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Biopolitics, Imaginaries and Tensions in the Urban Space : A decolonial critique of the discourse of inclusion in the city of San José, Costa Rica

Mar Fournier Pereira

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Université de Lille
École doctorale Sciences de l'homme et de la société 473
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Biopolitics, Imaginaries and Tensions in the Urban Space:

*A decolonial critique of the discourse of inclusion in the city of
San José, Costa Rica*

Par Mar FOURNIER PEREIRA

Thèse de doctorat de Philosophie

Dirigée par Sam BOURCIER

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Summary

Title: Biopolitics, Imaginaries and Tensions in the Urban Space: A decolonial critique of the discourse of inclusion in the city of San José, Costa Rica

Summary:

Discourses of inclusion have gained special importance in Costa Rican politics. Political parties promise inclusion, NGOs compete for international cooperation funds to develop projects along these lines, collectives demand inclusion, entrepreneurs and corporations offer inclusive commodities, spaces and experiences. However, when analyzing these discourses and practices, the notion of inclusion seems, paradoxically, too lax and at the same restricted to a small sector of beneficiaries.

This thesis seeks to analyze, from a decolonial perspective, these dominant discourses and practices of inclusion in the city, as well as the narratives of people who inhabit the city. I also seek to elucidate the ways in which biopolitics flows through discourses of inclusion, generating new ways to regulate populations. In this sense, in this work, inclusion discourses and practices are understood as both cultural and material processes.

I pursue the following hypothesis: (1) that both conservative and progressive projects of inclusion in San José, share the rhetoric of “rescue”, which implies the intervention on bodies and spaces, wrought by social imaginaries on national identity, and therefore, (2) that the notion of inclusion in Costa Rica reproduces the coloniality of power.

This approach is based on Christina Hanhardt’s provocation to think of the city as “a critical nexus for analyzing how politics, policies and property have indelibly shaped LGBT social movements, in particular in response to violence” (Hanhardt, p.11). I think of the city of San José as a critical nexus for analyzing how biopolitics and national imaginaries have shaped social movements for inclusion (including LGBTIQ+). In dialogue with city dwellers who are left out of inclusive policies (trans* asylum seekers, queer people with disabilities, unhoused trans* people, sex workers, among others), I analyze the biopolitical and necropolitical practices that are reproduced in a variety of projects (from LGBTI bars to Christian charitable programs) that self-identify within the discursive framework of inclusion. The tensions that these projects generate produce dynamics of displacement, homonationalism, queer regeneration, social hygienism and the spectacularization of violence.

The thesis is divided into three parts. The first part delves into the historical processes that produce the imaginaries of Costa Rican identity, which is essential to understand the power relations that are established today in and around the inclusion projects in the city of San José. This part also addresses some of the main theoretical developments in the field of biopolitics, and puts them in dialogue with theories and knowledge produced in Abya Yala, in order to develop a plural theoretical framework for analysis. The second part analyses projects that seek the inclusion of impoverished and hungry people from the discursive positions of hygienism, charity or commodification in the city. The third part analyzes a series of discourses and projects of neoliberal inclusion developed in various fields: party politics, NGOs, neighborhood groups, gay entrepreneurship, diversity marketing. The thesis attempts to map the power relations that emerge within and around these projects, and tries to show the continuities that exist between apparently different projects.

Keywords: Biopolitics - Decoloniality - Urban studies - Inclusion - Neoliberalism.

Resumé

Titre : Biopolitique, imaginaires et tensions dans l'espace urbain : Une critique décoloniale du discours d'inclusion dans la ville de San José, Costa Rica.

Résumé :

Les discours sur l'inclusion ont pris une importance particulière dans la politique costaricienne. Les partis politiques promettent l'inclusion, les ONG rivalisent pour obtenir des fonds de coopération internationale afin de développer des projets dans ce sens, les collectifs demandent l'inclusion, les entrepreneurs et les corporations offrent des produits, des espaces et des expériences inclusives. Cependant, lorsqu'on analyse ces discours et ces pratiques, la notion d'inclusion semble, paradoxalement, trop laxiste et en même temps ces bénéfiques sont limités à un petit secteur de la population.

Cette thèse cherche à analyser, dans une perspective décoloniale, ces discours dominants et ces pratiques d'inclusion dans la ville, ainsi que les réflexions des personnes qui habitent la ville. Je cherche également à élucider les façons dont la biopolitique traverse les discours d'inclusion, générant de nouvelles façons de réguler les populations. En ce sens, dans cette recherche, les discours et les pratiques d'inclusion sont compris comme des processus à la fois culturels et matériels.

Dans cette recherche/thèse, je poursuis deux hypothèses : (1) les projets conservateurs et progressistes d'inclusion à San José partagent la rhétorique du "sauvetage", qui implique l'intervention sur les corps et les espaces, façonnée par les imaginaires sociaux sur l'identité nationale, et donc, (2) la notion d'inclusion au Costa Rica reproduit la colonialité du pouvoir.

Cette approche se fonde sur la provocation de Christina Hanhardt, qui invite à considérer la ville comme un point de contact critique pour analyser la façon dont la politique, les politiques et la propriété ont façonné de manière indélébile les mouvements sociaux LGBT, en particulier en réponse à la violence (Hanhardt, p. 11). En ce sens, je conçois la ville de San José comme un nœud critique pour analyser comment la biopolitique et les imaginaires nationaux ont modelé les mouvements sociaux pour l'inclusion (y compris les LGBTIQ+). En dialoguant avec les habitants de la ville qui sont exclus des politiques d'inclusion -demandeurs d'asile trans*, personnes queer handicapées, personnes trans* sans abri, travailleuses du sexe, entre autres-, j'analyse les pratiques biopolitiques et nécropolitiques qui sont reproduites dans des divers projets qui s'identifient à partir d'un cadre discursif de l'inclusion. Les tensions que ces projets génèrent produisent des dynamiques de déplacement, d'homonationalisme, de régénération queer, d'hygiénisme social et de spectacularisation de la violence.

La thèse est divisée en trois parties. La première partie se penche sur les processus historiques qui produisent les imaginaires de l'identité costaricienne, ce qui est essentiel pour comprendre les relations de pouvoir qui s'établissent aujourd'hui dans et autour des projets d'inclusion dans la ville de San José. Cette partie aborde également certains des principaux développements théoriques dans le domaine de la biopolitique, et les met en dialogue avec les théories et les savoirs produits dans le Sud Global, afin de développer un cadre théorique pluriel pour l'analyse. La deuxième partie analyse les projets qui cherchent à inclure des personnes appauvries et affamées à partir des positions discursives de l'hygiénisme, de la charité ou de la marchandisation dans la ville. La troisième partie analyse une série de discours et de projets d'inclusion néolibérale développés dans divers domaines : politique partisane, ONG, groupes de voisinage, entrepreneuriat gay, marketing de la diversité. La thèse tente de cartographier les relations de pouvoir qui émergent au sein et autour de ces projets, et essaie de montrer les continuités qui existent entre des projets apparemment différents.

Mots-clés : Biopolitique - Décolonialité - Études urbaines - Inclusion - Néolibéralisme.

DEDICATION

Para Alondra,
maestra de la vida, guardiana de las calles,
hermana de jauría
que iluminaba las esquinas con su loca risa,
cuyo eco no podrán apagar.
Rest in power, Aloe bella.

Y para Lucía,
quien no alcanzó a escribir una tesis,
pero escribió “que el mundo entero vea como nuestra furia arde”.
Rest in power.
Y que tu memoria haga arder los muros
de la transfobia en la Universidad.



Love & rage

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reflections that turned my brains, guts, imaginaries and privileges upside down. I thank them for this radical transformation.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AED: Alianza Empresarial para el Desarrollo

CCDCR: Diverse Chamber of Commerce

ENAHQ: Encuesta Nacional de Hogares.

FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization

FDA: Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

HIAS: Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society

HIVOS: Humanist Institute for Cooperation in Developing Countries

IMAS: Instituto Mixto de Ayuda Social

INA: Instituto Nacional de aprendizaje

LGBTIQ+: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, intersex, queer and plus.

OC-24/17: Advisory opinion requested by Costa Rica to the Inter-American Court of human Rights

MR: Militant research

UN: United Nations

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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Résumé Substantiel en français

Le Costa Rica est un petit pays qui se proclame "Suisse d'Amérique centrale". Ce slogan, repris dans les paroles des hymnes nationaux, condense une série d'imaginaires coloniaux qui produisent l'identité costaricienne en tant que peuple blanc, pacifique et profondément démocratique, où prédomine une importante classe moyenne qui fait disparaître les écarts entre riches et pauvres (Jiménez 1998; Sojo 2010 ; Sandoval 2004 ; Acuña 2002). Ces imaginaires nationaux ont été reproduits et renforcés pendant plus de deux siècles par les gouvernements et les autorités qui trouvent dans ces discours un instrument prolifique de gouvernementalité. Ils ont également été utilisés par des entreprises pour mobiliser des capitaux internationaux et nationaux. Ces imaginaires ont été intériorisés par la population, façonnant une identité nationale sous une illusion suprématiste et blanchie de l'*être* costaricien.

Sur le plan politico-économique, le Costa Rica s'est engagé dans la voie du néolibéralisme depuis les années 1980. Tout au long de ces années, une série de programmes et de politiques de libéralisation économique ont été mis en œuvre dans le pays, favorisant la réduction de l'État et le libre-échange. En outre, l'Église catholique exerce un grand pouvoir sur les décisions politiques et la culture du pays. Le Costa Rica est aujourd'hui le seul État confessionnel des Amériques. Le libéralisme économique et le conservatisme social constituent la recette politique que les gouvernements de droite prescrivent depuis plusieurs décennies.

En 2014, après des décennies de bipartisme alternant entre deux partis de droite, le Partido Acción Ciudadana (PAC)¹ est arrivé au pouvoir avec un programme apparemment alternatif et un discours centriste. Malgré son discours, pendant deux périodes de gouvernement, ce parti a continué à naviguer sur la voie néolibérale, atteignant même à des résultats que les gouvernements de droite n'avaient pas réussi à obtenir (par exemple, l'interdiction du droit de grève dans la plupart des services publics). Si leur politique économique était plutôt de droite, ils ont cherché à compenser par des politiques progressistes sur certaines questions sociales, notamment en ce qui concerne les droits des LGBT. Ils ont exploité le discours sur les droits humains pour se positionner en tant que gouvernements centristes. A partir de 2015, et avec une force inouï, le parti au pouvoir a commencé à prendre des mesures positives, en approuvant politiques d'inclusion favorables aux personnes gays, lesbiennes et trans*. Le néolibéralisme et les droits de l'homme est devenu la recette renouvelée que le gouvernement PAC a prescrit à la population.

¹ Parti d'Action Citoyenne (PAC).

Bien qu'insuffisantes, ces politiques font aujourd'hui du Costa Rica le pays doté de la législation la plus progressiste pour les personnes trans* et les couples du même sexe d'Amérique Centrale. Dans le contexte de la situation sociopolitique à laquelle sont confrontés d'autres pays de la région, comme le Nicaragua et le Honduras, où des gouvernements autoritaires persécutent, criminalisent et assassinent les militants des mouvements sociaux (y compris les militants LGBTIQ+ et féministes), ce nouveau cadre juridique a fait du Costa Rica un pays accueillant pour les migrants qui cherchent à protéger leur vie. Cela ne s'est pas traduit par un soutien spécifique aux migrants LGBTIQ+, qui contrairement se plaignent du fait que l'État costaricien n'aborde pas les particularités que l'exil implique pour les personnes qui incarnent la dissidence sexuelle/de genre, et qu'il reproduit plutôt souvent les pratiques de discrimination structurelle.

Malgré cela, *l'inclusion arc-en-ciel* est devenue le drapeau des gouvernements PAC. Toutefois, ces politiques ne sont pas restées sans opposition. Les partis politiques conservateurs ont proliféré et se sont renforcés au cours de la dernière décennie, y compris les partis d'idéologie fondamentaliste chrétienne, dont la base continue de croître. Aujourd'hui, ils constituent une force politique importante dans le pays. Au niveau institutionnel, Fabricio Alvarado, un candidat présidentiel d'idéologie chrétienne fondamentaliste, a remporté le premier tour des élections en 2018, et bien qu'il ait finalement perdu l'élection présidentielle, cette idéologie contrôle aujourd'hui un pourcentage important du Congrès.

En 2022, Alvarado est arrivé troisième. Cependant, un candidat populiste néolibéral, Rodrigo Chaves, a remporté le second tour des élections avec un parti pratiquement inconnu. Le mécontentement qui s'était accumulé après les politiques du dernier gouvernement PAC a été récupéré par Chaves, qui a également reçu le soutien de la plupart des partis religieux conservateurs. Monsieur Chaves, qui a été sanctionné pour avoir harcelé sexuellement ses subordonnées féminines alors qu'il travaillait pour la Banque Mondiale, incarne la figure de l'homme fort et autoritaire qui promet d'apporter le changement au pays. Dès les premiers mois de son mandat, il a commencé par éliminer certaines des initiatives *d'inclusion arc-en-ciel* du PAC. Par exemple, il a cessé de hisser le drapeau arc-en-ciel dans les institutions publiques le 17 mai (journée internationale contre l'homo/lesbo/bi/transphobie). Il a également supprimé le poste de commissaire présidentiel aux affaires LGBTI et créé à la place un commissaire à l'inclusion sociale, qui sera chargé des populations LGBTIQ+, autochtones et d'ascendance africaine. Toutefois, cela ne doit pas être interprété comme une évolution vers une perspective intersectionnelle, mais plutôt comme une réduction des politiques publiques et des investissements sociaux en faveur de ces populations.

Cet affrontement idéologique, exploité par les partis politiques pour attirer les votes et par les médias, a exacerbé la polarisation sociale au Costa Rica. Si, d'un point de vue idéologique, le pays continue de s'orienter résolument vers la droite, l'agenda féministe et les droits des populations LGBTQ+ continuent de faire l'objet d'un débat public. Selon une récente recherche costaricienne réalisée par Treminio et Pignataro (2021), l'opposition à l'égalité du mariage a une corrélation directe avec la tendance à voter pour les partis de droite radicale. Les tensions autour des droits des femmes et des populations LGBTQ+ au Costa Rica ont été configurées sur la base d'une logique manichéenne et binaire qui dessine deux camps aux positions discursives concurrentes. D'une part, il y a les groupes dits "pro-vie" (principalement des secteurs religieux catholiques et néo-pentecôtistes ayant des activités communautaires et politiques), qui ont une représentation importante à l'Assemblée législative et ont des bases solides dans les communautés chrétiennes et catholiques de la classe ouvrière. Ils ont des positions anti-LGBTIQ, anti-avortement, anti-féministes, et certains d'entre eux partagent également des positions anti-migrants et pro-armes. De l'autre côté, il existe un large éventail de groupes, d'ONG, d'entreprises, de politiciens et de personnes de la société civile qui partagent une position "pro-droits humains". Pendant les gouvernements PAC, ils avaient le contrôle du pouvoir exécutif. Ils sont favorables aux droits des personnes LGBTQ+, et une partie d'entre eux soutient également le droit à l'avortement.

Cependant, au-delà de la polarisation, une bonne partie de ces secteurs partagent une position compatible avec le projet néolibéral. Cette thèse cherche précisément à dépasser la polarisation manichéenne, et à étudier comment les imaginaires nationaux et la colonialité sont liés à la biopolitique dans les projets d'inclusion néolibérale. L'analyse cherche à retracer les manières dont la biopolitique gère la vie et les corps dans la ville, à travers les projets d'inclusion développés par les secteurs "pro-vie" et "pro-droits de l'homme" à San José.

L'inclusion dans la ville, la ville inclusive

San José est la ville la plus grande et la plus peuplée du Costa Rica, et donc un scénario où les projets idéologiques et les conflits sociaux se matérialisent sous des formes biopolitiques. Si nous considérons la biopolitique comme une forme de rationalité politique par laquelle la vie et la population sont gérées, régulées et normalisées, alors les espaces, les corps, les relations et les conditions de vie sont les substrats où cette forme de gouvernementalité est produite.

Au cours des dernières décennies, les gouvernements de différents partis politiques ont traduit les imaginaires sociaux de l'identité nationale en politiques urbaines pour la ville de San José. Les autorités

locales élaborent des programmes visant à repeupler la ville, à la rendre plus sûre et plus propre, et à "activer" ses espaces publics. Les parades et les festivals, la construction de centres commerciaux et de tours d'habitation (accessibles aux citoyens de la classe moyenne supérieure), et la présence accrue de la police dans les rues sont quelques-unes des principales lignes d'action des gouvernements locaux de San José.

En même temps, au-delà des politiques officielles et des conceptions institutionnelles de la ville, un nombre croissant d'organisations et de collectifs de la société civile développent des projets d'intervention dans l'espace public. Des deux côtés de l'apparente polarisation idéologique, des projets sont lancés pour intervenir dans la ville. Ces projets cherchent à "sauver" la ville de San José, à la "régénérer", à la "réactiver". Ils prônent une ville pour tous, une ville véritablement inclusive. La diversité de ces collectifs va de la charité chrétienne à l'hygiénisme social : de jeunes bénévoles installent des douches portables pour nettoyer les sans-abri ; un groupe de jeunes entrepreneurs queers cherche à régénérer la Zona Roja [Zone Rouge²] et à la transformer en "zone arc-en-ciel" (une zone touristique embourgeoisée avec des bars, des restaurants et des magasins accueillant les queers) ; des entrepreneurs vendent des appartements de luxe inclusifs dans des tours d'habitation conçues par des queers ; des voisins s'associent à la police pour éliminer les personnes indésirables dans les rues, etc.

Ces projets semblent, à première vue, très différents les uns des autres. Cependant, malgré la diversité de leurs slogans et de leurs origines, et les différences apparentes dans les méthodes qu'ils proposent, ces groupes partagent un noyau commun : l'idée que nous devons intervenir dans la ville pour la rendre accessible, propre, agréable, vivable et sûre.

Les discours en tant que pratiques sociales produisent des réalités, mais ils sont rarement transparents. C'est dans leurs hypothèses et leurs omissions, dans la subtilité et les implications pragmatiques des mots et des énoncés, que nous trouvons le champ de pouvoir que les discours abritent (Foucault 1982, 1993). Si nous considérons le discours comme un moyen de production de la vérité (Foucault 1982), le côté idéologique de ces projets est révélé. Ces projets découlent de notions normatives de ce que la ville devrait être et pour qui elle devrait être.

Il y a d'importantes lacunes ou omissions dans ces initiatives populaires d'"appropriation" de la ville. Les discours de repeuplement, d'activation, de régénération et de sauvetage évoquent l'idée d'une ville vide. Mais San José n'est pas vide, ni mort. Il est habité depuis des décennies, par des personnes vivant dans ce que Fanon (2010) décrit comme la zone du non-être. Dans une analyse de la race, de la

² Ce nom fait référence au « quartier rouge » de San José.

classe, du genre, de la sexualité et du handicap, ces discours ont en fait plusieurs points communs : en général, ils reproduisent l'imaginaire du Costa Rica en tant que nation blanche, de classe moyenne, pacifique et démocratique ; en bref, ils reproduisent l'imaginaire de l'exceptionnalisme costaricien au sein de l'Amérique centrale.

L'idée d'une ville qui a besoin d'être sauvée soulève la question suivante : de quoi ou de qui a-t-elle besoin d'être sauvée ? Avec la prolifération rapide des projets visant à rendre la ville plus sûre et plus agréable pour les citoyen.ne.s qui la « méritent », d'autres habitants qui ne se conforment pas aux normes de la nation, comme les personnes que pratiquent le travail sexuel, les gens de la rue, les migrant.e.s et les femmes trans pauvres qui luttent pour survivre à San José depuis des décennies, voient leur champ de mobilité et même leurs chances de survie dans l'espace public vraiment réduits.

Dans ce contexte, San José devient un scénario de conflit, où ses habitant.e.s connaissent des dynamiques de déplacement, de répression, de régénération, d'appauvrissement, d'hygiénisme social et de discrimination. Je m'intéresse à ce scénario : les discours qui contestent ce que la ville devrait être, et les différentes manières dont ces projets interviennent sur les corps et les espaces publics. Je m'intéresse également à ce qui les sous-tend. Ces discours font obstacle à d'autres récits qui tentent d'échapper à la dichotomie politique et aux formes néolibérales d'inclusion. Au-delà de l'axe vertical évident du pouvoir que le gouvernement exerce sur la ville, je cherche à saisir les relations de pouvoir sur l'axe horizontal, c'est-à-dire entre les personnes et les groupes qui utilisent, imaginent et occupent la ville. Cette thèse vise à analyser, dans une perspective décoloniale, ces discours dominants et les pratiques d'inclusion dans la ville, ainsi que les récits des personnes qui l'habitent.

Construction du problème de recherche

C'est dans le contexte décrit ci-dessus que la notion d'inclusion a pris de l'importance dans les débats politiques au Costa Rica. À première vue, les politiques et les pratiques d'inclusion sont louables. Cependant, les discours promouvant l'inclusion au Costa Rica ont rarement été analysés dans la perspective critique de la biopolitique et de la décolonialité.

Dans cette thèse, je conçois les discours et les pratiques d'inclusion comme des processus culturels et matériels. J'ai abordé cette analyse en circulant dans la ville de San José, en observant les interactions quotidiennes, en visitant des projets d'inclusion, en dialoguant avec ses habitants et en cartographiant les zones clés. Cette approche s'appuie sur la provocation de Christina Hanhardt, qui propose de considérer la ville comme un point de contact critique pour analyser la manière dont la politique, les politiques et la propriété façonnent les mouvements sociaux LGBT, en particulier en réponse à la

violence (Hanhardt, p. 11). Je considère la ville de San José comme un nœud critique permettant d'analyser la manière dont la biopolitique et les imaginaires nationaux façonnent les mouvements sociaux en faveur de l'inclusion (y compris les LGBTQ+), et comment la politique, les politiques et la propriété façonnent les relations de pouvoir qui traversent les corps, les espaces et les relations sociales. La violence sera donc comprise dans cette recherche comme une dynamique complexe, avec des expressions de classe, de genre, de race, de sexualité, de handicap et la combinaison de ces éléments et éventuellement d'autres.

