The Cross-Dressed Caribbean: Writing, Politics, Sexualities

Introduction

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On 23 June 2010, Christopher ñDudusò Coke, Jamaicaôs most wanted fugitive, was arrested along the Mandela Highway in St. Catherine. When he was apprehended he was clean-shaven and wearing a womanôs wig; in the car in which he was traveling the police found a pink wig, a pair of female glasses and a hat. Also wanted by the United States to answer drugï trafficking and gun-running charges, ñDudusò had escaped from his stronghold of Tivoli Garden, West Kingston, when the police had tried to arrest him on 17 May. It was suggested that he might have been able to stay at large for more than one month because he was wearing womenôs clothes.[1]

Dudusô masquerade was aimed at eluding surveillance rather than attracting attention, but it nevertheless echoes Johnny Deppôs camped-up performance of ambidextrous sexuality as Captain Jack Sparrow in the film *Pirates of the Caribbean*. The image of Caribbean pirates was shaped by histories such as the seventeenth centuryôs *Bucaniers of America*, a protean and influential account which emphasized the piratesô homo-social tribalism, their cruel yet chivalrous behavior, and their predilection for aristocratic, old-fashioned and extravagant clothes.[2] As the cases of Dudus and Jack Sparrow exemplify, cross-dressing has always had multiple functions, so it is not surprising that the piratesô subversive sartorial extravagance has paved the way to Carmen Boullosaôs *Theyôre Cows, Weôre Pigs* (1997), a contemporary rewriting of *Bucaniers of America* that features a young girl who, wishing to end a life of exploitation as a prostitute, decides to wear male clothes and board a ship bound for Tortuga to become one of the ñBrethren of the Coast.ò In a similar vein, in *Kingston by Startlight* (2005), the Jamaican-born writer John Farley combines facts and fiction in his retelling of the story of Anne Bonny, a real-life Irish woman who travelled to Jamaica, dressed as a man, became a pirate, had a relationship with another cross-dressing woman, and was then put on trial in London in 1721 for piracy. Anne Bonnyôs life echoes in important ways the life of

Enrique/Henrietta Faber, who cross-dressed as a man to study medicine at the University of Paris, served as a military surgeon in Napoleonôs army, and went to Cuba, where she also practiced medicine. In 1823 Enrique/Henrietta was accused by his estranged wife of being a woman and sentenced to serve four years in the Havana Womenôs Hospital. Her story is re-imagined by the Cuban novelist and theorist Antonio Benítez-Rojo in *Mujer en traje de batalla* (2001; Woman in battle dress), a novel that exposes the colonial origins of heteronormativity and, as Kerstin Oloff argues in this volume, exemplifies how racial, patriarchal, and class oppressions converge in the white conjugal family, the bulwark of colonial values. The rejection of heteronormativity, Oloff insists, is posited as a crucial step towards the full decolonization of contemporary Caribbean discourse and society.

In the geography of the imagination, therefore, Enrique/Henrietta Faberôs and Anne Bonnyôs adventures, the aspiring ñBucanierò girlôs cross-dressing in Boullosaôs novel, and Captain Sparrowôs camp excessiveness powerfully realign the Caribbean, a region only too often associated with machismo and homophobia, with daring transgressions of colonial values predicated upon gender binarism, patriarchy, and race and class division. Fictional scenarios are nevertheless informed by specific power relations, and these ñpiratesqueò subversions of gender allocations are, like Dudusô strategic performance, just one component, perhaps a symptom, of broader power struggles that comprise, but are not limited to, the sexual sphere. Not unlike Jack Sparrowôs, Boullosaôs pirate girlôs, Enrique/Henriettaôs, and Anne Bonnyôs, Dudusôs cross-dressed body becomes a complex emblem of queerness, vulnerability, and *badness*; it challenges dominant gender norms but also reminds us of the complex history of disenfranchisement and emasculation that has characterized the Caribbean since the fifteenth century and is still playing out in contemporary collective spaces of (dis)identification such as Jamaican dancehalls. It is intriguing that in Jamaican dancehalls, a space generally associated with that countryôs culture of homophobia, it has become popular for men to bleach their skin and to wear a stylized coordination of branded clothes, expensive jewelry, tight jeans, and intricate and flamboyant hairstyles.[3] Of course, these menôs obsession with attire does not necessarily imply that they are not sexist and/or homophobic and that they do not support, or even practice, violence against women and gay people. Dancehalls, however, are important sites where the politics of clothing still play a crucial role in the ongoing contestation of Caribbean sociopolitical, gendered, racial, and class-bound hierarchies. In her reading of Ebony Pattersonôs recent series of paintings inspired by dancehall culture, Lizabeth

Paravisini argues that dancehalls have the potential to become places where traditional gender allocations and social norms can be challenged.

Caribbean Cross-Dressing and the Politics of Clothing

In this volume the Caribbean is understood as a cultural, regional, multilingual area made up of former plantation societies, whose contours have always suffered from a form of indeterminacy.[4] Signifiers such as ñAntilles,ò ñWest Indies,ò and ñCaribbeanò tend to denote geographical zones that overlap but are not synonyms: denominations, in fact, often reflect colonial empires that have mapped, divided, renamed, and remapped the area according to political supremacy. Caribbean thinkers have tried to go beyond colonial and linguistic subdivisions in different ways: they have affirmed that ñthe unity is submarineò (Edward Kamau Brathwaite) and that the Caribbean is ñthe seaò (Derek Walcott), ña multiple series of relationshipsò (Édouard Glissant), and ñan island that órepeatsô itself, unfolding and bifurcating until it reaches all the seas and lands of the earthò (Antonio Benítez-Rojo).[5] The essays in this volume chart the Caribbean, developing and investigating a series of submarine trajectories and multiple relations that connect Cuba and mainland Surinam passing by Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Saint Lucia, and Trinidad. Our contributors also follow the unfolding and bifurcation of Benítez-Rojoôs ñrepeating islandò and include in their analyses fantastical and imaginary settings that, however, maintain strong connections with the region and, implicitly or explicitly, take into account different diasporic locations, which Evelyn OôCallaghan has controversially indicated as being fundamental to Caribbean diasporic authorsô ñdaringò to bring to the fore ñthe troubling consequences of the heterosexual imperatives which operate in the Caribbean.ò[6] Residents of the Caribbean, however, are becoming more and more vocal about gender and sexuality issues and forcefully demand the abolition of laws that criminalize non-heteronormative behaviors and sexual orientations: amongst other things, for example, Caribbean lawyers are spearheading an ongoing legal battle which challenges the constitutionality of the ban against cross-dressing in Guyana, which can have far-reaching effects region-wide.[7]

