a right to a mother and father. Marriage is between a man and woman” (figure 2). Democratic values, as preached by the Church, sounded dangerously familiar. Let us not forget that the junta constantly proclaimed “…their respect for human rights, exalting the values of Western and Christian civilization” (Mignone 1992). The military practiced a sinful Catholicism, while the Church continues to preach in favor of an oppressive democracy. In order to further this relationship between violence and identity, as it relates to bodies, I would like to present the following poem, which I translated into English. It highlights how even today this history haunts the memories of Argentina’s future.
Their chests were frozen, more from fear, than because of the cold air up high. An identical drop of cold sweat rolled down their foreheads, which the window’s wind gusts nearly curved horizontally. Both swallowed dryly with their heart in their mouths. These congruencies further blurred the limits of reason and confused their identities. The motor’s noise mixed with the vibrations of the turbulence made their mouth clinch and their teeth grind. They were polar opposites that were attracted and repelled to and by each other at the same time, they also shared the same bewilderment, like two rivals that find themselves on the ground after the rope in the tug of war breaks. They tried to ignore their fate, which was already set, but they were conscious of the imminent fatality. In the next few moments, both would change, but contrarily. One would be assassinated and the other would become an assassin. They both wanted to change their identities, but both were hostages of this horrible act. In their nightmares they would repeat this scene but their roles were switched.

One dreamed he was a young, subversive, filled with life and inexperience; the other dreamed himself more mature, bored with life but content with his security. One, in his dreams, was guilty of being ignorant and enjoyed his perpetual state of apprenticing, while the other, on his side, grew proud from knowing his monotonous future. The military man and the student were living their respective first and last flights.

Both tried to disguise their fear, wanting to follow the expectations of their positions, one a rebel and the other obedient. The damn red light turned on and turned off the definitive hope that there could be a miraculous change of plans. The nightmare’s ending became each time more real. The side door opened and the icy wind impacted the cold they had within. The abundance of air suffocated them; just like its absence will at the bottom of the sea,
where one will forever sleep.

Time was behaving like it did in their dreams; sometimes it eternalized seconds, other times it skipped through hours.

A body fell continually into the abyss. But, which one of the two, the dreaming military man or the dying student? The confused military man, seeing the falling body, feared that he was the student who dreamed up his own assassination. There was only one solution for this unjust ending to this dream (or reality.) A moment later, after a great act of bravery mixed with perplexity, it was two bodies that fell into the sea, and it no longer mattered who was who.

---

1 This was one of Pablo’s first poems written in 2014. I translated it to show how we both experienced the field together but expressed it differently. However, his work blurs the boundaries between literature, history, and anthropology while my work attempts to blur the boundaries between anthropology, history, and art. When we met each other, neither could have imagined who we would become. He was busing tables in Miami and is now a graduate student at NYU’s prestigious creative writing program, and I am a mother (fútbol mami.)
Chapter 7: The Reproduction of Vulnerability

It is not an uncommon sentiment for diasporic communities in this day and age, to find comfort and support within online communities because they enable exchanges that are not analyzed in the same way as in real life. The Internet, especially for immigrants, is a space to congregate and share memories, resentments, and hopes without the same fears as expressing them in real life. Writing on the topic of Diasporas and digital technology, Adoni Alonso and Pedro Oiarzabal argue that, “the Internet offers the possibility to sustain and re-create Diasporas as globally imagined communities.” Noting that these platforms and devices afforded by the Internet also “redefine” our own identity and reality adding, “Technologies that allow us to re-create our own reality that even employs time that is long gone or space that is far distant, transforming both within an imaginary landscape” (Alonso and Oiarzabal 2010:9-10). It allows immigrants who remain connected to their native countries and norms to be virtually honest.

I came closer to Sergio’s computer screen to read the article about Sonia Perez, which is where we started this story. There was something unsettling about the fact that we had multiple distances from this tragedy and despite this, it felt very personal. I found it objectively offensive that this woman was (mis) represented in such an insensitive way to the world. I was first taken a back by the insensitivity of the headline, which identified the victim as “a self-obsessed Argentine.” This text reads suggestive of a greater cultural problem that merited further inquiry but due to word limits, resorts to sound bite reporting, and goes with the “easiness” afforded by stereotypes. In the account, Sonia Perez suffered a fatal blood clot after she injected Vaseline to increase the size of her breasts; this “dangerous DIY” procedure resulted in a pulmonary embolism. Perez was framed like a victim and more (per such an insinuation) as the (sole) perpetrator of her fate. It is also hard to empathize with such a “vain” woman. Sergio blurted,
“She’s a mother! How selfish of her to even think that bigger breasts were somehow more important than being logical.”

Historically cosmetic surgery was deemed a subversive act. Victoria Pitts-Taylor notes that it was “seen as a corruption of the natural body-self relation. The body that has undergone cosmetic surgery has been criticize for creating untruthful representation of the inner self, for allowing an impression of the self that passes as someone else “Pitts-Taylor 2007:17). However, can our bodies be assumed “unnatural” when they are “altered?” Perez was remembered as a celebrated athlete as evidence of her physical strength but the story is underscored by rigorously intimating that despite this, she was mentally “weak” to succumb to her vanity. Nonetheless, no human body has the capacity to fight off “this type of product,” declared chief of surgery, Julio Pla Cardenas. The Daily Mail called her a “self-obsessed Argentinean woman,” in their headline without hesitation or consideration as to the real possibility of a mental illness such as body dysmorphic disorder.

Pitts-Taylor notes that the “essentialist” logic that underscores the history of plastic surgery is very much still in vogue with contemporary society fear of the subversive body. Additionally, she posits that the plastic surgery does not solely transform the physical body or one’s outward appearance but it has “cultural, medical, and political” implications as well because of its impact on what we “the self-interior.” This suggests the procedure penetrates far deeper than the physical body reveals (Pitts-Taylor 2007:16). Hence Perez’s choice to undergo such a risky procedure suggests that she believed that the social benefits outweighed the risks. It is hard to support the notion that she ignored this was not a “normal” activity. The report states that when she arrived at the hospital to be treated, she did not immediately disclose she had self-injected Vaseline. Her logic and subsequence silence suggests shame” of being (perceived) as irresponsible and negligent. This reasoning seems to disproportionately impact women when it

433
comes to their bodies.

“I hardly believe that she was motivated by narcissism…alone.” Sergio was stunned and questioned, “What type of person would go to such lengths, knowing the obvious risks?” He then blurted that the story also noted she had recently suffered third degree burns while sunbathing. It was these details, which were desperately woven together in order to substantiate the consequences of being so “self-obsessed.” This categorization read like a warning. It was completely devoid of an examination of social and cultural norms that engender such risky behaviors. This was not an isolated case nor phenomenon within Western culture. Sergio turned around, and asked, “Isn’t that an oxymoron? Self-obsessed Argentine?” He rolled his eyes and emphasized that this was an English publication. He believed that because she was Argentine, their tone sounded especially harsh. “Would this story even be one if she was from any other country? There’s something ironic in all of this, no? They (the English) love to try to give it to us any chance they get,” as a result of previous battles outside and on the soccer field.

I thought that Sergio pointing out this “oxymoron” in the headline deflected critiquing Argentine culture because perhaps it would hit too close to home. It is not unusual for Argentines to be the first to make jokes about Argentines. In a way it is a goalie move. A goalkeeper, as Eduardo Galeano explains, “does not score goals; he is just there to keep them from being scored” (Galeano 2013:4). You cannot really belittle or embarrass someone who is self-deprecating and cara dura (shameless). You disarm them before they can take a shot. The Argentine Independent published their top five Argentinean jokes in 2013, citing that they emerge form the national tendency to self-critique and be “self-aware.” When it comes to these jokes, the material is infinite, “From historical references to an identity formed through migration, to the more recent woes of the economic crisis—it seems that nothing is off limits for Argentines. And if laughter is the best medicine, they sure know how to find the cure.”
Additionally, the article further contextualizes “everyday jokes” and “an ability to make fun of themselves” as components of the “Argentine personality.” This extraordinary character trait attests to their “passion and thoughts…an ability to make fun of themselves, demonstrates pride, defiance, and self-awareness” (Gnomic 2013). However, some things are just not funny especially when you don’t have a fair advantage.

**Democracy has a Hole**

A hallmark of liberal democracies is “tolerance for minority rights…without (it), democracy is flawed.” This reminder was printed in a 2010 issue of Americas Quarterly, whose findings provides sobering evidence for those who have hopes that the youth in Latin America will bring a deepening of democracy to the region” (Morales 2010). The report cites that low education levels, in conjunction with hegemonic Catholic values, deter Latin Americans from fully grasping the relationship between LGBT rights and democracy. In a follow-up issue titled, “Six Reasons Why Argentina Legalized Gay Marriage first,” American Quarterly astutely argues that Argentina was a logical choice for this human rights advancement. Its historical analysis exalts the 2002 legal recognition of same-sex unions in Argentina, however it stops short from looking at how Catholicism and an ever-growing evangelical community mobilizes outside of the City of Buenos Aires around issues that affect the quality of the life of the LGBT community. However, the while the report highlights how poverty and economic decline does not discriminate, it fails to address how the LGBT experience poverty and economic decline differently. If you are gay, it is not illegal or uncommon be “treated” as if you are insane, a woman, or criminal.

Prior to the constitutional legalization of Same-Sex marriage, a dozen same-sex couples were wed. The most notable of these couples are Alejandro Freyre and Jose Maria Di Bello. On December 29, 2009 they became the first gay couple to marry in all of Latin America. Prior to
this event, Gay Marriage was considered “illegal” within the Argentinean civil code, while the national constitution was silent on this matter.” I believe that the founding fathers felt no need to clarify the matrimony clause, because the constitution assumed all citizens to be heterosexuals. Freyre and Di Bello solicited a marriage license in Buenos Aires so that they could marry on December 1st. They wanted to commemorate World Aids Day (both are HIV positive.) They were denied the right to marry at the time and place. They then traveled further South with the support of Governor Fabiana Río, whose queer reading of the constitution allowed them to wed. Speaking on behalf of the Church, Bishop Juan Carlos of the City of Río Gallegos said that this was, “an attack against the survival of the human species.” While speaking on behalf of the State, Gov. Ríos responded that this marriage was, an “important advance in human rights and social inclusion (BBC News, Argentine Gay Couple Becomes First in Region to Marry 2009).

I want to make the mention that Gov. Ríos was the only female governor in all of Argentina, which further aggravated the Church and its supporters when she came in support of gay marriage. Her message of “equality” and “rights” was disruptive and out of “place.” This particular wedding garnered a lot of international publicity because it brought attention to how the LGBT community is treated within a “questionably” modern and democratic Argentina. Activists across the globe proclaimed that LGBT rights are a human rights issue, and that Argentina should lead the path towards a legally sanctioned gay altar within a traditionally Catholic Latin America. This visibility began to put international pressure on a national issue. Blogs started to question if Argentina, despite courting international gay dollars, was in actuality not as “modern” as they had claimed within its marketing (Barrionuevo, In Macho Argentina, a new Beacon for Gay Tourists 2007). On Facebook and other social networking sites, the LGBT community congregated to follow each and every step down the aisle. However it is important to look back, in order to fully appreciate the importance of this stride towards democracy.
Franco interrogates the interrelatedness between the masculinity performed by the *milicos* (military men) and the subsequent feminization of male prisoners by highlighting the relationship between homophobia and violence in “performing masculinity.” She questions if this a result of the social construction of Argentine masculinity? Franco explains that:

…Military governments inherited a long tradition in which the power to inflict pain was taken as proof of masculinity. The rituals that bonded man male groups (whether boarding-school rites of passage, military drills, or group sexual experiences, traditionally reduced the other to the status of passive victim, to a body to be acted on or penetrated…Yet abjection often forced male prisoners to live as if they were women, so for the first time, they came to understand what it meant to be constantly aware of their bodies, to be ridiculed and battered, and to find comfort in everyday activities like washing clothes or talking to friends (Franco 1992:108-9).

Within the death camps and detention centers; masculinity reaffirmed heterosexuality (through the rape of women) or through the negation of maleness (by castration or witnessing the rape of a wife/girlfriend. It became clear that, feminized prisoners were unable to exercise rights to his body.

Diana Taylor writes that the military officers were often engaged in homoerotic rituals, aimed at making recruits into “real men.” She explains that part of the training drills included taunting, stripping soldiers naked, and putting them in right quarters to workout…for their viewing pleasure. These acts were justified in the name of sorting “sissies” from “soldier males” (Taylor, Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina’s Dirty War 1997:73-4). Building on Cornwall and Lindisfarne’s observations on how competing masculinities were produced and negotiated, Eduardo Archetti writes that in Argentina, “different images and behaviors contained in the notion of masculinity are not always coherent” and in fact, they may be “competing, contradictory and mutually undermining” (Archetti 1997:200). The fact that these “real men” were so invested in producing “docile bodies” through the deployment of sexually repressive practices indicates a heterosexual anxiety, obfuscated by homophobia that is embedded within traditional notions of masculinity (Foucault 1984:179). The
military disseminated the belief that real Argentine men, were heterosexual and only these men, were worthy of the rights afforded to them by democracy (ironically enough.)

In 1983 after losing a significant amount of public support, the dictatorship fell and the LGBT community’s visibility became a feature of Argentina’s break with the past. This national moment, provided “an opening for the emergence of a gay and lesbian movement” which previously had been quelled through physical and mental violence. The LGBT presence within public life was not necessarily welcomed by the State apparatus despite’s Argentina’s transition to democracy. It was spearheaded by military men who remained at the forefront of the military apparatus and “weak” political puppets, which who held them “above” the law, justice, and the civilian apparatus. Brown notes that repression against LGBT people was still rampant and enforced by the police, even after return to civilian rule. He mentions the 1984 police raid of a gay-club called Balvanera. Two hundred people were detained and the owners of Balvanera went into exile after receiving numerous death threats. Whereas before the military were secretly detaining and torturing the “gender deviants” for the sake of the social body, now the police arrest and monitored the LGBT community in the name of “public order.” Brown discerns that for this reason, “Argentinean lesbians and gay men…have a difficult relationship with the state, especially the police, when it comes to their sexuality” (Brown 2002:112). Argentina still lacks a full commitment to democracy.

For many Argentines, after enduring years of political repression, democracy was understood to simply mean the “absence of a dictatorship.” Due to the military’s intervention in the democratically elected governments of Alfonsín (1983-1989) and Carlos Menem (1989-1999), the transition to democracy was rendered “incomplete” (McSherry 2009). Moreover, impunity remained a legal norm against crimes committed during the dictatorship, until the Kirchner administration overturned the controversial Amnesty Laws in 2003 (Greste 2003). Until
that point, civil society was constantly reminded that the State was still impartial to the military, and the (Christian) values it promoted. For example, compulsory military service was upheld until 1994. All young Argentine boys were obligated to serve in the military, if there ID number was drawn during the yearly national lottery. This mandate was then replaced with “voluntary” military service. However, the mandatory Military Service Law was left on the books in 1994 (just in case.) They are political leaders who advocate for compulsory military service for men such as Provincial Senator Mario Ishii. In 2014 he declared at a rally that it should be brought back for young Argentines who did not study or work in order to “bring back order” into their lives. Senator Mauricio Macri said that such a proposition would be a “return to the past” (2014). As president he has gone on record stating on radio that he would “reconsider” this proposition seriously after a viral online petition asking him to do so. It has been (uncomfortably) suggested that this “pancake” (*panqueque*) move is to appease the right-wing constituents.

I have heard various horror stories of family members and friends being checked out by the military, in order to ensure that they were “fit for duty” when service was compulsory. The only physical ailments that were considered just cause for not serving in the military was having a flat foot or OAD (*Orificio Anal Dilatado*). *El “culo roto”* (broken anus) is the vulgar way of referring to the “condition” of having engaged in “gay” sex.\textsuperscript{175} It refers to a dilated anus and indicates previous penetration. Questions of choice or desire were irrelevant during the bodily examination. OAD was sufficient cause to be rejected from serving “the nation,” and for this reason the medical scrutiny of this orifice was normalized. In the military’s view, after being penetrated, it was impossible to be a “real man.” Sergio shared his memory of this coming of age ritual. He shares that he was stripped naked and asked to bend down so his anus could be looked at it, while waiting on a line with other naked boys in the same position. This was a common known practice was expected of “real Argentines” male citizens.
The most disturbing part of this ritual was that if you were found to have OAD, the military stamped your DNI (Document of National Identification) with a seal that read, “Rejected due to OAD.” Like in most countries, your Identification card or passport is necessary to move around. It is a requirement for most official activities. It is a necessary document in order to enroll in school, obtain employment, own assets, drive a car, etc. Additionally, a DNI is necessary in order to vote, which is another national (obligatory) mandate. Until this day, men are randomly stopped by police officers and asked to show their DNI at any given moment, which raises the stakes if you are stamped as having an OAD. It can be argued, that in addition to proving one’s identity, these men simultaneously asked to prove their “masculinity.” If they are unable to do so, “they pay a price.” In 2009 the Argentine parliament revamped the national military act, to allow lesbians and gays to serve in the military however, it lacks legislation to hold accountable perpetrators of crimes motivated by any form of hate.

The police in Argentina now assert deploy violence in similar ways as the military dictatorship and for similar purposes. This type of violence falls comfortably under the umbrella of reproductive justice. Just like how the military men branded young people as subversives, the police is known to be hostile to whom they identify as (potential) delinquents or criminals, and additionally, they are unaccountable. Commenting on the history of police violence within Argentina, Anthropologist Maria Victoria Pita explains, “There is a historical tradition of confrontation and violence between civil society and the police. It is a very complicated issue because it has to deal with the basis of cultural development and political conditions” (Corb 2016). Argentina’s toxic patriarchy as deployed by the State conflates masculinity with violence, and brands subversives with the same stamp as the dictatorship: poor, roqueros, LGBTs, women, and cabezas.

An example of the relationship between violence, masculinity, and the State can be seen
in the case of Walter Bulacio.\textsuperscript{176} This case also explicitly reaffirms the incompatibility of rock \textit{nacional} in Argentina and the State; they are diametrically opposed and as such, clash in terms of their versions of truth. Bulacio was killed at the hands of police officers in 1991. They detained him at a rock concert by \textit{Patricio Rey y sus Redonditos de Ricota} at the Obras Sanitarias stadium in Buenos Aires. Even though he was a minor and the \textit{Ley de Patronato de Menores} prohibits detaining a minor without a judicial court order, he was held at the station. The following morning he left to the Hospital where they found that he had sever head trauma. His autopsy revealed that he was unequivocally beaten with foreign objects in his penis, torso, and head. He came a symbol of the police brutality that inflicted torture and death through violence on those who they deemed as subversives for the good of the \textit{alta suciedad (sociedad.)}\textsuperscript{177} In 2013, Miguel Angel Esposito who was determined to have provoked Bulacio’s death was told that he would not have to serve prison time (Rodriguez 2013). This verdict once more affirmed the impunity that has characterized Argentina’s (impartial) justice system and its constant violation of rights and violence against Argentina’s most vulnerable (in the case a minor.)