Bien qu'ils diffèrent sur les bénéficiaires des projets d'inclusion et sur les mécanismes pour promouvoir une ville inclusive, actuellement, presque tous les figures politiques et les partis qui se présentent aux élections locales ou nationales, qu'ils soient progressistes ou conservateurs, proposent de "réintégrer dans la société" tous ceux et celles qui ont été exclu.e.s de la vie sociale productive. En d'autres termes, ils promettent l'inclusion néolibérale. Des ONG d'affiliations diverses sont en concurrence pour le financement de projets d'inclusion dans la ville de San José. Les corporations et les agences de tourisme font la publicité du Costa Rica comme d'un paradis gay d'inclusion tandis que des volontaires chrétien.ne.s de l'étranger et Costaricien.ne.s viennent « sauver les âmes » des travailleurs/euses du sexe en les aidant à se remettre sur le droit chemin de l'inclusion sociale.

Bien qu'ils ne s'accordent pas sur une définition unique, tout le monde semble parler d'inclusion. Un certain nombre de questions se posent : que signifie l'inclusion ? Qui ces projets sont-ils censés "inclure" ? Pourquoi ont-ils été exclus en premier lieu ? Que faut-il faire pour être inclus ? Qui les projets d'inclusion excluent-ils ? Qui effacent-ils ?

Dans le cadre d'une approche biopolitique, j'étais intéressé par l'analyse de la manière dont l'inclusion est utilisée pour réguler la vie et la population. Dans une perspective décoloniale, je me suis particulièrement intéressée à la manière dont les discours et les pratiques d'inclusion reproduisent la colonialité du pouvoir et de l'être (Castro-Gómez et Grosfoguel, 2007), et aux façons dont les pratiques d'inclusion affectent ceux et celles qui habitent la zone de non-être (Fanon, 2010).

S'appuyant sur la notion foucauldienne de pouvoir (Foucault 1993), cette thèse cherche à démêler la microphysique du pouvoir qui est produit et reproduit dans les interactions quotidiennes : les frictions, les contradictions, les pratiques de domination et de résistance, les tensions biopolitiques autour de dichotomies telles que propreté et assainissement, vivable et invivable, sûr et dangereux, agréable et désagréable, en bref, les nœuds entre les différents systèmes d'oppression dans la matrice de domination (Hill Collins 2000), et les imaginaires nationaux qui tissent tout ce qui précède. J'aborde les discours comme la production de la connaissance, de la vérité et de la normativité, et les pratiques sociales comme la matérialisation vivante des relations de pouvoir. Plus précisément, je cherche à

aborder le problème de la manière dont la normativité biopolitique et les imaginaires nationaux façonnent les discours et les pratiques d'inclusion dans la ville de San José, au Costa Rica.

Objectifs et hypothèse de recherche :

Comme objectif général, cette thèse vise à analyser la configuration de la normativité biopolitique et des imaginaires nationaux, dans les discours et les pratiques d'inclusion dans la ville de San José, Costa Rica.

Afin de mener à bien cette analyse, cette recherche s'est articulée autour de trois objectifs spécifiques:

1. Analyser les discours de différents projets sur la notion d'inclusion dans la ville de San José.
2. Examiner les pratiques de normativité biopolitique dans les projets d'inclusion et les tensions qu'elles produisent dans les interactions quotidiennes dans l'espace public de San José.
3. Explorer les récits, réflexions et pratiques de résistance avec des personnes en désaccord avec la notion d'inclusion imposée dans la ville de San José.

J'ai commencé ce processus de recherche avec deux hypothèses : (1) que les projets d'inclusion conservateurs et progressistes à San José partagent la rhétorique du « sauvetage », qui implique une intervention sur les corps et les espaces, forgée par les imaginaires sociaux de l'identité nationale, et, par conséquent, (2) que la notion d'inclusion au Costa Rica reproduit un discours colonial.

Description du plan de la thèse

Cette thèse commence par un chapitre qui décrit le cadre éthique/épistémique à partir duquel le processus de recherche est développé. Les réflexions éthiques traversent l'ensemble du travail, cependant, ce premier chapitre fournit un cadre qui rend compte de ma position par rapport à l'objet d'étude, aux participant.e.s et en général aux processus de production de connaissances dans l'université coloniale moderne.

Cette recherche adopte l'approche des "Epistémologies du Sud" comme partie intégrante de son cadre épistémique et éthique. Santos (2005) introduit la notion de "sociologie des absences", pour mettre en évidence les silences que l'épistémologie hégémonique produit autour de certaines expériences, subjectivités et formes de connaissance. Ces silences reflètent le côté politique de la recherche, les relations de pouvoir dans lesquelles certaines formes de connaissances, de pratiques

et d'existences sont rejetées comme résiduelles, lorsqu'elles ne répondent pas aux impositions du savoir dominant. Par ces absences, la science moderne efface la diversité et les possibilités d'autres manières de penser, de créer et d'exister. La colonialité du savoir ne reflète pas seulement une vision unilatérale du monde qui sert les intérêts de la domination et de l'oppression, mais l'impose activement comme la seule vision possible.

Santos (2005) affirme que cette rationalité hégémonique a un effet dévastateur, similaire à celui des grandes monocultures sur la biodiversité. Pour y faire face, il propose de cultiver des écologies de la connaissance, dans lesquelles peuvent germer des histoires, des voix, des subjectivités, des façons de penser et d'exister qui ont été marginalisées, réduites au silence et effacées. L'écologie de la connaissance revendique la pluralité, la diversité et l'hétérogénéité, sans la hiérarchisation violente dans laquelle certaines connaissances sont construites comme valides et d'autres sont marginalisées.

Dans cette perspective, le Chapitre 1 : *Ethical/Epistemic framework*, commence par établir ma position au sein des épistémologies trans*. Ensuite, il aborde une réflexion sur la recherche militante, qui cherche une approche horizontale et respectueuse des connaissances, des demandes et des besoins des communautés. Ce Chapitre répond au souci de trouver des moyens d'atténuer ou de compenser la violence épistémique que la recherche universitaire produit inévitablement. Dans ce but, une deuxième section développe une réflexion essentielle sur la colonialité du pouvoir, du genre et de la connaissance, ainsi que les contributions qui ont été développées à partir du tournant décolonial. Cette recherche adopte une position décoloniale par rapport à l'analyse de l'objet d'étude, mais aussi par rapport au processus de production de connaissances avec les participants.

Dans une troisième section, ce Chapitre présente l'appareil méthodologique à partir duquel cette recherche est développée : l'analyse foucauldienne du discours et le processus ethnographique (avec des techniques telles que les entretiens informels, l'entretien-parcours et la cartographie sociale). En ce qui concerne le travail de terrain, l'essentiel s'est déroulé en 2019. À l'origine, j'avais prévu un deuxième moment de travail sur le terrain en avril 2020, mais en raison de la pandémie de COVID-19, j'ai dû le suspendre. Je suis retourné au Costa Rica en mars 2021, ce qui m'a permis de réaliser quelques entretiens et exercices d'observation afin de terminer la collecte des données pour l'analyse. Au total, j'ai réalisé plus de 40 exercices d'observation dans des espaces publics, des activités institutionnelles et communautaires, des projets d'inclusion et des expériences de résistance. Dans le cadre de ces observations, j'ai mené des dizaines d'entretiens informels. Dix d'entre elles sont directement référencées dans l'œuvre, mais toutes ont contribué à la construction de mes réflexions sur San José. J'ai mené 12 entretiens semi-structurés, 7 entretiens-parcours. J'ai également réalisé plusieurs exercices de cartographie en dialogue avec les participant.e.s. Le matériel

a été transcrit à l'aide du logiciel Sonal. Pour l'analyse, j'ai utilisé le logiciel Atlas-ti, en adoptant une version flexible de la proposition de Jäger (2007) pour l'analyse du discours foucauldien. Pour le processus d'écriture, en accord avec l'écologie de la connaissance, j'ai utilisé la technique des récits discontinus. Cette technique vise à tisser ensemble les récits de différents membres d'un milieu pour construire un texte à voix multiples (Biglia et Bonet-Martí 2009, 13).

Au-delà des techniques, ce chapitre aborde également la relation établie avec les participants et les considérations éthiques entourant les liens que nous tissons. Enfin, le Chapitre se termine par quelques réflexions sur la place d'aspects tels que l'informalité, la temporalité, la confiance et la rétribution dans un processus de recherche affective tel que celui-ci.

Après avoir présenté le cadre éthique/épistémique qui encadrera le processus de recherche, le développement de ce travail est organisé en trois grandes parties. La première partie, *Biopolitics and coloniality: A Costa Rican brew* [Biopolitique et colonialité : Un breuvage costaricien], commence par deux Chapitres qui exposent le contexte historique et le corps théorique à partir desquels l'analyse de cette recherche est développée. Le Chapitre 2, "*The Central American Switzerland*": *A historical perspective* [La Suisse de l'Amérique Centrale" : Une perspective historique], tente de retracer les conditions historiques qui produisent les imaginaires nationaux et l'identité du Costa Rica en tant que nation ressemblant davantage à la Suisse qu'à ses voisins d'Amérique Centrale. Cette section commence par analyser l'un des imaginaires les plus problématiques et les plus profondément ancrés de la culture du Costa Rica : la blancheur costaricienne. Cette section analyse les origines de l'imaginaire de la blancheur et la manière dont ce discours a alimenté le racisme structurel dans la législation et la culture costariciennes. Une deuxième section analyse d'autres imaginaires nationaux liés à la blancheur : la paix innée, la démocratie éternelle, l'égalité et la protection divine de la nation bénie par la Virgen de los Angeles [Vierge des Anges³] qui est paradoxalement connue comme « la negrita » [la petite *negre*]. J'analyse ces imaginaires à partir de la logique de la colonialité du pouvoir, et je tente de les problématiser en les confrontant aux réalités vécues par différentes personnes dans le Costa Rica d'aujourd'hui.

Dans la troisième section du chapitre 2, je propose une analyse critique des instruments qui ont été utilisés pour construire les statistiques officielles sur l'ethnicité au Costa Rica, et leur rôle dans la reproduction de l'imaginaire de la blancheur, qui tend à blanchir le métissage dans le pays. Les contributions conceptuelles des auteurs féministes d'Abya Yala sont un outil fondamental pour l'analyse décoloniale dans cette section. Dans ce sens, je reprends le concept d'*amefricanidad* [amefricanité] de Lélia Gonzalez et le concept de *mestizaje ch'ixi* [métissage ch'ixi] de Silvia Rivera

³ Il s'agit d'une divinité qui a été déclarée « Sainte Patronne » du Costa Rica en 1824.

Cusicanqui pour réfléchir aux possibilités d'un métissage critique. Un métissage qui ne cherche pas à s'assimiler à l'idéal colonial européen de la blancheur, mais qui vise à reconnaître ses racines bigarrées et s'engage à libérer les peuples d'Abya Yala. Enfin, cette section explore quelques expériences de réexistence développées par des personnes racisées et métissées qui cherchent à mettre en tension les imaginaires de l'identité costaricienne à travers l'artivisme.

Le chapitre 3, *Biopolitics of embodied imaginaries* [Biopolitique des imaginaires corporisés], aborde les développements théoriques et conceptuels autour des notions de biopolitique, de biopouvoir et de nécropolitique. Plutôt qu'une description des principaux courants du vaste champ de la biopolitique, ce chapitre cherche à fournir des outils pour répondre à des questions telles que : Comment la biopolitique opère-t-elle dans un pays colonisé aux aspirations européistes comme le Costa Rica ? Quelles formes peut prendre la nécropolitique dans un pays qui se proclame le berceau de la paix et de la démocratie en Amérique Centrale ? Comment lire le nœud critique entre la biopolitique et la colonialité, et ses effets sur les corps, les espaces, les relations de pouvoir et les pratiques de résistance ?

Dans une première section, le chapitre explore le développement de la biopolitique dans les travaux de Michel Foucault (1978 ; 2003 ; 2009 ; 2008). Des contributions telles que le concept de biopouvoir et les dispositifs de sécurité sont particulièrement importantes pour cette recherche. Je discute ensuite quelques développements ultérieurs dans le domaine de la biopolitique, tels que les concepts d'*Homo Sacer* et de *vie nue* proposés par Giorgio Agamben (1998), qui fournissent des éléments importants pour comprendre comment et pourquoi certains sujets sont construits comme "tuables" et leur mort est présentée comme nécessaire pour le bien-être de la population. Je poursuis ce chapitre avec quelques lectures actuelles pour comprendre la forme dont il opère le biopouvoir dans le néolibéralisme contemporain, avec des auteurs comme Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri (2013), Paul B. Preciado (2013) et Sam Bourcier (2017). Preciado remet l'accent sur la sexualité qui, comme le dit Foucault (2003), est le point de rencontre entre le corps et la population. Bourcier, pour sa part, étend la critique de la biopolitique aux politiques LGBT, ce qui fournit des éléments importants pour analyser la manière dont les systèmes d'oppression continuent de reproduire les pratiques d'exploitation et d'exclusion, même au sein de projets et de discours qui s'articulent autour de l'inclusion.

Je me tourne ensuite vers la notion de nécropolitique proposée par Achille Mbembe (2013). Mbembe reprend le concept de biopolitique mais constate une lacune dans l'œuvre de Foucault et une conception légère et problématique du rôle historique du racisme dans le développement de la biopolitique. Il considère qu'avec ce parti pris, la théorie de la biopolitique est insuffisante pour interpréter la politique économique contemporaine qui pousse des millions de personnes dans la

précarité et la mort. Mbembe propose ensuite les concepts de nécropolitique et de nécropouvoir pour rendre compte d'une évolution de la biopolitique qui consiste non pas à *faire vivre ou laisser mourir* les gens, mais à décider qui doit mourir. Je complète cette section avec les contributions de Warren Montan (2013) sur le concept de nécro-économie, une façon de comprendre comment le mode de production capitaliste est fonctionnel et nécessaire pour la nécropolitique. De même, je reprends les contributions de Sayak Valencia (2010), qui propose une lecture des formes que prend la nécropolitique dans le capitalisme contemporain, spécifiquement dans des contextes où l'État n'a plus le monopole de la guerre. Valencia propose le concept de capitalisme gore pour décrire l'amalgame de violence et de néolibéralisme qui nourrit nos sociétés contemporaines. Les contributions de Valencia sont fondamentales pour comprendre les formes complexes que prend le pouvoir dans les projets analysés dans ce document.

Suivant la ligne ouverte par Mbembe et Valencia, la section suivante aborde certaines des principales critiques de la manière dont des auteurs tels que Foucault et Agamben abordent le racisme dans leurs conceptions de la biopolitique. Avec des auteurs décoloniaux comme Ramón Grosfoguel (2012), et des féministes comme Allison Howell et Melanie Richter-Montpetit (2019), j'explore les implications de l'eurocentrisme dans le domaine de la biopolitique, où la colonialité et le genre constituent des absences épistémologiques importantes. Enfin, à partir d'une position transféministe décoloniale, je tente d'établir un dialogue avec le savoir des peuples d'Abya Yala, afin de réfléchir à ce que nous pouvons apporter aux études sur la biopolitique à partir de l'expérience de la survie et de la réexistence de cinq siècles de colonialité. Dans ce sens, je reprends les contributions de Lorena Cabnal (2010) et ses réflexions sur le paradigme cosmogonique ancestral du Sumak Kawsay, développé et incarné par les peuples autochtones du sud d'Abya Yala. Ces notions, prises avec respect et sans chercher à se les approprier ou à les dissocier des peuples, territoires et corps qui les ont créées, fournissent des éléments importants pour une lecture décoloniale de la biopolitique. En dialogue avec ces concepts, j'essaie de réfléchir aux possibilités d'une biopolitique alternative qui ne vise pas à administrer la population, qui ne pousse pas à la *vie nue*, ni ne reproduit le *capitalisme gore* et son nécropouvoir. Une biopolitique alternative, émancipatrice, qui, enracinée dans la communauté, permet de défendre la vie et les biens communs.

Enfin, ce chapitre se termine par l'analyse des manifestations de racisme structurel à l'encontre de trois populations qui incarnent la construction d'un "autre" menaçant la nation imaginée : les Afro-Costariciens, les indigènes Ngäbes et les migrants nicaraguayens. Par l'analyse critique des lois, des espaces physiques, des blagues, des nouvelles et des *mêmes*, je cherche à problématiser les manières dont la colonialité et le biopouvoir sont noués au Costa Rica pour produire ces populations en tant que *vie nue*.

La deuxième partie, *The management of the abject bodies in the city* [La gestion des corps abjects dans la ville], analyse une série de projets qui interviennent sur les corps des populations qui incarnent la dépossession, la paupérisation et la faim dans la ville. Le chapitre 4, intitulé *Hygienism : aesthetics of the "city for everyone"* [Hygiénisme : esthétique de la "ville pour tou.te.s"], analyse une série de politiques, de pratiques et de projets qui tournent autour de la position discursive de l'hygiénisme. L'hygiénisme cherche à adapter les espaces et les corps à une normativité qui répond à la productivité capitaliste. Le chapitre commence par une brève discussion sur l'émergence du discours hygiéniste et son arrivée à San José. Il développe ensuite une reconstruction historique de la mémoire collective trans*, en dialogue avec un groupe de femmes trans* qui s'autoproclament comme de « survivantes de la guerre ». Les *survivantes de la guerre* décrivent les dynamiques de criminalisation, de punition et d'administration biopolitique qu'elles ont subies entre les années 1970 et 1990 à San José, en raison des politiques hygiénistes de l'État et du gouvernement local. Une situation qu'elles décrivent comme une véritable guerre, à laquelle plusieurs de leurs compagnons n'ont pas survécu. Ce chapitre explore des articles de presse qui montrent que les politiques d'assainissement de la municipalité de San José n'ont pas cessé et continuent de déplacer les sans-abris, les migrant.e.s, les personnes qui vendent de marchandises dans la rue ou celles qui pratiquent le travail sexuel.

Une deuxième section de ce chapitre analyse le discours et les pratiques développés dans le cadre du projet *Chepe se baña*⁴. Il s'agit d'un projet bénévole et de réduction des risques qui propose des douches mobiles aux personnes vivant dans la rue dans différents quartiers de la ville. Le projet fonctionne grâce à ce qu'ils ont appelé un dispositif socio-sanitaire, dans lequel ils cherchent à guider les actions de ces personnes sans qu'elles se rendent compte qu'elles sont dirigées. Le projet cherche à rendre digne la vie des personnes vivant dans la rue grâce à l'hygiène et la réduction des risques, et tente de rendre compte de ses résultats par la publication de photographies dans la logique du "avant et après". Le chapitre se termine par un dialogue avec Elena, une ancienne usagère du projet qui s'est battue pour être autorisée à rejoindre l'équipe de bénévoles, et Fabiola, une femme trans, migrante salvadorienne, qui vit dans la ville sans adresse fixe. En résistance aux processus d'institutionnalisation pour la désintoxication, Elena et Fabiola partagent leurs expériences de réhabilitation dans la rue, et réfléchissent au potentiel de guérison que la rue représente pour elles.

Le chapitre 5, *Hunger* [Faim], répond à une émergence majeure qui a émergé lors du travail développé en 2019. De retour à San José après deux ans d'études en France, j'ai trouvé une ville pleine de ventres affamés. Ce chapitre commence par l'analyse de quelques chiffres sur la situation de la pauvreté, de l'extrême pauvreté et surtout de la faim au Costa Rica. Ensuite, j'analyse le projet Sikwa, une

⁴ « Chepe » est le surnom familial de « José », qui dans ce cas fait référence au nom de la capitale costaricienne : San José.

entreprise qui cherche à se positionner comme un centre gastronomique d'éducation et de recherche sur les traditions et la culture indigène du Costa Rica. En pratique, le projet vend des plats basés sur des recettes ancestrales des peuples indigènes, qui ont été adaptés à l'esthétique et aux prix d'une clientèle blanche et métisse des classes moyennes et supérieures de San José. Le chapitre analyse ensuite différentes situations qui se sont produites dans le cadre d'exercices d'observation ethnographique réalisés lors d'une « walking tour » [promenade] autour de la culture du café à San José, ainsi que lors d'activités destinées à la population trans*, organisées par des institutions publiques, des ONG de défense des droits humains et des chercheurs universitaires. Les interactions qui ont eu lieu dans le cadre de ces activités rendent compte de la manière dont les inégalités se matérialisent dans la ville.

Dans la troisième partie, le chapitre présente les réflexions issues d'un exercice d'observation ethnographique réalisé dans l'activité appelée *Los Juegos de la Calle* [Les jeux de la rue]. *Les jeux de la rue* est une activité caritative chrétienne dans laquelle des bénévoles recrutent des sans-abris et les organisent en équipes qui s'affrontent pour gagner une place à la cantine. Tous les participants recevront une assiette de nourriture, mais la règle est la suivante : le premier à gagner est le premier à manger. À la fin de la compétition, les participants reçoivent également la parole divine, dans un sermon qui tente de les convaincre de quitter la drogue et la rue. En parallèle, un concours de photographie a lieu parmi les volontaires, ce qui provoque une intense dynamique de spectacularisation de la misère. Le chapitre se termine par le récit de l'expérience du projet *La Feria Pinolera*⁵, dans lequel un groupe de femmes et de réfugiées et demandeuses d'asile trans* s'organisent pour gérer des stratégies de survie dans un projet d'économie solidaire féministe qui tente de rompre avec la normativité néolibérale.

La partie III de cette thèse, « *Inclusive Costa Rica*, the happiest country in the world [Le Costa Rica inclusif », le pays le plus heureux du monde], contient 3 chapitres qui abordent les manières dont le discours de l'inclusion se matérialise dans les domaines de la politique, des ONG, du marché et de la sécurité. Le chapitre 6, *The political economy of diversity* [L'économie politique de la diversité], aborde les contradictions de la dialectique inclusion/exclusion (Sawaia 1999) au Costa Rica, où l'inclusion de certains implique souvent en même temps l'exclusion et l'oppression d'autres. Le chapitre commence par une réflexion critique sur la notion d'inclusion, élaborée sur la base de dialogues avec les participant.e.s. Je retrace ensuite le moment où commence la montée des discours d'inclusion au Costa Rica, et la voie par laquelle l'inclusion devient un synonyme unidimensionnel de droits pour les populations LGBTIQ+. Cette recrudescence est influencée par la politique internationale, mais répond

⁵ « Pinolero/a » est l'ethnonyme de Nicaraguayen.ne.