The politics of clothing have always had a strong symbolic function in the Caribbean. Ever since Columbusôs arrival in the New World, clothing has been instrumental to the production and (re)definition of race, color, class, and ethnicity. Quite significantly, the indigenous populationôs nakedness or semi-nakedness was strategically re-encoded as a sign of primitiveness, savagery, and

passivity.[8] The New World itself was re-qualified as a tabula rasa, a female ñnudeò ready to be possessed by the powerful and fully (albeit not always appropriately) dressed colonists.[9] Later, the slavesô paucity--or complete lack--of clothing became a powerful marker of their animal-like status: ñWhy not also ask us to put clothes on our cows, mules and dogs?ò a colonist of Saint-Domingue replied to a visitor who asked him why his slaves were left completely naked.[10] Despite the fact that a Royal Ordinance of 1784 prescribed that every slave should be provided with two changes of clothing per year, in travel writing about the eighteenth-century French colony, slaves are frequently referred to as wearing ñtattered ragsò or nothing at all.[11] Nudity is still a problematic signifier in contemporary Caribbean societies. In an insightful analysis of the controversy caused by Laura Faceyôs *Redemption Song*, a monument comprising two naked figures (one male and one female) created to celebrate Jamaicaôs emancipation from slavery, Carolyn Cooper identifies their nudity as the core of the problem because, in a Caribbean context, it can still suggest vulnerability, impotence and lack of dignity.[12] In a 2007 study of the politics of gender in Trinidadian Carnival, however, Pamela Franco shows that womenôs nudity can also be seen as subversive: when women began to participate more actively and in greater numbers in the street parade of Carnival Monday and Tuesday, it was their intense *wining* (a highly sexualized dance) and the scanty costumes they were wearing in what became known as ñskimpy *masò* that provoked public outrage.[13] Far from being a stable signifier, nudity has always had multiple functions. Also dressing in a particular way and cross-dressing can have a multiplicity of meanings depending on specific conjunctures of place and time, and the essays that follow try to do justice to transvestismôs shifting connotations.

During slavery, in the plantation areas, much of the profit derived from the sale of provision groundsô produce went into self-fashioning, and in the cities, tailors assisted the ambitious house-servants partial to personal ornamentation. Their limited resources notwithstanding, some slaves worked hard to improve their appearance; and for the slaves who could afford it, clothing developed into a crucial indicator of social status, an individual signature and a signifier of resistance. In his *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de lôIsle Saint-Domingue* (Topographical, physical, social, political and historical description of the French part of the island of Saint-Domingue), Médéric Louis Élie Moreau de Saint-Méry explains that there were varying degrees of ñluxuryò amongst male slaves: ñif they were not lazy,ò they possessed several changes of shirts and pants, hats, and shoes and donned expensive kerchiefs on the head, around the neck and in their pockets. Often, he continues, such a wardrobe could cost as

much as forty or fifty French louis.[14] As for female slaves, Saint-Méry insists that it is hard to believe how much they were ready to spend for a fancy garb. This could include a chemise, a skirt, ten or twelve handkerchiefs for their hair, necklaces and gold rings, beaver hats or hats with gold embroidery, corsets, camisoles, mules, and even stockings.[15] Free blacks and enfranchised mulattoes (especially women) were also extremely conscious of dress. Their proud ostentation of luxury items initiated ñthe war of lace and clothingò that engaged the White and Colored inhabitants of the colony in a fierce competition. White colonists found it imperative to legislate on clothing in order to restrain what they considered a dangerous display of individuality on the part of the Black and Colored people. In 1740 and 1779, for example, very specific and detailed Ordinances enjoined house slaves and freedmen/women to restrain from ostentation in dress.[16]

Given the importance that clothing had acquired as an instrument of repression and, concomitantly, as a means of resistance, it is not surprising that a valuable weapon in the arsenal of one of the legendary leaders of the 1791 Saint-Domingue slave rebellion, Romaine Rivière or Romaine the Prophetess, was his impressively non-normative appearance. The father of two children, married to a mulatress, Romaine the Prophetess was well known for his cross-dressing practices and his appropriation of the Virgin Mary symbol. He set up quarters in an abandoned church near Trou-Coffy, preached mass before an inverted cross with a sabre in his hand, and proclaimed to the slaves that God was black and that all the whites were to be exterminated.[17] According to some sources, Rivièreôs religious practices testify to the variety one finds among Vodouisant cults of the time, and his appropriation of Mariology could identify him as Kongolese, that is, from a part of Africa which had been exposed to and had freely adapted Catholic symbolism for three hundred years.[18]

Catholic symbolism is also at the core of Lee Easton and Kelly Hewsonôs essay on Lawrence Scottôs *Aelredôs Sin* (1998), in which they highlight the instability of the gendered meanings of ecclesiastic vestments--here the monkôs robe--and explore the ambiguities and liberating possibilities generated by a cultural encroachment rooted in the Catholic past of colonial Europe. *Aelredôs Sin* is structured around two cross-dressed fictional figures. Jean Marc de la Borde is a West Indian man who, in the 1960s, enters Ashton Park Monastery as Brother Aelred but subsequently rejects Catholic sexual morality, embraces his own homosexuality and becomes a scholar of the Black Atlantic. Significantly, when he dons the ambiguously gendered robe of the monk, Jean Marc/Aelred begins to feel anxious about his racial identity. The second crucial cross-

dresser in the novel is the African slave-boy Jordan, a captive at Ashton Park in the eighteenth century, who appears next to a ñgentleman of wealthò (probably the previous owner of the estate) in a portrait hanging in the stairway of the monastery. Kneeling at the gentlemanôs feet, the black boy is dressed in silks, satins, and taffetas, mimicking his masterôs attire. While revealing how clothing was employed to enforce the white masterôs ideas about race, class, and gender, this portrait and the visual tradition it encapsulates also disclose how colonial discourse contained the seeds of its own destruction: as Homi Bhabha would put it, in the slave-boy Jordanôs cross-dressing one can detect ñat once resemblance and menace.ò[19]