María del Carmen Verdu, a social activist against police brutality, noted after the verdict an ominous point about the (little) difference between a dictatorship and a democracy within Argentina.\textsuperscript{178} She notes that, “they repress and kill because that is the role that the successive governments make them play.” Adding that independently of the technicalities or legal loopholes that denied justice for Bulacio, “we know what we need to know: that Bulacio was killed by the police and that this demonstrates to what extreme governments are willing to go to defend their repressive tools” (Rodriguez 2013). In 2012, a video was posted on YouTube that showed policy interrogating two young men who were stripped down to their underwear by men dressed in civilian clothes who were apparently police officers. Verdu notes, “Torture is a common tool which is still applied constantly in many detention centers and even to suspects held at police
stations cells before their court appearance…we have been able to prove it multiple times in court through oral testimonies of the victims” (Romo 2012).

Carolina Rocha argues that the inability of judges to impart justice is symptomatic of Argentina’s “crisis of masculinity” because it “disavows male hegemony.” Because some men are endowed with the power to use “force or violence without any moral or legal constraints,” this makes others “feel weak and defenseless, and thus need institutions to protect them and mediate in social life.” She warns that this can have grave implications for society as a whole because without a “clear punishment for those who carry out criminal acts,” this breeds “barbarism” or “the law of the strongest.” This can explain why violence and injustice are constants throughout Argentine history. This perhaps explains Argentina’s inner struggle and disposition to all forms of crisis because, “the inability to sanction those who employ violence presents a serious challenge to the development and continuity of a civilized nation” (Rocha 2012:139). Those who abide the law are also feminized in relation to the law which performs masculinity through “force” and “violence.”

In 2016, barely two months into his term, he decreed a national public security emergency and authorized the transfer of federal police officers into the Buenos Aires government’s metropolitan police force. Mathew Corb reports, “The culture of police violence, however, lives on and serves as a constant reminder of the countries past and where it needs to go in the future” (Corb 2016).

**The State of Justice and Violence**

I would like to draw parallels between the United States and Argentina in regard to the importance of reproductive justice and violence. Where as in the United States it is more discernable and vivid that African American women are by in large historically denied sufficient social, economic and political power to be able “to parent children in safe and healthy
environments.” This is a direct result of the United State being a former-slave holding society. Terry O’Neil further explains this through the Crisis in Ferguson and describes its relationship to reproductive justice as a residual affect of slavery, “under slave codes, enslaved women lacked legal status not only to refuse sex and childbearing, but also to keep the children they birthed. Slaveholders regularly removed children from their mothers after weaning, either for sale to third parties or simply to prevent the formation of family bonds and loyalty” (O’Neil 2014). Where as the United States does not hold slaves, it does still criminalize and punish poor women of color by creating conditions that delimit their opportunities to reproduce and mother. One way in which this is done is through the institutions in which public services are distributed and stigmatized (welfare, Medicaid, etc.) Also, this is also apparent in the ways in which even medical institutions privilege white reproduction in relation to that of African Americans or poor people. Arneta Rogers argues that, “While the crisis of systemic police violence has historically centered on the harm inflicted on victims of police brutality,” feminists are claiming this issue as one of reproductive justice. However, one can argue that this is an issue that has also impacted Argentina because of similar structures of patriarchy that govern the social body.

Someone Else, Somewhere Else

“I was taught to try to change who I was or simply become someone else. So nobody would tease me when I was asked what I wanted to be when I grew up, I said police officer. You are pushed to pass as someone else, if you can change your physical appearance, you are taught that what you are not is what is desirable.” Sergio pointed out how Sonia Perez is said to have had suffered third degree skin burns due to sun tanning prior to her untimely death. He said, “She was white enough to not be treated like she was poor but needed to become dark enough in order to be considered desirable.” He clarified that he doesn’t mean dark “Latino brown,” but meant like “Hamptons bronze.” I am familiar with the symbolic appeal of bronzed skin within Buenos
Aires. When I lived in Recoleta in 2003, there was a tanning spa that had had a steady clientele around the corner from my apartment. This business was booming during the same time when one could see *cartoneros* collecting cardboard directly outside of the spa’s door during the morning and throughout the night. After the economic crisis, paper and cardboard became too expensive to export and so garbage began the site to ravage for commodities that could be recycled. Garbage picking literally became a profession.

In 2003, CNN reported anthropologist Francisco Suarez stating that, “The activity grew sharply with the necessity to find these materials and the deepening social crisis” (CNN.COM/World). The economic crisis plunged over half the country into poverty. A parallel to this phenomenon could be seen in people that search garbage in New York City to pick cans in order to supplement dwindling incomes (Genzlinger 2013). The recyclables that one is redeems directly correlates to the money that is to be made. While this may not necessarily be the most desirable form of making money, in both cities it can be argued that it provides a relatively steady income in the midst of growing inequality and uncertainties.

When I returned in 2015 to visit my old stomping grounds, the tanning salon was still there. In fact, the business had expanded its storefront and enhanced their signage with digital screens that ran the week’s discounted services with prices converted into dollars and Euros. The digital screen enabled real time rates that kept current with the fluctuating prices and exchanges. Despite the numerous medical studies published within peer-reviewed journals confirming a link to skin cancer, it remained a popular precisely because of the social meaning of tanned skin. I asked Sergio if he had ever used a tanning bed. He reported:

*I did in the late 1990s. I had just moved to Buenos Aires from Rosario. I don’t like the sun that much, that is why I preferred New York to Miami. But, I remember that the attendant at the spa told me if I wanted to strip down to my underwear, I could. I have never been comfortable going nude in front of a woman, and under that circumstance, it was especially weird. She then told me how to control the levels and time of the tanning bed and I worried that I was drawn to excessive*
behaviors. I remember that I left thinking I looked like Brad Pitt. I then went to my job interview the next day at a new restaurant at Puerto Madero. I acted like I was him. I ended up getting the job, that is the funny thing. I then felt I had to keep it up because I was afraid if I got pale, they (my boss and customers) would not see me the same way. I was so paranoid about keeping my job I was afraid that they would give me the shitty shifts. Tourists who go to Argentina like to be served by people who don’t make them feel guilty that they are able to vacation. It isn’t like Miami where our customers like to be served by people who look better than them so they feel better about themselves because we are serving them.

He then turned to me and asked, “Did you ever try it?” I sensed he thought he had shared too much information. I remembered vividly my first and only time attempting to artificially tan. It was a traumatizing experience. I had just started working out in Buenos Aires and my personal trainer had told me that tanning would accentuate my physical progress. However, against my intuition and knowing full well I suffer from anxiety, I tried to go through with it. I had an instant panic attack when the tanning bed door closed.

All I could do was remember that scene in Sleep Away Camp II: Unhappy Campers (1988) when a girl gets burned alive on a tanning bed. The instant cremation certainly left a scar on my impressionable mind. The salon assistant came to my rescue, because my heart was racing. I was dizzy and I started to cry. I felt overwhelmed but also pretty stupid, and that made me really homesick. I looked at Sergio, and confessed, “Yes, and you can imagine how it went.” Sergio knew I about my anxiety and tried to get me to attend meditation classes with him in Miami. He believed it would “help” me at work. He was a real “Zen” even during Friday happy hour. While I spent most of my shift near the dumpster in the back, smoking cigarettes trying to “calm” myself down he tended to thrive. He would end the night with sometimes double the tips I made which I accepted was due to his “strong work ethics, good looks, and love of money.” This was how he would make me “feel better,” when I closed out my tables at the end of the night.

In the United States, artificial tanning became associated within popular culture as a part of Jersey Shore subculture. Who can forget that “tanning” was part of the unholy trinity of Gym-
Tanning-Laundry (GTL) as practiced by MTV’s Jersey Shore cast? USA Today called tanning (and indirectly the group that practiced it) a “health hazard.” Kim Painter reported that the Skin Cancer Foundation, primarily funded by sunscreen makers, called MTV out and requested warning messages to be run during reruns of the show. They claimed, “The show deceives consumers by failing to disclose the links between skin cancer and the tanning practices it promotes”. Whether because of the health impacts of the “to die for” practice or the social penalty for the orange hue, mainstream American culture indirectly promotes these risky behaviors too. Arguably, this is a Western trend found within diverse countries that consume its images and products in order to effectively buy into the modern “lifestyle.” A study published in December 2013 (inconclusively) found that “college women who regularly watched reality beauty shows were at least twice as likely to use tanning beds or tan outside as those who did not watch” (Painter 2014).

Within eighteenth-century European upper class communities tanned skin represented, “humble class origins, as most unskilled workers and farmers would be tanned from protracted sun exposure during the workday,” it later became a connotation of “upper-class taste and an affluent lifestyle” (Vannini and McWright 2010:228, Holubar and Schmidt 1994). It seems that bronzed skin became the new tan within a City that was once considered the “Paris of South America.” For this reason the term “cabecita” became even more stigmatized because darker complexions are socially penalized and branded as “inferior.”

**Society Makes me Sick**

“She was clearly sick…in her head.” Referring to Perez’s extreme tanning practices, Sergio started to sound empathic. My question to him was how “sick” could she be within the context of a culture that places an extraordinary high premium on aesthetics due to the prominence of “patriarchy, heteronormativity and neoliberal capitalism. The sordid relationship
between these social determinants engenders all types of pathologies and structural challenges for “feminine embodiment.” This compels women to be (slightly) “passive objects of a patriarchal cultural construct” because they are denied identities outside of their conforming bodies (Caudwell 2015: 66). Lisa Jean Moore and Mary Kosut remind, that there is an imperative need for bodies to conform to these impossible standards and ideals, because, “as citizens of larger social bodies (the communities and institutions our bodies populate), we are responsible for keeping our bodies functioning in the pursuit of national goals and economic agendas” (Moore and Kosut 2010:27). Patriarchy promotes and rewards bodies that support and promote the ideals and values of a culture where men are privileged.

Speaking directly to the case of Argentinean women after the economic crisis, Barbara Sutton explains how patriarchy triggers irrational behaviors, “In a climate of economic crisis, when many men’s sense of masculinity was challenged by unemployment and the inability to fulfill traditional male roles, women’s sexy bodies were also used to reassure men of their sexual prowess” (Sutton 2010:77). I explained to Sergio that Perez’s extreme measures to achieve breast augmentation was misguided but not completely outside of the scope of the countless extremes measures women undertake in order to “fit into” the prevailing and painful cultural norms. I offered ordering salads, foregoing deserts, female circumcision, childbirths (without epidurals) and Brazilian waxes as universal examples of said extremes that women by in large are expected to conform to. I do not wish to go down an essentialist trajectory when making this claim. Rather, I suggest that it is easier for women to convince themselves that a salad tastes better than the slice of pizza she might crave. (Think about this in the context of first dates, a performance where a woman’s sexual appetite should be consistent with her appetite for food if she is to be considered “good” or a “catch.”) We got into a heated debate over what he denied were gender stereotypes.
Sergio’s conclusions started to upset me, to say the least. “Women should take care of
themselves so that they look and act like good women.” I gave him “that look” I used to give him
whenever he asked me to cut my cigarette break short. He unapologetically reminded me, “Don’t
think men don’t do the same to conform to society’s standards.” I proceeded to make my case. I
argued that while men may feel pressures to be “strong” and “virile,” I have yet to hear of men
undergoing Brazilian waxes, at least not at the same rates as women or for the same purposes. He
laughed but then immediately wrinkled his forehead. Men are also not motivated by the same
reasons women are to get waxed, and when they endure it is considered as the ultimate marker of
strength and sacrifice, which is a direct juxtaposition to when women undergo these waxes which
are expected of them. Waxing spas are another recession proof industry I pointed out.

In 2014, before the World Cup, Pot Noodle launched a competition for one “lucky fan” to
win a “trip of a life time,” if they underwent “the gruesome wax.” Reporting on this competition,
the Mirror called its contestants “brave men” (Prenderville 2014). The competition then went
viral on YouTube. Young male fans publically underwent the procedure in front of the entire
(virtual) world. They called them, “Brozilians.” The competition by design is underscored by the
assumption that only males can be legitimate soccer fans. Also the waxing procedure was then
gendered because of their vastly different implications. Upon choosing to suffer such a painful
and “emasculating” practice, these men were then in the run in for tickets to the World Cup in
South America. For the love on fútbol, quite literally their “balls” were put on the line and thus
solidified them as the ultimate fans that demonstrated their “worthiness” of male admiration.
They were willing to sacrifice in order for a trip to the mecca. I offer a direct counter experience
for women during World Cup fever. One spa in England offered women a free caiprinha
(Brazil’s national drink) for undergoing the procedure. They invited them to win and “close their
eyes and think about their nation” as their pubic hairs were literally pulled out.
Women who undergo Brazilian waxes, they know full well that it is not a pleasurable experience. However, they may not be fully cognizant of the potential health risks with a bare area, it makes it easier to transmit viruses such as “HIV, hepatitis, herpes simplex, and human papilloma” (Dault 2011:40). The procedure entails an esthetician pouring wax that is as hot as a “steak hot off the grill,” onto the labia, spreading it with a Popsicle stick, and then ripping the pubic hair from the follicles in one swoop. The Atlantic reported in 2011 that, “Today, it’s all but commonplace for women to go extreme measures to get bald, pre-pubescent nether regions…60 percent of American women between 18 and 24 are sometimes or always completely bare down there; while almost half of women in the U.S between 25 and 29 reported similar habits” (Fetters 2011). These numbers, whether they accurately reflect the state of pubic hair in America today, they do confirm that many women still stigmatize pubic hair as “unclean,” as evidenced in the study. This view points to a problem (for women) because in actuality, pubic hair works like an anti-bacterial of sorts; it is a “safety net to protect the vulva from bacterial infections” (Tiggerman and Hodgson 2008:891). Additionally, the trend signals a societal that is normalizing ephebophilia (sexual attraction to pre-prepubescent bodies), and that has countless other ramifications for women (and children.)

However, to consider one’s natural state as “dirty,” also reveals another double standard within patriarchal culture. Renee Bondy writes that pubic hair indicates “physical and sexual maturity, and hence strength.” However, as a result of social transformations in society that took women out of the domestic sphere and into public life, she argues that this is why women are then expected to “make their bodies appear childlike, rendering them seemingly less adult and less powerful (26). In Magdala Peixoto Labre’s study, “The Brazilian Wax: New Hairlessness Norm for Women,” one woman is quoted saying that after she got a Brazilian she felt, “like a 12-year-old, but a naughty, Lolita kind of 12-year old” (Labre 2002:120). The mainstreaming of this
trend indicates a real problem in how women relate to their bodies, and the lengths they are willing to undergo in order to soothe the anxieties of meeting expectations of a (sick) society. How did this embodied testament of the body transitioning from pre-pubescence to adolescence become the site to negotiate femininity (Tiggerman and Hodgson 2008:896).

By ripping this particular body hair, do women in fact shed some of their agency and is such an excruciating act become “desirable” and “marketable” for work and play? These women, inspired by “Carrie Bradshaw, Hugh Heffner, and Barbie”, must surely find pleasure in the end result, its implications (she is one strong one) or in the least in its cost effectiveness (no need to buy razors, shaving cream, and other tweezing tools). They are countless examples within society that suggest that women have a much harder time and face more expectations for “fitting in.” All of these embodied choices that are risky, dangerous, and demanded seek for women to conform to the oppressive constructs of “beauty” in which being sleek, taller, and thinner is desirable and rewarding. Women are particularly vulnerable as a result, Wollstonecraft argues that, “Taught from their infancy that beauty is woman’s scepter, the mind shapes itself to the body, and roaming around its gilt cage, only seeks to adorn its prison” (Wollstonecraft 1992:132). Barbara Sutton, speaking specifically to female embodiment in Argentina highlights how after the economic crisis, the grips of the crumbling economy and social unrest, further gripped women who were poor.

“Did you know that men in Argentina are now injecting Vaseline into their penises?” Within the same headline that shared Sonia Perez’s tragedy, men were also presented to be doing such “crazy” things to enhance that which differentiated them from the female sex. Doctors have warned in the past about increasing numbers of men injecting themselves with Vaseline, which contains petroleum, to increase the size of their penises” The consequences are said to be “sever deformation” and due to the tissue damage, “erectile dysfunction,” which is a social fatality
(Brady 2014). Why would this trend be relevant now? What does it suggest? Sergio and I shut down the computer agreeing that society can make you sick, he concluded, “What’s really sick is our culture. That is what killed her.” Patriarchy, homophobia, and sexism were some of the most deadliest and most painful diseases ever to counter modernity.

I have included a list of songs inspired by the death of Walter Bulacio by Argentine artists of popular music, which include rock nacional, cumbia villera, and reggae. I choose to include this list in order to provide insight into how this event marked Argentine society and culture, and how the music maintains him alive in memory. Skoll highlights the importance of music but more so why and how it is made in order to get a sense of how they cope with such tragedies. He writes, “Tapping into a current social unconscious, the arts represent social trends even as they contribute to shaping them. Historically, the arts have represented social trends before sociological discourse have reported them” (2013:45, Jameson 1981).
Chapter 8, Part 1: Queer Argentinidad

“What do you think the Obelisk looks like?” I did not want to know where this was going. Well, actually, yes. Let us go there. I smiled, “It is pretty obvious.” Carola stuck up her middle finger. It means the same thing she said. He shrugged her shoulders, “Basically, it’s all about showing that we have the biggest dick. When in reality so much obsession with their dicks, makes them big dicks.” We were sitting in a park watching a group of street performers. We left our group, which consisted of a few of my cousins. On December 1, 2016 during World Aid’s day, a pink condom was put on the erected structure commemorating the occasion. Carola made an interesting point, “The idea that your penis defines who you are as a nation. What if you don’t have one?” She pointed to her crotch. This is where I begin this reflection on queer embodiment.

This made me think about popular Argentine sayings that point to an obsession with male sexuality however, are used without hesitation by women and by men infront of them too.