également à un contexte de forte polarisation sociale entre les forces politiques progressistes et les forces politiques conservatrices (y compris les partis chrétiens et l'Église catholique). Je réfléchis ensuite à la manière dont le discours des droits de l'homme a été récupéré par le projet néolibéral. Je discute des effets que le processus d'ONGisation a eu au Costa Rica, dans le cadre de l'administration biopolitique de l'inclusion et de la continuité de la dépendance coloniale dans le pays. Par la suite, j'analyse en particulier le cas de l'organisation de travailleurs du sexe actuels et anciens, *La Sala* [Le Salon], qui a subi des pressions de la part de professionnel.e.s, d'une église chrétienne et d'une ONG abolitionniste du travail du sexe, qui ont abouti à leur expulsion et à leur déplacement des locaux qu'ils occupaient depuis de nombreuses années dans la Zone Rouge de San José. Enfin, le chapitre se termine par quelques pratiques collectives de résistance, des pratiques que j'appelle *Trans*olidarity* [Trans*olidarité⁶], qui cherchent à construire des communautés pour maintenir la vie face à la voracité du projet néolibéral. Ces pratiques ont été fondamentales pendant les pires moments de la pandémie, lorsque les politiques d'inclusion des grandes ONG, de l'État et du marché étaient complètement absentes.

Le chapitre 7, intitulé *The profitability of inclusion* [La rentabilité de l'inclusion], se penche sur l'analyse du marché de l'inclusion. Il se penche sur deux volets de l'inclusion néolibérale : la production de l'homo-citoyen en tant que sujet de l'homonormativité, et l'incorporation de l'homo-citoyen au marché, en tant que consommateur, producteur et marchandise. Ce chapitre commence par une analyse critique de la notion de citoyenneté sexuelle. La citoyenneté sexuelle est liée à l'État-nation et, au Costa Rica, elle reproduit les imaginaires nationaux avec tout leur bagage colonial. Cette section analyse un projet politico-électoral qui promeut un programme d'inclusion dans le cadre de la citoyenneté sexuelle. Il aborde également les tensions générées avec les personnes queer et trans* qui ne répondent pas aux critères homonormatifs de l'inclusion néolibérale. À partir de ces remarques, je cherche à démontrer que le cadre discursif de la citoyenneté produit une notion limitée et restrictive de l'inclusion qui reproduit les inégalités structurelles. Ensuite, j'analyse trois projets d'entrepreneuriat et de corporatisme gay qui ont réussi à faire de l'inclusion une activité rentable : La *Cámara de Comercio Diversa* [La Chambre de Commerce de la Diversité], qui promeut l'inclusion dans les entreprises privées ; l'*Expo Boda Pride LGBTI* [l'Expo Mariage Pride LGBTI], qui exploite le commerce croissant des mariages divers ; et la *Pride March* [La marche des fiertés], une expérience lucrative de privatisation d'une mobilisation populaire. Enfin, je rassemble quelques expressions de résistance à l'homonormativité néolibérale imposée par ces projets.

⁶ Pour l'union des mots « Trans* » et « solidarité ».

Finalement, le chapitre 8, intitulé *What is a safe space?* [Qu'est-ce qu'un espace sûr ?], pose la question de savoir comment les "espaces sûrs" sont compris et construits dans la ville. Pour répondre à cette question, il explore différents projets dans le domaine des loisirs, du logement et de la sécurité dans l'espace public. La première section analyse deux projets d'entrepreneuriat gay. La première est une tentative ratée de régénération queer dans la Zone Rouge de San José, par laquelle des entrepreneurs ont tenté de relancer l'économie et de redonner de la couleur au quartier grâce à un restaurant et un club gay qui stylisaient l'esthétique décadente du quartier et de ses habitants. Le second est un projet de logement inspiré du design queer, qui promet un espace sûr, privé et plein de commodités à ses locataires. La deuxième section examine comment le capacitisme compulsif et la colonialité des capacités façonnent les espaces publics et privés, y compris ceux qui sont présentés comme sûrs. En dialogue avec Alex, un militant pour les droits des personnes handicapées et LGBTQ+, j'ai arpenté les rues d'Escalante, un quartier chic rempli de magasins soi-disant inclusifs, et j'ai cartographié l'accessibilité des locaux pour les personnes en chaise roulante. Nous avons également fait le tour de plusieurs bars et clubs gays afin de déterminer leur accessibilité. La troisième section traite du fonctionnement et des implications d'un projet de sécurité dans lequel les voisins et les forces de police unissent leurs efforts pour garder les rues du Quartier Amon (un quartier historique, autrefois bourgeois) exemptes d'être indésirables ou menaçants. Les différents projets analysés reflètent une conception de la sécurité qui tend à provoquer des dynamiques d'exclusion, de déplacement, de répression et de privatisation. Le chapitre se termine par la description d'une série d'expériences et de pratiques collectives qui s'inscrivent dans la défense des biens communs. Il s'agit de pratiques qui cherchent à construire la communauté et à tisser des formes alternatives de sécurité qui résistent aux discours autoritaires et d'exclusion.

Réflexions et conclusions finales

Sur le processus de recherche

En partant de ma position sur la base des épistémologies trans*, cette thèse a cherché à développer un processus de recherche avec les personnes concernées, et non sur elles. Ce n'est pas toujours facile, mais c'est une façon de rompre la complicité avec la colonialité du pouvoir et du savoir. Cette recherche a été élaborée dans le cadre d'un dialogue avec plusieurs personnes : les participant.e.s en premier lieu, qui ont partagé avec moi leurs précieuses connaissances corporelles. Mais ce processus a également impliqué des collègues, des militants et des universitaires de différentes disciplines, qui ont accompagné les exercices d'observation dans la ville, ou contribué à des réflexions théoriques, éthiques et méthodologiques. Cela laisse sans aucun doute une empreinte sur ce travail, ce qui, je

crois, est l'une de ses qualités. Plus qu'une empreinte, des empreintes multiples, les empreintes d'un engagement en faveur du dialogue, de la transdisciplinarité, de l'écologie de savoirs, de la recherche collective et de la solidarité dans les processus de recherche.

De même, le respect des participants a été une préoccupation tout au long de cette recherche. J'ai toujours essayé de garder à l'esprit que je travaillais avec des personnes, pas des objets, et que ces personnes, de surcroît, incarnaient l'imbrication de diverses conditions d'oppression. En ce sens, j'ai essayé de répondre aux formes de rétribution qu'ils ont demandées, comme la production de deux courts métrages audiovisuels. Les courts métrages, intitulés *Todo el mundo me va a decir Jacob* [Tout le monde me dira que Jacob] y *Fabiola, Madre Tierra* [Fabiola, Terre Mère], répondent à la demande de deux participants qui souhaitaient capturer leur voix, leur histoire, leur travail, leur corps et leurs réflexions dans un récit audiovisuel susceptible d'inspirer d'autres personnes. En plus de ces produits audiovisuels, j'ai cherché à accompagner le travail des participants et de leurs collectifs, en particulier dans le contexte de la pandémie, où leurs efforts étaient axés sur le maintien de la vie des populations avec lesquelles ils travaillent.

Sur les dialogues théoriques

Dans cette étude, j'ai cherché à faire dialoguer des connaissances diverses sans les hiérarchiser. Je n'ai pas toujours réussi, mais cela a toujours marqué mon parcours. La perspective de la *pluriversalidad* [pluriversalité] (Dussel 2013) était fondamentale. Cette recherche n'aspire pas à imposer une vérité, mais à remettre en question les vérités qui nous sont imposées et à comprendre comment elles sont produites et comment elles ont un impact sur la vie quotidienne. À cette fin, il a été important de lire des théories et des recherches développées dans le Nord global, qui offrent des réflexions, des questions, des perspectives et des expériences qui enrichissent l'analyse et fournissent des outils pour réfléchir aux problèmes de nos propres réalités. Mais aussi, les théories du Sud global, les épistémologies du Sud, les études décoloniales et les féminismes, les savoirs et les cosmovisions des peuples d'Abya Yala apportent des réflexions complexes sur le pouvoir et la biopolitique, et soulignent à de multiples niveaux les oppressions qui ne sont pas vécues de la même manière dans tous les corps et dans tous les lieux. À ce dialogue pluriel, dans lequel la biopolitique rencontre le Sumak Kawsay, dans lequel les appareils du pouvoir sont lus dans une clé décoloniale, s'ajoutent les voix du savoir incarné, des personnes qui réexistent et repensent le pouvoir, l'oppression et les luttes pour maintenir la vie dans ce petit coin d'Amérique centrale.

Sur la stratégie méthodologique

L'appareil méthodologique utilisé dans cette thèse était pertinent pour aborder l'objet de la recherche à partir de perspectives multiples. Cette étude exigeait une méthodologie suffisamment souple pour résister aux complications et aux imprévus liés à l'étude des relations de pouvoir dans la ville. Une méthodologie inductive, qui ne conditionne pas l'écoute à des catégories préétablies et qui permet de faire émerger les urgences du terrain. J'avais besoin d'une méthodologie dans laquelle il serait possible d'articuler des formes de résistance à la violence épistémique, ainsi que de concevoir des formes de rétribution envers les participant.e.s dont les réflexions rendent cette recherche possible. En ce sens, la transition entre le processus ethnographique et l'Analyse Foucauldienne du Discours (ADF) a permis de combiner une série de techniques et de stratégies méthodologiques adaptées aux besoins des participants, des espaces ou des situations que je cherchais à analyser.

Étudier la ville en y entrant, en la parcourant en dialogue avec les participants, a permis d'observer les tensions provoquées par la dialectique inclusion/exclusion dans les différents projets analysés et dans la ville elle-même. Les exercices d'observation dans la ville, les entretiens informels dans les espaces publics et les entretiens-parcours ont ouvert un champ épistémologique vaste et riche, dans lequel ont émergé des réflexions, des catégories et des questions de recherche qui n'avaient pas été envisagées au départ.

L'AFD cherche à dévoiler les relations de pouvoir à travers l'analyse des discours et des dispositifs. Elle s'intéresse à ce qui a été dit et à ce qui n'a pas été dit, et surtout à l'analyse de ce qui peut être dit dans un moment et un espace donné (Arribas-Allyon et Walkerdine 2008). En ce sens, l'AFD a fonctionné comme un fil conducteur entre les différents projets et situations analysés, un fil qui tisse l'analyse de projets qui, à première vue, semblent avoir peu en commun.

Cartographie de l'inclusion, de l'exclusion et de la ré-existence

Les conclusions de cette thèse sont nouées dans une carte du pouvoir, un exercice de cartographie sociale qui cherche à identifier les dynamiques d'inclusion, d'exclusion et de ré-existence dans la ville de San José (voir page 657). Cette carte cherche à localiser dans l'espace les différents projets et situations analysés. A partir des résultats finaux de l'ACD, j'essaie de montrer les proximités, les continuités, les tensions, les ruptures et les résistances qui existent entre les différents projets.

En ce sens, il était fondamental de comprendre le pouvoir au-delà de l'exercice vertical de l'autorité. Le pouvoir, comme le souligne Foucault (2002), opère dans les actions, dans les relations. Nous la trouvons dans le droit, dans les institutions de l'État, mais aussi dans les interactions quotidiennes, dans les relations qui sont générées quotidiennement dans la ville. En ce sens, le pouvoir est plutôt un champ de forces, avec des vecteurs qui poussent dans différentes directions, simultanément, parfois

coordonnés, parfois désordonnés. Dans la lignée des contributions traditionnelles telles que les études foucaaldiennes, décoloniales, féministes et critiques de la race, du queer et du trans*, cette recherche vise à fournir des preuves empiriques de l'importance d'étudier les multiples dimensions du pouvoir et la manière dont elles sont entrelacées.

Un premier niveau des conclusions de ce travail consiste à caractériser le type de projets analysés. Cette caractérisation n'est pas conçue comme une nomenclature normative. Son objectif est d'identifier la manière dont les relations et les actions sont configurées dans le cadre de ces projets, afin de comprendre la manière dont le pouvoir opère. J'ai identifié cinq lignes principales :

Projets	Caractéristiques
Projets en format d'ONG	<i>Modèle associatif.</i> Structure verticale, généralement centralisée dans un conseil d'administration ou un directeur. Ils utilisent un vocabulaire droit-humanitariste. Dépendance à la coopération internationale. Position d'expertise ou de supériorité par rapport aux populations cibles.
Projets d'entrepreneuriat	<i>Modèle d'entreprise.</i> Explicitement pour le profit. Ils font de l'inclusion un produit. Ils conçoivent les populations comme des clients.
Projets relatifs à la politique d'égalité	<i>Modèle politico-institutionnel.</i> Ils cherchent la transformation par le biais de mécanismes normatifs au sein de l'État-nation. L'inclusion est comprise comme l'incorporation des droits dans la loi. Ils conçoivent les populations comme des citoyens.
Projets d'assainissement social	<i>Modèle répressif.</i> Inclusion basée sur l'idée d'espaces sûrs pour ceux qui le méritent. Ce sont des projets de classe, de race, de domination. Ils génèrent des dynamiques de déplacement vers les populations.
Projets communautaires ou de ré-existence	<i>Modèle activiste.</i> Différentes formes de structure. Basé sur la communauté. Résistez à l'inclusion néolibérale. Ils conçoivent les populations comme des partenaires.

Sur la base du AFD, j'ai pu identifier à un deuxième niveau d'analyse les différentes positions discursives à partir desquelles ces projets opèrent. Les positions discursives constituent la situation idéologique résultant de la participation au discours des individus et/ou des groupes et des institutions (Jäger 2007). Bien que tous les projets soient inscrits dans un macro-discours d'inclusion néolibérale, il existe des particularités qui déterminent la manière dont les relations de pouvoir sont configurées au sein des projets, ainsi qu'avec les autres habitants de la ville. J'ai identifié cinq positions discursives

majeures, qui n'épuisent peut-être pas les manières dont le pouvoir est configuré dans les projets d'inclusion dans la ville :

Position discursive	Caractéristiques
Droit-humanitariste	Il part d'une perspective universaliste des droits humaines. Tendance à reproduire une inclusion unidimensionnelle. L'inclusion consiste à adapter les lois, les espaces et les relations sociales au cadre normatif international. Fondé sur l'État-nation, il reproduit inévitablement la colonialité du pouvoir.
Commercialisation	Elle transforme les connaissances, les identités, la culture, les espaces, la nature et les biens communs en marchandises. Il dévore la dissidence. L'inclusion est une marchandise qui s'achète. Le marché régit les relations de pouvoir. La productivité et la capacité de consommation hiérarchisent la vie et l'accès à l'inclusion.
Hygiénisme	Elle cherche à gérer les corps et les espaces et à les adapter à une normativité morale et productive. Il fonctionne par le biais de dispositifs disciplinaires et de sécurité. Elle produit des relations de pouvoir dans le cadre de la biopolitique, généralement traversée par la réification.
Sécurité	La sécurité est comprise comme une condition préalable à l'inclusion. Elle utilise des mécanismes répressifs de surveillance, mais agit également sur les actions par la gestion des risques et des peurs. Le dispositif disciplinaire peut coexister avec le dispositif de sécurité. Il produit des relations de pouvoir qui construisent des ennemis, des menaces et des frontières imaginaires.
Secours	Elle part d'une position de savoir/pouvoir, externe et verticale, qui agit pour sauver des populations construites comme nécessiteuses, vulnérables ou perdues. Elle vise l'incorporation et l'assimilation. Elle ne cherche pas à transformer les bases de l'oppression. Il peut employer des mécanismes caractéristiques des dispositifs disciplinaires, bien qu'il fonctionne principalement grâce aux mécanismes des dispositifs de sécurité. Elle tend à générer des relations de pouvoir caractérisées par la réification.

Un troisième niveau d'analyse a permis d'analyser les processus et les effets de subjectivation qui se produisent dans le cadre des discours d'inclusion. Arribas-Allyon et Walkerdine (2008) proposent la subjectivation comme l'une des dimensions du AFD. Par subjectivation, ils entendent les pratiques

matérielles/signifiantes dans lesquelles les sujets sont constitués. Il est important de préciser que lorsque je parle de "sujets", je ne me réfère pas à des personnes ou à des identités spécifiques, ni à des étiquettes qui définissent des catégories essentialistes, mais à des positions dans les relations de pouvoir. Elles ne sont ni fixes ni finies, et ne s'excluent pas mutuellement. Ils sont la configuration de pratiques matérielles/signifiantes, qui résultent de processus historiques et nous produisent en tant que sujets.

J'ai identifié quatre configurations majeures de subjectivation : le sujet *régénéré* (qui intervient dans des espaces qu'il considère comme dégradés afin de les améliorer) ; le sujet *entrepreneur* (qui convertit le commun en marchandises) ; le sujet *charitable* (qui essaie de sauver les autres) ; et le sujet *bon Costaricien* (qui reproduit la race, la classe, le patriarcat, le capacitisme et le genre binaire).

En plus de ces sujets, j'ai identifié une *multiplicité réactive* (Bourcier 2017), une série de sujets dissidents de l'inclusion néolibérale. Il est difficile de les regrouper dans une catégorie de subjectivation en raison de leur grande diversité et de leur pluralité. Ce sont des sujets qui sont produits comme minorisés, résiduels ou indésirables dans les relations de pouvoir. Cependant, ce sont des sujets qui résistent, qui rejettent la marchandisation de leurs luttes et de leurs vies, qui n'aspirent pas à s'assimiler comme de "bons Costariciens". Au contraire, ces sujets s'engagent à défendre les biens communs, à construire des communautés qui maintiennent la vie contre l'assaut du projet néolibéral et de la colonialité.

La ville comme assemblage de dispositifs de pouvoir

La gestion des corps dans la ville est régie par la normativité néolibérale. La production, la reproduction et la consommation gèrent la vie et les relations dans la ville. En examinant comment les discours de pouvoir/savoir opèrent sur les actions, les corps et les objets dans l'espace public, et en prêtant attention aux relations entre eux, le cas de la ville de San José nous permet de voir que les dispositifs disciplinaires coexistent avec les dispositifs de sécurité. Différentes technologies de pouvoir opèrent simultanément, par différents moyens, pour maintenir la normativité néolibérale.

À partir d'une analyse des relations de pouvoir qui se configurent autour des différents projets d'inclusion à San José, je soutiens que la ville, plus qu'une scène, est un territoire en conflit. Bien que les autorités et les habitants de la *zone de l'être* aient cherché à la proclamer comme leur propriété, cette recherche nous a également permis de reconnaître les actions et les projets collectifs qui contestent le pouvoir et cherchent à développer des biopolitiques alternatives dans la ville afin de maintenir la vie. Selon Foucault (2001) les dispositifs de pouvoir sont un ensemble de discours, d'institutions, de lois, de mesures administratives, d'énoncés scientifiques, de propositions

philosophiques, morales et philanthropiques, de planifications architecturales, de structures dans l'espace, qui sont agencés pour le contrôle et/ou l'administration de la population. En regardant la carte qui rassemble les différents projets analysés, Je suis favorable à conclure, à la suite d'Agamben (2006) que la ville néolibérale est un assemblage de dispositifs de pouvoir, où la vie et la mort sont administrées par des technologies qui gèrent les corps et les espaces. C'est dans ces espaces, dans les sujets qui les habitent et dans les relations qu'ils entretiennent, que se consolident les dispositifs de pouvoir.

Après un long processus d'observation, de dialogues pluriels, d'analyse critique du discours et de réflexivité, je conclus à la validité des hypothèses qui sous-tendent cette recherche. La première hypothèse postule que les projets d'inclusion conservateurs et progressistes de San José partagent la rhétorique du "sauvetage", qui implique une intervention sur les corps et les espaces, façonnée par les imaginaires nationaux. En effet, il est possible d'identifier la rhétorique du sauvetage de manière explicite dans de nombreux discours qui sous-tendent les projets analysés. De même, le AFD a également permis de retracer la rhétorique du sauvetage qui est implicite dans les pratiques et les relations de pouvoir. Cependant, ce n'est pas la seule position discursive identifiée dans les projets. En ce sens, je nuancerais cette hypothèse en disant que ce que tous les projets d'inclusion partagent, au-delà du sauvetage, c'est la normativité néolibérale. La normativité néolibérale contient la position discursive du sauvetage, mais aussi l'hygiénisme, la marchandisation et la sécurité. Au nom de l'inclusion néolibérale, toutes sortes d'interventions sur les corps et les espaces sont justifiées, allant, comme nous l'avons vu, des formes les plus subtiles de gestion aux formes les plus violentes de répression.

Les imaginaires de la blancheur, de la démocratie, de la paix, de l'homogénéité et des valeurs religieuses nous produisent en tant que sujets et en tant que collectivité, façonnent la normativité et influencent la manière dont nous nous rapportons les uns aux autres. Les imaginaires nationaux sont compatibles avec la normativité néolibérale. Ils renforcent les oppressions structurelles et l'imbrication de ces oppressions sur les corps et la vie. Les imaginaires nationaux façonnent les modalités d'exercice du pouvoir.

La deuxième hypothèse était que la notion d'inclusion au Costa Rica reproduit un discours colonial. Tout au long de cette étude, j'ai essayé d'établir des dialogues entre les théories, les pensées et les connaissances du Nord et du Sud, ainsi que des dialogues avec les habitants de la ville de San José. Dans ces dialogues, la colonialité revient sans cesse à la surface. Dans un pays qui aspire à devenir « une partie » du Nord global, avec une population qui s'efforce de se blanchir, qui méprise ses voisins et qui se croit bénie par Dieu et la Vierge, l'inclusion ne peut échapper à la colonialité.

En examinant la carte du pouvoir, il apparaît clairement que la fibre qui lie tous ces projets est la colonialité sous ses différentes formes. La colonialité du pouvoir, du savoir, du genre, de la capacité, entrelace les différents projets, les soutient, les configure, les produit. Les différents cas analysés tout au long de cette thèse montrent que le biopouvoir ne s'exerce pas seulement dans les actions du gouvernement et des autorités, mais qu'il vit dans les liens, dans les relations, dans les interactions sociales quotidiennes. Le panoptique est plus diffus que jamais. Mais cette diffusion ne se traduit pas par des fissures ou une atténuation de ses domaines, mais plutôt par une sorte de multiplication et d'intensification. À côté du panoptique comestible dont Preciado (2013) nous mettait en garde, dans lequel nous avalons volontiers le contrôle, et du panoptique portable qui façonne désormais nos manières de nous lier et de voir le monde, j'ai trouvé une multiplicité de micro-panoptiques qui veillent sur la ville. J'ai trouvé une armée de "bons costariciens" transformés dans les yeux des forces de l'ordre, et des bénévoles charitables, des homopoliticiens, des responsables d'ONGs, des hommes d'affaires et des commerçants transformés en machines qui nettoient, rangent, domestiquent et embellissent les corps et les espaces pour garantir la productivité et l'accumulation du capital.