However, if Catholic symbolism and the politics of clothing are crucial in Scottôs *Aelredôs Sin* and played their part in Romaine the Prophetessôs subversive cultural, class, racial and gender cross-dressing, it is noteworthy that, as Roberto Strongman insists in his comparative study of novels by René Depestre and Frankétienne, and Anne Lescot and Laurence Magloireôs film *Des hommes et des dieux* (2002; Of men and gods), the transcorporeality of the Afro-diasporic religious tradition of Vodou greatly facilitated the assumption of cross-gender subjectivities. Romaine the Prophetessôs transvestism, therefore, is a thoroughly complex reinvention which reveals that Caribbean cross-dressing has always been part of broader struggles against colonial oppression and cannot be reduced to sexual politics alone. It is noteworthy that the law that bans cross-dressing in Guyana, and which is currently being contested, comes from a section relating to ñMinor Offences, Chiefly in Townsò and is the product of old vagrancy laws promulgated in the late nineteenth century when Guyana was a colony. Such laws were designed to restrict access to public spaces by the working poor and to control the behavior of black and brown people in the urban center.[20]

The legacy of Romaine the Prophetess is evident throughout this collection, but the link between political militancy and cross-dressing is addressed in particular by Kerstin Oloff, Paula K. Sato, Roberto Del Valle Alcalá, Chantal Zabus, and Michael Niblett. Oloff, as already mentioned, analyzes Benítez-Rojoôs revisitation of the life of Enrique/Henrietta Faber through a Foucauldian lens. Organizing his protagonistôs self-understanding around a queer sexuality, Oloff argues, Benítez-Rojo puts the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in dialogue and invites us to apply Enrique/Henrietteôs transgressive vision to revolutionary Cuba, redirecting his critique toward Cuban discourse on the nation and on the post-Revolutionary institutionalization of homophobia in the 1960s and 1970s.

It was José Martí, in 1889, who defined the Cuban male as possessing the ñhappy facultyò of allying opposing signs of race and gender. Not only was the Cuban both black and white, he also concealed beneath the delicate appearance and poetic temperament of a woman the fighting nature of a man. Martíôs vision of racial inclusiveness became the ideal of all Cuban governments in the twentieth century, including that of the revolutionary government, which recycled the multiracial, military side of Martíôs construction in its symbolic figure of the new Cuban man. However, this image reclaimed the masculine, military side of Martíôs Cuban through his abjection of the Cuban male of effeminate appearance as anti-Cuban and counter-revolutionary. Sato argues that Severo Sarduyôs 1967 novel *De donde son los cantantes* (Where the singers are from) recuperated Martíôs description of Cuban man in all its queerness and reinstated the ñeffeminacyò of Cuban identity as an occasion for agency and autonomy rather than passivity and defencelessness. The Sino-Cuban transvestites of Sarduyôs novel manage to deflect the heteronormative and Orientalist gaze of the imperialistic ñWest,ò while reclaiming a gendered inclusivity that the hypermasculine archetypes of 1960s revolutionary Cuba had rejected and proscribed.

The logic of immanent resistance as developed by Reinaldo Arenas in his autobiography *Antes que Anochezca* (1992; Before night falls) is investigated by del Valle Alcalá. Set against the normalizing instincts of bureaucratic consolidation in the Cuban revolutionary process, Arenasôs libidinal masquerades and equivocal gender types offer to constantly destabilize the binary inscription of desire within well-policed discursive frames. Cross-dressing, in this context, takes on a non-literal and consequently explosive dimension in the constant shuffle of internal dissidence. The proliferating cast of pansexual figures, *locas*, ñreal menò and poets confirms a radically ñotherò existence haunting the very core of the disciplinary projection and threatening to subvert it from within at every turn.

The instability of gender, complicated by the vagaries of nationalism, is also the focus of Zabusôs contribution. Through the ñsplitò characters of Clare Savage, the tragic mulatta, and the glamorous and exuberant Harry/Harriet, Zabus argues, Michelle Cliffôs *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987) documents the growth of the Jamaican nation under Michael Manley (in his first term [1969-1980]) up to the disillusionment with his ñpolitics of participation,ò and ñflauntsò a concern with *passing*, both racial and sexual. While making a necessary detour through conceptions of drag, cross-dressing, and camp in the 1970s, this chapter rehearses recent theories on transgender to reflect on Cliffôs uses of camouflage (in its military sense and in terms of cross-dressing and cross-

gendered identification). H/Hôs move from tokenistic ñunder-dressingò (that is, wearing the underwear appropriate to the opposite sex) to becoming a non-surgical male-to-female transgendered passing subject is mediated via an excessive ñover-performing.ò This reaches bathetic levels when H/H and Clare Savage camouflage as armed resisters against Jamaicaôs ñsodomy-rapeò by American imperialism and futilely aim to engender a nation-in-drag.

The importance of gender politics to a rethinking of strategies of resistance is also at the core of Niblettôs essay on Patrick Chamoiseauôs *Biblique des derniers gestes* (2002; Biblical register of final deeds). It takes as its starting point the assertion by Balthazar Bodule-Jules, *Bibliqueôs* protagonist, that his participation in various struggles against oppression was compromised by his not being ñPalestinian enough in Israel. Not Jewish enough in Germany. Not Zapatista enough in Mexico. Not Black enough in South Africa ... Not gay enough in San Francisco ... Not woman enough everywhere.ò[21] The essay considers the ways in which the destabilizing of traditional gender roles intersects with a reformulation of the politics of rebellion, liberation, and national identity, and suggests that Chamoiseau has shifted his conception of gender, and its codification in the narration of the nation, over the course of his novels. In *Biblique*, it is argued, the emphasis on cross-dressing and the sexual dimorphism of many of the characters are central to the bookôs problematization of individual and collective identities.