- “Calienta la paba, pero no ceba el mate”- She’s a tease
- “Cerrado como culo de muñeca”- shut like a doll’s ass
- “Echar un polvo” – to fuck
- “Mojar la chaucha” – to get laid
- “Mala leche” – bad luck
- “Un pelo de concha tira más que una yunta de bueyes” – one pussy hair pulls more than a team of oxen
- “Al pedo como teta de monja” – useless like tits on a nun
- “Tomátela” – fuck you
• “Tirame la goma” – suck my dick

Matadora is a travel website that intends to give you a real (superficial) breakdown about Argentine cultural norms. They provide this service to foreign travelers who are “intimidated” or “too busy” to engage in reading anthropological literature on foreign culture, instead they provide you the sound bites. I find that it gives insight into a public perception about what constitutes an “Argentine essence.” They listed “things you will never hear an Argentine say.” I find that they also point to an ambiguity in terms of gender norms, which are consistent with the regional traditional values. You probably can only infer this ambiguity it if you read “into” it and compare with stereotypical representations of machismo culture. Consider the following phrases that are listed as part of the everyday Argentine language. I have included parenthetical associations that can be interpreted in response to them.

• #1 “It’s not worth to start a discussion about this, my friend, you know you are always right!” (Infallible?)

• #2 “I don’t have any advice to give you, I’ll pass.” (Self-important or a Narcissist?)

• #3 “I’m so sorry I can’t go to the party tonight, because I have to get up early tomorrow.” (Irresponsible? Incessant? Excessive?)

• #15 “I just lost another “truco” match, but that’s OK, it’s having fun that matters!” (Competitive? Soar loser?)

• #17 “I’m not in the mood to talk about politics, let’s talk about the weather instead.”

• #24 “No, thank you, if I have another beer I will fall asleep.” (Drinks a lot?)

• #33 “And no, my accent is not sexy” (Latino stereotype?)
Carola laughs, “You think that they’re not obsessed with their penises” and having “the biggest one? It is literally a cock right whenever you get my brother’s together. They’re just bitter because I was always strong then them.” I then think about a question that has been bugging me about the Argentinean Lame Duck. It may sound random, but then again, nothing is (within fieldwork) or life. Who claimed the fuck (with the biggest penis) as Argentine if it also lives within Chile? While homosexuality is found in nature, it is proven that homophobia is not. It is a learned behavior, this in relation to Argentine gender roles, made me thinks about the old nature/nurture debate, but in a new light.

Carola looks at me and after a prolonged debate about who claimed the Lame Duck as Argentine she said, “I know things would have been different if I had just stayed with the tradition.” I snapped, “What tradition?” She knew what she was talking about, “Argentines are traditionally homophobic.” Knowing I would correct that statement by saying, “not all.” She then interjected with, “What about my family?”

(Mainly) political homophobia overwhelms Argentina because of the unequal gender roles inherited and perpetuated through “tradition.” This political homophobia has been examined as a postcolonial residual from which problematic masculinities emerge as nationalistic (Boellstorff 2004). It is underscored by the belief that, “men and women should be equal, should play roles incompatible with each other and should be confined in hierarchy where the form dominates the latter” (Ottosson 2009). This also suggests another reason why sport is so attached to masculinity and homophobia within Argentine society.

Geertz shows how competitions are rooted in a drive that supersedes greed; instead it is instead a moral imperative. Additionally, in his analysis of the cockfight, he also shows how society retains cohesion through the shared emotions experienced and constructed by the individual participants of the events, “the thrill of risk, the despair of loss, and the pleasure of
triumph.” He demonstrates how sport is a post-colonial legacy of political and cultural Western imperialism” (Geerz 1972:83). These spectacles are when masculinity are most put on trial. In the field, it can all literally be seen through the lens of the cockfight.

Latino gender roles of machismo and Marianismo speak to this principle, where a woman’s excessive aggressive/masculinity is often constituted by its “other,” a passive, subservient woman. These rigid gender roles are believed to be biologically determined. They then become privately and publically policed through multiple institutions, which are charged with defining “appropriate” citizenship. Heterosexuality therefore remains the biggest attribute of model citizenship (Htun 2001). Patriotic duty, since the invention of Argentina is performed in the reproduction of more citizens within the institution of marriage. It is best exemplified in the man’s ability to serve the nation in the army too. These performances are heavily invested in masculinity (of the toxic kind.) At the turn of the century in Argentina, psychiatrist studied hysteria assuming that this was what determined sexual difference between the genders. These studies were then used to support the “sexual distinctions of the day,” which explains how patriarchy became scientifically proven within Argentine culture (Rodriguez 2003:47).

On March 23, 2004 former President Nestor Kirchner ordered to take down the Presidential portraits of General Videla and Bignone from the military academy’s hall of honor. These men were the opening and closing leaders of Argentina’s Dirty War and therefore (morally) culpable for the kidnappings, torture, and disappearances of thousands of Argentine men and women. With this act, Kirchner sought to send a clear message, the type of leader, no longer has a “place” within a democratic Argentina (Fauik 2008). A lot of this act is all a result of deeply problematic notions of masculinity, which are embedded in the gender relationships within Argentina.
However, gender and sexuality in Argentina is more complex than traditional binary views. I am using queer theory in order to facilitate a germane analysis of the nation, given the recent legalization of same-sex marriage in 2010 (Jargose 1996:1). I examine the homoerotic origins and homosexual phenomenon of tango and fútbol in order to further this proposition. However I would like to make mention of Argentina’s “other” Diego, a forgotten hero and victim of patriarchy that ignited gay liberation, as we understand it today in New York City.

During the Stonewall Riots a young Argentine soccer player was so afraid that he was going to be deported during the raids because he was gay that he jumped out of the police prescient window and impaled himself on a “14-inch spike fence.” The New York Daily News printed the graphic photo of his body on the front page, crucified and soon forgotten by even queer history projects. Yet, his death organized LGBT people to come and mobilize for their rights. The only information I could find on him is that his name was Diego, he is the “other” great on. However, just like history has a way of whitewashing the past to suit its heteronormative needs, I intend to recover this figure for LGBT and Queer history in my next project.

*Argentinidad, Queer?*

The concept of Argentinidad first appears in Jose Hernandez’s nationalist text, Martín Fierro (1879). In it, the gaucho (the Argentine cowboy who roams the rural pampas) becomes a symbol of the nation. He represents a period when rural life is being ousted by the multiple projects of modernization and their rapidly expanding areas. He embodies the struggles between the rural/urban, Argentine/European, the traditional/the modern, the regional/the universal within the formation of this particular nation. This conflict is epitomized by the nineteenth century discourse of Sarmiento’s *Civilization and Barbarism* (2003). Jorge Luis Borges writes that we will never fully know Martín Fierro, just like we will never fully know Hamlet. His
Shakespearean reference has great implications. He insinuates that both men struggle with their (sexual) identity, which also relates to the volatility of Argentine notions of masculinity.

Gustavo Gavieiro writes on homoeroticism within this epic poem and describes its implications to queerness noting, “homosexual phenomenon might well be mentioned here, including the inherent problematic associated with them…especially when they conceal a homoerotic dimension, in a certain sense, could function as a semantic matrix capable of inspiring a series of reading whose strength would imply a new horizon of cultural considerations” (Gierrola 1996:317). Eduardo Archetti elaborates on this implication to masculinity by citing how the gaucho was the first Argentine male ideal that appears as a referent within Argentine culture. He writes, “The Argentinean nationalist writers of the 1910s, attempted to recreate the national, the essence of the nation and of Argentinidad in the future of the gaucho, a romantic male free rider and heroic figure of the Argentine wars of independence” (Archetti 1999:18). I would like to highlight a few details of this story that give insight into popular ideas about Argentinidad.

Argentinidad has more to do with an attitude, a point of view, and a relationship between the body and movement as seen in dance, fútbol, and migration. Unlike Argentina’s national identity is not rooted in a story of romance, but rather one more specifically about violence and hyper-masculinity. Early nationalist writers throughout the Americas depicted the nation (la patria) in the figure of a woman and the fate of her transgressive love affairs as the origin of the nation (Sommer 1993). In Martín Fierro, the (marginal) gaucho is depicted as exceptionally cunning fighter with a knack for words. He was a payador, whose skill was heightened even more when he drank alcohol. Payadas are considered part of the “gauchesca” culture.193 Martín Fierro loses his family. He is prone to fighting and engages in payadas (a lyrical singing duel) with a black payador (singer) who turns out to be the younger brother of the black man he had
killed in a previous duel. He deserts the military, yet is invested on the performance of “honor.” There is a constant black presence within this poem as well, he insults, fights, and kills the black payador. He embodies character traits and flaws that have been traditionally associated as issues that still plague Argentine society such as violence and hypermasculinity. He becomes an outlaw and sets out to live with the natives in pursuit of a better life.

Eventually, in La Vuelta de Martin Fierro (1879) he discovers that his pursuit for a better life presents more problems because he is taken as a spy by the cacique (chieftain) and is held prisoner. Eventually, he meets the mother who is crying over the body of her dead son who is presumably killed because she was accused of witchcraft. He then leads towards “Christian lands,” en-route towards civilization.

New York

Hernán handed me a photo. It was Rodrigo dressed up like a little gaucho. His father wanted me to know, “This was in Córdoba.” I looked at the photo and pointed to the kid sitting next to him. He looked familiar. I asked, “Is this Angel?” Angel, his brother, was in what appeared to be black face. What is this about? I also noticed that Carola was not in the photo. She was Angel’s twin sister, so that means that she was clearly in the same grade. They explained that during the fiestas pátrias (May 25) they dress up the kids like historical figures from 1810 (Creoles, Spanish, Slaves). They apparently paint their faces black by using a wine cork and heating it up on a hotplate on the stove. He then said that when it cools off, you paint your face black with it. I looked at Pablo who was watching an old Maradona’s game on the television. “I did it too. But, it was not racist.” Blackface? Hernán defended this tradition, “This is common practice. This is what all kids did when they were kids and this is what they still do now.” Hernán took out his phone to show me the Facebook page of his niece. She had a photo of her children during their school function commemorating the founding fathers. Not only were the boys all dressed in gaucho clothes, but some were in black face too. I thought, “no one is offended?” But then, I also saw that in the photo, they were no girls. “What did Carola dress up like?” The brothers look at their father, expecting his response. “Carola was always different.” What did that mean? “Carola was kicked out of school that year because she was caught kissing a girl by the nun. She then had to go to the school where all the kids, even from the Villa, went. I thought that would teacher her a lesson.” Angel then sapped, “Carola however was dressed like a gaucho. My mother dressed her up anyway but at home. She did not go to school dressed like that.”

Carola the Gaucho
At the 2005 Oscars, Argentine composer, Gustavo Santaolalla dedicated his award to his father and Argentina. His score won for the film “Broke Back Mountain.” Argentines felt incredibly proud of this award. Though, the film itself raised some national eyebrows about what did men who were alone in the rural pampas. The comparable lifestyles between the filmic depiction of the roaming cowboy and the real-life roaming gaucho proved unsettling. The film’s translated title was, “The Secrets of the Mountains.” This film compelled the media to expose the “secrets” of the Pampas. The Revista Veintitrés in Argentina examined “The gay Gauchos” focusing on the existence of a gay bar within the pampas. Its cover was a photo of two gauchos kissing; however they used their boina, a symbolic vestment of the nation, to cover their faces. Critical discussions about the relationship between Argentine masculinity and the nation ensued (as they so often do.)

Lomas de Zamora

Carola was in Buenos Aires going to a conference at the local University. I asked her to meet me for lunch. I had gifts from her brothers, which included the New York City FC soccer jersey. It is the same colors as the Jersey from Club Atlético Belgrano de Córdoba (which is their family’s club.)

It is important to unpack the inherent “paradoxes and contradictions” found within Argentina’s notion of masculinity and nationhood, in order to out its queerness. By examining moments of Argentine crisis, this theoretical venture is viable. Nicholas Shumway observes that, “While Argentina’s recurrent crisis obviously have many causes and explanations, I can’t help sensing that the competing myths of nationhood bequeathed by the men who first invested Argentina remain a factor in the country’s frustrated quest for national realization (Shumway 1993:296). Balderston and Guy question if it is at all possible to discuss aspects of Latin America without taking into account gender and sexuality, because it provides depth to such
analysis about how the body experiences space and other bodies underneath clothes, covers, and critiques of them. Their interrogation alludes to these categories as “spaces of conflict, revelatory of culturally significant issues (Balderston and guy 1997: 7-8). These issues complicate these categories that in turn draw national boundaries of difference. In Argentina, this happens in a way that is marked by the changing models of masculinity that are imbued with homosexual panic.

**What Crisis Does and Is**

Crisis (political and economic) breaks down traditional gender roles because of the economic changes brought about a workforce. As a result, what was “masculine” or “feminine” had little to do with sexual orientation, and more to do with the spaces each gender occupied, within the public sphere to perform such identities (Bedford 2008). Yet Norma Alarcón argues that discourses on differences and identity produce particular type of knowledge about this transformation, “the paradoxes and contradictions between subject position move the subject to recognize, reconstruct, and exploit difference through political resistance and cultural production in order to reflect the subject-in-process” (Alarcon 1996:38). The legalization of same-sex marriage and adoption offered an opportune way to reaffirm its “avant-garde” image by queering one of the most traditional institutions, the family (Darío 2002:206). Accordingly, discourse on this legislation, was heavily tied to the nation, Sarmiento’s legacy, and its impact on gender roles. Conservatives feared that same-sex marriage would give the appearance that Argentina was queer but many activists argued that it always was.

I lived in Argentina during this particular moment of economic crisis and have visited during different times (during the Kirchner regime, and most recently under Marci.) I can testify that these visits and the subsequent experiences walking through the streets were at first frustrating to my feminist sensibilities. Every man I met (when I was alone) felt the need to
“protect” me. My plumber, refused to let me go watch a soccer game, stating that he was a stand-in for my father and husband who were on the other side of the world. In this side of the world, he vehemently explained to me the following, “the brothel and the soccer stadium are a man’s place.” What does being a man in these particular “spaces of dissention” mean? Was I “too much” of a woman? And if so, what does this mean? How should I reinterpret these “imperfect sketches” of the nation, if not with a queer lens (Foucault)? My intervention in doing so is to contextualize the legalization of gay marriage within a queer Argentina and explicitly relate it to traditional ideas of “Latinidad” in regard to patriarchy.

Mario (Hernán’s father & Carola’s Grandfather)

Mario, Carola’s grandfather shared with me tidbits of his life that attested to how his passion for tango was passed on to Carola, and hot to his father. He remembered:

When I was young we went out to dance tango. I danced it really well. My mother was a single mother. My father was from Italy but he just gave me his DNA and his last name. I never saw him in my life. My mom had to raise me alone. She could not afford renting an apartment or a house by herself. Those were not options for single women. This is why she used to rent a room in a pension. All the women there were single women without any husbands. They worked “at night” at the quilombos. My mother had no one else so she would leave me with them when she went to work in the morning. They spoiled me because I was literally the only child around. They loved me. What they did also was teach me to dance tango. This is how I was able to get the ladies. I swept women literally, “off their feet.” The only one who took after me in terms of being able to move, with such precision was Carola. Hernán has two left feet. It is embarrassing; I used to tell him that this is why he could not kick a soccer ball. Shameful…Pelotudo.

It was Sunday and I wanted to take Pablo to see the street fair. Also, it would give me an opportunity to see Carola dance. On the weekends, she would dance in San Telmo with her girlfriend’s brother, Humberto. If she was as good as her grandfather told me, then she surly was incredible. Carola’s girlfriend, Luz, saw us and waved us down. She was seated on a bench watching Carola and Humberto. Tourists were crowding the couples who danced. They were
taking photos of an “authentic” displacement of Argentine culture. I came closer and saw that they were dropping dollars and Euros, which suggested that this was not a display for local eyes.

Carola commanded the dance floor. It was amazing to see it up. I wondered if this was what the tourist felt or did my knowledge of her life was what truly moved me. Carola saw me and smiled.

**Gardel: Tango’s (Latino) Macho?**

“He’s (Gardel) such an iconic figure and part of who we are as Argentineans…” – Gustavo Santaolalla

Like most mythic heroes, either through “strategy or coincidence, certain mysteries surround their persona. In the case of tango’s iconic figure, Carlos Gardel, the most prominent one that survive concern his national origin, his sexuality, and the production of his image. In a transforming Argentina, this national symbol, the beloved “morocho del abasto” garners special attention. For example the United States Postal service in 2011 included him on the stamps that paid homage to Latino musical figures, such as Selena, Carmen Miranda, and Celia Cruz (Fox News 2010). This news demonstrates that Latinidad, which conflates cultural and national identity, now claims Gardel and Argentina. However, had historically exalted more the differences between Argentines and its neighbors. To be homogenized by the United States is also an indication of Latinidad’s overwhelming imposition onto uniqueness. In order to fit into the milieu of Latino culture, Gardel’s macho guide will now overwhelm his queer identity, because “hombres” in Latino culture can only be machos (Miranda 1997).

According to Argentine journalist Brizuela, many Argentines are currently outraged at the possibility that Gardel’s past life might be “outed” because of what this will articulate to the world. When the Argentine actress Carmen Barbieri, granddaughter of one of Gardel’s guitar players, shared on television that her grandmother assured her that Gardel was gay, she was accused of being unpatriotic. She also said that her grandmother loathed him and swore he was
shot in the ass, and not the chest, as he often proclaimed to the public (Gardel…El Morocho Gay del Abasto 2010). Brizuela affirms, “it is obvious that Gardel performed his masculinity” in the same way that Greta Garbo “performed her femininity” (Brizuela 2005). I ask, obvious to whom?

**Dying of Love: Luz (A mini-Testimony)**

*I met with Luz, who wanted to share with me how she fell in love with Carola. I am clearly a sucker for love stories. I use the testimony approach to her declaration of love as I do not want to write as if I am retelling this story.*

I just recently told my parents about Carola. I am thirty-five and I still worry about what they are going to think. I had already left the father of my kids. I dated but I was unhappy. We met at the gym. We were both going to a kick boxing class where the teacher was this really buff guy. All the other students thought that he was gorgeous and were just falling for him (guys and girls.) They barely were able to follow what he was asking them to do because he immobilized them with his “good looks.” Seriously, they would just stare at him. It was ridiculous but more because he loved every minute of it. I would roll my eyes and Carola and I would laugh…at him. I would position myself to where she was going to work out because I knew that then we would laugh at him, together. It wasn’t that he was not good looking but what I did not know was that Carola knew him. He was gay. I had not picked up on that but Carola and him were actually friends. One day they invited me to go out with them after the class. I showered and since my husband had the kids that weekend, I figured “Why Not?” What ended up happening was that she was driving and I sat in the back of the car. We locked eyes because she adjusted the mirror to see me. That is when I knew something was up because I turned so red.

After that night, we started hanging out more and more. She started coming to my house. She met my kids. They loved her. It was something that kind of happened. I asked her one night
to not leave to her place. I wanted her to stay with me. I wanted her to be just for us. She warned me that this could become a problem but I told her that I just felt like I could not be without her anymore. I decided to tell my parents. They were open to meeting her but my brother and father continued to ask questions that I thought were so embarrassing. However, when they found that she could ride horses and that she worked at an estancia, and was actually pretty known in the cowboy circuit, they started to open up to the idea of her becoming part of my family. They also like that she takes care of us. My father always worried because he thought that the father of my kids was an idiot. He was right but I knew that he just wanted me to be happy. When I tell them that I want to have another child with Carola that is something that they don’t get and so say to not “play God.”