Le biopouvoir nous habite et parfois nous ne sommes même pas conscients du rôle que nous jouons au sein de la gouvernementalité. Peut-être s'agit-il d'une conclusion qui peut offrir des perspectives pour les projets de résistance. Le pouvoir étant configuré dans la clé de la colonialité, il est urgent d'articuler la résistance sur des fronts décoloniaux, non seulement comme une réponse ou une contestation, mais comme un chemin, comme de multiples chemins qui renoncent à la violence coloniale et s'engagent dans une autre biopolitique, une biopolitique décoloniale qui soutient, produit et célèbre la vie. Cette étude est un effort critique et réflexif pour comprendre les implications des pratiques matérielles et signifiantes qui nous produisent en tant que sujets, et pour comprendre les différentes manières dont nous participons à ces relations de pouvoir, avec l'intention que cela fournisse d'une certaine manière des outils pour transformer les manières dont nous reproduisons la domination et l'oppression.

0. Introduction

Costa Rica is a small country that proclaims itself the “Central American Switzerland”. This slogan, sung in the lyrics of patriotic hymns, condenses a series of colonial imaginaries that produce the Costa Rican identity as a white, peaceful and profoundly democratic nation, where a broad middle class prevails, blurring the gaps between rich and poor (A. Jiménez 1998b; Sojo 2010; Sandoval 2004b; Acuña 2002). These national imaginaries have been reproduced and reinforced for over two centuries by governments and authorities that find in these discourses a prolific instrument for governmentality. They have also been used by companies to mobilize international and national capitals. These imaginaries have been internalized by the population, configuring our national identity under a whitewashed and often supremacist illusion.

At a political-economic level, Costa Rica embarked on the path of neoliberalism in the early 1980s. Throughout these years, a series of programs and policies of economic liberalization have been implemented in the country, promoting the reduction of the state and free trade. In addition, the Catholic Church exercises great power over the country's political decisions and culture. Costa Rica is today the only confessional state in the Americas. Economic liberalism and social conservatism make up the recipe of the cocktail that right-wing governments have prescribed for years.

In 2014, after decades of bipartisanship between two right-wing parties, the Acción Ciudadana Party (PAC) came to power with an alternative program and a centrist discourse. Despite its discourse, during two periods of government, this party continued to navigate the neoliberal path, even achieving results that openly right-wing governments had failed to achieve (e.g., the prohibition of the right to strike in most public services). If they had a right-wing economic policy, they sought to compensate with progressive policies on certain social issues, especially with regard to LGBTIQ+ rights. They leveraged the human rights discourse to position themselves as centrist governments. The first PAC government began to take affirmative action and approve inclusion policies favorable to gays, lesbians and trans⁷ people. It was followed by a second government of this party, led by Carlos

⁷ Throughout this thesis I use the word trans* with an asterisk adopting a widely developed position within the field of Trans* Epistemologies (see Radi 2019; 2020). The word ‘trans*’ is an umbrella term used in the field of Trans* Studies to name the diversity of people whose gender does not match the sex they were assigned at birth. The asterisk next to the word trans is an intervention strategy that operates on a visual, semantic and political level. It comes from programming languages and works as a wildcard: anything can be placed after the asterisk (Radi 2020). For example, trans* can refer to trans women / men / knowledge / scholars / children / or even nothing, just trans. However, I put the self-determination of the participants before my own positioning, so on occasion I will use trans women (without asterisk) or similar formulations, respecting the ways in which the participants indicated they wanted to be referred to.

Alvarado Quesada, who continued the path initiated by his predecessor, although veering increasingly to the right. Neoliberalism and human rights became the new cocktail that the PAC government prescribed to the population.

Although insufficient, these policies make of Costa Rica today, the country with the most progressive legislation for transgender people and same-sex couples in Central America. In the context of the socio-political situation faced by other countries in the region, such as Nicaragua and Honduras, where authoritarian governments persecute, criminalize and assassinate social movements (including LGBTIQ+ and feminist activists), Costa Rica has become a receiving country for migrants seeking refuge to protect their lives. This has not translated into specific support for LGBTIQ+⁸ migrants, who, as I will elaborate in the thesis, rather claim that the Costa Rican state does not address the particularities that exile implies for people who embody sex/gender dissidences, and rather, often reproduces practices of structural discrimination.

In the late 2010s, rainbow styled inclusion became the PAC's governments' flag. However, these policies did not advance without opposition. Conservative political parties have proliferated and strengthened over the past decade, including parties with a Christian fundamentalist ideology, whose bases continue to grow. Today, they constitute an important political force in the country. At the institutional level, Fabricio Alvarado, presidential candidate of fundamentalist Christian ideology, won the first electoral round in 2018, and although he finally lost the presidential election, today this ideology is a significant force in the Congress.

In 2022 Fabricio Alvarado came in third place. However, a neoliberal populist candidate, Rodrigo Chaves, won the second round of elections with a virtually unknown party. The discontent accumulated after two PAC governments was recovered by Chaves, who also received the support of most conservative religious parties. Chaves, who was sanctioned for sexual harassment behavior against subordinates while working for the World Bank, embodies the figure of a strong authoritarian man, who promises to bring change to the country. In his first months in office, he began by eliminating some of the PAC's LGBTIQ+ inclusion initiatives. For example, he desisted from

⁸ Throughout this study I use the terms "LGBTIQ+ people" or "LGBTIQ+ movements", although I believe that this designation can be problematic. I find this alphabetic soup uncomfortable and artificial. In its romantic version, it pretends the articulation and unity of the struggles of those who everyday face the oppression of the cisheteropatriarchal regime. History has shown us the importance of the articulation of struggles. We are stronger when we come together. But the origins of this conceptual articulation do not come from the movement, but from the technical language of international cooperation. This articulation has not been horizontal or equal for all parties, and its effects on the bodies marked by the last letters of this algorithm have been devastating. However, since this is the designation used by most collectives in Costa Rica, I use it in this thesis. I try to do so critically, as Eli Vásquez (2012) points out, recognizing the plurality of bodies, demands and organizations that cannot and should not be homogenized.

commemorating the international day against homo/lesbo/bi/transphobia and raising the rainbow flag in state institutions on May 17. Furthermore, he eliminated the position of the Presidential Commissioner for LGBTI Population Affairs, and instead established a Commissioner for Social Inclusion, who will be in charge of LGBTIQ+, indigenous and Afro-descendant populations. This should not be interpreted, however, as an advance towards an intersectional perspective, but rather as a reduction of public policies and social investment for these populations.

As an effect of this ideological clash, recovered by the political parties to attract votes, and the agitated discussions exploited by the mass media, social polarization in Costa Rica has become exacerbated. While the country continues to move steeply to the right, the feminist agenda and the rights of LGBTIQ+ people continue to be a topic of public debate. According to a study by Costa Rican researchers Ilka Treminio and Adrián Pignataro (2021), opposition to equal marriage has a direct correlation with the tendency to vote for radical right-wing parties. In this context, the tensions surrounding rights of women and LGBTIQ+ populations in Costa Rica have been shaped on the basis of a Manichean, binary logic that draws two sides with competing discursive positions. On one side, there are groups so called “pro-Life” (mainly religious groups with political activities), who have strong forces in the National Congress and have solid bases in working class Christian and Catholic communities. They have anti-LGBTIQ+, anti-abortion, anti-feminist positions, and part of them also share anti-migrants, pro weapons positions. On the other side, there are a wide range of groups, from NGOs, enterprises, politicians and civilians who share a “pro-human rights” position. During the PAC governments they had control of the executive branch. They are favorable to LGBTIQ+ rights, and part of them support the right to abortion too.

However, beyond the differences, a good part of these sectors share a position in favor of the neoliberal project. This thesis seeks precisely to go beyond the Manichean polarization, and to investigate how national imaginaries and coloniality are linked to biopolitics in neoliberal inclusion projects. The analysis seeks to trace the ways in which biopolitics manages life and bodies in the city, through inclusion projects.

The path that led me to this research

The direct antecedent of this thesis is a process of affective and militant research that I have sustained for more than 8 years with a group of trans women in San José. It has been a deeply transformative process, the most intense epistemic and formative experience in which I have been involved. I approached this community searching for an absence, looking for dialogues that I could not find in books, papers, or even in so-called LGBTIQ+ organizations (which in practice were constituted by gay

and lesbian people) with a human rights agenda. My concern was political, academic and also personal. I wanted to meet trans* people who were absent from these middle-class organizations who named them in their objectives. I wanted to know their thoughts, their concerns, their needs, their stories that did not even appear in the official history of LGBT movements in the country. In short, I wanted to listen to them.

I found them in the streets of San José, a collectivity, a multiplicity of trans women who have built a community of affection (Valencia 2019), an affective community that sustains life against the necropolitics and structural transphobia in neoliberal Costa Rica. Many of them are activists in the organization Transvida, others are autonomous activists and others prefer not to call themselves activists. After my first approaches to this community, we began what is known in participatory action research as a familiarization process. We agreed to get to know each other better before deciding if we wanted to formalize some kind of relationship. I put my research interests on hold and began to accompany different activities carried out by the grassroots organization Transvida, and to support specific needs of the community. Over time we developed bonds of trust, complicity and solidarity that continue to this day.

They became my teachers, who taught me life lessons that I never found at the university. Despite being born and raised in San José and having lived for several years in the urban center, with them I got to know a different side of the city: other spaces, other dynamics, other inhabitants, other temporality, other histories, other forms of organization and re-existence.

In the context of this process, I also embraced my own transition, the affirmation of my handcrafted gender constructed in transfeminist dialogues with this community. It was with them that I found the words to recognize myself as a trans* person, as a Central American transfeminist activist, descendant of a lineage of warriors and survivors who opened all the roads so that today a person like me can write a thesis and teach in a public university. Most of the girls⁹ call me brother and I call them sisters. I consider it an appropriate way to name the kind of relationship we have built. However, I am fully aware that I am not one of them. For one thing, I am not a trans woman. But beyond that, my privileges of class, of race, my life history, the access I had to formal education, among other things, mark gigantic abysses between my living conditions and theirs, between my life chances and theirs. These markers and material conditions also determine the unequal ways in which we engage in a research process. As Jin Haritaworn points out with great clarity:

⁹ I use the nouns "woman" or "girls" to name this group of participants, respecting their will to be named that way. Likewise, I use "community" to name their collectivity, as it is the noun that they themselves have designated to name it.

The relationship between 'scientist and experimental subject, social scientist and research participant, journalist and news subject' is characterized by inescapable epistemic violence, including and especially where both share markers of oppression, as in the case of feminist ethnographer mining the lives of women in prison (Haritaworn 2015, 29).

I did not seek to mine or extract their knowledge, but I agree, as I will detail throughout this thesis, that epistemic violence is inescapable within the modern colonial university. For instance, while I received a grant to develop the research project, the trans women, whose stories and knowledge sustained the study, continued to live in the same precarious conditions and faced the same daily violence in the city. Faced with this, we have discussed and built together ways to mitigate epistemic violence, as well as forms of compensation. I continue to support their processes today, and we also continue to develop projects and research together.

We began to explore different participatory research methodologies, in order to enquire whatever research or existential questions stroke us. Research and knowledge production were focused on creating narratives and tools that could be useful for them, in their daily resistance against a system that continuously tries to silence their existence. As part of this process, I wrote my master's thesis entitled *Género, Clase y Afectividad: Vínculos y Comunicación en una Comunidad de Mujeres Trans*¹⁰ (Fournier 2017), as well as a series of academic and non-academic products with and for the community. That study was developed in a militant and participatory ethnographic process, in which we weaved the history of trans women in the city of San José between the 1970s and 2010s, based on plural conversations among survivors. To rescue the memory of the resistance of trans women is more than the systematization of a history of struggle, it is a collective practice of knowledge construction, a recognition of the path they have travelled and a dialectical reflection on what could come. In addition, this process generated a voluminous oral history archive, a history of survival, of affection, of complicity, of the emergence an autonomous trans community.

This process drove me time and again to the city where I grew up, drove me to think about it, to walk through it, to look at it with different eyes, to question it. At the same time, as the discourse of inclusion gained momentum in national politics and polarization filled the media, the word inclusion kept bouncing around in my head. I had been working with this community for a few years and the promised inclusion was nowhere to be seen. And although someone like me managed to grasp a few breaths of air with the new policies and regulations, inclusion did not reach the spaces that these trans women inhabit.

¹⁰ Gender, Class, and Affectivity: bonds and communication in a community of transgender women

Thus, conscious of my privileges, disgusted even by some of them, fully aware that my trans* experience is very different from that of that of my *compañeras*, and that the differences are not mere nuances in a rainbow but material conditions of existence, imbricated systems of oppression, I decided to make of this the object of study of my doctoral thesis. This was the path that led me to research inclusion and the city, inclusion in the city of San José.

Inclusion in the city, inclusive city

San José is Costa Rica's largest, most populated city, therefore, an arena where ideological projects and social crashes materialize in the form of biopolitics. If we think of biopolitics as a form of political rationality through which life and population are managed, regulated and normalized, then spaces, bodies, relations and living conditions, are the substrates for this form of governmentality.

During the past decades, governments from various political parties have translated social imaginaries on national identity into urban politics on the city of San José. Local authorities have been developing programs to repopulate the city, make it safer and cleaner, and "activate" its public spaces. Parades and festivals, construction of commercial hubs and tall habitational towers (accessible for upper-middle class citizens) and increasing the presence of police officers in the streets constitute some of the main lines of action of the local governments in San José.

Parallely, beyond the official policies and the institutional conceptions on the city, a growing number of civil society organizations and collectives are developing projects to intervene in public spaces. From both sides of the apparent ideological polarization, projects to intervene in the city are launched. These projects seek to "rescue" San José, to "regenerate it", to "reactivate it". They advocate a city for everyone, a truly inclusive city. The diversity of this collectives goes from Christian charity to social hygienism, young volunteers that set up portable showers to clean up unhoused people, a group of gay entrepreneurs who seek to regenerate the Red-light district, and turn it into a "rainbow district" (a pinkwashed, gentrified touristic area with gay-friendly bars, restaurants and shops), entrepreneurs that sell luxury inclusive apartments on queer designed habitational towers, neighbors that join forces with the police to displace unwanted people from the streets, and so on.

These projects appear, at first glance, very different amongst each other. However, despite the variety of their slogans and backgrounds, and the apparent differences in the methods they propose, these projects have a common core: the idea that the city must be intervened in order to make it accessible, clean, enjoyable, inhabitable and safe.

Discourses as social practices produce realities, but they are rarely transparent. It is in their assumptions and omissions, in the subtleness and pragmatic implications of words and statements,

where we find the power arena that discourses harbor (Foucault 1982, 1993). If we take discourse as the means for production of truth (Foucault 1982), the ideological side of these projects is revealed. They emerge from normative notions on what the city should be and who should it be for.

There are important voids or omissions in these very popular initiatives for “appropriation” of the city. Discourses of repopulation, activation, regeneration, and rescue evoke the idea of an empty city. But San José is not empty, nor dead. It has been inhabited for decades by people who dwell below what Fanon (2010) describes as the zone of non-being. When we perform an analysis of race, class, gender, sexuality and ableism, these discourses have in fact several points in common: in general, they reproduce the imaginary of Costa Rica as a white, middle-class, peaceful, democratic nation; in short terms, they reproduce the imaginary of the Costa Rican exceptionality within Central America.

The idea of a city that needs to be rescued raises the question: from what or from whom does it need to be rescued? With the fast proliferation of projects to make the city safer and more enjoyable for deserving citizens, other inhabitants who fail to meet the normativity of the nation, like sex-workers, unhoused people, migrants and impoverished trans women who have been struggling for decades to survive in San José, find their range of mobility and even their life chances reduced in the public space.

In this context, San José becomes an arena of conflict, where its inhabitants experience dynamics of displacement, repression, gentrification, impoverishment, social hygenism, and discrimination. My interest relies on this arena: the contending discourses of inclusion in the city, and the different forms through which these projects intervene the bodies and the public spaces. I am also interested in what lies beneath. These discourses obliterate other narratives that try to escape the political dichotomy and the neoliberal forms of inclusion. Beyond the evident vertical axis of power that the government exercises on the city, I seek to grasp the power relationships on the horizontal axis, between the people and groups who use, imagine and occupy the city. This thesis seeks to analyze, from a decolonial perspective, these dominant discourses and practices of inclusion in the city, as well as the narratives of people who inhabit the city.

Research Problem:

In the context described above, the notion of inclusion has gained relevance in political discussions in Costa Rica. At first glance, inclusion policies and practices are a laudable thing. However, the discourses that promote inclusion in Costa Rica have rarely been problematized and analyzed from the critical perspective of biopolitics and decoloniality.

In this work, I think of inclusion discourses and practices as both cultural and material processes. I approach this analysis by circulating through the city of San José, observing quotidian interactions,

visiting projects for inclusion, dialoguing with inhabitants and mapping key areas. This approach is based on Christina Hanhardt's provocation to think of the city as "a critical nexus for analyzing how politics, policies and property have indelibly shaped LGBT social movements, in particular in response to violence" (Hanhardt, p.11). I think of the city of San José as a critical nexus for analyzing how biopolitics and national imaginaries have shaped social movements for inclusion (including LGBTIQ+), and the way in which politics, policies and property have determined the power relations that traverse bodies, spaces and social relations. Violence, therefore, will be understood in this research as a complex dynamic, with expressions of class, gender, race, sexuality, ableism and the combination of the above and possibly others.

While they differ on who should be the beneficiaries of inclusion projects, and what are the proper mechanisms to promote an inclusive city, today, almost every politician and party running for local or national elections, either progressive or conservative, offers proposals to include "back into society" all those people who have been expelled from the social productive life. In other words, they promote neoliberal inclusion. NGOs of different backgrounds compete for funding of projects for inclusion in the city of San José. Entrepreneurs and tourist agencies publicize Costa Rica as the gay paradise of inclusion, while international and Costa Rican Christian volunteers come to save the souls of sex-workers by helping them get back on the right track of social inclusion.

Although they do not agree on a sole definition, everyone seems to be talking about inclusion. A series of questions arise: What does inclusion mean? Who are these projects seeking to "include"? Why were they excluded in the first place? What does it take to be included? Who gets excluded from inclusion projects? Who gets erased?

From a biopolitical approach, I was interested in analyzing the way in which inclusion is used to regulate life and population. From a decolonial perspective, I was particularly interested in the way in which inclusion discourses and practices reproduce coloniality of power and being (Castro-Gomez 2000; Grosfoguel 2007), and the ways in which inclusion practices affect those who dwell in the zone of non-being (Fanon, 2010).

Taking the Foucaultian notion of power (Foucault 1993), this thesis pursues to untangle the microphysics of power that are produced and reproduced in quotidian interactions: the frictions, the contradictions, the practices of domination and resistance, the biopolitical tensions around dichotomies such as cleanness-filthiness, habitable-inhabitable, safe-unsafe, enjoyable-unpleasant, the tessellations between different systems of oppression in the matrix of domination (Hill Collins 2000), and national imaginaries that interlace all of the above. I approach discourses as the production of knowledge, truth and normativity, and social practices as the living materialization of power

relations. Concretely, I seek to address the problem of **how do biopolitical normativity and national imaginaries, configure the discourses and practices of inclusion in the city of San José, Costa Rica.**

Research objectives and hypothesis:

As the general objective, this thesis proposes **to analyze the configuration of biopolitical normativity and national imaginaries in the discourses and practices of inclusion in the city of San José, Costa Rica.**

In order to conduct this analysis, this research revolved around three specific objectives:

1. To analyze discourses of diverse projects on the notion of inclusion in the city of San José.
2. To examine practices of biopolitical normativity in projects for inclusion and the tensions they produce on everyday interactions in the public space in San José.
3. To explore the narratives, reflections and resistance practices with dissidents from the notion of inclusion imposed in the city of San José.

I started this research process with two hypothesis: (1) that both conservative and progressive projects of inclusion in San José, share the rhetoric of “rescue”, which implies the intervention on bodies and spaces, wrought by social imaginaries on national identity, and therefore, (2) that the notion of inclusion in Costa Rica reproduces the coloniality of power.

Taking these hypotheses as a compass, the chapters that follow constitute the results of a research process that attempted to be dialogic and participatory. This research was developed in dialogue with multiple people: the participants, in the first place, who shared with me their valuable embodied knowledge. But also with different colleagues, fellow activists and scholars from different disciplines who got involved in this process, who accompanied the observation exercises in the city, or contributed with theoretical, ethical and methodological reflections. Although this is the product of my exercise in writing and weaving, the words and reflections are not mine alone. They are the product of collective reflections. My work has been to establish lines of dialogue between diverse forms of knowledge and bridges of communication between sectors that live and resist oppression. Collectivization undoubtedly leaves an imprint on this work, which, I believe, is one of its strengths. More than a footprint, multiple footprints, the footprints of a commitment to dialogue, to transdisciplinarity, to the ecology of knowledge (Santos 2014), to collective research and to solidarity in the research processes.

Description of the thesis plan

This thesis begins with a chapter that outlines the ethical/epistemic framework from which the research process is developed. Ethical reflections run through the entire work; however, this first chapter provides a framework that explains my position in relation to the object of study, the participants and, in general, the processes of knowledge production in the modern colonial university.

This research is developed taking the approach of “Epistemologías del Sur” (epistemologies from the south) as an epistemic and ethic framework. Santos (2014) introduces the notion of “sociology of absences”, to point out the silences that hegemonic epistemology produces around particular experiences, subjectivities and forms of knowledge. These silences reflect the political side of research, the power relations where some forms of knowledge, practices and existences are dismissed as residual, when they do not respond to the impositions of dominant knowledge. Through this absences, modern science erases diversity and possibilities of other ways of thinking, of creating, and existing. The coloniality of knowledge not only reflects a one-sided view of the world, that serves the interest of domination and oppression, but it actively creates it, and imposes it by displaying it as the only possible one. Santos (2014) says that this hegemonic reason causes a devastating effect, similar to that of large monocultures on biodiversity. To face this, he proposes to create epistemological ecologies, and invites us to generate an ecology of knowledge, in which stories, voices, subjectivities, forms of thinking and existing that have been marginalized, silenced and erased, can germinate.

From this perspective, *Chapter 1. Ethical/Epistemic framework* begins by establishing my position within trans* epistemologies. It then addresses a reflection on militant research, which seeks a horizontal and respectful approach to the knowledge, demands and needs of the communities we work with. The chapter explores the concern for ways to mitigate or compensate for the epistemic violence that academic research inevitably produces. To this end, a second section develops a reflection on the coloniality of power, gender and knowledge, as well as the contributions that have been developed by the decolonial turn. This study adopts a decolonial position with respect to the analysis of the object of study, but also with respect to the process of knowledge production with the participants.