Caribbean Cross-Dressing, Masquerading, and Carnival

The slaves and rebels of Saint-Domingue, as we have seen, resorted to clothing in order to make, both explicitly and implicitly, a political point. But they were not the only ones. In Isaac Mendes Belisarioôs truly wonderful *Sketches of Characters, in Illustration of the Habits, Occupation, and Costume of the Negro Population in the Island of Jamaica*, published in 1837, we are presented with twelve hand-colored lithographs, some of which represent black actors, musicians, and dancers richly and extravagantly dressed and performing in several traditional masquerades such as the Jonkonnu--a feature of Jamaican culture since the early days of slavery--and the ñSet Girlsò--which, incidentally, might have arrived in Jamaica from Saint-Domingue after the 1791 revolt.[22] The ñQueen/Maamò of the ñSet-Girlsò wore rich ornaments, which were ñprobably the loan of their mistress,ò while ñthe remainder of the dress was invariably purchased by herself, and at the cost of several pounds.ò[23] The dresses of the ñSet-Girls,ò ñcorrespond in color, &c. agreeably to establish rule, those of their Queen, and other Leaders, differing only in the *superior texture* of the materials.

These latter also display a greater profusion of Jewellery than their young followers can boast.ò[24] The Queen/Maam also held a whip in her hands, which was ñhighly necessary,ò Belisario explains, ñfor the preservation of order in her *corps de balle*tò but also ñin mockery of the purpose to which it is not infrequently applied,ò[25] thus enacting a sharp parody of the (male) slave-driver and a profound subversion of colonial strategies of reinforcement of social and gender hierarchies. These masquerades originally came from Africa, and the decisive role played by clothing in the survival of such African traditions in the New World is testified by the various elements of multiple African cultures which have been identified in the costumes and attitudes of the masqueraders.[26] In point of fact, the Jonkonnu performance, invariably referred to by Europeans in the anglicized ñJohn-Canoe,ò was constituted by a central figure who wore a distinctive headdress, generally in the shape of a houseboat, which had a clear conceptual connection with those used by the Ijo, Ibo, Ibibio, Yoruba and Agoni people in the Cross River delta in Nigeria.[27] Although African in derivation, the headdress had become creolized by the late eighteenth century and assumed by that time the shape of a colonial house.[28]

Obviously, Caribbean masquerades and transvestism derive from an ongoing process of creolization, which brings together different traditions in a syncretism that is typically Caribbean and that also blurs the boundaries between categorical subdivisions: gender, race and class are simultaneously interrogated, problematized, and challenged. The white masters strove to control and homogenize the politics of clothing, notions of sex and gender, and behavioral codes of their slaves and indentured laborers who came from different cultures and functioned according to different rules. The Indian indentured workers who crossed the Kala Pani to work on the sugar cane estates of the Caribbean, for example, came from a tradition where *hijras* (physiological males with feminine gender identity, womenôs clothing, and other feminine gender roles) have a long recorded history, and Sean Lokaisingh-Meighoo has brought to the fore the homoerotic subtext of Indo-Caribbean identity by focusing on the *jahaji bhai* (ñship brotherò) culture.[29] In this volume, Trinidadian writer Shani Mootoo recounts that on a recent trip to India, she observed that many ordinary men on the streets sport earrings and slippers and wear stylish and colorful scarves and kurta down to their knees. ñThey all looked, in Western terms, gay,ò she concludes and, she adds, ñI bet few were.ò She also laments that the gentle and reluctant-to-fight Bollywood starboy she used to admire at the Metro Cinema in San Fernando, Trinidad, when she was a child and with whom she controversially identified, has now been replaced by a tougher and more aggressive hero because

Hollywoodôs convention made the old starboyôs ways look effeminate and ñfey.ò Indians were not the only indentured laborers who arrived in the Caribbean after emancipation. As exemplified in Satoôs essay in this volume, there were Chinese migrants too, mostly males, whose presence in the Americas was surrounded with specific gender stereotypes, in particular a questioning of their masculinity.[30] Interestingly, this is addressed in Jamaican Patricia Powellôs novel *The Pagoda* (1998) through a Chinese woman, Lau A-yin, who dresses up as man to be able to migrate to Jamaica and lives there as a shopkeeper called Mr. Lowe. Being ñôbetweenô and outside, neither black nor white,ò Powellôs cross-dressing character is an alienated individual whose complex identity clearly ñdisrupts processes of colonial heteropatriarchy.ò[31]

Creolized figures such as the shape-shifter Pitchi Patchi from the Jonkonnu tradition and the West African Spider Anancy, the folk-hero and trickster of the *Anansesem*, which, incidentally, is often represented as a hermaphrodite,[32] are effectively revisited in the Jamaican Sistren Theatre Collectiveôs play *Muffet Inna All a Wi* (1986) where, as Karina Smith explains in this volume, actresses from an all-female cast reverse the gender parody found in the Jamaican pantomime and cross-dress to perform male characters. In Sistrenôs re-telling of the nursery rhyme ñLittle Miss Muffet,ò in which a garden spider, descending from its web, frightens a little girl, the Jamaican Miss Muffet is empowered because the spider forces her to fight for her rights. While exposing the gender binary system as a fraudulent construction, Sistren, far from simply caricaturing Jamaican men, make an explicit political statement about the treatment of Jamaican women in the machinery of the State. The play comments specifically upon the exploitation of women in the home, in the media, and in Jamaicaôs Free Trade Zone in addition to portraying the everyday violence many Jamaican women endure on the streets and in their communities.

Masquerade and cross-dressing are also at the heart of carnival, a crucial component of Caribbean culture and history and a powerful instrument of political opposition. One of the constitutive elements of carnival is the notion of ñthe world turned upside down,ò which manifests itself through different forms of cross-dressing. If, in Europe, the (mis)rule of carnival had a person of low rank impersonating someone of high status, in the Caribbean it is not difficult to imagine that slaves cross-dressed as slaveholders and other powerful figures of the colonial administration. Belisario thus comments on a masquerade which took place during the Earl of Mulgraveôs administration: ñHis Lordship with several other distinguished characters were personated by negroes in full costume, as closely imitating their models in *this* respect as possible; but, alas! they

had lost sight of one grand requisite to complete the resemblance, viz--ease of manner, and consequently their deportment being strangely at variance with that of their originals, rendered such mimic actions truly amusing.ò[33]

The accuracy and seriousness with which the enslaved population embarked in cross-dressing is evident, but what is equally clear is the anxiety that such practices created in the white ruling classes and the latterôs resulting urge to contain the challenge implicit in such performancesï - an urge undiminished by the fact that, as Gerard Aching has controversially suggested, what were originally spiritual practices might have been transformed into mere marketplace activities.[34] As a matter of fact, both residents and visitors to Jamaica had a tendency to exorcistically diminish and patronize masquerades by describing them as naive folkloric expressions and picturesque manifestations while they were in reality alarmingly subversive acts and transgressive assertions of resistance and autonomy.[35]