Tango and Youth Identity

Carola shared, “Tango was the music of my grandfather’s generation.” Mario went to tango clubs, during the “golden age” of this genre. Like many men of that era, he had a penchant for prostitutes so it is unclear if these clubs were actual brothels. (At least, this is what Hernán told me.) Nonetheless, Mario did stress he only danced with “women,” making me question if he had other options.

Argentine writer Ernesto Sábato describes a typical hombre tanguero (man of tango), stating he was filled with “that discontents, that ill humor, that vague bitterness, that undefined and latent anger against everything and against everyone which is almost the quintessence of the average Argentine” (Sábato 1965:16). The men, who grew up listening to tango, displayed a “deviant” disposition and/or a problematic relation to the opposite sex. According to Savigliano, heterosexual urges were beside the point with tango, because of the deep investment in the performance of masculinity, “Any interest in either lover or sex (with a woman) would corrupt the macho picture” (Savigliano 1995:43). Pablo’s grandfather, a former bank robber, fondly
shared how he would stir up trouble when he went to these types of clubs. He would approach a table full of *compadritos*, and simply say, “Gardel was gay (Gardel era puto.). And with this one statement, fists were thrown, bottles were broken, and blood was spilled.

**Carlos Gardel**

Carlos Gardel grew up on the fringes of society, like most bastard children within a patriarchal society. He was raised by a single-mother, who brought him to Argentina as a baby from France. His devotion to her and only her, lead many to question his sexual orientation. He grew up in El Abasto, an Italian enclave in the outskirts of Buenos Aires. This southern section of Buenos Aires is frequently referred to in tangos an *arrabal* (a ghetto.) Alfredo Mascia describes this immigrant ghetto as one filled with delinquency such as “gambling dens, cockfighting pits, brothels, bar girls, entertainment halls, dances shadow plays, pawnshops, second hand shops, etc. In essence, it was “barbaric.” Mascia describes its inhabitants as refugees who “constituted a society of shady characters, united solely by their condition as outcasts.”

They were foil to the modern, urban, *porteños*. Immigration within Latin American history provides the opportunity for the restructuring of definitions of “sexuality and “homoeroticism” (Foster 2002:166). Today, his smile decorates the City of Buenos Aires and beyond. What this smile represents is highly debatable. Scholars such as Gobello have gone as far to say that it was a “mask” that hid his homosexual (Gobello 1995). What is unequivocal is that Gardel represents Argentina’s most respected version of masculinity, regardless of his sexual orientation.

Castro observes that, “He (Gardel) obviously was a vulnerable, indecisive, gender uncertain male persona.” While simultaneously he, “…clearly represented the male ideal and as such still preserves as the epitome of Argentine masculinity” (D.S Castro 1990:78). The image of maleness constructed through tango, is one that is constantly in performance for other men. It seeks to “disprove” their homosexuality, by constantly reaffirming their heterosexuality. Early
tango dancers (*tangueros*) sought to impress men, with their “maleness” and not so much women. However, this is a complicated topic, because of the inverted markers of gender that overwhelm Tango. Tobin explains “many clues that are read to mark a man as manly are also read to make him a *marica* (fag)” (Tobin 1998:86). However, it is within the divide of public and private, that this issue of “masculinity” becomes more apparent:

> Men…must always demonstrate not only that they are ‘real’ men, but that they are not queer…Tango never makes an issue of femininity…the demonstration of proper heterosexual urges…must take place in the public domain…with large-scale public displays (Foster 1998:58).

Gardel sang a Tango that exalted the rebel, *a malevo* (think of rock and roll bad boy.) A malevo is admired by *porteño* of then and now because of the following virtues detailed in Gardel’s song, “you will never lack a women to toy with and fools to sweet talk because you are the best man who lives by his wits, you are always in control, always able to lead the pack…you ooze authority and power!” (Castro 1998:68). These traits remain ideal to *porteño* (patriarchal) men, who still look at Gardel as a male exemplar of the nation (Mascia 1980:295, Castro 1998:75). However, Castro explains that the “*porteño* male covers his vulnerability by adopting an air of petulant, aggressive masculinity,” which some have identified to signal an ambivalence in maleness (Castro 1998:69). This persistent indeterminacy can be read in fact as queer (Jargose 1996:1).

Gardel was a *malevo*. He received a bullet to his chest as a result of a street brawl. Thought the word on the street is that this might not be “so” true. That bullet never was extracted. This gave him street credit amongst his fellow gangsters (Barco 2010). This “wolf” was unstoppable and extraordinary (physically too.) In his tangos and filmic portrayals, Gardel was able to channel the perfect combination of “petulant masculinity with timidity towards women, a sense of control combined with a sense of helplessness in the face of destiny, and above all he had the golden tongue to charm the masses…he was the *malevo* of the tango”
(Castro 1998:69). He tamed his instincts, with civilizing gestures and aesthetics. The complexity of Gardel’s “male definition” is consistent with the crisis of Argentina’s nationhood (Sedgwick 1998:20).

Angel and Rodrigo start to pick up the table. They had just finished Skyping with their mother who was visiting Carola in Buenos Aires. They agreed they did not “miss her cooking.” Hernán was the chef of the house and was very elaborate with his meals. They say that when their mother used to cook, it was a very simple meal and it was complete in a matter of minutes. It usually consisted of, “a piece of meat, flipped over, back and front (vuelta y vuelta) with a salad drenched in vinegar on the side.” She was a very “practical” cook according to them. Hernán on the other hand started to make dinner at lunchtime. Now that Hernán was older and worked less, they preferred for their father to do the cooking. Their mother also was not very good at organizing the house. Their mother however was good at just being their biggest cheerleader (hincha.) This is why when Hernán stopped talking to Carola; he went to visit her in Argentina without hesitation. Hernán had a hard time accepting that she dropped out of law school. That was why she had stayed in Argentina.

The brothers start to play a game of FIFA on their Xbox. Hernán walks over, “You see these guys they playing online soccer. Ask them to go kick a ball, ask if they can do that.” Alex turned around to respond, “I’m good. I play on my school’s team.” Hernán replied, “You’re good for an American, but not as good as for an Argentine.” Rodrigo defended his brother, “We can’t all be Carola, the gaucho.”

Crimes of Passion

One of Gardel’s first songwriters, Andrés Cepeda (El Loco Cepeda) died in a 1910 crime of passion. He was a well-known poet who was imprisoned for his anarchist thoughts and frequent street scuffles. Within the underworld Cepeda and Gardel were both part of the
underworld. The law made no differences between homosexuality, immigrants, and criminals. Cepeda was stabbed in the groin over his young gay lover. He wrote in “In Vain, In Vain,” a tango made famous by Gardel. In it he channels, what today is interpreted as a veiled declaration of homosexuality, “In vain, in vain/I wanted to be discreet/to keep in secret/my love for you (…)”

Given the cultural climate in Buenos Aires, blatant homosexuality was criminalized and censored. The reason for this, according to Castro, was that they “shun all female things” (Castro 1998:89). This makes Gardel’s heterosexuality even more questionable, when scrutinized against the Argentine imaginary. For this reason tango’s lyrics are being unveiled and re-historized as queer. Recent works, such as Osvaldo Bazán’s *Historia de la Homosexualidad en la Argentinidad: De la Conquista de América al Siglo XXI* (2006) takes this issue specifically.

Bazán argues that the homosexual in tango is present: he is just dressed in drag as a hyper-masculine male figure whose days were spent in despair between brothels and bars, prostitutes and lovers, cockfights and brawls. Marta Savigliano writes in respects to this that “tangos frequently portray such characters with complex gender identities that are troublesome when seen under the scrutiny of bourgeois patriarchal eyes” (Savigliano 1995). She expands that, “Tango is not about sex—at least not about heterosexuality --it is about love, love and sexuality…are queer preoccupations” (Savigliano 1995:45). In the same vein, Mosse states, “Tango is a manly concern” (Mosse 1985). Gardel became Argentina’s national symbol, embodying the complications between gender and sexuality. To even suggest, that Gardel was gay (despite it being a rampant rumor) is to speak out against the nation. The fact that Argentina’s National Academy of Tango expelled a member of speaking about Gardel’s supposed homosexuality in public, is indicative of the national anxiety of appearing queer (Tobin 1998:69).

Lamenting on tango’s present heterosexual display, Salecci writes, “Considered from the
present moment, in the context of this history of the tango, is this sense of loss…a mournful cry for that which is lost and gone…a nostalgia for homosexual desire lost in the sanitization of a forbidden dance” (Salessi 1997:168). Judith Butler would respond that “loss is endemic to homosexuality” thus explaining as postulated by Tobin, how hyper-masculinity can be interpreted as a consequence of tango’s repression of homoeroticism (Butler 1993:226-30, Tobin 1998:69). As Gardel once cried in the tango, “Al Mundo le Falta un Tornillo” modernity is now plagued with role reversals and inversions, where the criminal becomes a gentleman. It is in this world that Gardel and Maradona meet on screen.

**Final reflections**

Today, as fissures are opened up by differences related to race, ethnicity, class, and religion, the cultural construct of sex and gender proves revelatory of the ways in which desire and the nation continues to be shaped by the ideal of the Christian Family (Guy 1997:3). Therefore, it is impossible to discuss Latin America, for the specific purposes of Argentinidad, without first and foremost recognizing how sex and sexuality is experienced differently in the region because of context and contingency. Different bodies desire other bodies, and that which is “other” to the dominant is a constant problem for Argentinidad. Therefore, homosexual identity in Argentina was an invention, crafted, and ambiguous as is nationalism that remains rooted in an imagined desire that deviates from the expected, and maneuvers past traditional and rigid notions of identity.

The LGBT community in Argentina offers a significant contribution the study of social movements in Latin America, yet it remains surprisingly understudied within dominant social theories (Drucker 1996:92). In fact, most literature on social theory tends to gloss over the role of sexual identity in mobilizing individuals (Warner 1993:ix). In Stephen Brown’s article on the Gay and Lesbian movement in Argentina he explains how writing on Latin American social
movements minimize the importance of how sexual orientation and identity help organize around national issues (Brown 2002). To this, Daniel Balderston and Donna J. Guy acknowledge that early Latin Americanists were not interested in exploring the ways in which sex and gender became spaces of conflict due to the region’s “uneven modernity.” This silence has been productive for scholars who are interested in turning this ambivalence into “something else” – and making it the starting point of all historical questions, which seek to explain the present (Andaluzua 1987:74). I humbly attach myself to this great endeavor.

**Post Data: You do Know what you’re Going to Get**

I opened up the envelope that accompanied the box of chocolates that Carola had sent me. I wish to close this chapter with an excerpt from the note:

> I know that as you are trying to tell our stories, you might feel that they’re certain things that have to be taken out however, my story, my family’s story is just as much yours as they are mine. We are all part of the same story. If you want to know Argentina, you have to find it in the details, in our desires, in our wants, in our bodies, and in our movements. This is why I dance. This is why I love whom I please, because this is exactly what being free should do to you...allow you to think not only with your body or mind, but with your heart. I am happy here because of that. I feel that this is my place and as much as my family does not understand, I am content in this chaos that this country has always been.

**Canonizing Paths: When Gardel meets (Santa) Maradona**

“To be an Argentine is a feeling and feelings do not have a price...” –Diego Armando Maradona

“My heart is Argentine” – Carlos Gardel

In 1995, Argentine filmmaker Rodolfo Paliere, released the film, *El Día que Maradona Conoció a Gardel* (The day that Maradona met Gardel.) The plot centers on the resolve of two men, a watchmaker and a television editor who seek to free the soul of Carlos Gardel. In the film, Gardel makes a pact with the devil in exchange for immortality. The devil, “Lucy” is a
woman who makes Gardel sing to her for eternity, despite his desire to stop. Since he will live forever in the hearts and minds of Argentina, Gardel must continue singing. A popular phrase within the Argentine argot is, “Gardel sings better each day.” Unlike Elvis or 2-Pac, which are surrounded by conspiracy theories that question if they are dead, everyone agrees that physically, Gardel no longer exists. Yet he lives within La Argentinidad. Hence, Gardel is as a result enslaved to Lucy.

At one point in the film, Gardel yells in distress, “Until when? I’m dry!” He indicates that he thirsts for liberation…and a drink of water. Yet Lucy, who appears as a femme fatale simply laughs and revels in his misery. (What a terrible woman.) Gardel continues to sing and smile, though the audience is aware of his true feelings. In fact, knowing his suffering is essential to the story because you are unable to intervene. You become a “witness.” Also, his body betrays his “true” self. In order to free his soul, someone equally as loved by Argentina is necessary to break the spell. Only one person can challenge Lucy’s control over Gardel. The only man that could do this is a living-legend, one that exhibits semi-divine attribute… Diego Armando Maradona. The Argentine newspaper La Nación addresses the connection between these two national symbols stating, “without a doubt, two of the clearest exponents before the world of our most popular passions: tango and fútbol.” This film attempts to explore, per its director’s vision, “Gardel the man, and not so much the myth” through an equally mythical figure, Diego Armando Maradona (Martinez 1996). Both of these men represent Argentina, and both men trouble Argentine representations of masculinity as well.

A queer reading of this film would consider the character of Lucy (Lucifer) as representative of the nation. Argentina controlled Carlos Gardel’s image, upon reaching stardom. He was gripped with appearing like a “lady’s man” and is said to obsess about his weight (Collier 1986:166). I wonder if there was a connection between his anxieties with size with his
national identity as it does within present-day Buenos Aires’s anorexia epidemic (Maldonado-Salcedo 2010). This relationship would suggest that the social determinants that engender the anorexia epidemic in Buenos Aires after the economic crisis are self-perpetuating (historically) and as such symptomatic of deeply rooted issues related to the body and its place with society that are embodied. He was overly conscious of appealing to women, and this is said to have made him insecure and anxious. In order to achieve immortality, it was necessary for him to pleasure Lucy (the nation/la patria), by eternally performing tango. His pain and suffering brought her great pleasure. There is something about the eternal performance that speaks to gender performativity. Judith Butler posits that “if gender is something that one becomes—but can never be—then gender is itself a kind of becoming or activity, and that gender ought not to be conceived as noun or a substantial thing or a static cultural marker, but rather as an incessant and repeated action of some sort” (Butler 1990:112).

This cult film is suggestive about what it means to be masculine within Argentina and how it is tied to national discourse and performances that might go against one’s “true” self. This is part of “serving” the nation, Kimmel and Aronson argue that, it is by scrutinizing the way in which gender is performed, that “effeminacy reveals the unavoidable instability at the heart of all performances of masculinity” (Kimmel and Aronson 2004:247). Maradona is a key figure within contemporary spectacles of Argentine masculinity, because of his “divine” abilities on the soccer field. Argentina is eternally in love with these two men, because of their extraordinary abilities to be seductive and appealing. Even if you do not desire them, you will want to at least be (like) them…worshipped.

***

Parent-teacher conferences tend to be overwhelming, no matter how small the child. How do you take criticism about your child without wanting to defend him? As constructive as it is, it
is not (for me) easy to accept criticism about my son. Pablo’s first grade parent-teacher conference also coincided with “dress your profession” day at the school. Parents were supposed to dress their child up with what they wanted to be when they grew up. I asked Pablo what he wanted to dress up as. Essentially I was asking what do you want to do when you grow up. Which also means, what do you want to be? Your profession, inevitably, is part of your identity.

The parent teacher conference was immediately after school. All the parents wait until the children are picked up by their teachers and go up the stairs to their classes. I would stay until he no longer was visible. I literally would crouch down to see his little feet to the last possible moment. On the day I took him, the other parents asked me why I had forgotten to dress him up. I responded that he was dressed up. I cleared my throat, “He wants to grow up to be a soccer player. To be exact, he wants to play for the Argentine national team.” His classmates were dressed in suits, little girls with white doctor coats; others had their hair pulled up in buns. Pablo was dressed up with the Argentine national kit. It then hit. Maybe these mothers dressed them up with what they wanted them to be. I mean, surely my kid is not the only one who wants to play soccer. I looked around and there was literally only one other kid who had a soccer suit. It was the other Argentine-Colombian kid in his school. However, he was dressed in the Barcelona FC kit (he lived with his mother.)

Walking into the parent teacher conference, Pablo and I take a seat at the tiny tables and chairs. I thought how, “how demoralizing.” The teacher started off, “Your son is wonderful but he is…” She did not know how to say it. “He is sensitive.” Pablo and I were unphased. We nodded as she added, “Hypersensitive in fact.” We replied, “Actually, no. He’s just half-Argentine.”
Maradona’s Dominates all Balls

“I’d marry Maradona if I could…and I’m not gay!” – Male Devotee of Iglesia Maradoneana

“It’s be an honor to have sex with the greatest soccer player of all time…and I’m not gay. I’m just Argentine.” – Male Devotee of Iglesia Maradoneana

“I prefer women. I am dating Verónica. She is 31 years old, she is blonde,” responded Diego Maradona. At a 2010 FIFA World Cup Press conference, a BBC sports journalist questioned him about his “excessive” expressions of affections with his players. Images of Maradona kissing and embracing his players, lead many (non-Argentines) to question his sexual orientation. Popular websites formed groups asking, “Is Maradona gay?” Though he denied in the FIFA interview that he was “limp-wristed.” Others posted comments stating that, “he looks like it (gay) by the way he hugs and kisses people when celebrates.” Others cited the infamous photo of him locking lips with Hollywood actor Collin Farrell 2005, as proof of his homosexuality (Sabharwal 2010). Maradona’s official response is interesting because he only really stated his “preference.” Nevertheless his answer can be construed as just one more gambit, which Maradona’s celebrated career is filled with on and off the field.

Within Argentina, Maradona is so masculine, that rumor has it that homosexual sex does not actually make him “gay.” Nuanced? As the popular Argentine phrase goes, “Maradona is not gay, he just likes to party” (Maradona no es puto, es fiestero.) Argentines dare not call Maradona gay because he is their “idol.” What would that reveal about them? Idolatry is an understatement when one considers that there is an entire religion organized around him, La Iglesia Maradoneana in Rosario, Argentina. With followers and devotees throughout the world.
To even suggest that Maradona is a homosexual is as “blasphemous” as insinuating Jesus was not straight... though he too just hung out with a bunch of social misfits and the dudes from his squad. At most, skeptical Argentines would refer to Maradona as a “playful straight,” evoking his autobiography, which lists the countless women’s he’s “bedded” (*llevar a la cama*.) Defenders of his heterosexuality claim that since he had sex with so many different women, he must try new things. (Understandably.) It is generally acknowledged that he engaged in homosexual affairs. He was romantically linked with his friend Alejo Clerici. He is said to have “*enfiestarse*” (which means to party sexually) with Guillote (his former manager), Chris Miró (Argentina’s most famous Transvestites), Diego Diaz (former fútbol player turned soap opera star), Roberto Edgar de Volcán (former singer turned chauffer to the stars), Luciano Pereyra (singer), Luciano Castro (actor), amongst others. I list these alleged affairs because most of these men are popular heartthrobs within the celebrity culture of Argentina. However, this does not in any way make them “feminine.” It is rumored that there are videos of Maradona engaging in homosexual sex, but former president Carlos Menem purchased them all in an effort to save the national (masculine) image before the world (Animal 2009).