In a third section, this chapter presents the methodological apparatus from which this research is developed: a combination of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis and ethnographic process (with techniques such as informal interviews, go-along interviews and social cartography). Regarding the fieldwork, the largest part was developed in 2019. Originally, I had planned a second fieldwork phase in April 2020, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic it had to be suspended. I moved back to Costa Rica in March 2021, which allowed me to conduct further interviews and observation exercises to finish collecting the data for the analysis. In total, I conducted more than 40 observation exercises in public

spaces, institutional and community activities, inclusion projects and resistance experiences. Within the framework of these observations, I conducted dozens of informal interviews. Ten of these are directly referenced in the work, but all of them contributed to the construction of my reflections on San José. I conducted 12 semi-structured interviews and 7 "parkour-interviews" (interviews in motion). I also conducted several cartographic exercises in dialogue with the participants. The material was transcribed using the open-source software Sonal. For the analysis I used the Atlas-ti software, following a flexible version of Jäger's (2007) proposal for Foucauldian Discourse Analysis. For the writing process, in tune with the ecology of knowledge, I used the technique of discontinuous narratives. This technique seeks to interweave the narratives of different members of a setting to construct a text with multiple voices (Biglia and Bonet-Martí 2009, 13).

Beyond the techniques, this chapter also addresses the relationships established with the participants and the ethical considerations surrounding the bonds we build. Finally, the chapter concludes with some reflections on the place of aspects such as informality, temporality, trust, and compensation in a process of affective research such as this one.

After presenting the ethical/epistemic framework that will frame the research process, the development of this work is organized in three main parts. *Part I, Biopolitics and coloniality: a Costa Rican brew*, contains two chapters that outline the historical context and the theoretical basis for the analysis of this research. *Chapter 2, "The Central American Switzerland": a historical perspective*, attempts to trace the historical conditions that produce Costa Rican national imaginaries and identity as a nation that resembles Switzerland more than its Central American neighbors. The chapter begins by analyzing one of the most problematic and deeply rooted imaginaries in our culture: Costa Rican whiteness. This section examines the origins of the imaginary of whiteness and how this discourse has fueled structural racism in Costa Rican laws and culture. A second section analyzes other national imaginaries linked to whiteness: innate peace, eternal democracy, equality, and the divine protection of the nation blessed by the Virgin of the Angels. I analyze these imaginaries from the logic of the coloniality of power, and I attempt to problematize them by contrasting them with the realities experienced by different people in Costa Rica today.

In the third section of Chapter 2, I propose a critical analysis of the instruments that have been used to construct official statistics on ethnicity in Costa Rica, and their role in the reproduction of the imaginary of whiteness, which tends to whitewash mestizaje in this country. The conceptual contributions of feminist authors from Abya Yala are a fundamental tool for the decolonial analysis in this section. In this sense, I take up Lélia Gonzalez's concept of *amefricanity* and Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui's concept of *Ch'ixi mestizaje* to reflect on the possibilities of a critical mestizaje. A mestizaje

that does not pursue to assimilate itself to the European colonial ideal of whiteness, but rather seeks to recognize its variegated roots, and commit itself to the liberation of the peoples of Abya Yala. Finally, this chapter explores some experiences of re-existence developed by racialized and mestizx people who aim to put in tension the imaginaries of Costa Rican identity through activism.

Chapter 3, Biopolitics of embodied imaginaries, discusses theoretical and conceptual developments around the notions of biopolitics, biopower and necropolitics. More than a description of the main lines in the vast field of biopolitics, this chapter seeks to provide tools to answer questions such as: How does biopolitics operate in a colonized country that aspires to European whiteness like Costa Rica? What forms can necropolitics take in a country that claims to incarnate an innate peace? How are biopolitics and coloniality intertwined? What effects does this imbrication produce on bodies, spaces, power relations and practices of resistance?

In the first section, the chapter explores the notion of biopolitics in the work of Michel Foucault (1978; 2003; 2009; 2008). Concepts such as biopower and the security apparatus are of particular relevance to this research. Next, I discuss further developments in the field of biopolitics, such as the concepts of Homo Sacer and bare life proposed by Giorgio Agamben (1998). I continue this chapter with works that provide some current readings to understand the form taken by biopower in contemporary neoliberalism, with authors such as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2013), Paul B. Preciado (2013) and Sam Bourcier (2017). I then address the notion of necropolitics proposed by Achille Mbembe (2013). I complement this section with Warren Montan's (2013) contributions on the concept of necro-economics, a way of understanding how the capitalist mode of production is functional and necessary for necropolitics. Furthermore, I take up the contributions of Sayak Valencia (2010) on necropolitics and gore capitalism, to think about the way necropolitics take in contexts where the state no longer has the monopoly on war.

Following the line opened by Mbembe and Valencia, the next section addresses some of the main critiques of the way in which authors like as Foucault and Agamben address racism in their conceptions of biopolitics. With decolonial authors such as Ramón Grosfoguel (2012), and feminist authors such as Allison Howell and Melanie Richter-Montpetit (2019), I explore the implications of Eurocentrism in the field of biopolitics, where coloniality and gender constitute important epistemological absences. Finally, from a decolonial transfeminist position, I attempt to establish a dialogue with knowledges of the peoples of Abya Yala, in order to consider what can the experiences of surviving and resisting five centuries of coloniality contribute to the field of biopolitics. In this sense, I take up the contributions of Lorena Cabnal (2010) and her reflections on the ancestral cosmogonic paradigm of Sumak Kawsay, developed and embodied by the indigenous peoples of southern Abya Yala. These notions, taken with

respect and avoiding any intention of appropriating or disassociating them from the peoples, territories and bodies that created them, provide important elements for a decolonial reading of biopolitics. In dialogue with these concepts, I try to think of the possibilities of an alternative biopolitics that does not seek to administer the population, that does not push bare life, nor reproduce gore capitalism and its necropower. An alternative, emancipatory biopolitics, which, rooted in the community, allows us to defend life and the commons.

Finally, this chapter closes by analyzing manifestations of structural racism against subpopulations that embody the construction of an "other" that threatens the imagined nation. Through the critical analysis of laws, physical spaces, jokes, news and memes, I seek to problematize the way in which coloniality and biopower are knotted in Costa Rica to produce these sub-populations as bare life.

Part II: The management of the abject bodies in the city, analyzes projects that intervene on the bodies of the sub-populations that embody dispossession, impoverishment and hunger in the city. *Chapter 4, Hygienism: aesthetics of the "city for everyone"*, examines a series of policies, practices and projects that revolve around the discursive position of hygienism. The chapter begins with a brief discussion of the emergence of hygienist discourse and its arrival to San José. It then develops a historical reconstruction of trans* collective memory in dialogue with a group of participants who call themselves "war survivors". The war survivors describe the dynamics of criminalization, punishment and biopolitical administration that they suffered between the 1970s and 1990s in San José. The chapter also explores if hygienist discourses persist today.

A second section of this chapter analyzes the discourse and practices developed in *Chepe se baña*, a project that works on charity and harm reduction, taking mobile showers to different parts of the city for people living on the streets. The project seeks to dignify the lives of unhoused people through hygiene, and tries to account for its results by publishing photographs in the logic of "before and after". The chapter closes with a dialogue with Elena, a former user of the project who joined the team of volunteers, and Fabiola, a Salvadoran trans woman, who defends her decision to live in the city without a fixed address. They both share their experiences of rehabilitation on the street.

Chapter 5, Hunger, responds to a major emergent that came up during the fieldwork in 2019. Upon returning to San José after a couple of years studying in France, I found a city full of hungry bellies. This chapter begins by analyzing some figures on the situation of poverty, extreme poverty and hunger in Costa Rica. Next, I analyze the Sikwa project, a venture that seeks to position itself as a gastronomic center for education and research on Costa Rican ancient culinary traditions and native culture. The chapter continues by analyzing different situations around hunger and inequalities that occurred in the framework of ethnographic observation exercises carried out during a walking tour around the

coffee culture in San José, as well as in activities addressed to the trans* population, organized by state institutions, human rights NGOs and academic researchers.

In the third section, the chapter presents the reflections derived from an ethnographic observation exercise carried out in the activity called "The Street Games". The Street Games is a Christian charity event in which volunteers recruit unhoused people and organize them into teams that compete to win a place in the dining room. At the end of the competition, the participants receive a plate of food and also the divine word, in a sermon that tries to convince them to leave drugs and the streets. The chapter closes by recounting the experience of the Feria Pinolera, in which a group of women and trans* refugees and asylum seekers organized themselves to sustain life, in a feminist solidarity economy project.

Part III "*Inclusive Costa Rica*", *the happiest country in the world*, contains 3 chapters that discuss the ways in which the discourse of inclusion materializes in the fields of politics, NGOs, the market and security. Chapter 6 *The political economy of diversity*, addresses the contradictions of the dialectic of inclusion/exclusion (Sawaia 1999) in Costa Rica, where the inclusion of some often implies at the same time exclusion and oppression of others. The chapter begins with a critical reflection on the notion of inclusion, drawn from dialogues with the participants. Next, I trace the moment when the rise of inclusion discourses began in Costa Rica, and the route by which inclusion became a unidimensional synonym of rights for LGBTIQ+ populations. Next, I reflect on how the human rights discourse has been recuperated by the neoliberal project. I discuss the effects that the process of NGOization has had in Costa Rica, as part of the biopolitical administration of inclusion and the continuity of colonial dependency. In particular, I analyze the case of an organization of sex workers and former sex workers, La Sala, who faced different pressures to evict and displace them from the premises they occupied for many years in the Red-light district of San José. Finally, the chapter closes with some collective practices of resistance, practices that I call trans*olidarity, which seek to build communities to sustain life in the face of the voracity of the neoliberal project.

Chapter 7, *The profitability of inclusion*, delves into the analysis of the market of inclusion. The chapter focuses on two aspects of neoliberal inclusion: the production of the homocitizen, the subject of homonormativity; and the incorporation of the homocitizen into the market as a consumer, as an entrepreneur, and as a merchandise. The chapter begins with a critical analysis of the notion of sexual citizenship and its link with national imaginaries. This section analyzes a political-electoral project that promotes an agenda of inclusion within the framework of sexual citizenship. It also discusses the tensions generated with queer and trans* people who do not meet the homonormative criteria of neoliberal inclusion. Next, I analyze three projects of gay entrepreneurship and corporatism, which

have managed to make inclusion a profitable business: the Diverse Chamber of Commerce, which promotes inclusion in private enterprise; Expo Boda Pride LGBTI, which exploits the growing business of diverse weddings; and the Pride March, a lucrative experience of privatization of a popular mobilization. Finally, I gather some expressions of resistance to the neoliberal homonormativity imposed by these projects.

Chapter 8, *What is a safe space?*, queries how "safe spaces" are understood and constructed in the city. To answer this question, it explores different projects in the field of leisure, housing and safety in public space. The first section analyzes two gay entrepreneurship projects. The first is an attempt at queer regeneration in San Jose's Red-light district, through which entrepreneurs sought to revive the economy and inject color into the area with a gay club that stylized the aesthetics of the neighborhood and its inhabitants. The second is a queer-inspired housing project, which promises a safe, private, amenity-filled space for its tenants. The second section looks at how compulsory able-bodiedness (McRuer 2006) and the coloniality of ability (Ferrari 2020) shape public and private spaces, including those that are represented as safe and inclusive. In dialogue with Alex, an activist for disabilities & LGBTIQ+ rights, I walked the streets of Escalante, and mapped the accessibility of the premises for people who are wheelchair users. In addition, we toured several gay bars and clubs to map their accessibility, among other variables. The third section discusses the functioning and implications of a community security project in which neighbors and police forces join forces to keep the streets of the Amón neighborhood clean of undesirable or threatening beings. The chapter ends by describing a series of collective experiences and practices that are part of the defense of the commons, practices that seek to build communities and weave alternative forms of security that resist authoritarian and exclusionary discourses.

These chapters do not exhaust the various inclusion projects that exist in the city, but they constitute a sample in which it is possible to identify discursive positions and dynamics that enable an analysis of the complex ways in which power is configured in San José.

1. Ethical/epistemic framework

*¿Dónde compramos nuestras armas teóricas en América Latina?
Donde compramos nuestras armas de destrucción.¹¹
Rosana Guber*

Horizontality in social research has been an important concern for scholars and activists in the critical epistemologies, especially in the Global South¹². This concern has been particularly central in the development of critical epistemologies, as well as militant research (MR) approaches, which have a fertile trajectory in the tense relations that we maintain between academia and social movements in Latin America.

An epistemology based on collective realities and needs did not exist in the universities for a long time, and, still today, the gaps between laboratories and communities remain impassable in a considerable part of research domains. In its most hegemonic form, science and knowledge in the Western academia have been used to maintain the colonial order (Lander 2000), to undermine critical thinking and social change, and to control the peoples who are excluded from the academic dialogs. With this, I do not want to reproduce a dichotomous view of the coloniality of knowledge. As I will develop in the next pages, coloniality is an entangled system of power relations that cannot be reduced to a binary. However, I echo the words of various decolonial authors who point to the inherited violence that we continue to reproduce today in our universities.

Even when we can find militant research experiences and critical epistemologies developed all over the world, decolonial authors and communities point out that epistemic violence continues to be a problem today. In this regard, Maya- Kaqchikel researcher Aura Cumes (2018) criticizes the idea that this is an "old issue" in epistemic discussions in social sciences, because there are still abysmal inequalities and different forms of epistemic violence. She sustains that western theoretical models seem insufficient to understand the immediate reality of indigenous peoples. Therefore, Cumes affirms, for the subaltern scholars the social sciences constitute not only a field of knowledge, of construction of ideas and inquiry, but also a field of struggle (153).

¹¹ Free translation: "Where do we get our theoretical weapons in Latin America? Where we buy the weapons of mass destruction". Rosana Guber, in a conference pronounced at the University of Paris 3 (Guber 2019).

¹² Global South here addresses not a geographic place, but a positionality in relations of power and domination of the "West" over the "non-Western world" (Grosfoguel 2016b). Global North "may describe both historically dominant nations as well as colonized but wealthy ruling elites in the South" (Kothari et al. 2019, xxi–xxii).

In a similar line, trans* scholars, like Argentinian philosopher Blas Radi, have denounced that “the academy is still strikingly unwelcoming for trans* perspectives and scholars” (Radi 2019, 44). Trans* bodies today continue to be largely excluded from the centers of knowledge production where the theories that attempt to explain our realities are written (Martínez-Guzmán & Montenegro 2010; Berkins 2013; Radi 2019). The “inclusion of trans* people in the process of knowledge production does not acknowledge them as bearers of relevant understandings, but only as objects and instruments of analysis” (Radi 2019, 48). Consequently, many of the categories that have been used to describe and explain the realities of trans* people seem unfamiliar, inadequate, or even violent for them.

In this sense, Trans* Epistemologies seek to shift from doing research *of* trans* people to doing studies *with* trans* people. They strive to position trans* people as active subjects in the production of knowledge, with empirical and embodied knowledge that makes them experts, capable of creating their own concepts and theorizations of their reality (Espineira & Thomas 2019; Radi 2019; Stryker 2014). This reflection is central to this study, since most of the participants are trans* and queer people, who face other forms of oppression (class, race, disability, immigration status). Paradoxically, their bodies are excluded from the centers of knowledge production, where numerous articles about their existence are written, and their voices, their ideas, their reflections are seldom taken into account as valid knowledge.

From their particular fields, Cumes (2018) and Radi (2019; 2020) agree on the importance of creating epistemologies capable of responding to the realities of people that have traditionally been objectified. To respond should not be limited to describing or explaining their realities in the language and format of the Western universities. On the contrary, we need to generate tools that allow research and knowledge to tune in with the needs and demands of the communities; a situated epistemology (Haraway, 1988), “that does not renounce theoretical precision or a practical commitment to improving the life conditions of trans* people” (Radi 2019, 44).

Authors such as Stone (1992), Radi (2019), and Espineira & Thomas (2019), suggest that the forms of epistemic violence that trans* people suffer are grounded in the colonial discursive practices of the modern/colonial university. In this sense, trans* scholars and communities have cultivated fertile dialogues with other critical epistemologies, such as “indigenous knowledge, feminist theory, transfeminism, postcolonial studies, epistemologies of the South, and critical race theory” (Radi 2019, 58).

Echoing these dialogs, in the following pages I present the main theoretical contributions that draw the ethical/epistemic framework of this doctoral thesis. I begin by introducing the principles of militant research, which defines the way I approached the participants and the research problem. Next, I probe

the context in which this study is developed: the coloniality of power and knowledge. I explore some contributions of what has been called the "decolonial turn". I address the critiques that decolonial, communitarian and indigenous feminists have raised towards the mainstream decolonial theorists, and I incorporate reflections that participants in this process have launched. Subsequently, I describe the procedures, techniques and analytical approaches that served as a toolbox in this research project. Finally, I present a synthesis of the field work we carried out.

This chapter should be understood as a travel diary that describes the path we have traced. In this sense, in no way it intends to dictate lessons or crystallize a roadmap. On the contrary, it drops any universalist aspiration, and it takes root in the field of *pluriversality*¹³, the dialog of a multiplicity of experiences based on the recognition of differences, without these being transformed into hierarchies.

1.1. Militant research

Militant research offers an alternative (one among others) for researchers who do not wish to delink their epistemic work from the practices of resistance of their communities. Following the ideal of horizontality, a militant research approach avoids a directive role and takes a stand (academically and politically) on the side of social transformations to establish sustainable relations between all beings and their worlds (Vélez-Galeano 2018).

Martínez (2011) draws an interesting reflection from an action-research process with trans women in Barcelona, that led him to question the metaphor of social intervention, thoroughly used in social sciences engaged in social change. An intervention, he says, implies an abrupt cut, similar to the scalpel that opens the flesh in a medical intervention. It is, therefore, an action that is wielded on the vertical axis of power. Even when this intervention seeks to support the actions of the communities, it is still designed and implemented from an external position that promotes the reproduction of practices of epistemic violence. Given this, inspired by diverse traditions of militant research and engaged intellectuals, Martínez invites us to adopt the metaphor of *involvement*. Getting involved with a group or community implies accompanying without imposing, talking without lecturing, listening without labeling, and collaborating without commanding.

¹³ As I will further develop, the notion of pluriversality constitutes a key aspiration for the philosophy of liberation. Argentinean/Mexican philosopher Enrique Dussel proposes pluriversality as an alternative to modern universality that serves the perpetuation of coloniality. Dussel calls for South-South philosophical dialogs, based on "a pluriverse where each culture will be in dialogue with all others from the perspective of a common 'similarity,' enabling each to continuously recreate its own analogical 'distinction,' and to diffuse itself within a dialogical, reciprocally creative space (Dussel 2013, 26).

The Militant Research Handbook defines this approach as "the place where academia and activism meet in the search for new ways of acting that lead to new ways of thinking" (Bookchin, et al, 4), "a practice capable of articulating involvement and thought" (Colectivo Situaciones, 2005). In its Latin American version, militant research is rooted in the contributions of authors such as Orlando Fals Borda, Ignacio Martín-Baró, Paulo Freire, and Juan Carlos Mariátegui, and nourished by dialogues and experiences of social movements, communities, and activists in their embodied struggles against oppression and power. Militant research, as Vélez-Galeano (2018) states, "... located in postdisciplinary, critical and decolonial epistemological postures, allows dialogue between communities, researcher and academic institution encouraging intellectual production and the challenges of collective life" (143).

Regarding disciplines in academia, I am not sure if we can speak of a postdisciplinary context, at least not inside the modern colonial universities. However, being uncomfortable with the disciplinarian frontiers myself, I resonate with the proposal of the Costa Rican researcher, Carlos Sandoval. Sandoval (2009) proposes to think disciplinary fields from a relational perspective. That is, instead of concentrating on their boundaries, we should look for ways to create links between these. That is what he calls "zones of contact", areas where interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary dialogues can occur. "Esta posibilidad de diálogo entre diversas perspectivas posiblemente radique en buena medida en priorizar las interrogantes de investigación, más que cierta tradición teórica, metodológica o disciplinaria¹⁴" (Sandoval 2009, 179). This thesis is constructed precisely in one of those contact zones, where my own training background converges with a series of critical academic and non-academic knowledge traditions.

A militant research approach makes explicit its ethical commitment: it puts the tools of the university at the service of social change. It questions the power relations established by the grid of representations that nominate, control, legislate, systematize, classify and label reality (Ramírez de Castillo 2015). Militant research is based on horizontality and respect for the knowledge, demands and needs of the communities, which ultimately shape the course of a research process.

As Nubia Acua (2015) affirms, militant research is a critical space for questioning the hierarchies, the state of things, practices, ways of life, discourses and institutions, mediated by a commitment (militancy) with those communities who challenge injustice, exclusion, invisibility, and work to create a new sociality. Militant research, therefore, should not be understood as a methodology but as an ethical approach, that strives to make theory support practice or and practice support theory.

¹⁴ Free translation: This possibility of dialogue between different perspectives may lie in prioritizing research questions rather than a certain theoretical, methodological or disciplinary tradition.

I embrace the militant research position in this study, and although I recognize that any form of knowledge that passes through the sieve of Western academia will imply in one way or another some form(s) of epistemic violence, a central concern (perhaps the most central of all) in this process has been to search for ways to mitigate or compensate for the scars that our forms of knowledge production leave on the participants who feed our papers with their voices, bodies and experiences. In this sense, a dialogue with decolonial theory provides important considerations for the research process in all its stages, from the conception of reality to the questioning of power relations (including those inscribed by the research itself).

1.2. The coloniality of power

Decolonial theorists sustain that the colonial invasion of Africa, Asia and the Americas, and the subsequent exploitation processes based on extractivism, created the material and subjective conditions for modernity and capitalism. Colonialism is, therefore, constitutive of capitalism, and capitalism is consubstantially linked with the system of oppression based on race (Quijano 2007; Mignolo 2009).

However, decolonial theorists forewarn that coloniality should not be confused with colonialism. In contrast to the historically specific acts of colonialism through which one nation imposes its sovereignty over another, coloniality refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerge in the context of colonialism, which redefine culture, labor, intersubjective relations, aspirations of the self, common sense, and knowledge production in ways that accredit the superiority of the colonizer (Mendoza 2016, 114).