Carnival cross-dressing, as we have seen, concerned itself mainly with the subversion of color and class relations but gender subversion also played its part in the general questioning and undermining of social hierarchies and power relations. In nineteenth-century Trinidad, for example, the ñBaby Dollò and the ñPissenlitò were amongst the most outrageous masquerading traditions. For the ñBaby Doll,ò a man in drag held a doll which was supposed to be the ñbastard babyò of some bystander and made a big scene while his companion, impersonating a policeman, was called in to force the victim to pay child support. In the ñPissenlitò (literally the ñbed-wetterò), a man walked around sporting bed sheets or linens stained red in imitation of menstrual blood.[36] Interestingly, in the 1880s the ñPissenlitò was banned because considered too destabilizing for the colonial order and its gender allocations. In more recent, postcolonial times, the ñPissenlitò character has been conveniently left out from the project of preservation of ñtraditionalò carnival culture by the National Carnival Commission, a state-sanctioned governing body that oversees carnival activities in Trinidad.[37] However, the attempt to appropriate (and neuter) the subversive potential of carnival is not directed exclusively at cross-dressing performances. We have already seen how womenôs exhibition of flesh and defiant display of sexuality during carnival have met with intense disapproval in Trinidad, and Richard Fleming and photographer Leah Gordon warn us that the spontaneous, surrealist, anarchic, and ñwhorishò happenings and masquerading that characterize Mardi Gras in Jacmel, a coastal town in southern Haiti, might be under threat because of their incompatibility with ñcorporate sponsors, ticket sellers and travel agents who prefer the pomp and

organisation of a one-day parade, or *defile*, along a main street stretched with seating and banners promoting mobile phones and beer.ò[38]

Gender bending performances also feature in other carnivalesque forms of artistic expression and public arts such as the ñPaille-banane,ò a traditional Boxing Day dance that takes place in Castries, the capital city of the island of Saint Lucia, and that is described by Derek Walcott in *Omeros* and analyzed by Paravisini in this volume. The *Paille-banane* dance--whose central purpose is that of reliving the trauma of the Middle Passage--signifies simultaneously the commitment to maintaining African-derived traditions and to altering binarism and those race-, gender-, and class-based identities imposed by colonialism.

Cultural practices such as carnival and masquerade are strictly related to Caribbean (especially diasporic) experiences of hybridity, de-essentialization, or re-essentialization that register important connections and continuities with recent developments in gender studies. The role played by Caribbean performative traditions such as carnival and dubbing in the reconstruction of gender/sexuality, particularly in response to the legacies of slavery, is explored by Wendy Knepper in her essay on Nalo Hopkinsonôs queer science-fiction novel *Midnight Robber* (2000). Knepper argues that in this coming-of-age story, which takes place in alternative worlds and where the queering of space and time intersects with the queer experiences of the developing child and transgender hero(ine) Tan-Tan, carnival and cross-dressing operate in complex ways: both can serve hegemonic interests, but both can also serve a more radical function in terms of personal and self-transformation. Hopkinsonôs work is approached here also as an opportunity to rehearse a specific concern with in-betweenness and multiple contextuality that is common to both queer theory and Caribbean diasporic dynamics and that refuses to inscribe itself in a unitary or monolithic frame of reference.

Caribbean Cross-Dressing, Biopolitics, Mimicry, and Performance

Political theorists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, inspired by Michel Foucault, tentatively define ñbiopowerò as a disciplinary, if sometimes diffuse and porous, ñpower over lifeò through which domination is made effective. This is contrasted to a notion of ñbiopolitics,ò which refers to the converse, resistant capacity of life to ñdetermine an alternative production of subjectivityò beyond the frameworks of dominance (or ñnormalityò) and oppression.[39] This schematic opposition suggests a fundamental split within the regulatory function of discursive and categorical thinking,

and, in the particular context of potentially subversive practices such as cross-dressing, a very specific mode of immanent resistance undermining the geometries of the power relation: ñbiopower,ò viewed from the hybrid waters of Caribbean responses to the problematic of gender, names those manifestations of an organizing logic of colonial and heteronormative provenance which the jocular, but serious, modes of cross-dressing might effectively counter and transform. What the subject positions charted by the essays in this collection effectively instantiate is the enduring commitment of gendered life to the irreducible multiplicity and productivity of biopolitics, to the unrelenting and liberating creation of new subjectivities that different power forms induce in various institutional and social contexts. The disruptive life of gender subversion is therefore a privileged setting for the exploration of Caribbean history.

More poignantly, in her contribution to this collection, Mayra Santos Febres declares that she found her way to represent the Caribbean in the figure of an adolescent transvestite, going as far as suggesting that the Caribbean *is* transvestism. Once again, the problematic history of the Caribbean can provide an explanation for Santos Febresôs provocative analogy. After all, Christopher Columbus, who found himself in the Caribbean when his intended destination was the ñspice islandsò of the East, does say in his journal that the Caribs or ñcanibalesò or ñCanibaò are ñnothing else than the people of the Grand Khan,ò[40] thus paving the way for the subsequent patronymic ñcross-dressingò of the area as the West *Indies* and to the nineteenth-century ñLevantinizationò of the Caribbean.[41] Unsurprisingly, the literature from the area has often thrived on rewriting, intertextuality, and literary ventriloquism, techniques that can all be seen as forms of creative textual cross-dressing.