**A Matter of Balls**

Eduardo Archetti writes, that Argentinean soccer is a “world of explicit and implicit meanings” pertaining to sexuality (Archetti 2002:524). Diego Maradona, like no other, embodies the hallmarks of Argentine soccer: individualism, fast dribbling, and a petulant male aggressiveness. He is Boca Junior’s par excellence player, a team who is often accused of sodomy by its rivals, River Plate Club (Robin 1998:114). Jeffrey Tobin discusses the infamous case of soccer coach Bambino Veira in order to complicate the homoerotic nature of soccer. Veira was accused and convicted of sodomy with a minor in the 1990s. Tobin notes that:

…sexual suspicions are inevitable because soccer is itself suspect. Fans know their soccer-
playing idols are virile—in the sense of strongly sexually driven—and that they are men who live in a world of men. In this situation, a man who practices sodomy is, as always a sexual suspect, but so is the man who abstains—whose drive proves less than compelling. Fans, too are sexual suspects because of the intensity and the depth of their freedom…Any man who does not have a club to feel that way about is a sexual suspect, but so is the man who does have a club to feel that way about—as do the millions of “real men” who are never impassioned or excited by a woman as they are by a natal goal-scorer. Week after week, they go to the stadium to admire strong and dexterous young men, and to accuse opposing fans of sexual suspicious behaviors (116).

Veira was dismissed as head of River Plate, and outcast from many clubs except that of Boca Junior. Boca refused to label him as “homosexual.” In fact, they said he was another “victim of homophobia.” Homophobia is the fear of being treated like a woman. This is what is unacceptable, even if you engage in homosexual sex. Tobin concluded that, “in addition to taunting one another about practicing sodomy, Argentine soccer fans tend to believe regardless of their own sexual orientation, that sodomy is common in the soccer world” (115). Leon Godin, an Argentine sexologist explains, “if a guy is confined for four, five, six years in a setting where there is an abundance of persons of the same sex, after a certain period of abstinence he will want to penetrate whatever surface is at hand” (Gindin, quoted in Binaco 1994:7). Perhaps this is why the famous transvestite Cris Miró’s relationship with Diego Maradona (amongst other soccer players) is not so controversial (considering.) In Argentina, “the active homosexual” is not a homosexual; gay is “a man who is penetrated by another” (Tobin 119:120). In no other field, than that of the soccer field is this evident.

**Queer Subjectivities and Processes**

How this text is appraised is completely contingent on the identity and sensibilities that comes as a result of the encounter between text and the “other” who becomes through the practice of reading and identity practice that comes from language. I intend to experiment with language through the chapters in order to breakaway from “traditional” forms of writing about culture. I do this also to weave in queer subjectivities and queering processes that emerge implicitly and explicit as from the deployment of language in particular spaces and places (which
is a precarious construction in itself) in which Argentinidad is affirmed through embodied and imagined movements (Butler 228). I add value through my exploration of Juana Molina’s theorizations on queer Latinidad (a cultural identity) within my interrogation of Argentinidad (a national identity.) As identities and performances, both remain, “open to re-inscription and reinterpretation.”

Molina’s explanation of queer Latinidad in many ways intersects with Argentinidad. Both embodiments rest on the “spastic contradictions and paradoxes of bodies and sites, identities and spaces intersecting,” which she then, “exemplified by the juxtaposition of the terms, both provision and immediate” (Molina 2003:9). Consider that the meaning of Argentina’s name is also a contradiction. It was named after a resource it does not have but in many ways speaks to underscoring (popular) characterization of Argentines in relation to its neighboring Latino communities. The body is taken up as a culturally and socially mediated site of identity formation and negotiations.

Silver is the shiniest surface. It can exist in its natural state. It is not toxic but silver salts, which can be problematic because they can look indistinguishable to the untrained eye. It tarnishes with air and gets a black surface when it interacts. It is stable with water and oxygen. In compound form, it is used to try stop hurricanes (take on the forces of nature and reorient it.) Is its name really a paradox or does it reflect its queer identity? I conclude considering Waldo Ansadi’s text, “The search for Latin America, between the angst of finding her and fear of not recognizing her…” (9). In this project I search for her, Argentina, in the bodies, words, and memories of her greatest lovers and rivals…in the throws of her “deepest passions...”
Chapter 8, Part 2: SUSANA COOK INTERVIEW

Below is an interview conducted on February 4, 2014 with Argentine queer performance artist, Susana Cook who is based in New York City. I first encountered her watching public access television and sent her a message about Pablo having recently arrived to New York. She then sent him a shout out on her show, “hola al Cordobes.” I have since followed her work as a playwright; I find it fitting to allow her responses to stand singular in the form of the interview. I do not dare revise or edit any them, or do I want to attach my interpretation of her text into the work. Since she is a very public figure, I was authorized to use her name and to include her interview in an unabridged version, as you will find below.

You can read more about her work at:

www.Susanacook.com

When did you come to NYC? Why did you choose to become a Performance Artist?

I came to NYC in 1993.
I don’t think I decided to become a Performance Artist, but I adopted the name in New York. I realized when I came that what I was doing was called performance Art in here, so I adopted the name. My background is in theater, and I was doing a lot of work as an actor and writer, but not all of my work was fitting in the Theater category. I am not sure how was I calling it, but I was very happy to find the Performance Art name for it.

What role does Argentina play in your identity formation?

Argentina started playing a role in my identity formation after I left Argentina. It was not very visible or present while I was there. In Argentina we mostly identify with our ancestors. Most of us come from immigrants and I think we look somehow in our roots for our identity. The Argentine identity is very elusive while you are there. People call their friends with nicknames that have to do with their origins: ruso, tano, gallego, etc.

Define 'Argentinidad'

La Argentinidad... let’s see. People think a lot about “our food”. Only after leaving Argentina we realize that what we think is Argentine food for example, is not, really. For example the Dulce de Leche, many Latin-American countries eat dulce de leche, some call it cajeta, and other names. The empanadas, well, they make empanadas in most Latin American countries. And then, there’s the Tango. Yes, it’s very Argentino. But other countries Latinos, se atribuyen el tango.
When I came to New York, I realized that my Argentinidad had been defined already. My job was trying to understand what was that strong image they had of me already. There was a lot of stereotype. Some of it was true maybe.? I wasn’t sure.

But I remember joking in a little performance, saying “when I came to new york I realized I was Argentinean and then had to know some tango. So I called my mother in Argentina and I said: Ma, como se baila el tango?... Y que se yo nena, me contest, yo soy Italiana!

So I did a show called Tango Lesbiango

When was the last time your went to an asado?

I was vegetarian for many years, so didn’t like asados. I went to a couple of asados recently, but they were organized by friends from Chile, so they were very different from the Argentinean ones. The last time I went to an asado in Argentina was in 2007.

What "habits" do you still keep that are part of your cultural identity? (Ex. do you drink mate, do you make Nioquis on the 29th, etc?)

I drink mate

What is your favorite Club (soccer?)

Boca Juniors

Do you congregate with other Argentines? If so, where?

I don’t. They say that Argentineans avoid other Argentineans when we are away.

Here’s a joke:

When Argentineans leave the country we usually do good. We are like (abono/fertilizer/cow poop), if you put a little bit here and there it helps the plants grow, etc. But if you put too much in one place (Argentina) is just a big pile of shit.

Another Argentinean joke. I heard this one in Ecuador. The first time I realized that they hated us.

Si queres hacer un buen negocio. Compra un argentine por lo que vale y vendelo por lo que cree que vale.

Ahora me acostumbre, pero tenia 22 años cuando escuche ese chiste, and it hurt!

Otro:

Sabes que es el ego? El Argentinito que todos tenemos adentro

Within Argentina- how do you identify? (Porteña, etc?)

Porteña
What do you think about Diego Armando Maradona? (Soccer)

Diego Maradona was an amazing soccer player. I saw him only one for a world cup, in 1986 or something like that. I didn’t see him playing again. I know some parts of his story. I saw him making homophobic jokes during his interview with Fidel Castro.

What do you think about Pope Francis?

I think he’s trying to do something good. I like that he talks about the poor, against inequality. A little bit more flexible when he talks about gays. I wish he could talk about the abuse of children by priests.
I think they know that the Catholic church was crumbling, and that the few Catholics left are in Latin America, so they had to make this move.
I think he has good intentions. We’ll see.

What makes you different from other Latinos? What makes you Argentine?

What makes me Argentine is that I was born in Argentina. Our accent is very different.
When we are in Argentina we don’t know what the world thinks about us. I wasn’t aware.
Latinos hate Argentineans in general. Mostly in Mexico. I asked sometimes why. A couple of people told me that they resented that during the dictatorship many Argentineans went to Mexico and took the best jobs, or something like that. Well, the people who were fleeing the country were usually professionals, very well trained people, etc

El porteño es arrogante, I have a hard time sometimes with the porteño style. There are certain things that I really love about Buenos Aires, certain people. But I can’t stand el machismo, and that people feel …. Ok. Too long. Maybe because I live in the US, some people in my family wouldn’t let me open my mouth, because I am a Yankee, I can’t understand them anymore, etc

When did you identify with being a Latino and why? What do you identify as being “Latino?”

I left Argentina when I was 19. I went to live in Paris for a while. It was during the dictatorship.
I met many exiled Chileans in Paris, and that’s when I identified more clearly as a Latino, I think.

What was your perception about Latinos when you lived in Argentina?

When I was young, living in Argentina, we used to sing a song “Latino Americano, yo soy Latino Americano….” But the truth is, we had no idea who our latinoamericano brothers and sisters were. Nobody was coming to Argentina at that time, because it was dangerous, because of the dictatorship. And for us it was impossible to go anywhere, because it was expensive. Now there’s people from all over in Argentina, but for many years we were completely isolated.
Has this view changed? What do Latinos look like? Is that different that how Argentines look like?

Porteños for the most part were descendants of immigrants from Italy, Spain and Germany. People in the provinces had more indigenous blood. But I think this is changing, thank god.

Has migration changed the way you relate to your family?

Yes. Very much. As I said before, I am the Yankee. I remember having an argument with my brother once and he called me Bush. (Bush was president at the time)

How has your relationship with Argentina changed since migrating?

It has changed many times. Missing at first. Then I was feeling more and more distant. When I go I share time with my family (or I used to) TV is awful.

Have you adopted language that creates distance between you and your family in Argentina?

I have very little family left in Argentina.

What rituals do you participate or holidays that are distinct from Argentina?

Thanksgiving maybe. But Argentina is adopting many holidays from here. Like Halloween, Valentine’s day.

Are there any difficulties in the family that immediately relate to being in Argentina or in New York/Miami?

Yes. The distance with my sister and my brother grew too much. They are pretty much the only family I have left.

What rituals do you participate in that are maintained by your family in Argentina?

Ninguno creo
Do you communicate with your family through technology?

Does phone count as technology?
We did little Skype when my mother was sick.

How is that experience?

Skype was amazing. Phone is good.

What type of identity or lifestyle do you represent online?

Mine. The real one. Queer. performer

What type of images or information do you circulate about Argentina online?

A few things. I remember posting about the cacerolazos. Because I was proud. I remember my mother was going. I was asking her, how do you know where they are? And she said, they say in the news! So people like my mother were watching TV and they were saying in the news “There’s a cacerolazo in Cabildo y Juramento” so people were leaving their homes and joining.
“You see how beat up our flag is, that is how we feel. I wanted to collect money so we can get a new one because this is shameful. Then I thought, this is exactly the flag that represents Argentina, that represents how we feel. This is the one the Pro (Macri) made.”

Felipe, 72
Lomas de Zamora, Argentina

Figure 25 Torn Flag, a photo by Melissa Maldonado-Salcedo
The rock band, Bersuit Vergarabat, sang all three songs that inspired this dissertation. I would like to end where I started. These songs are “Sr. Cobranza,” “La Argentinidad al Palo” and “El Viento Trae una Copla.”

CHAPTER 9, Part 1: Inspiration and Conclusions in 3 Songs, On Loop

My senior quote in my catholic all girls’ high school was by Bob Dylan. Under my graduation photo and adjacent to that of my classmates, my choice of quote stood out when read against the bible versus and literary quotes that traditionally were used by my peers. My quote gives insight into my choice of sources in this text and my (personal) search for truth outside of traditional myth making industries. My choice in citation also indicates my strained relationship with religion, as understood through my lived experiences and passion for music. The quote read, “I don’t adhere to rabbis, preachers, evangelist, all of that. I’ve learned more from the songs than I’ve learned from any of this kind of entity. The songs are my lexicons. I believe the songs.” I still do, albeit for different reasons as I once did.

I introduce the origins of this thesis by first discussing the three songs that inspired this project and which guided me throughout my fieldwork. Marvin Harris writes that, “One point that anthropologists have always made is that aspects of social life which do not seem to be related to each other, actually are related” (Harris 1981:9). There were many times that I listened to these songs as a playlist in order to “feel” and accordingly “remember” the details that bond these narratives into a bigger one about identity and how we experience it through our bodies. Music generally offers an insight into a culture’s heart and gives context to an individual’s memory of it. Music is euphoric, transcendental, and also subjective. These three songs that I will discuss served as a soundtrack for my relationship with Argentinidad through various moments in my life that detail my ability to “feel” and “listen” to the “native’s view.” Archetti
explains that, “Notions of Argentinian identity are not exclusively constructed internally, within given boundaries. They can also be conceptualized in contraposition to other identities, recognized or not by the natives themselves. The ideas and images of the ‘national’ are quite often a mirror in which the glance of others is as crucial as the glance of the natives themselves” (Archetti 2003:228).

The study of lyrics as cultural texts delivers an ethnographic vantage point that reveals the circulation of counter narratives about national identity. In Argentina, the “official” has been historically constructed through deception in order to challenge the perimeters of memory and truth, which are also limited. I treat these three songs in my work as a “sonic graffiti.” The term helps ground the importance and emergence of rock nacional as a cultural movement in parallel circumstances as Hip Hop did in the United States. The first song I will analyze fittingly was initially written as a rap song, and then it was appropriated as a rock one.

**Song #1: “Sr. Cobranza” and its Prophetic Appeal**

The highly contentious song, “Sr.Cobranza” is best described as a protest song against “the system” where an imminent implosion loomed. VH1 would register the song as #72 on its list of the 100 most influential songs in Latin America during the 1990s. The 1990s was the height of Menemism where political power was obtained through criminal exploits and suspicious economic relationships and exchanges. The music video for this song presents the face of its singer, Gustavo Cordera, as subtitles of the lyrics are written in capitals beneath him. As the song progresses and the lyrics are increasingly more explicit, the words (subtitles) become censored. This disconnect indicates the tension between what you hear and what you see. The conflict the video reveals is at the core of Argentina’s problematic relationship with its identity, particularly because of the recurring theme of crisis.

There is a related controversy concerning this song, which has been obscured from its
legacy and mainstream popularity. It is important to note that this “Sr.Cobranza” was Bersuit’s first international hit with a major label, which introduced the band to a greater audience. The song was initially written and recorded by the rap group Las Manos de Fillippi in their 1998 album, Arriba las Manos, Esto es el Estado (Hands up, this is the State.) Hernán de Vega, who wrote the song, years later shared how the record label and Bersuit’s music producers appropriated the song and screwed him over (“nos cagaron de todos lados…” He also mentioned how Gustavo Cordera helped him get into the major label, because he was motivated by his own personal interest. There was a fine print clause in his contract that allowed Bersuit to record the song. Sadly, this had happened to him before, when cuarteto star Rodrigo recorded his hit, “El Cucumelo.” Despite such international successes, De Vega shares he does not mind working and living from his “changas,” which means odd jobs within the informal sector. He did not financial gain from these songs (del Mazo 2002). The story behind the popularization of “Sr. Cobranza” also reveals a recurring tendency in Argentina’s national narratives to blur the boundaries between fact and fiction. Bersuit’s commercial success was in part predicated on their public image as subversive and rebellious against the state.

The band appeared in The Take (2004), which is a documentary that tells the story of workers challenging globalization through the organization, mobilization, and solidarity of works against the Zanon factory. The film chronicles their arduous quest to “take back” and run the abandoned factory that was once the source of their livelihoods and economic stability. The Canadian filmmakers, Avi Lewis and Naomi Klein, concentrated the film’s message on the following motto, “Occupy, Resist, Produce.” The story is based on the events that lead up to “Latin America’s most prosperous middle class” sinking into a flood of “mass unemployment.”

Bersuit’s former front man, Gustavo Cordera, speaks in the film, and presents the worker’s fight and activism as a struggle akin to that of David and Goliath’s battle. He then
celebrates the underdog’s effectual defiance, “What the guys in Zanon did, fighting against the police with just marbles, like when were kids, with slingshots against real weapons, they took over the factory.” Bersuit is presented as a “fan” of the worker’s and is identified as one of “Argentina’s biggest rock bands.” This representation is particularly problematic because of the comments concerning Cordera’s actions that benefited from the fruits of someone else’s labor. Vega called Cordera a “flor de garca” (which in Argentine means fake or charlatan) because of the deceit that propagated him into stardom.

The first time I heard the song “Sr.Cobranza” by Bersuit Vergarabat was on a compilation CD of Latino rock gifted to me in the early 2000s. What I was able to hear in the music was a changing sense of self that was of particular interest to me as I was concurrently undergoing personal identity negotiations. Rocha writes that at the time this song emerges, “Traditional roles for men changed after 1989, when Argentina adopted a neoliberal economic model that entailed a comprehensive transformation not only of the national State but also of the discourses that sustained it” (Rocha 2012:8). This song signaled how dramatic was the impact economic insecurity had on gendered conceptions of power within the social sphere.