Decolonial thinkers point out that the processes of colonization and domination developed by Europe are the substratum that allows the advent of modernity. As the philosopher Enrique Dussel points out:

Modernity is an age of history inaugurated by Europe thanks to the discovery and dominion of the Atlantic Ocean (as a new geopolitical center) which enabled it to expand by sea and constitute commercial, military, and cultural empires, with Europe as their core. The European "I" (or ego) constituted other cultures as its colonies, subjected to its Will to Power, which encompassed nature as an exploitable set of objects that could serve as a form of mediation in order to obtain greater quantities of exchange value (Dussel 2013, 25).

In this sense, decolonial theorists suggest that in the context of colonialism, Latin America was fabricated as displaced from modernity, imposing a linear conception of time (opposed to the cyclical conception of time in many cosmogonies of Abya Yala¹⁵), in which modernity appeared as the finish

¹⁵ "Abya Yala supplants the term Latin America. It comes from the Kuna language and means 'land of full maturity.' It is becoming the preferred term to refer to the region" (Mendoza 2018, 119).

line instead of the ideological justification of the colonality of power that erases or crushes other forms of being (Mignolo 2009).

Aura Cumes (2018) sustains that there was no decolonization process in Latin America, and although most nations achieved independence a couple of centuries ago, colonality still determines the power relations in the world-system described by Grosfoguel (2016a) as modern/colonial, capitalist/patriarchal Christian-centric/western-centric. Decolonial feminist Breny Mendoza (2016) states that “precisely because the freedom of some presupposes the subordination of others, decolonization is always an unfinished project. Although colonialism has ended in most parts of the world, the ‘coloniality of power’ continues to define relations between the West and the Rest” (113).

Coloniality is more than the practice of domination and extractivism perpetrated by Europe on the territories, bodies and cultures of the Global South. As Dussel points out: “the colonialism of the European metropolises, whose domination has not only been military, economic, or political, but also ideological, cultural, and at its roots *philosophical*” (Dussel 2013, 7). The economy of plunder and domination established by European colonialism is based on a philosophy that is still in force even in countries that recently celebrated 200 years of independence. The persistence of this way of thinking, being and acting is what we call coloniality. Coloniality places the European “I” in a position of superiority over the other beings that inhabit the planet. It is a universalist philosophy that imposes a single truth. This philosophy, prone to a binary rationality, establishes a division between the human and the non-human, where the human is defined by the European “I”. This division then produces a hierarchization of life, where the human disposes of nature, exploits it, and extracts its resources, including those living beings whose lives have been hierarchized as inferior.

The original inhabitants of the colonized regions of the Global South were thus assumed to be sub-humans whose domination by Europeans supposedly endows them at the same time with a limited dosage of enhanced humanity. Coloniality was interpreted from the European perspective as a kind of gift, the endowment of humanity. This ideological core which underlies all the other modern ideologies has prevailed up until the present (Dussel 2013, 9).

Caribbean decolonial thinker, Ramón Grosfoguel (2012), echoes Franz Fanon’s (2004) contributions, to signal that race constitutes the line that traverses the oppressive relations of class, sexuality and gender in the imperial/capitalist/colonial world. Coloniality of power traces a border that divides those who are considered human in what he identifies as the “zone of being”, from those who are dispossessed of their humanity in the “zone of non-being”. Zones here are not geographic locations but a positionality in racial power relations (Grosfoguel 2012). In this sense, they are not physical spaces per se, but a configuration of markers of privilege and oppression that determine the life chances a person has, and the life they can live, often at the expense or because of other people.

In the binary logic of coloniality the “I” is recognized as human. The “I” inhabits the zone of being. That is, occupies a privileged position in the relationships of power. In the imperial/capitalist/patriarchal world-system, the “I” are Western, heterosexual, masculine, metropolitan elites (Grosfoguel 2012; 2016c). In the “zone of being” we also find the “Other”. The “Other” may not meet all the criteria that place the “I” in a position of superiority but embodies some markers that confer the recognition of their humanity. Grosfoguel defines the “Other” as

populations of the western metropolitan centers or the westernized subjects within the periphery whose humanity is recognized as such, but who at the same time live non-racial oppressions based on class, sexuality, gender or national/colonial dominations, under the hegemony of the imperial ‘I’ in their respective regions or countries (2016c, 12).

For instance, a white, European, heterosexual and bourgeois woman is considered an “Other”. Even if she is inevitably hierarchized below the “I”, she experiences oppressions mitigated by her racial privilege.

Below the impassable line of humanity, coloniality racializes bodies as inferior. Those who dwell in “zone of non-being” are not even considered “Others”, because they have been deprived of their humanity. They are considered subhuman (SH) or non-human (NH). This process of dehumanization was crucial for the imperial conquest, slavery and colonialism, and it continues to be a central pillar in structural racism to this day. In the *zone of non-being*, “the extension of rights, material resources and the recognition of their subjectivities, identities, spiritualities and epistemologies are denied” (Grosfoguel 2016c, 10).

Neither of these zones are homogenous, yet the line that separates the zones (also called “abyssal line” by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2007) in his own interpretation of coloniality) irreparably separates the human from the rest. This occurs on a global scale between centers and peripheries, but that also on a national and local scale, against various groups and communities that are marked as racially inferior.

“Decolonial thinkers suggest that slavery, forced labor, and the rightslessness of colonized peoples exist in dialectical relation to liberal notions of liberty, equality, justice and free labor” (Mendoza 2016, 112–13). As Grosfoguel (2012) affirms, oppression and intersectionality for non-Western subjects within the *zone of non-being* that has no comparison with access to human, civil and labor rights, norms of civility and emancipatory discourses recognized and lived by Western subjects oppressed in the *zone of being*. In the *zone of being*, the system manages conflicts with mechanisms of regulation and emancipation, while in *zone of non-being* conflicts are settled through mechanisms of violence and dispossession (Grosfoguel 2016c, 130). As I would develop in the next chapters, in a middle-

income country with whitewashed imaginaries like Costa Rica, inclusion is also lived very differently in the *zone of being* and in the *zone of non-being*.

1.2.1. Coloniality of gender

There are several contributions of antiracist, indigenous, communitarian, decolonial and black feminisms that render complexity to Grosfoguel's scheme in light of the co-constitution of oppressions. For instance, in *Coloniality of Gender*, decolonial feminist María Lugones (2016; 2008) calls attention on the bias of decolonial male theorists who place gender oppression as a subproduct of racial oppression. Lugones questions these fragmented understanding of race and gender. In dialog with Nigerian feminist Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí, Lugones signals that gender was not a principle for social organization in Yoruba peoples before Western colonization; thus, there were no hierarchies imposed on the basis of sex or gender differences. This leads her to affirm that, as a system of oppression, gender is a colonial imposition as well. Race is neither separable nor secondary to gender oppression, but they are rather co-constitutive (Lugones 2012).

It is important to note that communitarian¹⁶ and indigenous feminists question the generalization of Lugones' affirmations, and warn us to avoid the romanticization of pre-colonial societies (Cabnal 2010). Even if we can find narratives of peoples where gender did not organize social relations, indigenous feminists affirm that many communities in Abya Yala were far from gender equality or a utopian gender-less society, even before the colonial invasion. To deny or to oversee these experiences is a form of silencing indigenous women and the memory of their ancestors.

In a similar way, decolonial feminist Rita Laura Segato (2016) suggests that before the conquest, there were peoples for whom gender was not inscribed as a binary. In this sense, male and female were understood as complementary, not opposites or mutually exclusive categories. They co-existed in nature and they could even co-exist inside one human being. Even when gender could impose a hierarchy (male over female), one did not consider the existence of the other a problem. Thus, Segato speaks of a "low intensity patriarchy" to name the power relations that existed around gender in ancient societies in Abya Yala.

Maya-xinka communitarian feminist Lorena Cabnal (2010) affirms that there are ancient registries in oral history and traditions that give account of a pre-colonial patriarchy that she names "ancestral original patriarchy" (*patriarcado originario ancestral*), a millennial structural system of oppression

¹⁶ *Feminismo comunitario*, translated here as communitarian feminism, is characterized by Lorena Cabnal as a recreation and creation of feminist and cosmogonic ideological political thought, which has emerged to reinterpret the realities of the history and daily life of indigenous women, within the indigenous world (Cabnal 2010, 11–12).

against native or indigenous women. Based on a philosophy that regulates the cosmogonic hetero-reality as a mandate, *ancestral original patriarchy* configured roles, customs, principles and values in the ancient societies. However, with the colonial penetration, Western patriarchy (crossed by Christian morality and imperialist ideology) intertwines and knots with the *ancestral original patriarchy*. This process, that communitarian feminists name “entrenched patriarchy” (“entronque patriarcal”), gives birth to patriarchy as we know it today, entangled with racism, then capitalism, neoliberalism, globalization and so on. Thus, with colonialism came the binary notion of gender and the sex/gender system anchored to the mode of production that gives rise to capitalism. Patriarchal domination became totalitarian and expansive, imposing the coloniality of gender.

In this sense, Lugones affirms that:

1. There is no depatriarchalization without decolonization that is not racist.
2. There is no decolonization unless it is not detached from the colonial introduction of the hierarchical dichotomy man-woman, male-female.
3. Hegemonic feminism, white in all its variants, is Eurocentric, universalist, racist. (2012, 129).

For Cumes (2009), it is not a matter of keeping in mind ethnic specificity in gender analyzes, or gender specificity in ethnic analyzes, or ethnic and gender specificity in class analyzes, but rather of analyzing the mutual constitution of gender, race/ethnicity, and class in systems of domination and oppression.

In response to white, liberal feminisms articulated in the *zone of being*, which take the category "woman" as universal, critical feminisms have made important efforts to analyze the co-constitution or the imbrication of race and gender (Falquet 2020; Curiel 1999), and their relations with other systems of oppression such as class, sexuality, age, body ableness, among others. The contributions of these feminisms are essential, not only for analytical reflections on power and domination, but also to generate tools to take action to dismantle these systems.

Following Michel Foucault’s (1985) provocation to take theories as a toolbox (85), I briefly mention some analytical concepts (a few among many) that are useful for a feminist decolonial epistemology:

- “Simultaneity of oppressions”: a notion introduced by the Combahee River Collective (1986) to describe the way in which systems of oppression interlock and reinforce each other.
- “Intersectionality”: despite the terrible appropriation that it has undergone by white and capitalist feminisms, in its original version it was conceived by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) as "a prism, for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other" (2020, para. 3), a “lens through which you can see where

power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It's not simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LGBTQ problem there. Many times that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things" (Crenshaw 2017, para. 5).

- "Matrix of domination": Patricia Hill Collins (2000) uses the term to refer "the overall organization of hierarchical power relations for any society. Any specific matrix of domination has (1) a particular arrangement of intersecting systems of oppression, e.g., race, social class, gender, sexuality, citizenship status, ethnicity and age; and (2) a particular organization of its domains of power, e.g., structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal" (299).
- "Imbrication": from a materialist feminist perspective, Jules Falquet (2016) has coined this term to analyze how the social relations (*rappports sociaux*) of race, sex and class interweave. Falquet proposes this term as an alternative to intersectionality, to focus on the structural dimensions and historical dynamics that interlock race, class and sex in a specific context. She proposes that actions against domination must fight these three dimensions with the same determination.

It is important to highlight, as Ochy Curiel (2015) affirms, that these tools are based on different theoretical conceptions and have different implications for feminist politics. Nevertheless, they all coincide on the need to understand systems of oppression as consubstantial and entangled, and therefore, they call to avoid the error of the fragmentation of oppressions and struggles.

At this point, it is worthwhile to examine the concept of intersectionality and the way in which it has been incorporated, adapted and/or appropriated by various sectors (including some critical ones, such as certain feminisms), as I consider this to be a good example of the power of coloniality and capitalism to neutralize and depoliticize the mechanisms of resistance.

In this vein, in her book *Pursuing intersectionality, unsettling dominant imaginaries*, Vivian May (2015) analyzes a series of examples in which the concept and practices of intersectionality have suffered a backlash that results, in some cases, even producing anti-intersectional practices.

Intersectionality, says May:

is an analytical and political orientation that brings together a number of insights and practices developed largely in the context of Black feminist and women of color theoretical and political traditions... it approaches lived identities as interlaced and systems of oppression as enmeshed and mutually reinforcing: one aspect of identity and/or form of inequality is not treated as separable or as superordinate. This "matrix" worldview contests "single-axis" forms of thinking about subjectivity and power (Crenshaw 1989) and rejects hierarchies of identity or oppression (Combahee

1983; Lorde 1984; B. Smith 1983). An intersectional justice orientation is thus wide in scope and inclusive: it repudiates additive notions of identity, assimilationist models of civil rights, and one-dimensional views of power (May 2015, 3).

In this sense, May asserts that intersectionality remains indispensable in political and philosophical terms, as it provides a conceptual framework for questioning and challenging logics of domination, and invites us to develop collective processes of social transformation from a multi-issued and articulated perspective. It also calls us to question our own place in the matrix of domination, and to recognize that we too can reproduce oppressive relations even as we struggle for justice (May 2015, 5).

However, the concept of intersectionality has undergone a process of depoliticization and recuperation within the neoliberal project (Falquet 2020), in which it has been uprooted from its origins. In some cases, the reflection on race within the matrix of oppressions has even been erased (Crenshaw 2017; 2020). In May's words:

though it is widely cited and extensively applied, and as such would not seem in need of much further explanation or justification, the fact is that many uses and common understandings of intersectionality regularly: circumscribe its analytical and political vision, turn away from its radical roots, or flatten its capacity in other ways p (May 2015, 7).

In her book, May points out that these interpretations of intersectionality that are functional to capitalism and perpetuate racism are not only found in sectors we would presume to be adversaries to the struggles of racialized women for liberation, but we often find these interpretations in feminist scholars. This is but one more sign of how coloniality continues to shape our ways of thinking and interpreting reality.

Materialist lesbianfeminist Jules Falquet (2020) also criticizes the way in which intersectionality has been recuperated within the discourse of human rights, mobilized and sponsored by international cooperation, where it has also been stripped of its origins, whitewashed and fragmented, making it potable for the work of NGOs.

Critics and practitioners alike also often ignore an intersectionality fundamental: the need to analyze, as meaningful factors (and not just as descriptive elements), the interconnections (of different aspects of identity, various forms of domination [and also liberation], and micropolitical and macropolitical scales). Instead, intersectionality is read as a rationale for atomization and hierarchy (May 2015, 8).

Thus, as May (2015) demonstrates, "it is not uncommon to find it treated as a gesture or catchphrase, for example, used in a token manner to account for a nebulous, depoliticized, and hollow notion of 'difference.'" (8). As I will detail in the following chapters, this is how I have encountered the concept of intersectionality in the discourses of the projects analyzed in this thesis, and more generally, in the

discourses of neoliberal inclusion. The discourse of inclusion in Costa Rica reproduces this fragmented view of oppression that is functional of capitalism, circumscribing inclusion practices to the normative "LGBTI population", the normalized "subject of right" (Malcher and Deluchey 2018) that inhabits the *zone of being*, while those who dwell in the *zone of non-being* continue to be residual and unworthy of inclusion.

1.2.2. Coloniality of knowledge

Centuries after our ancestors fought against Spanish and Portuguese conquerors, and decades after the important contributions of anticolonial and postcolonial¹⁷ thinkers like Fanon, Spivak, Mohanty and the Subaltern Studies Group, today we continue to encounter diverse expressions of coloniality. One of the domains where coloniality is deeply rooted are the centers of knowledge production, especially the Western universities that reproduce the hierarchies of modern rationality (Castro-Gómez 2000).

Dussel warns that the "spirit of Modernity" has been presented as an era of European flourishing and creativity. However, from a critical perspective, Dussel warns that such creativity must be interpreted as:

una estructura concreta, ontológica, antropológica, ética, política de dominación, que utilizando las creaciones de todas las culturas dominadas (de las árabe-islámicas, su matemática y astronomía, entre otros saberes), las desarrolló creativamente, pero al mismo tiempo las hizo pasar como exclusivas invenciones propias mediante un inmoral recurso de ocultamiento de las fuentes¹⁸ (Dussel 2020, 27).

The racial inferiority of the *zone of non-being* occurs not only in relation to the domination and exploitation in economic and cultural power relations, but also in the epistemological field. As Grosfoguel (2011) argues knowledge produced in the *zone of non-being* is considered archaic, raw and inferior. At the same time, the coloniality of knowledge is based on the idea that knowledge produced in the Global North is the knowledge produced in the *zone of being* is superior and universally valid. universal. In this sense, it is valid for interpreting and explaining reality in any context.

Just to cite an example of the expression of coloniality in the current feminist debates in Costa Rica, sociologist María Florez-Estrada, feminist professor at the University of Costa Rica, criticized in an

¹⁷ It is important to note that although postcolonial and decolonial theories share a common root (the anticolonial critique), they should not be used as synonyms. For a further explanation on the differences between postcolonial and decolonial, see Breny Mendoza's magistral essay: Coloniality of Gender and Power From Postcoloniality to Decoloniality.

¹⁸ Free translation: a concrete, ontological, anthropological, ethical, political structure of domination, which, using the creations of all the dominated cultures (of the Arab-Islamic ones, their mathematics and astronomy, among other knowledge), developed them creatively, but at the same time passed them off as if they were its own exclusive inventions by means of an immoral resource of concealing the sources.

interview the notion of “common good” and claimed that individual rights and self-autonomy must never be sacrificed in the name of the commons. She claims that liberalism produced the most important and influential epistemic rupture of our time, since its concept of equality and individual rights overthrew hierarchies between human beings, recognizing human diversity. Therefore, she affirms, “el reto es construir una sociedad más justa a partir de reconocer la diferencia individual y la igualdad de derechos de cada persona y abandonar la noción arcaica y nociva de lo comunitario ¹⁹” (Flórez-Estrada 2020).

Florez-Estrada proposes liberalism as a movement with a universal potence that can liberate all populations. With these affirmations, she reinforces Western knowledge in the place of redeemer, without realizing that it was Western modernity that crystallized these hierarchies of race, class and gender. At the same time, her statements render archaic and inferior the historical knowledge of indigenous women, gender dissidents and queer movements who have fought in the global South to defend the community and the commons from the rapacious voracity of (neo)liberal capitalism (Federici 2019).

Just as Dussel points out, modern colonial philosophy “did not only have the pretension of being universal, planetary, and the expression of human reason as such, but also categorized all other regional philosophies of the South as ‘backward,’ naïve, and particular” (Dussel 2013, 5). Antiracist decolonial feminists criticize the ideological dependence of Latin American feminisms on the production of discourses in the Global North (Espinoza 2014). Consequently, mainstream Latin American feminism is still mainly bourgeois, whitewashed, urban, and heteronormative, and its discussions are disconnected from the lives of racialized, impoverished women, who are inevitably framed as “the other” (Curiel 2015).

In this sense, Yuderkys Espinoza (2014) denounces that the epistemic violence is such that “third world women” are trapped by the discursive colonization of Western feminism that builds the monolithic 'Other' of Latin America, and by the discursive practice of feminists of the South, who maintain a continuity with the matrix of colonial privilege, constituting them as the other of the Other (318).

Castro-Gómez (2000) criticizes the university as a privileged place for knowledge production. The Western university has the legitimacy to establish the boundaries between useful and useless knowledge, which makes other spaces of knowledge production invisible or inferior. Structured on

¹⁹Free translation: the challenge is to build a more just society by recognizing individual difference and the equal rights of each person and abandoning the archaic and harmful notion of the communal.

the basis of the coloniality of knowledge, the Western universities reproduce relations of epistemic violence, whether they are aware of it or not.

In this vein, Aura Cumes (2018) affirms that knowledge production in the Western universities is constructed through the bias and privilege of race/ethnicity, sex/gender, social class, and age, at the very least. This has established social imaginaries about who has knowledge, what is valid knowledge, who is the subject/authority and who represents the object/subaltern. For instance, trans* and queer people who dwell in the *zone of non-being*, like the participants in this study, are systematically framed as objects, as a source of raw data (Radi 2019). Consequently, when these subjects are named in discourses, policies and papers, even in those coming from engaged feminists in the Global North and South, it is done to speak *for* them, because their bodies, their voices and their knowledge are not there (Espinoza 2014, 321). They are usually included through processes of epistemic violence such as othering and objectification (Pérez 2019), constructed as victims, statistics or testimonies. Their theorizations and epistemes are not recognized, but rather used as unrefined material for the theories produced in the *zone of being*. This nourishes the configuration of the expert as the one who has the knowledge, and produces what Aymara scholar Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2010) denounces as an economy of ideas, salaries, commodities and privileges based on grants, titles and publications, or what Argentinian feminist philosopher Moira Pérez (2019) describes as the international division of academic work (6).

Pérez defines epistemic violence as "the different ways in which violence is exercised in relation to the production, circulation and recognition of knowledge: the denial of epistemic agency for certain subjects, the unacknowledged exploitation of their epistemic resources, their objectification, among many others" (1). In dialog with Rob Nixon, she proposes to think of epistemic violence as a form of slow violence, "a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (2).

Epistemic violence sustains the idea "that certain people or types of people are not capable of producing adequate knowledge, or will not be able to evaluate or understand it..." (M. Pérez 2019, 4). Trans* Epistemologies, for instance, struggle against diverse forms of epistemic violence like de-qualifying and disapproving trans* epistemic subjectivity, objectifying, canceling epistemic authority, subordinating division of intellectual labor, instrumentalization, academic extractivism, misreading, and colonial appropriation (Radi 2019).

Aura Cumes (2018) reflects on her experience as a co-researcher in a team conformed by a male scholar of European origin and herself, a young Maya-Kaqchikel researcher. Even when racism and coloniality were problematized within the team, Cumes encountered difficulties in different spaces

(including indigenous communities) for her voice was not recognized as legitimate. The coloniality of knowledge is deeply rooted in our subjectivities, whether we live in the North or the Global South. The mere inclusion of indigenous, trans*, queer and other oppressed people in the universities, conferences and research laboratories is not enough. As long as the coloniality of knowledge exists, and contributions of thinkers from the Global South need to pass through the global North to be considered valid, the inclusion of the “other” is merely decorative and utilitarian.

For instance, today in Costa Rica, transgender women who, despite multiple obstacles, manage to enter in the salaried world, continue to receive lower wages than cisgender people doing the same job. When they denounce that they are being underpaid, NGOs, international cooperation agencies and state institutions reproduce coloniality of knowledge, arguing that, since they do not have any formal training, they can only pay them as unqualified workers (anonymous activists of Transvida, in discussion with the author, April 15, 2021). Little matters that they produce higher achievement indicators than their cisgender colleagues, they will continue to be underpaid, because these institutions only recognize one form of knowledge, from which trans* people in Abya Yala are still largely excluded.