The Caribbean and transvestism, moreover, have traditionally been associated with, or, rather, erroneously or strategically reduced to, mimicry. Bhabha, however, has demonstrated how in colonial and postcolonial settings mimicry complicates the relation between colonizer and colonized and is always potentially destabilizing to colonial discourse.[42] Similarly, Marjorie Garber has pointed out that cross-dressing is an index of category crisis, ña failure of definitional distinction, a borderline that becomes permeable.ò[43] Enabling border crossing from one category to another, transvestism powerfully reveals the discursive constructedness of all categories and of their (alleged) distinctiveness and discloses the fact that, as Judith Butler has insisted, to a certain extent, all identities are unstable and imitative.[44] Concomitantly, the ability not only to mimic but, most importantly, to ñmasterò the practices, gestures, and attitudes of the (alleged) ñoriginalò has been

recast by Caribbean writers and theorists as a truly creative act of the imagination, not as mere imitation. As the Saint Lucian poet, playwright and essayist Derek Walcott has argued in his revisitation of the relation of the steel drum and calypso with the xylophone and the group chant, what originated in imitation ended in invention.[45] In this volume Santos Febres claims transvestism as the ploy through which the Caribbean signifies itself in a permanent process of *reinvention* that privileges the logic of transversality and what Édouard Glissant calls ñopacityò and ñrelation.ò[46] The cultural specificity of the Caribbean is located here in its protean human worlds--embodied by the unruly figure of the cross-dresser--and in its irreducibility to the imported taxonomies of Euro-Atlantic sexual politics.

Cross-dressers, hermaphrodites, transgendered people, and transsexuals haunt Caribbean literature, where sexual ñeccentricitiesò often become a key to understanding the Caribbean and its ñmongrelizedò identity; and, as we have seen, the central role played by clothing in the Caribbean and, by extension, the challenge to the social and racial hierarchy and to the binary construction of gender that it entails, appear to be foundational, ongoing, striking, and intriguing. Giving the figure of the transvestite in Caribbean literature pride of place and foregrounding the productive transformation that cultural and, in particular, literary forms can impose on inherited power relations, this collection offers a distinctive contribution to debates on biopolitics, biopower, and the formation of imagined collectivities in the postcolonial world that are currently unfolding both *within* and *without* the Caribbean and its diasporas.

The central role that performance and performativity play in cross-dressing is acknowledged by most essays in the collection, and the theatrics of transvestism are revealed as instrumental to undermining or reinforcing the naturalized hierarchies of powerï -as we have seen, Smith highlights this aspect particularly forcefully in her article on the Jamaican Sistren collective. However, *The Cross-Dressed Caribbean: Writing, Politics, Sexualities* also brings to the fore the dispersal or reinforcement of social conventions, norms, and discourses latent in literary texts that are often more ambiguous and fluid than embodied and specific performances, and points therefore to the fact that cross-dressing is not always liberatory. The discursivity of the marked body, for example, plays an important role in the establishment and debunking of such conventions and is the focus of Carine M. Mardorossianôs essay on Maryse Condéôs *Célanire cou-coupé* (2000; Who Slashed Célanireôs Throat? [2004]). In this unorthodox tale, Mardorossian insists, the fantastical functions as the literal and dramatic embodiment of the workings of hegemonic identity construction, and,

more specifically, as the dramatization of how norms of gender identity are given meaning via configurations of crossing. Indeed, gender in the narrative gets paradoxically naturalized not through an essentialist rhetoric of biological fixity but through its association with other identities such as race, nationality, and sexuality, which stabilize gender *by default*.

In ñTales Told under the San Fernando Hill,ò Trinidadian Lawrence Scott suggests instead an imaginative scenario where cross-dressing takes place in the context of young boys from a well-off family experimenting with their sexuality. Their playful crossing over, with its transformative and liberating potential, becomes a metaphor for various transgressive behaviors and desires, which are viewed as sins and therefore repressed in a colonial society where a moralizing Catholic Church seems to play a prevalent role. The boysô erotic performance, inspired in part by Hollywood films, is echoed in different narrative strands, alluding in turn to transvestite boys from Venezuela, a transracial love story between a white girl and an Indian yard boy, as well as an affair between the parish priest and one of his parishioners. Through these secret tales of crossing over, Scott presents the soul of a community whose passions have been smothered under an imposed veneer of respectability and normativity and for which transgression is a major element of their identity quest.

The experience of Indian indentured laborers is the point of departure for Mootoo, who revisits this dislocation by emphasizing its transformative potential and by characterizing this moment in which one left behind language, family ties, community, religion, and cultural traditions and embraced a new way of being as ña queerness of no return.ò Such ñqueernessò has been re-enacted by subsequent generations who have responded to the restlessness engendered by that earlier dislocation by migrating elsewhere yet again and/or by continuing to re-invent themselves. Mootoo identifies this primal rupture as the how, and the why of the stories written. From a personal perspective, Mootoo reveals how the figure of the soft-hearted Indian starboy with whom she identified still informs her writing and her creative artwork and assists her in the creation of new spaces where the multiplicity of genders is celebrated.

Caribbean Cross-Dressing: Repetition with a Difference

As Antonio Benítez-Rojo has famously pointed out, the Caribbean archipelago presents ñthe features of an island that repeats itself,ò but he also insists that ñevery repetition ... entails a difference.ò[47] This is true also of the trope of cross-dressing, which is indeed ñrepeatedò in all the texts analyzed by our contributors but, crucially, ñwith a difference.ò Furthermore, much like nudity

and wearing (particular) clothes (for example, the masterôs clothes), the practice of cross-dressing signposts different possibilities for subversion but also for reinscription of traditional and repressive values: ñdifferencesò in ñrepetition,ò therefore, are to be contextualized and historicized. *The Cross-Dressed Caribbean: Writing, Politics, Sexualities* is the first critical text which focuses on representation of cross-dressing in Caribbean literature that attends to both ñrepetitionò and ñdifferenceò by putting side by side texts from the Anglophone, Francophone, Hispanophone, and Dutch-speaking Caribbean and from the Caribbean diasporas.[48] All the texts in question have, in different ways, the trope of the transvestite at their heart; but, far from fitting into an overarching argument about transvestism and its implications, they powerfully demonstrate that there is no transparent interpretation of cross-dressing, which has multiple manifestations in Caribbean literature. Transvestism is here put in dialogue, but never conflated, with transsexuality (to be understood here as a form of gender reassignment, not of gender violence),[49] transgendered identities (characterized by the irreducible social contradiction of sex and gender expression in the same individual),[50] intersexuality and hermaphroditism, and the ñopen mesh of possibilitiesò represented by the term ñqueer.ò[51] Cross-dressing practices, in fact, are often concomitant with and, at times instrumental to, all these non-heteronormative forms of sexuality. Rejecting the distinction between transvestism and cross-dressing as, respectively, a compulsive disorder and a choice of lifestyle,[52] the following essays use both terms to signify oppositional strategies with manifold, at times contradictory, potentialities.