Rock music directed me towards my initial contemplation on the relationship between Argentina and the rest of Latin America. The song still sounds like a relevant battle cry for a regional unification against the multiple systems and structures of oppression propagated by capitalist interests. The lyrics were later termed “prophetic” because of its foresight into Argentina’s future. The song was penned years before its prognostication came into existence. The song was censored because it explicitly called the government and their “friends” narcos (“son todos narcos.”). The song also highlights the imperial relationship between Argentina and “el norte,” which is only free of violence when Argentina acquiesces to their demands.
Cordera discussed his personal views on revolution in relation to Sr. Cobranza’s message and call to action. He shared that if Argentina (el pueblo) wanted a true “revolution,” politics was an ill informed prospect to achieve it. Instead, he proposed “sex,” as the ultimate transformative weapon that could induce real transformations throughout society. He explains that because Argentines are always in “heat,” (tienen una calentura), sex (pleasure) stands as a readily available weapon against the repressive forces of the state and church (which are often indistinguishable.) He then argues that for this reason religion is necessary within Argentine culture because it imparts guilt, which then works to inhibit pleasure. Guilt, according to Cordera, “dominates all of Latin America” and therefore curbs the likelihood of a complete “revolution.” He then declares that, “an orgy of 50,000 people at la Plaza de Mayo would be more effective at achieving transformation” than the teachings of Ernesto “Che” Guevara. Where as “el Che” advocated for a revolution of “love,” Bersuit proposes a sexual one, which differentiates sex from love, and demarcates bodily desire from emotional gratification (coger no es amar.) The ability to differentiate love from sex in fact presents huge progressive possibilities that can modernize dated policies concerning reproduction and gender violence.

The music of Bersuit for a very long time directly addressed the social forces that would eventually bring Argentina to its knees. The problem all lies in Argentina’s inability to impart justice and this limitation makes “democracy” and repression… one and the same (“es la misma mierda”). The song states that the system attacks everyone who stands outside of it, you are a target for violence (te persiguen…) exercised by the state and its forces especially if you are poor or gay. These have been constant “enemies” of the state’s patriarchal narratives that punishes such problematic “deviancy.” The song calls for the unification of a very fragmented region because they share a common enemy.

Song #2: La Argentinidad al Palo and Amplifications of Identity
The second song I assess appears in the band’s 2004 album of the same name, *La Argentinidad al Palo*. The song documents the public spectacle of the *Argentinazo* (the economic crisis of 2001), which were fueled by political instability and social unrest. This crisis was a sensorial experience, which is effectively captured in the lyrics. It still smells like burning tires and sounds like the banging of pots and drums. These experiences together amplified an *Argentinidad* made possible through the collusion between historical myths and the present realities of the crisis. The lyrics reckon the contradictions embedded within various elements of Argentine identity. These also claim them to be inherently self-perpetuating.

According to the song, Argentines have an innate ability to be the “the best” and the “worst” of the world at what they do. They list the many ways in which Argentina has shaped the world as well, through groundbreaking contributions in the fields of sport, science, and art. They invented, “color television, ball point pens, and cartoons.” Argentina also discovered “finger prints,” which indicates its relationship with the question of “identity.” Interestingly, the song also designates Argentine women as “the most beautiful women in the world.” These myths, inventions, and discoveries stand secondary to this “truth.” This also points to the aspect of *Argentinidad* that speaks to a competitive disposition and a desire to be “the best” in the realm of competition. The song references that they are champions at “soccer, boxing, and hockey.”

The song also suggests that this all comes from the passion that has characterized Argentines. They “kill for love,” which means they are also willing to die for it. The song presents that what actually makes Argentines “the best” is something that exists within their DNA. They are a direct result of the histories that produced a “mixture” of highly “combustible” races (“mixtura de alta combustión.”) The volatility within Argentine identity is a blessing, but it is also a curse. The song proceeds to then list the many historical instances in which “the worst” coexists with its greatness, which mentions the pleasure and pain that occurred during the
dictatorship. It was also when Argentina won its first World Cup (Videla en el ‘78). The song then points to el Argentinazo (cinco presidentes en una semana) and lists the multiple failings of neo-liberalist policies which effectively disappeared the middle class (“el que apuesta al dólar pierde.”)

Subsequently, front man Gustavo Cordera asks, how can “we” Argentines move through “ecstasy” (pleasure) and “agony” (pain) with such ease? He then concludes that Argentina is best represented in the performance of Doctor Favaloro’s “shot in the heart.” Dr. René Favaloro was a pioneer in cardiac bypass surgery. He established a foundation that at the time of his suicide was 18 million dollars in debt. He wrote several letters requesting support from the government while also expressing his frustrations with corruption that pervaded the health system. He commits suicide by shooting himself in the heart in 2000. The New York Times notes that his death went “beyond the national fixation with neurosis and death,” calling Argentines “some of the world’s most psychoanalyzed people.” His death opened up the “deepest questions about themselves and their country.”

In an essay entitled “the Sad Land of Psychoanalysis and Tango,” Claudio Ivan Remiseira writes that the death of Favaloro “marked a transcendental moment in this climate of frustrated expectations.” It was a turning point that brought to the surface many of Argentina’s worst fears. Clifford Karuss quotes the author Tomas Eloy Martinez who saw this event in particular as just one of many other symptoms that necessitates attention given the profound morning and grief it ignited. He shares, “It would be unjust to attribute to the government of Fernando de la Rúa the responsibility of these tragedies—the emigration of so many young people, the worsening poverty, the suicide of an exceptional scientist. But all these things are alarming symptoms that we cannot pretend to see” (Krauss 2000).

The national mourning that followed Favaloro’s death brought to the surface long held
concerns regarding Argentina’s future against a rapidly changing backdrop. It was later discovered that he wrote a letter to then President de la Rúa, which revealed how he was “tired of being a beggar in his won country.” The song suggests that this love (and hate) for the self and country, is what has also given Argentines, “a bad name” throughout the world and accounts to how and why they are “misrepresented.”

**Song #3: “El Viento Trae una Copla”: Singing a Shared Embodied History**

The last song that most inspired this work is of personal significance to me because in many ways I am able to see part of my family’s migration story in it, “El Viento Trae una Copla.” The song shares the memories and embodied practices of an immigrant in Miami who remembers the hurricane that one day “cut one of his wings off” and made him “fall and drag himself” on the ground. This winds of change that made him fly from his “place,” is the economic crisis. However, it can also be the political crisis. This song provides a common narrative for Argentines who live outside of the country in the United States. The song starts off with the typical drum march that is emblematic of national anthems throughout the Southern Cone.

Cordera discusses the bodily transformations migration has caused, such as the “rough skin on his hands” and the feeling of terror at the sight of law enforcement (“el terror fue la ley.”) This is a consequence of being undocumented and “deportable.” Deportation is a direct attack against family and can alter the life choices that immigrants most fear. Throughout my fieldwork, I heard instances of whenever one of my subjects saw a car that “looked” like either a Ford Falcon or that said, ICE, they felt their “hearts beat a bit faster” or they would begin to “sweat.”

I remember that one of the telling details Pablo’s mother noticed when he sent his first pictures from Miami to Argentina were his hands. They were dry and peeling because of the
boiling water and chemicals that he used to wash dishes at restaurants. Through the ritual of washing dishes, the song’s protagonist considers the forces and memories of how he became his job, a dishwasher (*dishwahero*.) He asks, “How come, if I am Argentine?” He shares the ways in which he attempts to salvage his identity by resisting whenever possible, like by drinking the leftover alcohol in the glasses. The mixture gives him a buzz while working (“*el mezcladito me enciende.*”) The declaration as an “Argentine,” is one made possible because of migration.

In Argentina, identity in regard to “place” is usually in relation to *el Porteño* (of Capital Federal), “el Cordobés” (from Córdoba), or “Rosarinos,” (from Rosario.) The other way identity is formed in Argentina connects to the migration histories of family. It is not uncommon for people in Argentina to call each other names like “*el ruso*” (the Russian), “*el tano,*” (the Italian), el “*gallego*” (the Spaniard) or “*el polaco*” (the Pollack.) The United States obscures the differences that once fragmented Argentine identity around social categories that within in Latino-America do not hold the same significance. Argentines are equally “*ches.*”

The song explores how this Argentine now sees himself in relation to the patrons because he “washes the dishes of people who are better than him.” Their worth is determined by the fact that they are patrons and consumers, while he serves and works. His new circumstances make him in many ways no different than other immigrants coming to the United States in search of economic survival and opportunities. Immigration was a fundamental part of the Argentine narratives of identity, but this particular wave to the United States in many ways anchors them in the United States where they seek to maintain a relationship with their identity history. Archetti explains this, “Argentina received, between 1869 and 1930, more immigrants in relation to its native population than any other modern country, and there was a perfect mirror of this historical pattern in the growth and development of the capital city of Buenos Aires, the city where tango was invented and football developed “ (Archetti 2003:221) This then takes a toll on his ability
to be realistic and loses sight of reality and “goes crazy.” He looks out at the ocean and fantasizes about “swimming back,” to where his family is in Argentina, and to whom he remains committed to (“no me saqué el anillo.”)

Cordera explains that the album in which these songs appear, trace how Argentines “became” Latino. This was not possible prior to the crisis, because they could not see the bridges that connected Argentina with the region’s history. After December 2002, Argentines became according to him, “orphaned, without the god of the 1990s whose temple was the Banks, let our god money protect us.” He explains the intention behind the album, “This album has to do with coming closer to other pueblos, because Argentines… generate a lot of repulsion in some communities and this is why we reveal in this album where it comes from, as a way to show our humblest side.” It was after these embodied experiences that Argentina and its people were forced to ask once more from a different position, “what are we really going to do about our destiny, our lives, with our histories, our customs (El Mostrador 2014). Immigration afforded an opportunity to consider this question differently as it was tackled in the most challenging of spaces, which affirmed identity through the imagined and real movements through these spaces.
Chapter 9, Part 2:

Concluding thoughts on the Anthropologist as Student of Culture

The anthropologist that values “keeping it real,” can stand to in many ways “learn” from your subjects. This seems like a fair anthropological objective within the dynamics that structure fieldwork. However, this is not always the case. We cannot ignore that anthropology is heteronormative and privileged in terms of the academy. If you have a sense of entitlement outside of the discipline, you probably lack sufficient humility to “learn” from your subjects instead learning (somewhat) about them. I just want to suggest, instead of arguing the fact, that can you really call yourself an expert “on poverty” if you have never lived in poverty a day in your life? You would probably refer to those you study as “the poor.” This then certainly will read as if you, the anthropologist, is sharing information about them that they are incapable of telling themselves, which is a misguided assumption about the relationship between poverty and intelligence. It ignores that poverty is about systemic and institutional power, and not about individual choices. Thus, being a celebrated and accomplished anthropologist certainly does not mean you “practice” good anthropology.

My anthropological principles are no different than my personal code of ethics because they demand honesty from informant and subject alike. However, I also recognize my limitations and prejudices, traumas and conditions, and history as valid sites of introspection. Historical trauma informs people’s health, lives, and social relations across space and time (Duran and Duran 1998). It even informs how (and why) we choose ethnography.

I will say that as an immigrant or child of one, you learn quickly how to navigate distinct worlds simultaneously. You learn to translate contextually and strategically. A doctor’s recommendations is translated with more contextual accuracy than a teacher’s report card (as it was so many times in my case.) After all, you cannot only know how to communicate effectively
in another language; you know how to “read” the body too. Learning to read people’s reaction is key. Parents are usually tasked with being our first instructors for this skill, which you will understand how this actually emerges in our adult lives. My father is legally blind so he has no ability to read people’s reaction to his words. This is can be very liberating in one way, but also it can normalize political incorrectness. Only as an adult I have learned that “brutal honesty” is not always a good thing. My mother is very careful with her words because of her religious and cultural upbringing. She is a craft politician in that sense because of her ability to speak with ambiguous language (which is very much a Latina mother’s forte.) She is as effective as a poet and a politician.

Through fieldwork, I learned to purposefully tell stories and truth. This is an especially difficult task when you write about your own family. There are just certain things that you do not “talk about.” I wanted to break away from this tradition without compromising trust or “realness.” So in order to access truths, I needed to be forthcoming with my own (even if still remains a work in progress when it comes to sharing and learning about them.) Yet, this is a formidable step in that direction.
PLAYLISTS

**Songs Inspired by Diego Armando Maradona**

1) “Capitán Pelusa” by Los Cafres

2) “Yo Te Digo” by Los Calzones Rotos

3) “Santa Maradona” by Mano Negra

4) “Maradona” by Andres Calamaro

5) “Maradona Blues” by Charly Garcia

6) “Marado” by Los Piojos

7) “La Mano de Dios” by Rodrigo Bueno

8) “Para Siempre Diego” by Los Ratones Paranóicos

9) “Made in Argentina” by Mala Fama

10) “Para verte Gambetear” by La Guardia Hereje

**Songs inspired by Las Malvinas**

1) “Comunicado 1666” by Los Violadores

2) “2 de Abril” by Ataque 77

3) “Alma Fuerte” by El Visitante

4) “Héroes de Malvinas” by Ciro y los Combatientes

5) “El Banquete” by Virus
6) “Gente del Sur” by Rata Blanca

7) “The post war dream” by Pink Floyd

8) “Shipbuilding” by Elvis Costello

9) “Where the Rose is Down” by Big Country

10) “Let’s Start a War” by The Exploited

11) “Cómo Estás Amigo” by Iron Maiden

12) “Cua Cua Amen” by Indio Solari

Songs inspired by the death of Walter Bulacio

1) “Arde Buenos Aires” by Fabulosos Cadillacs

2) “Cantito Popular” by Los Redondos- La Renga

3) “Walter” by Resistencia Suburbana

4) “Juguetes Perdidos” by Patricio Rey y los Redonditos de Ricota

5) “Ayer Soñé con Walter” by Fito Páez

6) “Ya Morí” by Ratones Paranoícos

7) “Hiel sangre” by la Renga

8) “Pistolas” by Los Piojos

9) “Gatillo Fácil” by Flor de Piedras

10) “Walter Palmeras” by Taburete
Pablo’s grandfather, Luis Rosatti, often would his tales about his life with this phrase. He was the most honest.

“A certain kind of way” is a linguistic gambit. It is purposefully vague, because the reaction is completely contingent on the individual. It recognizes that the same information will resonate differently depending on the person. This is a phrase most commonly heard within the vocabulary of “articulate hustlers.” I will break this down further in the text, but for now, just know that this is my way to claim my “hood” identity unapologetically.

I chose my first citation in this project with Cortázar’s quote in mind. “Everything is Everything,” is a song from the 1998 album The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill. It came out during my first year of undergraduate studies. There is a line that has always stuck with me and has influenced how I engage with anthropology. Lauryn sings, “I wrote these words for everyone who struggles in their youth. Who won’t accept deception, instead of what is truth. It seems we lose the game, before we even start to play. Who made these rules? We’re so confused. Easily led astray, let me tell ya that everything is everything.” This is why I am motivated to make up and bend the rules of traditional ethnography in accordance to who I am and how I experience the discipline. I am forever grateful for the support of Murphy Halliburton, Ismael García-Colón, John Collins, and Matt Brim for supporting me in this endeavor. They are really everything and their influence exists in everything I write.

My undergraduate colloquium at the Gallatin School of Individualized Studies at New York University was entitled, “The Arts and Violence within Latin America.” My concentrations in this degree were drama therapy, Latin American history and culture, and studio art. (Chang, Professor Publicizes Resignation Letter After Slurs 2012).

I am explicitly referencing the musical West Side Story’s song entitled, “America” which was written Stephen Sondheim and Leonard Bernstein. Yes, a Shakespearian reference. I could not help myself.

This tension is described in the poem, “Vuelos,” by Pablo Alvarez, included in my conclusion. This lyric is from Marley’s song, “Three Little Birds” from his 1977 album, Exodus.

I am referencing the 1989 song “Parents don’t Understand” by DJ Jazzy Jeff and Will Smith.

“I can’t fight this feeling Anymore” by Reo Speedwagon.

“Dreaming” an identity into existence, is a popular narrative within Argentina as seen in the story of “el sueño del pibe” (the child’s dream.) National figures and international stars like Maradona, Juan Martin del Potro, Manu Ginobili, and Lionel Messi often discuss their childhood as one in which they were guided by a “dream” to play for Argentina and to become the best in the world. This is woven into this text’s structure as well. The metaphor originates in the 1942 tango of the same name by Reynaldo Yíso.

I purposely do not clarify if the acquisition of the television is through purchasing.

I argue that after the economic crisis of 2001, the beauty industry started to boom and the fashion industry became really hostile to bodies that did not fit into their “small sizes.” I then contextualize the ensuing anorexia epidemic as a response to the anxieties associated with a “latinization” of Argentina.

One of the most cherished memories I have of my son with his paternal grandfather is of them both sitting inside an inflatable Ben 10 pool under the Lomas de Zamora summer sun. Part of Mauricio Macri’s presidential campaign rested on his promise of offering a change to Kirchnerismo. His slogan was “Cambíemos” (Let’s change.) As of yet, he has started to fulfill his promise of change but not in the way that his supporters could have envisioned. As Ismael García...
Colón points out in his discussion on democratic consumerism, the signs are already present in Argentina to suggest similar end results in regard to individual and community health. The local (mom and pop shops) are being rapidly replaced by the global (Wal-Mart) forces of capitalism and neoliberalism, which are oppressive to the worker and their families, and constrains democracy (García Colón 2006).

18 I want to say that I used this term before Larry Wilmore did in Comedy Central’s the Nightly Show. I guess great minds think alike or something like that.

19 (Molina Guzmán 2010:117).

20 “All of my evil.” This comes from a hymn that asked God (called Savior) to “wash me in your blood, clean me of all of my evil.” This was a popular hymn in my church where many of the members’ conversion (testimonies) had common themes such as addiction, affairs, and abuse. These are also the most common reasons that families are destroyed. However, “there is power in the precious blood of the lamb.”

21 This was one of my go to “facts” that I shared during my guided tours through the United Nations (2002-2004).

22 This is a reference to Pedro Almodovar’s film Mujeres al Borde de un Ataque de Nervios (1988). In it this film he touches on themes related to the “ataque de nervios” which is a culture-bound psychological phenomena where women (for the most part) displays “dramatic outpouring of negative emotions bodily gestures, occasional falling to the ground, and fainting, often in response to distress.” The film also underscores who a lot of this is a result of machismo which has a “post-traumatic stress” (Liebowitz, Marshall, Schecter, Davies 2000).

23 Churches were described sanctuaries (safe spaces) during the Underground Railroad and for immigrants during the 1980s. Recently immigrants facing deportation under the Obama’s administration were offered sanctuary at places of worship (Howell 2015).

24 Adultery and abandonment are “justified” reasons for divorce.

25 John 3:16 is often quoted to explain God’s love for the world this is why he saved it. The other reference is to the rock band Nazareth’s 1978 hit, “Love Hurts.”

26 “El Cajon del diablo” (the devil’s box) is what Latino Pentecostal preachers would call television especially because of the sexual content of Telenovelas which could “corrupt the mind.”