One of the most common forms of epistemic violence in Latin America is epistemic extractivism. Grosfoguel (2016b) defines extractivism as the processes of looting, dispossession, theft, and appropriation of resources from the global South for the benefit of some demographic minorities of the planet considered racially superior, who make up the global North and who constitute the capitalist elites of the world-system (128).

The devastation and dependency effects produced by extractivism as a productive model have been widely studied in the Global South. In the field of knowledge, extractivism works in a similar way: it is based on practices of extraction of "raw materials" from the Global South, which are processed in the academies of the Global North, sustaining an economy of knowledge that also causes dynamics of devastation and dependency to our cultures and peoples.

Criticism of epistemic violence should not be understood in a binary way, though. It is not a question of rejecting all knowledge elaborated in the Global North, nor of assuming that the knowledge produced in the Global South is free from epistemic violence. Anti-racist feminists in Latin America have been clear in pointing out the dynamics of coloniality that travers feminisms in our region. As I will develop in the next section on pluriversality, we are not saying either that no dialogue is possible between cultures, or that one culture cannot be enriched by the knowledges of others. The underlying problem, as Grosfoguel (2016b) points out, occurs when one culture destroys another and, in the

process, appropriates their contributions without leaving any trace in memory about the peoples who produced them (140).

Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2013) denounces that “the extractivist mindset isn’t about having a conversation and having a dialogue and bringing in indigenous knowledge on the terms of indigenous peoples. It is very much about extracting whatever ideas scientists or environmentalists thought were good and assimilating it” (¶14). Decontextualized from their embodied origins, these knowledges are processed in Western universities to remove all potential radicalism from them, therefore making them more suitable for the market (M. Pérez 2019; Rivera Cusicanqui 2010).

Against this outlook, parting from a militant research approach, I resonate with important questions that decolonial authors have raised: How to make sure that our feminism does not end up being an accomplice of the (neo)colonial interests of material and symbolic production of subjects for their exploitation and domination? (Espinoza 2014). How can we construct a liberation philosophy based on south-south dialogues? (Dussel 2013). And how can a solidarity policy be developed in such a way that it can go in both directions and does not entail a racist colonial paternalistic unilateral act of the westernized left on the peoples in the *zone of non-being*? (Grosfoguel 2016) These questions do not dictate recipes, but they draw the limits of the abysses that I wish to avoid. Although I believe that all research developed from Western academia will inevitably involve some form of epistemic violence, my aspiration in this project has been to mitigate as much as possible the impact of these practices on the participants. In this attempt, the decolonial turn provides important theoretical and ethical tools.

1.2.3. The decolonial turn, pluriversality and the ecology of knowledge

Coloniality operates through a universalist logic, a pretension of truth that is imposed through domination (often by force). Modern philosophy “negates all other philosophies (from the South), and which categorizes them as being equivalent to mythological, folkloric, conventional, backward, particularist, and/or pseudo-philosophical thinking” (Dussel 2013, 14). It is a position that does not seek and does not allow learning with the Other, for it is sustained in the universal expansion of one truth (Dussel 2020, 36). However, all over the Global South, coloniality has not operated without resistance.

Queer, transfeminist and pornoactivist, Rachele Borghi (2020), in a provocative embodied reflection on [de]coloniality and privilege in the university, argues that, in order to confront the persistence of

coloniality, we need to escape from this universalist logic that is presented to us as the only truth. We must adopt another grammar, says Borghi.

Une autre grammaire est nécessaire pour comprendre où nous en sommes actuellement, visualiser la situation au sein du système-monde et imaginer des scénarios alternatifs vers lesquels tendre. Cette grammaire : c'est la théorie/la pensée/la critique/l'approche/la proposition décoloniale. La pensée décoloniale ne fait pas référence à la décolonisation du colonialisme, mais à la *colonialité*. Elle ne renvoie pas à une période passée mais se conjugue au présent (Borghi 2020, 48).

Decolonial thought and practices are not new, nor were they invented by the renowned authors we cite today. Latin American and Caribbean thinkers situate the origin of anticolonial thought in the early resistance against the colonial invasion inaugurated in 1492 (Mendoza 2016). Antiracist feminist Yuderkys Espinoza (2014) points out that decoloniality in Abya Yala, as a philosophical and political practice, is grounded on the struggles of afro and indigenous peoples in the beginning of the conquest and colonization of the Americas, to face genocide, European domination and the slavery that colonialism brought with it.

In this vein, Dussel sustains that

these political, economic, and cultural moments of liberation must also be considered to be culminations of a philosophical process, as well as the birth of a philosophy which is intertwined with praxis and which lays the foundation for a justification of this age of emancipation from colonialism (Dussel 2013, 14).

Nurtured by this long history of resistance, the decolonial turn²⁰ invites us to think of alternative, dissident research approaches that can help us to create paths towards social transformation. Walter Dignolo (2009) affirms that de-colonial thinking seeks to unveil the silences of Western epistemology, and encourages the engagement in "epistemic disobedience", to de-link (epistemically and politically) from the web of imperial knowledge (20). A decolonial thinking and practice must abandon the old Eurocentric interpretative frames (Espinoza 2014).

Authors such as Dussel propose the idea of pluriversality, of an analogical pluriverse that functions as an alternative to the univocal universality. Pluriversality consists in a process of intercultural dialogue, in which cultures can flourish without crushing or denying each other, without seeking to impose themselves on others.

In asserting the particularity of their own traditions and the creative possibilities of their own situations, dialogues among the philosophers of the South work towards the realization of a pluriverse, where each culture will be in dialogue with all others

²⁰ "The decolonial turn does not refer to a single theoretical school, but rather points to a family of diverse positions that share a view of coloniality as a fundamental problem in the modern (as well as postmodern and information) age, and of decolonization or decoloniality as a necessary task that remains unfinished" (Maldonado-Torres 2008, 2).

from the perspective of a common “similarity,” enabling each to continuously recreate its own analogical “distinction,” and to diffuse itself within a dialogical, reciprocally creative space (Dussel 2013, 1).

In this line, Borghi (2020) proposes the metaphor of a kaleidoscope, through which we can look at the simultaneous existence of multiple and plural realities that meet and interact, without the devouring pretension of one over the others.

Décolonialiser signifie concevoir la réalité comme pouvant être kaléidoscopique, et ressembler davantage aux images du kaléidoscope qu’aux projections cartographiques... Le kaléidoscope nous donne à voir la pluriversité du système-monde. Accepter la proposition décoloniale c’est non seulement remplacer les lunettes avec lesquelles nous observons la réalité, mais aussi changer radicalement les outils avec lesquels nous regardons/interprétons/nous projetons dans celle-ci (Borghi 2020, 52–53).

Eduardo Restrepo and Axel Rojas define pluriversality in opposition to the global and totalitarian designs in the name of universality. Pluriversality constitutes a commitment to make visible and viable the multiplicity of knowledge, ways of being and aspirations about the world (2010, 21). Diverse “perspectives compose a ‘pluriverse’: a world where many worlds fit, as the Zapatistas of Chiapas put it... a matrix of alternatives, from universe to pluriverse” (Kothari et al. 2019, xxviii).

Plurivesality, says Dussel (2020), opens a path for liberation and justice, as it enables to “originar desde otros horizontes ontológicos, históricos, antropológicos y ético-políticos, desde las más auténticas tradiciones de cada cultura, un mundo mejor, más justo, más adecuado a las exigencias ecológicas de la naturaleza²¹” (24).

Grosfoguel claims for a decolonial critical theory where the knowledge that has been marginalized or silenced can emerge. In the words of Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, we need “...a shift in mindset from seeing indigenous people as a resource to extract to seeing us as intelligent, articulate, relevant, living, breathing peoples and nations” (Grosfoguel 2016b, 136). In the following chapters, we will see that queer and trans* participants in this project make a similar claim to white, bourgeois scholars and activists, and to the State institutions that continue to minimize their voices and their actions. However, this should not be understood as a claim for inclusion or assimilationist incorporation. As Borghi puts it:

La perspective décoloniale ne dit pas au monde occidental on est là, laissez-nous parler, prenez-nous en considération. Ce serait remettre l’Occident au centre de la formule *The west and the rest*. Non. Les théories décoloniales parlent, disent,

²¹ Free translation: to originate from other ontological, historical, anthropological and ethical-political horizons, from the most authentic traditions of each culture, a better, more just world, more adequate to the ecological demands of nature.

affirmement, énoncent, dénoncent. Si elles s'adressent à l'Occident, c'est pour lui dire :
« Eh, je vais te dire un secret, tu n'es pas tout seul... » (Borghi 2020, 89)

Decolonization of knowledge involves a constant questioning of society and power, with a deep commitment to justice (Cumes 2014, 155). Mignolo (2009) states that "it is not enough to change the content of the conversation, that it is of the essence to change the terms of the conversation... In order to call into question the modern/colonial foundation of the control of knowledge, it is necessary to focus on the knower rather than on the known" (4).

However, as I cite Mignolo I must address Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui's sharp critique to internal coloniality practices within the decolonial theory. As an Aymara/Bolivian feminist and activist, she denounces that authors like Anibal Quijano and Walter Mignolo are writing from their privileged positions, disconnected from the communities that nourish their theories. In her regard, their papers come dangerously close to forms of epistemic violence, as they take ideas and notions that were produced by thinkers or collectivities of the Global South, and they return them regurgitated and entangled in a depoliticized discourse of otherness. In this sense, it is clear that decolonial discourse does not resolve inequalities by itself. Rivera Cusicanqui claims that a theory on decoloniality cannot exist without a decolonial practice (2010, 62).

In dialog with her, Grosfoguel (2016b) criticizes decolonial authors that produce knowledge without linking their writing and their activity to the struggle for the liberation of the peoples. As a result, their contributions only serve to acquire symbolic, economic capital, and status in the academies of the Global North. They have no impact on the peoples that dwell in the *zone of non-being*, where the "raw materials" for their papers were extracted from. A decolonial theory without praxis runs the risk of falling into what it intends to contest: a de-politized analysis, a disembodied reflection, which, detached from the communities that germinated them, becomes infertile for the production of true transformations.

On the decolonial path, I find Boaventura de Sousa Santos' (2009; 2016a; 2014) proposal of an epistemology of the South to be a particularly prolific tool to break with the coloniality of knowledge that is entwined with the coloniality of power, gender and being. He introduces the notions of *sociology of absences* to point out the silences that hegemonic epistemology produces around particular experiences, subjectivities, and forms of knowledge. By silencing some forms of knowledge and being, modern science erases diversity and possibilities of other ways of thinking, creating and existing. The coloniality of knowledge not only displays a one-sided view of the world that serves for domination and oppression, but it actively creates it and imposes it by presenting it as the only possible one.

This rationality purposely produces and reproduces a series of sociological *absences*, where some forms of knowledge, practices and existences are dismissed as residual. These absences produce the subjects that Fanon (2004) has named “the wretched of the Earth”: the ignorant, the residual, the inferior, the local, the unproductive. As I will develop, discourses that operate on this rationality crystallize this study’s participants in each of those categories, and, therefore, devoid their reflections of any valuable knowledge.

As a response to this univocal rationality, Santos (2009) uses the metaphor of *ecology* to explain the need to look for alternative approaches to knowledge production. Hegemonic rationality causes a devastating effect on epistemologies, similar to that of large monocultures on biodiversity. To face this, he proposes to create *epistemological ecologies*:

1. In resistance to the monoculture of knowledge, he proposes a plural ecology of knowledges. The monoculture of knowledge “consists of turning modern science and high culture into the sole criteria of truth and aesthetic quality, respectively” (Santos 2014, 272). This rationality, where only scientific rigor is valid, reproduces the great systems of domination that sustain the world as we know it:

The epistemological difference that does not recognize the existence of other kinds of knowledge besides scientific knowledge contains and conceals other differences—capitalist, colonial, sexist differences ... For an ecology of knowledges, knowledge-as-intervention-in-reality is the measure of realism, not knowledge-as-a-representation-of-reality (Santos 2014, 314–15)

2. In resistance to the *monoculture of linear time*, he proposes the *ecology of temporalities*: time conceived as linear is only one of many ways in which communities understand time. Peasant communities, for example, live a seasonal temporality, many indigenous communities conceive time cyclical way, etc. As I will develop later, this reflection was fundamental in this research project, as it led me to make my calendar flexible in order to respect the urgent times of the participants.

3. In resistance to the *monoculture of the naturalization of differences* that conceals hierarchies, he proposes an *ecology of recognition* that enables a decolonial turn to distinguish which differences have been instrumentalized to impose hierarchies. This exercise allows to break the dichotomies inherent to the binary thought of Western modernity. This is a path that we explored in this study, in which we attempted to break with the essentialist conception of identities, and with the false horizontality implied by concepts such as the “LGBTI community”, which portray this diversity of existences as a homogeneous group.

4. In resistance to the *monoculture of logic of the dominant scale*, manifested especially through universalism and globalization, he proposes the *ecology of trans-scale*, inviting us to transit between local and large scales. This is another fundamental principle in this research. We part from the

rejection of any universalist aspiration. On the contrary, grounded on the logic of pluriversality, this research seeks to reflect on the particularities of life in a peripheral country with First World aspirations, and the ways in which people who live in the *zone of non-being* experience oppressions and organize their resistance.

5. In resistance to the *monoculture of capitalist logic of productivity*, which only recognizes as important what produces capital, he proposes an *ecology of productivities*, which seeks to recover and recognize alternative systems of production. From this perspective, emotions, subjectivity, affectivity, bonds, and commonality become not only valid research objects but also possible frameworks that can change the ways we conduct research in the academic context.

How can we produce knowledge in these lands of ecologies? Santos (2009) proposes another metaphor, the *intercultural translation*, understood not as the vertical action to explain something but as a dialogue in the logic of pluriversality, through which we can achieve intelligibility without destroying diversity.

In order to bring together different knowledges without compromising their specificity, we need intercultural translation. Intercultural translation consists in searching for isomorphic concerns and underlying assumptions among cultures, identifying differences and similarities, and developing, whenever appropriate, new hybrid forms of cultural understanding and intercommunication that may be useful in favouring interactions and strengthening alliances among social movements fighting, in different cultural contexts, against capitalism, colonialism, and sexism, and for social justice, human dignity, or human decency. Intercultural translation questions both the reified dichotomies among alternative knowledges (e.g., indigenous knowledge versus scientific knowledge) and the unequal abstract status of different knowledges (e.g., indigenous knowledge as a valid claim of identity versus scientific knowledge as the only valid claim of truth). In sum, the work of translation enables us to cope with diversity and conflict in the absence of a general theory and a commando politics (Santos 2016a, 22).

Santos claims for an *epistemology of emergences* in which stories, voices, subjectivities, forms of thought and existence that have been marginalized, silenced and erased, can germinate and grow. The *ecology of knowledges* claims for plurality, diversity and heterogeneity, without the violent hierarchization where some forms of knowledge are valid and others are minorized. In a similar line, Santiago Castro-Gómez (2000) claims for decolonial research to abandon the principles of distance, asepsis and detachment, and replace them with an approach that seeks involvement, proximity and rapprochement.

To break with coloniality of knowledge within Latin American feminisms, decolonial feminists reclaim the recognition of the knowledge produced by subaltern subjects by the means of experience as a valid epistemic field (Curiel 2015). In this sense, participants in this study are conceived as subjects,

not objects. In this project, following the contributions of authors like Berkins (2013) and Espineira & Thomas (2019), the participants are considered experts in the field of their own existence, but also in the empirical analysis of the power relations and the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in the city.

Even when we analyze hard topics such as dispossession, hunger and exclusion, I am careful not to crystallize the participants in the position of victims, but rather listen to their experiences of agency, their transformative, analytical, creative power, the strength of their persistence to survive the lethal power of biopolitics and necropolitics in the city of San José. Their reflections here have the same value as the critical theories with which we dialogue. Perhaps even more, since they are experts with embodied knowledge, who know their context and their oppressors better than any author. "The certitude that the subaltern can speak is one distinguishing feature of decolonial theory" (Mendoza, 112).

NO QUEREMOS SER MÁS ESTA HUMANIDAD

(Susy Shock 2017)

Rayaremos sobre los himnos sagrados esta frase,
sobre las maravillosas páginas universales,
en cada una de las Ciencias y sus tomos,
hasta en cada una de las Bellas Artes,
que lo único que han hecho es bien repetir el
único libreto viejo
para que nada cambie,
para que todo siga,
y nosotras no tenemos más paciencia,
no tenemos más tiempo,
ni siquiera nos tenemos cerca,
y nos molestan sus rezos, sus saberes, sus
diagnósticos, sus leyes,
sus obras de teatro y sus cines,
donde lo binario continúa,
porque la única novedad a que se atreven
(desde que aprendieron a hacer el fuego hasta acá)
es a no salirse del principal mandato:
"¡Que nada fuera de lo binario es posible!".
Han cruzado los Andes por lo binario,
han esclavizado culturas por lo binario,
han peleado dictaduras por lo binario,
han inventado estrellas y deportistas por lo binario,
van a misa, todos los domingos, por lo binario,
¡porque la tierra no es redonda!
y los varones no hacen pis sentados,
y el deseo es un planeta tan lejano

que apenas resplandece
y millones mueren década a década
sin siquiera haberlo soñado...
Y en cambio, para nosotras, sea eso nuestra brújula,
nuestra más generosa agua...²²

1.3. Methodological approach:

For me, this process began even before I even met the participants. It started with a certain restlessness, a recurrent question that stroke me while I participated in middle class, self-styled LGBT organizations, around the year 2014. Concerned about the intersectionalities of gender, sexuality, class and race, I copiously asked the gay & lesbian activists about the trans* movement in Costa Rica, and their answer was always the same: *there is no trans* movement here, their living conditions are so adverse that they don't have the means to get organized.*

This sounded suspiciously simplistic, but at that time there were no visible trans* organizations in our country, so the question remained unanswered. I found some books on transgender women in Costa Rica written by a gay scholar, but his descriptions seemed rather misogynistic, even transphobic. After a while, I understood that if wanted to learn about the trans* people in Costa Rica, I had to get out of the commodities of my class privileges. Waiting for them to appear in the hegemonic narratives or to come to the mainstream LGBT organizations was not an effective approach to escape the logics of the *sociology of absences*. Therefore, I left the library and the equal marriage meetings, searching for the *emergence* of the voices that were absent.

We met in the streets. A vibrant and diverse community of trans women who work, live or hang out in downtown San José. From the first day I met them, they proved everyone wrong. I was impressed by their powerful voices and their political clarity. They stroke me with embodied reflections on gender, class, politics, justices and solidarity. They were courageous and organized. This was the first *sociological absence* that I discovered.

This first encounter in the streets profoundly marked the course of my activism and my academic work. After some time, we cultivated a garden with the metaphor of involvement (F. Martínez 2011). We became allies, friends, partners in a long militant research process that extends to the present. Pérez (2019) affirms that “in order to dismantle the mechanisms of epistemic violence, it is

²² Free translation of the poem by trans sudaca artist Susy Shock: WE NO LONGER WANT TO BE THIS HUMANITY / We will write this phrase on the sacred hymns, / on the marvelous universal pages, / in each and every Science and their volumes, / even in each of the Fine Arts, / that the only thing they have done is to repeat the same old script / so that nothing changes, / so that everything stays the same, / and we have no patience anymore, / we don't have time, / we don't even have each other around, / and we are irritated by your prayers, your knowledge, your diagnoses, your laws, / your plays and your cinemas, / where the binary continues, / because the only innovation that you dare to attempt / (ever since you learned how to make fire up to now) / is not to deviate from the main mandate: / "That nothing outside the binary is possible!". / You have crossed the Andes for the binary, / you have enslaved cultures for the binary, / you have fought dictatorships for the binary, / you have invented stars and athletes for the binary, / you go to mass, every Sunday, for the binary, / because the earth is not round! / and men don't pee sitting down, / and desire is a planet so far away / that it barely glows / and millions die decade by decade / without even dreaming of it... / And instead, for us, let that be our compass, / our most generous water...

fundamental to learn how to see them” (10). When the equal marriage activists told me that there was no trans* movement in Costa Rica, they were actually erasing the history and the possibilities of trans* people to be the protagonists of their own struggles. It is not true that there was no trans* movement in our country, it is just that we did not recognize their own forms of organization.

Over 8 years, I have accompanied this community’s²³ work and struggles, and they have accompanied mine. We have developed various projects together, including the systematization of their community’s oral history, that can be found on my Masters’ dissertation “Género, Clase y Afectividad: Vínculos y Comunicación en una Comunidad de Mujeres Trans” (Fournier 2017). Through collective dialogues with trans women who are or were sex workers in the city of San José, survivors of cruel forms of pathologization, criminalization, persecution, incarceration, torture and violence in the 1970s and 1980s, we weaved a narrative to confront the *sociology of absences*. In cozy, bustling, coffee afternoons, we developed an *ecology of knowledge*, a story told and embodied by the voices that mainstream gay & lesbian activists and scholars did not recognize.

That experience constitutes a direct antecedent to this research. Throughout their stories, we witnessed the emergence of conceptions about the city, about the transformations in the public space and their ways of inhabiting it, about violence but also about joy, about celebration, and the ways in which solidarity has allowed them to create a wandering community.

The discourse of inclusion in Costa Rica has never been so strong as it is today, and yet, a constant emergence in our conversations were the tensions in the discourses and practices of inclusion in the city of San José, from which they continue to be excluded. This is how the idea of this thesis arose, in close dialog with this community and with other participants who dwell in the *zone of non-being*, with their bodies and experiences crossed by different systems of oppression. Taking decoloniality as an ethical/epistemic framework, in the following pages I describe the toolbox of techniques and procedures used to collect, systematize, and analyze the information. I portray the informants and participants, and the activities carried out. Finally, I present some methodological reflections on the research process.

1.3.1. Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) is a form of Critical Discourse Analysis interested in unveiling the power relations through the analysis of discourses and power apparatuses (*dispositifs*). There is no handbook or a single way of doing FDA, but rather an assemblage of theoretical and methodological

²³ I use "community" to name their collectivity, as it is the noun that they themselves have designated to name it.

tools for discourse analysis, inspired by the contributions of Michel Foucault (Jäger 2007). In this project, I use a loose version of FDA to analyze the discourse and practices of inclusion in the city of San José. From a decolonial perspective, I do not seek to apply the categories created in the North to explain what happens in Costa Rica, but to take FDA as a method to approach this complex reality.