As we have seen, alongside gender cross-dressing, the contributors to this volume explore class, cultural, and racial cross-dressing, and Santos Febres in particular identifies transvestism as an empowering and opaque strategy for survival and as a compelling metaphor for Caribbean culture. Satoôs study of the work of Severo Sarduy analyzes transvestism as a narrative strategy for the inclusion of sexual and racial difference through a simulation of cultural and geographic otherness; under-dressing and over-performing, as we have seen, are discussed by Zabus in her essay on Cliff, and *transdressing*, a peculiar form of ñposthumousò cross-dressing practiced by a real-life eccentric of Santo Domingo, is recounted by the novelist Rita Indiana Hernández and analyzed here by Odile Ferly. Ferlyôs essay explores how Santos Febresôs *Sirena Selena vestida de pena* (Sirena Selena, [2000]) and Hernándezô *La estrategia de Chochueca* (1999/2003; Chochuecaôs strategy) dismantle the binary mind-set that underlies common understandings of identity. Ferly argues that in these novels the cross- or *trans*dressed figure functions as a third position, *neither*

male *nor* female. Yet, rather than putting forward a single alternative or third gender that would be static, these millennial texts propose a gamut of genders. Indeed, the protagonists shift gender identifications and/or sexual orientations, deflating any essentialist approach to selfhood. Both novels unsettle dichotomous conceptions of self to consider instead the multitude of intermediate positions available on the identity spectrum, while simultaneously exposing identity categories themselves as constructs. Here, therefore, transvestism appears to be truly transformative.

Ferlyôs thoroughly positive assessment of the creative potentialities of cross-dressing is almost diametrically opposed to cautionary views such as the one expressed by Zabus in her study of Cliffôs *No Telephone to Heaven*, and those identified by Mardorossian in Condéôs *Who Slashed Célanireôs Throat*? and by Paravisini in José Alcántara Almanzarôs ñLulú or the Metamorphosisò (1995). In *Célanire*, paradoxically, through the crossing and crisscrossing of identities, normative identities get reinscribed over and over again; in ñLulúò the cross-dressed body becomes an emblem of defiance and criminality and emerges from the text as dangerous, degenerate, and expendable, while in Cliffôs *No Telephone to Heaven*, as Zabus concludes, camouflage has no intrinsic transformative powers but only manages to gesture towards a queer nation. Carefully probing and questioning the symptomatic status of cross-dressing practices as signifiers of ñcategory crisis,ò[53] Isabel Hoving also proposes that in certain contexts these practices might ultimately reinforce rather than undermine given definitions of gender. Hovingôs exploration of contemporary Dutch-Caribbean writing begins with a consideration of how, in Surinam, there are different discourses to frame the transvestite, which are not necessarily subversive or postmodern. Hoving goes on to discuss the cultural critique accomplished by narratives (by Henna Goudzand-Nahar, John Jansen van Galen, Karin Amatmoekrim, Annette de Vries, and others) that represent pedophiles, transvestites, gay people, and incestuous relationships. These stories, in which different discourses of sexual transgression collide, are often organized according to the logic of abjection: the transgressive markers of social crisis disappear once they have served their goal -- that is, the reconstruction of the main protagonistôs normative identity. In contrast, Cándaniôs 2002 novel *Huis van as* (House of ashes) suggests that sexual border-crossers signify a more permanent alienation that is shared by all citizens of the postcolonial nation and its diaspora. Cándaniôs novel sees alienation as the main problem of the transnational Surinamese community, not its binary sexual and racial organization; the transvestite does not therefore emerge as the subversive border-crosser. Nevertheless, the discourse of transvestism is used to create a model of endlessly transformative

desire. By juxtaposing these discourses of sexual transgression, the novel refuses closure; instead, it invites us to reconsider the main predicaments of Caribbean postcoloniality.

The Cross-Dressed Caribbean: Writing, Politics, Sexualities is informed by a refusal to distinguish between ñcriticalò and ñcreativeò pieces or to segregate linguistic areas and is organized according to a fourfold division that emphasizes as forcefully as possible how specific issues are ñrepeated,ò but always with a ñdifference.ò The aim is not to be comprehensive (clearly an impossibility) but to insist on the necessity of a debalkanization of Caribbean literature that goes beyond the limits represented by national and/or linguistic borders. The essays by Sato, del Valle Alcalá, Zabus, and Niblett in ñRevolutions in Drag,ò the first section of this volume, focus on the clash between institutional centralist power and more or less effective forms of resistance enacted by anti-binarism. The interventions of Oloff, Easton and Hewson, Smith, and Knepper in ñôPassingô through Time,ò our second section, probe the temporal complexities of anti-binary resistance, showing how ñpastò and ñfutureò projections of culture variously index and reflect ñpresentò contexts of struggle. In ñTheories in the Flesh,ò the third part of the book, Santos Febres, Mootoo, Scott, and Mardorossian open up biopolitical and subjective production to a multiplicity of corporeal modes and to a post-binary ontology of gender rendered here, through performance, memory, and experience, as a constant flow of individual and collective ñbecoming.ò Importantly, this section evokes different cultural sources and contexts of queerness, cross-dressing, and gender transgressions: while Santos Febres refers to music and the voice of her iconic transvestite, Scott records the influence of Hollywood and Mootoo engages with the singing, dancing, and gentle-hearted starboys of her adolescence. ñSymptoms and Detours,ò our last section, includes four comparative contributions by Strongman, Paravisini, Ferly, and Hoving. These essays subvert the logic of identity as difference reappropriated by sameness, contest the possibility of dialectical reconciliation in the post-binary ñparadigmò and reiterate how cross-dressing is not necessarily a revolutionary or radical practice in all situations. By showing how transvestism can, sometimes, contribute to reinstating and reinforcing oppressive and repressive templates, Hoving in particular underlines, once again, the major role played by context in ñrepetition with a differenceò and invites us to consider how reactionary reinscriptions can question and, at times, even annihilate the subversive possibilities of transvestism highlighted in other parts of the collection.

[1] See Walker and Matthews, ñCops tailed óDudusô,ò and Hussey-Whyte, ñPink Wig.ò

[2] Esquemeling, *Bucaniers of America*.