27 Lorenzo Lamas, an Argentine actor, played the protagonist role in the scripted series The Renegade that ran for five series on primetime television in the United States between the years 1992-1997.

28 The idea that virginity is lost with vaginal intercourse also explains why anal sex is prevalent within Christian fundamentalist youth culture.

29 This title references two key texts that inspired this chapter personally. They forced me to identify my foremothers within me and compelled me to question how history produced and reduced them to memories that survived in my body. The first is Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales’s poem “I am Joaquin” which traces the conflicting identities within Latinidad and Pedro Almodovar’s film, All about my Mother (1999) which focused on the roles of mothers, the institution of motherhood, and the performance of mothering in the formation of Latina women. Both texts signal how identities are weighed down by history, which we have to make peace with in the present in order to claim, affirm, and liberate ourselves as subjects.

30 This title is taken from the Christian children’s hymn, “Jesus loves me.”

31 (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1997:54).

32 The series focused on issues of race and ethnicity as indicators of an individual’s self-image and social standing. As a case example, the documentary looks at the way permed hair/curls within a predominantly Aymara (indigenous) society in Bolivia, becomes a symbol of economic and social progress.
A popular hair flattening technique in which a hairdryer is used to achieve the desired “sleek” hairstyle.

The doobie is a hairstyle in which the hair is wrapped around the head in a circular motion to maintain a straight texture. It is most commonly practiced by women of color whose hair texture is “coarse” or curly.

“Pins and Needles” is an early and common symptom of Multiple Sclerosis which refers to the sensation of walking on pins and needles. (www.nationalmssociety.org) MS attacks the mobility of your extremities and therefore limits movement. I am using this metaphor to also consider how these practices and rituals could impair my mind or delimit my ability to dream or think due to the internalization of these stigmatizing values.

“I Could Only Imagine,” is the name of a popular gospel song by the group MercyMe. It was released in 1999 and details the imagined encounter between God and his servant. The servant does not know how to move his body to appropriately respond being in the “presence” of such celestial power. The lyrics ask, “Shall I stand in your presence or shall I fall to my knees?”

I am using the word “huge” like Republican presidential candidate’s Donald Trump deployment of the term which is often the context of a gross exaggeration about his abilities or self. Thus the term implies a delusional reading of reality (Krugman 2016).

V.C Andrews authored the book Flowers in the Attack (1987) that was the first in a series of novels based on the incestuous love affairs within generations of the Foxworth, and Dollanganger family.

I am explicitly recognizing evolution in order to further ground my argument concerning the book of Genesis as history.

Purity rings replaced Chastity belts with very little impact in terms of sexual behaviors and health outcomes when compared to non-pledgers (Rosenbaum 2009).

Augusto Boal explains that the “theatrical language” is the most essential language because it enables the actor (human) to become hyper conscious of their “roles” in order to be able to change up their circumstances to best suit their strategy or goals. My use of “goals” can also enhance how we watch fútbol and apply it to Argentinidad’s theatricality on the biggest global stages or in the most frivolous interactions with the world.

For example, in 1995 President Alberto Fujimori modified the General Population Law in Peru to include voluntary surgical contraception (sterilization) as a means of contraceptive. This then ignited a campaign that ended up sterilizing women without their consent throughout the Andean region. Most of the women who were subject to this procedure were “poor, indigenous, and spoke Quechua” (Lizaraburu 2015).

Jason Wilson also notes that Borges’s sister and mother were arrested for insulting Evita and then singing the national anthem (Wilson 2006). This supports Borges’s view that she was untrustworthy and vindictive. He was also fired from his post at the Municipal Library because of his criticism of Peron and his wife (Shanzer 1986:19).

Employment agencies where undocumented workers get matched with families, construction companies, or service industries who pay them off the books are not at all that uncommon although they remain very secretive and covert. You only connect with one by word of mouth, after a friend (potential client or worker) brokers an introduction. The informal employment sectors are becoming increasingly more professionalized (organized) in cities that have a growing immigrant population and industries that depend on this labor (New York, Los Angeles, and Miami, to name a few.) I visited Karen’s employment agency which was located in Jackson Heights and whose operations were run inside the private home of a woman known as “Normita.” I accompanied Karen who was connecting her friend Mayra, who had recently moved from Miami to New York. She wanted for Mayra to be matched with a job. Normita thought I was looking for work too, and so I was able to pass as an undocumented worker in order to enter her house. However, Normita then asked Karen to bring more of her friends who looked “white,” like Mayra and not like me (whom
she pointed at to ensure she knew the difference.)
45 I reviewed the ad that the employment agency had posted concerning this job. Karen responded to it because when they first referred her, they suggested it would be “an easy job.” According to Karen, the description read to her like the tasks would be “light.”
46 Morir Soñando is a typical Dominican drink which literally translates to “die dreaming.” It is made up of milk and orange juice.
47 I met Karen while conducting fieldwork for my second Master’s program at New York University in 2006.
48 The University of Buenos Aires has a strong department of “Estudios Queer” (Queer Studies) as part of the University’s degree granting program.
49 Mary Magdalene is another biblical figure that is often depicted as a red hair (Harvery 2015).
50 The Comechingones (part of the “original” peoples of Argentina) are an indigenous tribe that lived in Córdoba, Argentina pre Colonial occupation of the region (Sirouyan 2015).
51 The King James Version uses the word, “sorrow,” as an inextricable feature of childbirth given her actions, “in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children.”
52 In the Pentecostal church I was born into and where I also spent the majority of my childhood and youth, the women’s association recited this particular bible verse during their weekly services and/or campaigns. In unison they would chant in rote, without ever a consideration of the verse that immediately followed. In hindsight I find this memory of women (all whom were mothers and married) comparable to when soldiers respond, “Yes sir,” to their military superiors. Both follow strict marching orders. They both know that they are responding to a specific “call,” which is to fight against the forces that threaten “our way of life.” It is worth noting that the women only recited the first verse, which emphasized “the fear of the Lord,” while also discounting anything that could be perceived as vanity such as “charm” and “beauty.” These attributes inherently were considered immoral, sinful, and a “threat” to male/Godly/national dominance. I have chosen to include the second one that honors “her” labor. Given the cultural expectations concerning gender roles within Latino communities, only teachings that supported this traditional and machista view were referenced and taught, and eventually framed to enmesh guilt and sacrifice as familial, civic, and divine obligations.
53 There is a thriving counterfeit brand name clothing industry throughout Argentina because of the social pressures to keep up appearances despite lacking the purchasing power to do so.
54 Entre Nos (2009).
55 Another space lost to words.
56 I also found it a strange circumstance that I never felt this type of “encouragement” outside of the field of anthropology.
57 The testimonials were all recorded and edited from a series of interviews that were conducted throughout my fieldwork. They were eventually approved in their final form by the authors who chose the name under which they would appear.
58 This was a way to call her “Peruvian” or “Bolivian.” They are typically associated with selling fruit at markets or vegetable shops (verdulerías.) It is a way to belittle her through a racist reference.
60 (Pendleton 2006).
61 (Del Río 2016).
62 D10s spells out Dios, which means God. Devotees of Maradona call him a God, but instead of the letters –“I” and “o”, they use the number 10, which is Maradona’s position on the national team, which would be the equivalent to a quarterback.
The Gambeta, an Italian word, means the quintessential Argentine movement, which originates in the description of a movement from an animal that is native to Africa.

I grew up in a Latino-Pentecostal church in which cultural ideas of gender and sexuality were conflated with Christian beliefs.

WAG stands for wives and girlfriends of sport stars.

Antonio’s autobiography traces how he started a solidarity movement of parents who lost their children due to the war and traces how they used their public voice to denounce the State’s (in)action in protecting and providing for its soldiers. Interestingly, he highlights how the age of the soldiers did not necessarily reflect that they were adults. Many, were drafted right out of high school and with very military training.

A Cábala (and not Kabbalah as it is translated into within the press coverage concerning his beard) in Argentina means a superstitious bet.

(Storni 1987:13).

“Bosteros,” are fans of the Argentinean Boca Juniors club. They are rivals to the River Play Club. The original name was “boteros,” because they needed “boots” to cross the Riachuelo or Río Matanza (the slaughter river.) This river is filled with high levels of industrial waster, arsenic, chromium, copper, zinc, and lead (Valente 2006). It divides the City of Buenos Aires which is heavily segregated around economic status and the Southern suburbs which are predominantly populated by “cabecitas,” the working class, and immigrants from the peripheral neighbors. “Cabecita” literally means “blackhead,” and it is a derogatory slur for those who immigrated from the Provinces of Buenos Aires to the city of Buenos Aires. The word “bosta” literally means livestock feces. The appropriation of “bosteros” as an identity for the fans of Boca Juniors represents them as “border crossers” and like fertilizer…essential to life but more than often unpleasant (as explained by Juan Diaz.) The Riachuelo is a highly polluted river, which literally and symbolically divides Argentina’s haves and have-nots, representing the ruins and decay of Argentina’s modernity and the source of countless health problems for those who live near. Javier Auyero delves directly into the “environmental suffering,” that occurs to residents of the shantytown of Riachuelo (Auyero 2009).

Lomas de Zamora is a suburb to the South of Buenos Aires. This is where my immediate family currently resides.

The Kalama brothers were originally from Córdoba and all three had migrated to South Beach with their parents who were senior citizens. Kalama tried to make it as a boy-band that sang flamenco-pop at night while working in restaurants in the daytime. They attempted to adjust status claiming political asylum. However, the lawyer they were working with was discovered to be fabricating cases and so all of her clients were automatically issued an order of deportation. Immigration went to look for each of them at their respective restaurants and then went to detain their parents. The brothers and band have since disbanded upon their return to Córdoba, Argentina.

Picadas are a cross between appetizers and coldcuts. This is usually served before the asado.

Victor Hugo Morales is a Uruguayan born sports journalist who maintains a close friendship with Maradona.

“How great thou art” is a popular Christian hymn.

In the Oscar nominated film, The Son of the Bride (2001) the actor who is pretending to be a priest jokes that “they idolized and crucified him.” When they questioned his disrespect, in jest he clarified that he was talking about Maradona (and not Jesus.)

All I ask God, is that all the lies do not make me indifferent.” This song was a protest song by the Folkloric singers during the dictatorship in Argentina.

My extension of Maradona’s name is in order to mimic how his followers chant it. I do this also to position myself as one more believer.
The River Plate soccer club hinchas are called gallinas (chickens) and millonarios (millionaires) by Boca hinchas, bosteros. Comprehensive Medical Attention Program. PAMI functions in similar ways as Medicare and Medicaid and its managed by the Health Ministry of the government. Prosecutor Alberto Nisman was found dead from a bullet to the head on January 18, 2015 on the day before submitting to the court an accusation of the President covering up a “secret deal to shield terrorists,” whombre died AMIA.

The Bleacher report listed 25 celebrities who struggled with addiction and who even played while battling addiction. It lists Maradona in addition to the referenced Irvin, Agassi, and Gooden (Tabone 2010).

The famous Argentine soccer chant goes, “Soy Argentina…es un sentimiento…no pue do parar.” (I am Argentine…it is a feeling…I cannot stop.)

As a former employee of the United States and having witnessed up close and personal the debates of the General Assembly, I agree. Carlos Tévez recently played in the Serie A’s (Italy’s) Juventus club. The name “Fort Apache” comes from the 1981 crime drama of the same name. Like the cinematic representation of the Bronx in that film, it is often noted that the Argentine police do not enter the Fort Apache shantytown and thus it is a lawless space much like the Wild West depicted in the 1948 John Wayne film of the same name. Sociologist Javier Auyero has drawn comparisons between Argentina’s shantytowns and the south Bronx in his work (Auyero 1999).

Latinidad is only invoked when the rival is from a former Colonial or imperial country. Argentinidad is invoked when against any other Latin American country, particularly Brazil.

La Co-lim-ba (colimba) is an acronym used to refer to Argentina’s compulsive military training, which consisted of corra (run), limpie (clean), and barra (sweep.) Argentina suspended compulsive military service with law no.3948 after the infamous Carrasco case, leaving the possibility on the books for it to be evoked during times of national crisis and war.

The referees who did not disallow the goals Nasser and the linesman Dotchev would never reconcile with the incident that tarnished their careers and made them frenemies (Shumanov 2014).

Bin Nasser would go on to blame Dotchev on the 15th anniversary of the hand-goal in an Argentinian newspaper Olé. Dotchev would be called a “national traitor” in his native Bulgaria. “That goal that Maradona scored against the English with the help of the divine hand is for now the only trustworthy proof of God’s existence.”

The Ruben Blades line would be written to my partner in an e-mail because he declined a party by a group of classmates that were Dominican. They interpreted, rather erroneously and without merit his declination of the invite to him thinking, as they blatantly said, “better because he you are Argentine.”

The Uruguayan soccer player, Luis Suárez, was accused of being racist against Patrice Evra (who is of French- African) during a Liverpool vs. Manchester United match in 2011. Suárez would state that Evra called him a “sudaca,” and Evra accused Suarez of calling him a “negro” (black). While sudaca is a pejorative sluragainst Hispanics from Latin America, Suárez (who is bi-racial) would be sanctioned by the Futbol Association (FA), while Evra was not.

Puerta 12 refers to the tragedy of June 23, 1968 when during a clásico match between Boca and River Plate a door at the stadium did not open and the stampede of the fans trampled to death a total of 71 victims (Teseoriere 2008). The organization, “Salvemos al Fútbol,” is an NGO in which the families of victims of soccer violence have called for more justice, transparency, and accountability of the perpetrators of criminal activities that finance the barra bravas (hoodlun gangs), which incite violence and make the soccer stadiums unsafe for ordinary citizens to enjoy (Teseoriere 2010).

This intro was written in the typical style of gauchesque literature and spoken in the style of
payadores. It precedes the son written for Diego Maradona by the rock nacional group, Los Piojos.

94 Quote by Boca president Daniel Angelici in response to the clash between River Plate club and Boca Juniors during the Copa Libertadores.

95 The AFP news agency quotes Mori screaming after being sprayed by an irritant by Boca Fans (Bosteros) before coming out for the second half of the match at the Bombonera stadium in Buenos Aires (Sinnott and McGowan 2015).

96 Upon winning a World Cup the national team obtains a star to symbolize the number of wins on their jerseys and all other logos that represent the national team. Argentina has won two stars. The first in win was in 1978 in Argentina and the second in 1986 in Mexico.

97 Diego Maradona has publically denounced FIFA corruption on various occasions since early on in his career but after the latest revelation that rocked the core governing body he vowed to “fight the mafia at the heart of the scandal” (Reuters 2015).

98 Before starting fieldwork, I maintained a vegetarian diet and I had outgrown red wine as my alcoholic drink of choice. However, in an effort to “fully” immerse myself within my fieldwork I knew that these were staples for Argentine asados (BBQ) that I chose not to abstain from in an effort to gain trust, acceptance, and inclusion within the families I chose to interview.

99 When my son made the Boca Junior Youth Academy the president of the Club welcomed the new members with that statement, where our club and family are one.

100 This was Victor Hugo’s question concerning Maradona as he narrated Maradona’s second goal against the English in 1986. Other sports journalist such as Fantino have tried to modernize this question by asking Messiwhat videogame had he come from, but it was not as memorable for the right reasons.

101 The cover of Hernán Casciari’s book, España Perdiste (2007) is of a beer bottle with the typical logo (El País 2016) of the Argentine brand Quilmes, but with the title on it, “Spain, you lost.” The image plays with Argentine brand recognition, as seen in the text of the copy.

102 This is a direct reference to Countess de Lesseps from the Bravo show the Real Housewives of New York and her song “Money can’t buy you Class” and her book, Class with the Countess: How to live with Elegance and Flair (2009).

103 Their most famous player was Diego Maradona and currently is Carlos Tévez, who returned triumphantly from the Serie A Juventus Club in Italy at the peak of his career to play at Boca.

104 (Spanish) The Argentine national soccer chant uses the word “quilombo” which means brothel in lunfardo.

105 He pronounced Argentina with in English but also with the typical che-cho characteristic of the Argentine vernacular.

106 The Argentine immigrant enclave is called “Pequeña Argentina which translates to “small Argentina” and “un gran país,” is a national slogan that translates into Argentina is a country that is great (metaphorically) and “big” (literally)

107 In my 2002 Masters Thesis, “Latinaje: Demarcating South Beach and Miami,” a waiter on Ocean Drive clarified that Miami and South Beach are not the same thing. Miami is Cuban while South Beach is, according to him was “filled with Argentines.”

108 I am referencing the 1987 Hip-Hop album by Erik B. and Rakim, “Paid in Full.”

109 I am not inserting a shameless plug for Pablo’s book, but I am suggesting that due to our relationship (as a family) we are drawn to similar topics and viewpoints, although he writes literature and I ethnography.

111 This is very evident in countries that have a history of colonialism and imperialism such as baseball in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic or Cricket in India. However thinking about
soccer as a Colonial legacy inherently frames it in the context of nationalism.  

There is film, Cama Adentro (2004), touches on how crisis changed the relationship between employer and the live-in maid in Argentina.  

I took Julie Taylor’s lead in this approach to my own fieldwork in general, and in the value I place on embodied knowledge and experience in exploring Argentinidad.  


I went to a screening of Tango in New York City when it first came out. I recall describing it to my sister as “passionate” and “confusing.”  

The phrase “Todo Vuelve” is a direct reference to Argentine rocker, Fito Paez’s song, “Fue Amor Pop” which is then covered and adapted by Fabiana Cantilo in Colectivo Inconciente.  

I am referencing Whitney Houston’s 1987 hit, “I want to dance with somebody” from her self-titled debut album, Whitney. I spent countless hours in front of the mirror lip singing this song as a child.  

In the instructional website ballroomdancing.com, they explain the following, “The Tango 8-Count Basic (sometimes simply called the Tango Basic) is a simple combination of two slow walks and a “Tango Close”. The five steps are counted “Slow, Slow, Quick Slow”, resulting in a total of 8 counts. When social Tango was first introduced, many instructors used a simple vocal cue to help their students remember the steps: "T - A - N - G - O", or "Walk, Walk, Tan - Go - Close". The latter cue would help beginners remember when to close the feet, and thus the term Tango Close came to describe the last three steps” (ballroom dancing 2005).  

(Deleuze 1997:37).  

This time rather than opt for a public confession, he let the Family Worship Center know that, “The Lord told me its none of your business” (Kauffman 1988:79).  

Supporters of colonial rule and colonialist expansion policies contend that Colonialism has been, and remains an evangelizing mission whose aim is to ‘civilize’ the ‘natives’ (Fanon 1967:32). The Sword and the Cross can be equally powerful and destructive  

In the 2004 song, “La Argentinidad al Palo,” a list is given a the tumultuous mixture of Argentina’s various Ethnicities, religions, and races, with a final claim to “French pedigree.”  