[3] Bayley, ñDonna Hope.ò See also Archer, ñAccessories/Accessaries,ò and Ellis, ñOut and Bad.ò

[4] See Hulme, ñExpanding the Caribbean.ò

[5] Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens*, 64; Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 139; Walcott, *Omeros*, 320, ñI sang our wide country,/the Caribbean Seaò; Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating Island*, 3.

[6] OôCallaghan, ñNaipaulôs Legacy,ò 115.

[7] ñMarking World Day.ò

[8] See Hulme, *Colonial Encounters*.

[9] For more on this see de Certeau, *Writing of History*; Hulme, *Colonial Encounters* and ñPolytropic Manò; McClintock, *Imperial Leather*.

[10] Malefant, *Des colonies*, 232 qtd in Fouchard, *Haitian Maroons*, 41.

[11] Fouchard, *Haitian Maroons*, 41-42.

[12] Cooper, ñEnslaved in Stereotype.ò

[13] Franco, ñThe Invention of Traditional Mas,ò 18.

[14] Saint-Méry, *Description topographique*, 1: 59.

[15] Ibid., 1: 59-60.

[16] Fouchard, *Haitian Maroons*, 43-44.

[17] For more on Romaine the Prophetess, see Fick, *Making of Haiti*, 127-29, 307-08.

[18] Rey, ñVirgin Mary,ò 354, 350, 343.

[19] Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 86.

[20] A. Trotz, ñThis Case is about and for All of Us.ò

[21] Chamoiseau, *Biblique*, 808.

[22] Barringer and Forrester, introduction, *Art and Emancipation*, 1. The cover of this volume reproduces one of Belisarioôs sketches, namely the one captioned ñKoo, Koo, or Actor Boy.ò

[23] Belisario, *Sketches*.

[24] Ibid., letterpress accompanying the lithograph for ñRed Set-Girls and jack-in-the-Green,ò facsimile reproduction in Barringer et al., *Art and Emancipation* (emphasis in the text).

[25] Belisario, *Sketches*, letterpress accompanying the lithograph for ñQueen, or Maam of the Set-Girls,ò facsimile reproduction in Barringer et al., *Art and Emancipation* (emphasis in the text).

[26] Barringer and Forrester, introduction, *Art and Emancipation*, 1.

[27] Martinez-Ruiz, Item 183, in Barringer et al., *Art and Emancipation*, 479.

[28] Forrester, Item 38, in Barringer et al., *Art and Emancipation*, 432.

[29] Lokaisingh-Meighoo, ñóJahaji Bhai.ôò

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[30] Frydman, ñJamaican Nationalism.ò

[31] Prater, ñTransgender, Memory, and Colonial History,ò 22.

[32] See, for example, Salkey, ñAnancy and Jeffrey Amherst.ò

[33] Belisario, *Sketches*, letterpress accompanying the lithograph for ñQueen, or Maam of the Set-Girls,ò facsimile reproduction in Barringer et al., *Art and Emancipation* (emphasis in the text).

[34] See Aching, *Masking and Power*.

[35] Barringer and Forrester, introduction, *Art and Emancipation*, 1.

[36] Scher, ñCopyright Heritage.ò

[37] Ibid., 471, 472.

[38] Gordon, *Kanaval*, 16.

[39] Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, 57.

[40] Qtd in Hulme, *Colonial Encounters*, 22.

[41] For a fuller account of the Levantinization of the Caribbean, see Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean*. Sheller suggests that ñEuropeôs relation to the Caribbean can most profitably be understood if we return to its original entanglement with Asiaò (108). Europeans, Sheller insists, ñproduced the idea of the Caribbean via a hybrid Orientalist and Africanist discourse characterised by an unstable logic of East vs. West, tradition vs. modernity, barbarism vs. civilisation,ò 109.

[42] Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, chapter 4.

[43] Garber, *Vested Interests*, 16.

[44] Butler, *Gender Trouble*.

[45] Walcott, ñCaribbean: Culture or Mimicry?ò 9.

[46] Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* and *Poetics of Relation*.

[47] Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating Island*, 3.

[48] Academic studies on sexuality in Caribbean culture have been on the increase in the past ten years. Most of these studies, however, focus on homosexuality and homophobia, on manifestations of normative and non-normative sexualities in particular islands or other equally specific locations in the Caribbean, but they do not tackle cross-dressing and transvestism, particularly not in the literary field. One possible exception to this is Sifuentes-Jáureguiôs *Transvestism, Masculinity and Latin American Literature*, which brilliantly engages with the figure of the transvestite in the works of Alejo Carpentier, José Donoso, Severo Sarduy and Manuel Puig. Sifuentes-Jáureguiôs discussion of contemporary theories about gender in the context of Latin America usefully maps a geographical and cultural territory that is adjacent but not identical to the one explored in this volume. One should also mention Curdella Forbesôs interesting study of gender and performance in the works of George Lamming and Samuel Selvon, entitled *From Nation to Diaspora*, which appeared in 2005, but mostly concentrates on hermaphrodism as a trope that can help to conceptualize West Indian gender. Worth listing is also a collection edited by Parker et al. and published in 2002, *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, a cross-cultural

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discussion of the ways in which national identities can inform and be informed by sexual, gendered, racial, and/or class identities. It does not have the Caribbean as its focal point, but both the collection as a whole and, in particular, the section entitled ñTailoring the Nationò--which foregrounds the ñmiscegenation of clothesò (Norman S. Holland), the ambivalent politics of clothing (Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass), and the ways in which the figure of the cross-dresser stands at the crossroads of sexism, racism, and imperialist/colonialist desire and fantasies (Marjorie Garber)--can perhaps be seen as an important precursor to our collection. Though there *have* been hardly any book-length studies of Caribbean cross-dressing, a few articles have started to appear on the subject, notably by Archer and Ellis.

[49] Janice Raymond has controversially argued that male-to-female transsexuals are rapists who appropriate female bodies for themselves, concomitantly reducing them to being mere artifacts (*Transsexual Empire*, 104).

[50] We are here following Leslie Feinbergôs self definition: ñI am transgendered. I was born female, but my masculine gender expression is seen as male. Itôs not my sex that defines me, and itôs not my gender expression. Itôs the fact that my gender expression appears to be at odds with my sex. ... Itôs the social contradiction between the two that defines meò (*Transgender Warriors*, 101).

[51] Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, 8.

[52] Garber, *Vested Interests*, 17, 4.

[53] Ibid., 17.