(Delesur 2015).  

I am reference the popular Colombian Telenovela, Betty La Fea that was adapted for the US audience, “Ugly Betty.”  

“Ni una Menos” is based on the assassinated Mexican poet Susana Chavez’s poem in which she uses the phrase “Ni una Muerta más” in order to highlight the femicides occurring in Ciudad Juárez. It was later adapted to “Ni una Menos” by activists joining her cause in favor of women’s rights.  

The SynFlorix vaccine experiment of GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) in 2007-2008 used 13,000 Argentine infants, many without the consent of their parents to test a vaccine. Babies were selected from poor families that sought medical treatment from public hospitals. Pediatrician Ana Marchese reported that the selection process would prey on families that were illiterate, completely dependent on the “State apparatus,” and who were the most “vulnerable sections of society.” A total of 14 babies died as a result. Local doctors profited from their vulnerability and were paid a total of $350 dollars per subject (Tajan, GSK Fined Over Trials; 14 Babies Reported Dead 2012, Tajan Glaxo Smith Line Fined over Trials on the Babies of Argentinean Poor 2012). This case can also be considered an issueof reproductive justice as well.  

(O'Reilly 2012:63).
A current example of this tendency can be seen in Targeted Regulation of Abortion Providers (TRAP) laws and Personhood measures in the United States, which present a direct “threat” to abortion rights. Borgmann explains that, “Personhood measures…would ban all abortions and potentially even some forms of contraception and in vitro fertilization methods.” While, TRAP laws fly “under the radar, by mimicking ordinary health regulations” (Borgmann 2014).

I was extra upset for not being able to spend the holiday with my own family. As staffers we could “technically” refuse to work the event because we were unpaid for those hours of service but knew that it would not be overlooked when it came time to our (taxed) Christmas bonus. Rep. Velazquez could not understand how not one constituent had come to the event. I have many stories that I could share to lead you (the reader) to look at Congressional Velazquez in a new light and I am not barred from doing so because everything (what you say, what you do, and what you report) is documented as a Congressional employee and she is a public figure so I do not require her permission to write about her. I only share what I can prove, and I could only prove what I have lived and learned.

I must also note Galindo’s 2005 “Himenoplastic,” another performance piece in which she embodies a Guatemalan reality, she undergoes hymen reconstruction surgery under similar conditions as thousands of Guatemalan girls “without medically certified doctors or anesthesia,” in response to the social pressures to “remain virgins” until marriage (Otal 2012: 234).

Loco means crazy, and it is often akin to saying, “dude” or “bro.”

I am referring to Whoopie Goldberg’s rendition of “I will follow him,” in the film Sister Act (1992). In it, sister Mary Catherine (whom she plays) blurs the boundaries between Christian and carnal love by singing love songs and making them in hymns.

Literally translates to “Bettering the race” and is laden with Colonial ideas about inferiority as seen within the indigenous and particularly black (enslaved) populations.

A few examples of “foundational fictions” that used “romance” in order to further national ideas about race and class throughout the Americas can be seen in Jorge Isaac’s Maria first published in 1867 in Colombia, Manuel de Jesus Galvan’s Enriquillo first published in 1879 in Dominican Republic and in Gertrudis Gomez de Avellaneda’s Sab first published in 1841 in Cuba (Isaacs 1968, Galvan 1882, Avellaneda 1841). These novels (or elements of them) have been adapted into contemporary Telenovelas therefore perpetuating the origins of these Colonial beliefs still present within Latin American/Latino society.

Constanso is 61, a 33-year U.S resident and owner of Buenos Aires Bakery in northern Miami Beach (Hemlock and Benjamin 2002).

Argentine anthropologist Nicolas Fernandez Bravo notes that the sweetbread part of the Asado (Argentine BBQ) was historically given to slaves thus explicating how Argentina’s “gastronomic symbol” indeed has an “African character,” although this is unfamiliar to most foreigners. He notes that, “This (sweetbreads) is now part of the general meal, and thought of as a special delicacy, but at one time this would never have been eaten among the elites” (Luongo 2014). This is one more example of how Africaness (blackness) can be excavated within Argentine identity.


“It’s my money and I need it now” is the catch phrase in the commercial for JG Wentworth, a company that buys structured settlement payments from injury victims (McNay 2011).

Puto is a slur that translates to the English gay slur, “faggot.” It is commonly used within Argentine (popular) vernacular to emphasize something or someone as inferior, weaker.

Like the rockband Bersuit Vergarabat’s song highlights, in Argentina “the future has a way
of repeating the past...time does not stop.” The enemy remains the same during times of crisis, the State/Government. This explicates in many way why Argentinidad is not directly correlated with a traditional relationship with the Statelike citizenship, but rather with an opposition to it. For example the popular chant, “el que no salta es un ingles”, jumping (saltando) is a way of claiming Argentinidad, because if you do not jump by default you are English (un inglés) and therefore, the enemy.

143 “To Beef or Not to Beef” is a 2004 song by rock nacional artist Indio Solari.

144 Grande translates literally to “big,” however in the Argentinean vernacular it also is used to mean “awesome.”

145 “Los del 2000” means “of the year 2000s.” This group specifically refers to young Argentines who entered right before the end of the Visa waiver program.

146 Recoleta is an affluent neighborhood in Buenos Aires capital.

147 “Gringo-Landia” is what the United States is often called by young Argentines but also represents the first-world countries, which no longer allowed lawful entry to Argentines after the economic crisis. My use of the term originates from the song by Argentine rock star, Indio Solari, “To Beef or not to Beef.” In this song he describes his life as not being able to “give anymore” and thus resolves to take the pilgrimage into the United States or tofurther his metaphor- any of the countries that after the Argentinazo denied entry to Argentines through their subsequent immigration programs like in Australia and England. He references entry through the “Río Bravo” and also denotes his experiences. “To beef or not to Beef, mi vida aquí, no daba más, me fui en un trip…to gringo-landia.” The song also highlights the fact that Argentines who find themselves in a socioeconomic predicament as the protagonist must now enter (illegally) in pursuit of socioeconomic opportunities given the suspension of the Visa Waiver program between the United States and Argentina in 2002 specifically. This song serves to transcend nationality because while it is situated from the perspective of an Argentine, it could represent the struggles of any other Latin American immigrant who seeks work, stability, and opportunities. They share reasons why “gringo-landia” is idealized as a destination, albeit through a “frightening” path. The song also connects fascism and xenophobia which reads salient given the recent mainstream media comparison between 2016 Republican Presidential candidate Trump and Hitler in regard to their political rhetoric and anti-immigrant policies.

148 This list represents common reasons found within my ethnographic interviews as to why migration to the United States was deemed “necessary.”

149 “Rich like an Argentine” was a term commonly used in Europe a century ago which highlighted its relative “prosperity of the commodities-exporting economy” (Romero and Gilbert 2014).

150 We can observe that racial categorizations do not solely depend on skin color but rather multiple factors, while “colorism” and “pigmentocracy” highlight the relationship between wealth and social status with skin color(Teles and Steele 2012).


152 (Borges 2010:85).

153 I choose to cite Richard Pryor because his comedy best explained to me the way race and racism worked in the United States. If it had not been for his contributions, I would not be able to fully grasp DuBois, Fannon, or even Stuart Hall. This is not to say that Pryor is any less serious a thinker than the aforementioned scholars but instead I seek to highlight that sometimes our review of literature omits key referents that do not necessarily come from the Academy but nonetheless influenced our critical thinking on issues with an undisputed authority coming from “experience” and “keeping it real.”

154 If you look like an “immigrant “or “suspicious” (both classifications being synonymous with
brown and black) than you could be “legally” stopped and asked to present valid identification or more invasively, you could be frisked and potentially lose your “freedom” (Archibold 2010, New York Times 2013).

155 Chamuyo loosely translated is the “art of Argentine bullshitting,” a form of Argentinismo (as expressed in Borges’s “The language of the Argentines” and Marco Aguinis’s El Encanto Atroz de Ser Argentino (2002).

156 Good job Cordobés (from Córdoba.) You even speak English!

157 A “negro” connotes more a behavior that is redolent of Domingo Sarmiento’s “barbari” (Sarmiento 2004).

158 This is a vulgar way of saying I “gave it to you,” which suggests that before you noticed; you were ‘fucked.’ This one of many Argentine euphemisms that use sex as a metaphor for particular behaviors that usually teeter between cunning and swiftness (which also are appreciated skills for soccer and characterize the Argentine style of playing).

159 La Mona Jimenez is noted as “Cuarteto’s Elvis.” It is also considered Cordoba’s “most authentic music” (Rodriguez 2012).

160 Sarmiento’s foundational work invents Argentina as a country that is in a constant struggle between “civilization and Barbarism,” which until this day manifests in the macro and micro levels in terms of how wealth is “unequally” distributed.

161 During the Haiti-Dominican Republic border conflicts escalated during the Trujillo era when native Haitian Creole speaking Dominicans could not pronounce the word “perejil” (Parsley) correctly which soldiers used as proof that they were not Dominican. The BBC cites that it is estimated that between “9,000 and 20,000 Haitians were killed in the Dominican Republic on the orders of the Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo” (Davis 2013). Leo Chavez identifies that the fear of “Amerixica” is presented by the “vanish border” in which Mexican children become the American “norm.”

162 Once is the Buenos Aires garmenting district.

163 It is one of the few cities within Argentina in which a founder cannot be named. I share this detail it seems relevant to why Rosario has garnered such global attention as the birthplace of many Argentine superstars.

164 Rosario is Argentina’s third biggest City.

165 Villeros are residents of the ever-growing Buenos Aires shantytowns. While they are shantytowns throughout other Argentine cities, those in Buenos Aires are particularly more crowded and violent due to the concentrated poverty and criminal activities. A feature in The Economist noted in a feature on the proliferation of these communities that, “Despite strong economic growth, the population in such settlements rose by 50% between 2001 and 2010. This is largely because many of the residents work informally, and are therefore unable to secure the documents needed to rent outside the villas. An estimated 10% of the city’s population lives in shantytowns” (The Economist 2014).

166 “Fame” is an extra special song to this particular story and me because of Carlos Alomar. Alomar is the song of Puerto Rican Pentecostal ministers who collaborated with Bowie and would later go on to work with my favorite Argentine rock band, Soda Stereo. I find that great parallels exist between Bowie and Soda Stereo’s front man, Gustavo Cerati. Radio personality and musician, Bruno Rosatti talked about this relationship on an Argentine online radio show, Terminal Nocturna (2016).

167 Manuel Adrogué writes that the popularity of Taekwondo grew exponentially during the mid 1980s and currently has earned Argentina many international gold medals and titles.

168 Thanksgiving an important holiday within Latino migrant families because it is the only holiday that isnot celebrated back in their home countries, it is exclusively American. However, for
Latino Pentecostals is embraced because of the religious connotations of giving thanks (to God.) Therefore it tends to not be a melancholic and nostalgic holiday, as are Christmas and birthdays.  
169 Government employees and workers are often called “ñoquis” within Argentina because they are said to show up to work only at the end of the month in order to be paid (particularly pre and post campaign seasons.)
170 The tradition of eating ñoquis every 29th day of the month originates in the VIII century in Veneto, Italy. The legends states that a young Christian doctor by the name of Pantaleon was preaching and one day asked bread from a group of peasants. They invited him to eat with them at their table where he was given Ñoquis. As a token of gratitude he then guaranteed them a year of blessings, which came true. They are said to have found coins under his plate and for this reason leaving coins under the plate is still practiced as a way of bringing good (monetary) luck. However, many Argentines claim that the ritual currently has no mystical connotations. It is a very cheaply made dish that is beneficial at the end of the month when you are waiting out the days to be paid (Parise 2016).
171 Mariano Poltkin notes how in 1962 an archbishop in Buenos Aires issue a pastoral letter condemning pornography because in addition to it be “a sin,” it could leave “deeply psychical wounds” in the mind of vulnerable children. He also notes how Catholic schools started also started to advertise “psychiatric bureaus.” This all correlates with the growing demand of psychoanalytic therapies that have become ubiquitous and accessible within Buenos Aires, despite economic constraints for treatment (Plotkin 2002: 70, Romero 2012).
172 Night of the Pencils was a series of kidnappings and forced disappearances of young students in 1976, during the National Reorganization Process. The students were tortured, raped, and murdered. They had been mobilizing in order to campaign to have their Secondary School Bus Ticket (Boleto Escolar Secundario-BES) restored. However, because they were thought to be sympathizers of the Guevarist Youth, a militant subversive group, they became targets of the military. Night of the Pencils is based on the testimony of Pablo Diaz, who was the only survivor to be released. (Seoane and Nunez 2003).
173 General Jorge Videla was the head of the Argentine Junta, responsible for the “death, disappearance and torture of tens of thousands Argentines” (Doughty 2013).
174 Caradura literally translates to having a hard face (emotionless.) This is a celebrated virtue of goalkeepers, religious leaders, and politicians in particular because they are able to deflect and disorient most effectively by not showing their “feelings,” as so often seen within Argentine history and culture.
175 The United States currently excludes transgender people from service on medical grounds because current policies by the Department of Defense defines a psychosexual condition (a paraphilia.) Additionally, if a transgender person has undergone sex-reassignment surgery, they may be excluded based on “major abnormalities or defects of genitalia” due to the surgery (Department of Defense (Defense 2011). Therefore it can be argued that where, how, with who, or when people pee or have sex seems to be a concern of hypermasculine institutions, which serve the nation.
176 View playlist on Walter Bulacio at the end of the chapter.
177 “Alta Suciedad” is a song by Rock Nacional musician Adrés Calamaro. The word is a play on the idea of high society, but he denotes their hypocrisy by substituting the word for society (sociedad) with that of dirty (suciedad.)
178 Verdu is the director of an organization that monitors police brutality, known by its Spanish acronym CORREPI.
179 Rocha references two popular films from 1997 that embody this crisis of masculinity and its relationship with justice (or lack there of). She uses the films Cenizas del Paraíso and La Furia (Rocha 2012:137).
Lost in words. No greater example of this trend exists than in the popularity of skin bleaching products throughout the developing world.

Joshua Fogel, a health researcher at Brooklyn college is quoted as saying that there is no “real way” of knowing if viewers tanned more because of the shows they watched (Painter 2013). However, nonetheless, the numbers are suggestive of a susceptibility of women to engage in risky behaviors as a result of the global media’s irresponsible messages (Media Foundation, Jhaly, and Killbourn 2010).

Les Luthiers, the Argentine-comedy group have a parody of this called, “Payada de la Vaca” which I saw on their official website www.lesluthiers.com.

The term Quilombo originates from the slave quarters (blacks) and then went to mean the brothels and now means “mess.”

“Coger no es amor” (to fuck is not love) is a song that appears in their 2004 album, La Argentinidad al Palo.

They are one of the first bands to have a song that spoke about the Malvinas War in

On May 16, 1982 the military government organized a “Festival for Latin American Solidarity” and invited to participate some of rock nacional’s greatest exponents such as Charly Garcia, Luis Alberto Spinetta, León Gieco, Litto Nebbia, Nito Mestre, David Lebón, Ruben Rada, Raul Porchetto and Pappo. The only group that rejected the invitation was Virus, and they ended up responding with this song that is included in their album entitled, Recrudece (Telam 2014).

The song addressed the pain that this war caused while highlighting that the real responsible for this barbaric act is imperialism (Telam 2014).


Borgmann, Caitlin. "'TRAP laws' are a threat in disguise to abortion rights." *The Los Angeles Times*, November 30, 2014.


Brown, Stephen. "'Con Discriminacion y Represion no Hay Democracia'" *The Lesbian and Gay


Clarín. "Un hijo de Donald Trump comparo a su padre con Macri." *Clarín,* May 1, 2016.
—. "Antonio de la Rúa, otra vez junta a Shakira." *Clarín,* August 16, 2016.
—. "El reality de las millonarias." *Clarín,* April 26, 2016.
—. "Macri ya veto la ley antidespidos: 'Es una ley contra los Argentinos'." *Clarín,* May 20, 2016.


Crettaz, Jose.—. ""Boludo", la palabra que mejor representa a los argentinos." *La Nacion,* October 23, 2013.


Doughty, Steve. "Did he faily to stand up to Argentina's brutal junta? Critics say pope did little to help those who disappeared when country was under right-wing military rule." The Daily Mail, March 13, 2013.


Giulinano, Michael James. *Thrice-Born: The Rhetorical Comeback of Jimmy Swaggart*. Macon:


Joyce, Kathryn. "Biblical Battered Wife Syndrome: Christian Women and Domestic


Mail, Daily. "He's very territorial...I have to do them with women now": Shakira reveals that Gerard Pique has banned her from appearing in raunchy music videos with men." March 8, 2014.


Markham, Sam. "One Goal, Two Tongues." *Howler Magazine.* January 22, 2014.


—. "Mauricio Macri desautorizo a Duran Barba por sus dichos sobre el Papa y el aborto." *La Nacion*, Noviembre 20, 2015.

—. "Maradona dijo que Balter "aprendio a chorear" de Grondona y lo comparo a Jose Lopez." *La Nacion*, 16 June, 2016.


Paasonen, Susanna. Figures of Fantasy: Internet, Women, and Cyberdiscourse. New York:


Powell, Jeff. "Argentina and Germany meet in World Cup final for third time...let's hope it is more like the entertaining first match than the second." The Daily Mail, July 2014, 2014.


Powell, Jeff. "Argentina and Germany meet in World Cup final for third time...let's hope it is more like the entertaining first match than the second." *The Daily Mail*, July 2014, 2014.


national-team.htm.


Sanghani, Radhika. "Cheating, Waxing and keeping schutum: apparently the only things women can do during the World Cup." The Telegraph, June 5, 2014.


Sommer, Doris. "Foundational Fictions: When History was Romance in Latin America." *Salmagundi No.82/83 (Summer-Spring),* 1989: 111-141.


Steinbuch, Yaron. "Rio Olympic athletes will be the best protected in Olympic history between the sheets." *The Daily Telegraph,* June 19, 2016.


—. "Diego Maradona vows to fight FIFA 'mafia' at heart of corruption scandal that rocked governing body." *The Daily Mail*, July 30, 2015.

Reuters, Telegraph sports and. "Angel di Maria claims Real Madrid pressured Argentina not to play in World Cup final against Germany." *The Telegraph*, September 6, 2014.


SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON QUEER ARGENTINIDAD


Gierola, Gustavo. "Eroticism and Homoeroticism in Martin Fiero." In Liteatures, Bodies and Biases:Sexualities in Hispanic Cultures and, by edited by David Foster.


Lugones. "La Patria Fuerte and La Grande Argentina."


Salessi, Jorge. "Nacionalismo y Sexualidad: Buenos Aires, 1880-1914." Hispamerica, Año 20,