Discourses must not be understood as simple texts or oral expressions, but rather in wider perspective. Echoing Foucault's robust theory of power, Michael Arribas-Allyon and Valerie Walkerdine affirm:

Discourses are not 'things' but form relations *between* things; they are not objects as such but the *rules* and *procedures* that make objects thinkable and governable; they are not autonomous entities but cohere among *relations of force*; and, finally, discourses do not 'determine' things when there is always the possibility of resistance and indeterminacy (2008, 105).

Discourses are linked to action; they serve to exercise power with all its effects (Foucault 2002; Jäger 2007). Discourses are not static; they are produced in a historical context that determines their conditions of possibility. In this sense, it is always necessary to address the context in which a discourse is produced. The next chapter, for instance, delves into the conditions of possibility in which the discourse of inclusion emerges in Costa Rica.

FDA acknowledges that, as historical subjects, researchers are also embedded in dynamics of power. In this sense, FDA proposes to make explicit the ideological position of the researcher, and to always keep in perspective that we do not live outside the power apparatuses we analyze. In this sense, like Siegfried Jäger, I am interested in the "function of discourses in the bourgeois-capitalist modern industrial society as techniques to legitimize and ensure government" (2007, 33–34).

Based on Foucault's theoretical contributions, Arribas-Allyon and Walkerdine (2008) propose three broad dimensions that a FDA should take into account:

1. Genealogy: which they understand as an analysis of the historical and cultural context, the conditions of possibility in which discourses emerge.
2. Power: the description of power relations, the way power mechanisms function and the apparatuses that organize these relations.
3. Subjectification: the material/signifying practices in which subjects are made up (91-92).

For this project, I will focus specially on the last two dimensions. Although a genealogy of the discourse of inclusion in Costa Rica would be enriching and valuable, it would imply a different kind of research. In fact, Jäger (2007) suggest that the amplitude of a genealogic analysis is such, that it can be addressed by a large number of single projects (51). Nevertheless, when analyzing the context in the next chapter, I will address the conditions that make possible the rise of the discourse of inclusion

from a historical perspective. This should not be understood as a genealogy, but it provides important elements for future studies seeking to develop a genealogy of the discourse of inclusion.

“As ‘agents’ of ‘knowledge (valid at a certain place at a certain time)’ discourses exercise power. They are themselves a power factor by being apt to induce behaviour and (other) discourses. Thus, they contribute to the structuring of the power relations in a society” (Jäger 2007, 37). Michel Foucault (2002) states that power is everywhere, it crosses and constitutes the relationships between people, between groups and institutions, configures subjects, defines the limits of their actions, and channels them. Power acts on and in social relations, it does not simply drop control over the subjects or groups, but operates through their actions. In this sense, Foucault moves away from the vertical conception of power, in which some subjects and groups exercise power from a superior plane, in a univocal way over those who are oppressed.

Power relations, then, are not always obvious to the naked eye, nor are they easily identified from the observation of the obvious characteristics of the relationships. Power

is a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely; it is nevertheless always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action. A set of actions upon other actions (Foucault 1982, 789).

To understand the historically determined forms in which power is exercised, Michel Foucault introduces the notion of “apparatus” (dispositif).

“What I am trying to pick out with this term [the dispositive; le dispositif] is ... a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble, consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural planning, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic proportions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the dispositive. The dispositive itself is the network that can be established between these elements” (Translaion by Raffnsøe, Thaning, and Gudmand-Høyer 2014, 1–2, from the original in French²⁴).

In his article “*Ciudad, espacio público y gubernamentalidad neoliberal*” Jorge Sequeira (2014) explores the notion of apparatus in dialog with Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben, and its possibilities to analyze the city. He proposes to understand the neoliberal city as a place of production and consumption par excellence in the global economy, that articulates space and life in a living body, as

²⁴ « Ce que j’essaie de repérer sous ce nom, c’est, premièrement, un ensemble résolument hétérogène, comportant des discours, des institutions, des aménagements architecturaux, des décisions réglementaires, des lois, des mesures administratives, des énoncés scientifiques, des propositions philosophiques, morales, philanthropiques, bref : du dit, aussi bien que du non-dit, voilà les éléments du dispositif. Le dispositif lui-même, c’est le réseau qu’on peut établir entre ces éléments. » (Foucault 2001, 299)

the objective of political extraction strategies (70). In this sense, the city can be understood as a power apparatus or an ensemble of apparatuses (Agamben 2006).

“...llamo dispositivo a todo aquello que tiene, de una manera u otra, la capacidad de capturar, orientar, determinar, interceptar, modelar, controlar y asegurar los gestos, las conductas, las opiniones y los discursos de los seres vivos. No solamente las prisiones, sino además los asilos, el *panoptikon*, las escuelas, la confesión, las fábricas, las disciplinas y las medidas jurídicas, en las cuales la articulación con el poder tiene un sentido evidente; pero también el bolígrafo, la escritura, la literatura, la filosofía, la agricultura, el cigarro, la navegación, las computadoras, los teléfonos portátiles y, por qué no, el lenguaje mismo, que muy bien pudiera ser el dispositivo más antiguo, el cual, hace ya muchos miles de años, un primate, probablemente incapaz de darse cuenta de las consecuencias que acarrearía, tuvo la inconciencia de adoptar²⁵ (Agamben 2011, 257–58).

Jäger proposes power apparatuses as device where we can thoroughly analyze the interplay of (1) discursive practices (in which knowledge is transported), (2) non-discursive practices (actions in which knowledge is also transported), and (3) manifestations (where knowledge of discursive practices is materialized). Consequently, FDA works with the reconstruction of knowledge in discursive practices (drawing attention to what is said but also to the ‘blank’ areas in discourse), as well as to the knowledge contained in non-discursive practices that lead to manifestations/materializations (2007, 56–58). Following his proposal, we could say that power/knowledge can be observed in discourses, actions, and objects in the public space.

An analysis of power apparatuses is not aimed at the establishment of truths, but seeks to understand the entanglement of power relations in a determined time and space. Unlike quantitative approaches that deal with voluminous corpuses of data, FDA deals with the field of what can be said. “Because Foucauldian analysis is more interested in *discontinuity* than continuity, a corpus of statements seeks to adequately reflect the diversity of discursive practices, and pinpoint their transformation over time and across different institutional spaces” (Arribas-Allyon and Walkerdine 2008, 105).

Under the caveat that it should not be taken as a recipe or a procedural handbook, Jäger (2007) suggests a series of procedures or phases to conduct FDA:

1. Selection of the ‘object’ to be investigated.

²⁵ Free translation: ... I will literally call a dispositive anything that has in some way the ability to capture, orient, determine, intercept, shape, control and secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions and speeches of living beings. Not only, therefore, the prisons, the psychiatric institutions, the panopticon, the schools, the confession, the factories, the disciplines, the legal measures, etc., whose connection with power is in a certain sense evident, but also the pen, writing, literature, philosophy, agriculture, cigarettes, navigation, computers, cell phones and - why not - language itself, which is perhaps the oldest of apparatuses, in which thousands and thousands of years ago, a primate - probably without realizing the consequences that would follow - had the unconsciousness of allowing itself to be captured.

2. Brief characterization of the discourse plane.
3. Establishing material archive.
4. Fine analysis of discourse fragments which are as typical as possible of the sector.

He also signals some elements some elements that FDA can address:

- a. *Discourse fragments*: A text or part of a text which deals with a certain theme. They combine to form discourse strands.
- b. *Discourse strands*: Constituted by thematically uniform discourse. In their synchronic dimension, they allow to identify what has been said or what is/was sayable in a particular historical context.
- c. *Entanglements of discourse strands*: understood as discursive knots where discourse strands enmesh. In this research, following the entanglement of discourse strands allows us to track the *absences* and the complex configuration of power.
- d. *Discursive events and discursive context*: refer to events that are politically prominent. Amplified by the media (we could say, today, by social media as well), they can influence the direction of the discourse strand to which they belong. "...Sketching them marks out the contours of the discursive context to which a current discourse strand relates" (48).
- e. *Discourse planes*: A plane refer to the nature of a discourse, the field of knowledge where it grows. For instance: science, politics, media, education, everyday life, business, etc.
- f. *Discursive position*: They constitute the ideological "location from which the participation in the discourse and assessment of it for individuals and/or groups and institutions result" (Margret 1996, 47 in Jäger 2007, 49). Since they are not always visible, they can be revealed as a result of discourse analysis.

Based on this, in this study I analyze the apparatuses in which discursive and non-discursive practices of inclusion are configured in the city of San José. Although some institutional texts are included in the analysis (such as laws, public policies, official statistic surveys and governance plans of political parties), I focus is on everyday life in the city. In this sense, discourses that circulate in less formal spheres such as television interviews, and publications on social media are also included. Likewise, the set of interviews transcripts and ethnographic observation exercises in the public space are also contemplated in the FDA. Finally, theories and knowledge legitimized as "expert" are included as part of the analysis, since they constitute discourses of knowledge / power.

1.3.2. Research subjects and objects

As I have said, in this thesis participants are understood as subjects, not as objects of research. By objects, I understand discursive practices such as texts and graphic representations (including memes and graffiti), as well as inanimate things in the public space that constitute manifestations/materializations of discourses. For instance: parks and squares, residential, commercial, and institutional buildings, urban furniture, road infrastructure. Likewise, even though this conflicts with indigenous cosmogonies of Abya Yala, within the objects I also include those living

beings (non-human animals and vegetal species) with whom it is not possible to establish a dialogue mediated by language. Finally, non-discursive practices like actions and interactions are also considered objects of study. For a detailed description of the subjects, objects and activities carried out, see annex #1.

Regarding the research subjects, I distinguish two types based on the relationships that we established in the context of this project: informants and participants. Informants are all the people who conceded me formal or informal interviews, people with whom I sustained dialogs in the streets, people with whom I shared a plate of food, and people who inhabited the public space where I conducted ethnographic observation. In sum: experts, activists, artists, informal vendors, inhabitants of the city of San José. On the other hand, I name as participants all the people who got actively and dialectically involved in this project.

At all times I tried to take care of the ways in which I engaged with the participants and informants. Likewise, I tried to write in a respectful way, being careful with the knowledge that had been shared with me, and always taking into consideration the safety of the participants. This made the process participatory at all stages, along the lines of what Jin Haritaworn points out about their own research process:

...to highlight my interlocutors as important knowledge producers in their own right. Given the dangers of backlash that this also entails, this has meant running individual passages by participants, to ask which ones they preferred to be cited with their name, which with a chosen pseudonym, and which anonymously (Haritaworn 2015, 15)

To do justice to their contributions, it is important to name them as co-researchers who constitute my partners in the analysis of the discourses and practices of inclusion in the city of San José: Fabiola "Madre Tierra", Jacob Ellis, Kassandra Bogantes, Alex Vásquez, José Zambrano, Nana, Iris González, Maybol, Juana, Maripazz Mateo, Felipe Guzmán, Dayana Hernández, Tiffany Ortega, Antonella Morales and Transvida's team, Marga Sequeira, Carlos Regueyra, Miguel López, Paula Piedra, David, Daniela Núñez, Miguel Regueyra, Mariana Mora, Luis Gómez, Juliana Sánchez.

I already knew some of the participants from the work I have done for several years with a community of trans women in San José. Some others I knew from diverse activism experiences in which I have been involved or were introduced to me by friends and colleagues from the sphere of activism. And others I met on the streets, or through the snowball sampling technique, in which participants invite other people to participate.

1.3.3. Techniques for collecting information

Ethnographic process

This study was inspired by what decolonial afrofeminist, Ochy Curiel, has named as anthropology of domination, which consists in unveiling the forms, ways, strategies, discourses that define certain social groups as "others" and from positions of power and domination (Curiel 2013, 28). In this sense, I intend to unveil the power apparatuses through which the discourses and practices of inclusion operate, and the way in which they configure power relations, and I seek to do so in dialogue with people who are left out from neoliberal inclusion projects. To this end, the ethnographic process has been fundamental.

Patricia Schettini and Inés Cortazzo (2015) define ethnography as a systematic approach to a social situation, considered globally in its natural context. The fundamental objective of this process is the empathic understanding of the phenomenon under study (39). Elsie Rockwell (1987) describes ethnographic analysis as the constant and organic process of collective construction of knowledge that seeks horizontality in ethnographic work, opposed to the usual division between 'data collection' and 'analysis' that marks other research traditions. From this perspective, the analysis is carried throughout the entire process, and it takes into account the effects of the researcher's interaction with participants as part of the analysis. Thus, the ethnographic process implies different phases of writing and rewriting, a constant back and forth between the field and the theory. This process is what allows the construction of an object of study and the conceptual transformation that characterizes an ethnographic work.

The main technique I used for the ethnographic process was participant observation, defined by Francés, et al. (2015) as a process in which the researcher gets involved with a group or collective and participates in their quotidian activities. The level of implications depends on the objectives. In this case, I let the participants decide to what extent they wanted me to get involved in their daily activities. This technique, the authors affirm, allows us to capture not only the objective and manifest phenomena, but also the subjective meaning of many social behaviors of the group or social actor with whom we work (Francés et al. 2015, 107).

Interviews:

Three kinds of interviews were conducted in this project: semi-structured interviews, informal interviews, and what I call "parkour-interviews" (see annex #1 for a complete list of subjects who were interviewed during the field work). Semi-structured interviews consist of "a qualitative data collection strategy in which the researcher asks informants a series of predetermined but open-ended

questions” (Ayres 2008, 810). I used this technique to collect specific data with subjects who represent typical discourses strands (both mainstream and dissident) of practices of inclusion in the city of San José.

“Where structured interviews have an explicit agenda, informal interviews have a specific but implicit research agenda. The researcher uses informal approaches to discover how the people conceptualize their culture and organize it into meaningful categories” (Fetterman 2008, 290–91). Dozens of informal interviews were conducted along the ethnographic process, with subjects that I met in the different activities and public spaces observed. Some informal interviews were also conducted people who work as Uber drivers, restaurant waiters or street vendors.

Finally, I invited participants to engage in what I call “parkour-interviews”, a form of mobile interviews that we adapted to approach the study of inclusion in the city of San José. “Go-along interviewing is an innovative approach to obtaining contextualized perspectives by conducting mobile interviews in which the participant acts as a navigational guide of the real or virtual space within which he or she lives” (Garcia et al. 2012, 1395). I speak of *parkour* in reference to urban free-running practice, to account for the journey we made through the city, in which we faced, overcame or confronted different obstacles, barriers or frontiers that determined the field of action of the participants.

I proposed them to choose a meeting point in downtown San José. From there, we walked around the city, following their own path, while talking about reality, the city, and their lives. In this sense, the routes did not always revolve around the reconstruction of the activities in the daily life of the participants, but rather were designed and directed by them, with the objective of exploring the city, and showing me what they considered relevant in their reflections on power and inclusion. We used a lavalier microphone to record our dialogs, and in some cases, we also registered video and geo-localized data points. This technique combines the flexibility of informal interviews, with the interactive, affective and sensory experience that moving around the city involves. It proved to be very fertile for the *ecology of knowledges* and the *epistemology of emergences*. I included a meal at the end of every *parkour-interview*, caring for the well-being of the participants, whose material conditions of existence in many cases are extremely precarious.

Documentary research and virtual ethnography

I relied on documentary research and virtual ethnography to identify discourse fragments that represent hegemonic practices of inclusion. Jashim Ahmed (2010) defines documentary research as “the analysis of documents that contains information about the phenomenon we wish to study” (2). I examined laws, public policies, and governance plans from political parties. I complemented this data with virtual research techniques. Virtual ethnography is an adaptation of observation to the virtual

medium, that seeks to analyze documents and interactions in the web (Hine 2008; Saumure and Given 2008). I used this technique to collect popular expressions and typical discourses published on social media, in the form of text, illustrations, posters and memes.

Yang Yue defines an internet meme as “an image, video, piece of text, etc., typically humorous in nature, that is copied and spread rapidly by Internet users, often with slight variations” (2019, 2) . Her research emphasizes that internet memes are cultural elements that synthesize ideas, behaviors, or lifestyles. In other words, memes are ideologic and they can represent discourse fragments and strands.

I also conducted participatory ethnography in a group chat that the organization *Chepe se baña* maintains with its volunteers on the WhatsApp platform. The leaders of this organization invited me to join the chat, in order to gather information for this study. However, since the totality of the people participating in the chat did not give their explicit authorization as informants in this investigation, I do not use direct citations from this chat, to protect the anonymity of the interlocutors.

Similarly, an informant who asked to keep their identity anonymous for security reasons, shared with me a transcript of a group chat that neighbors, business owners and representatives of public institutions of Barrio Amón (a bohemian neighborhood in downtown of San José), keep with the police in the framework of a security project called *Plan Cuadrante*. In this chat, participants share texts, photographs and geolocated positions of what they consider to be threats in their neighborhood. Namely: unhoused residents of the city, young people consuming marihuana and other substances, trans women practicing sex work, among others. The police provide a rapid response, they move to the place, disperse or repress the suspected person and send a photograph of the area "clean of threats".

The person who shared this transcript requested that it be taken into account for the analysis, as they consider that it constitutes valuable information on the discourses and practices of security in the city of San José. However, as with *Chepe se baña's* chat, the analysis of this material will preserve the anonymity of all its members, since they are not formally informants in this project.

Social cartography:

Originally, I intended to use participatory mapping techniques to collectively build graphic representations of power relations in the city, from a decolonial and intersectional perspective. Activists Julia Risler and Pablo Ares, from the collective *Iconoclastas*, define collective mapping as a process of creation that subverts the place of enunciation to challenge the dominant stories about the territories, based on the daily knowledge and experiences of the participants. Participants' knowledge

is represented on a graphic and visual support, reflecting on connections with other themes and pointing out the consequences of power relations. This is complemented with the process of recalling experiences and spaces for organization, resistance and transformation, in order to weave the network of solidarity and affinities (Risler and Ares 2013, 12).

In this sense, collective mapping seems like a powerful technique to explore ecologies of knowledges. However, a previous experience with the community of trans women in San José made me doubt the suitability of the technique for this project. In 2017, in the context of my masters' research, I proposed them to work with maps of the city, an exercise of collective mapping that could result in a collaborative cartography of their history in the public space. Nonetheless, this proved to be quite unfertile for them. I began by inviting them to draw the city on a blank piece of paper, but none of them wanted to take the crayons. In a next session, I brought some maps of the city of San José, and invited them to intervene, but it did not work either. I realized, then, that I was biased by my own class privileges and the coloniality of knowledge. It did not occur to me that a map would be an alien tool for them.

I apologized and determined myself to think of methodologies that adapt better to their own forms of communication and knowledge. Mixe intellectual, Yasnaya Aguilar Gil (2019), sustains that reading does not makes someone a better person. Reading gives one access to one way of knowledge transmission, one among several others. She draws attention on the fact that in our society, when a person cannot read is causes affliction, but no one regrets that other types of knowledge, such as oral tradition, are disappearing.

Taking into account these powerful reflections, and following the invitation of the *Iconoclastas* to think of the map as a strategy, a mean, not an end (Risler and Ares 2013, 7), I decided to take another road to explore the spatial representations of power relations. Stefano Di Gessa (2008) offers some alternatives for building maps with communities: interviewing and sketch mapping (that consists of drawing spatial representations as a complement to conversations with informants) and GPS-based field mapping (that consists in using a GPS device to create geo-localized data in situ in the field).

We used both techniques to complement observation, informal and *parkour-interviews*. Even if I assumed the role of the active mapper, most information contained in the maps was provided by participants. As I generated the sketches for the maps, I consulted with participants to get their feedback. This resulted in a plural graphic representation of their reflections on the city.

1.3.4. Instruments for systematizing data:

I used the following tools and instruments to document, organize and classify the information:

Recordings: Interviews and observation were registered using voice and/or video recording and photographs. Virtual documents were downloaded and classified according to their main theme.

Reflective journal: Throughout the field work, I kept two instruments for registering information: a notebook (where I wrote down things in situ, phrases, maps, diagrams, etc.), and a field diary, with reflections that I tried to write at the end of each day, based on the notes and recordings of what I observed, as well as my own thoughts and affects.

Transcriptions: All the material recorded in the field (interviews, voice notes, videos), as well as the reflective journal were transcribed using the open-source software tool Sonal, which allows to carry out some preliminary analysis, such as the identification of emerging categories and lexicometry.

Geo-localized data: I used Experience Fellow, a proprietary app for affective collaborative mapping, to register non-discursive actions and material manifestations in the city. This app assigns text and/or images to geo-localized points in a map, as well as a simple affective assessment of the observed situation. I used this app during observation as well as *parkour-interviews*, to register both my interpretations and feelings as well as the participants.

1.3.5. Analytical procedures

The fieldwork produced a voluminous corpus of data for the Foucauldian Discourse Analysis. All the material was processed with the proprietary software Atlas-ti, following Jäger's (2007) insights on FDA, to identify the discursive positions that coexist in tense relation in the city.

For the analysis of discourse fragments, I followed the procedures suggested by Jäger:

1. General characterization of the actor/speaker/object.
2. General characterization of the institutional framework, the context where the discourse fragment is produced.
3. Description of the text 'surface': the support in which the discourse circulates, its visual or sonorous design and configuration, etc.
4. Analysis of rhetorical means: argumentation strategies, logic and composition, implications and insinuations, collective symbolism and metaphors, style, intertexts, references to sources of knowledge, etc.
5. Identification of ideological statements based on contents: for instance, what is the notion of inclusion in a discourse fragment? What is its understanding of human, human rights, city, safe space, etc.?
6. Analysis of any other striking issues. That is, the absences and emergences that we found in this process.

7. Concluding interpretation of the entire discourse strand analyzed.

These procedures allowed the systematic analysis of the voluminous material resulting from the field work. As part of the participatory approach, some of the discursive fragments and their interpretations were discussed with the participants, in order to have their embodied reflections as feedback.

1.3.6. Written, graphic audiovisual narratives

This thesis' chapters are organized according to the major *emergences* that resulted from this analysis. For the writing process, in tune with the *ecology of knowledges*, I used the discontinuous narratives technique. This technique seeks to interweave the narratives of different members of an environment, to build a text with multiple voices. For the researcher, this entails weaving a coherent narrative without homogenizing the diverse interlocutors (Biglia and Bonet-Martí 2009, 13). In this sense, different contributions maintain their autonomy, but they form a dialogue in the logic of pluriversality.

In addition to the thesis, some of the participants expressly requested that their reflections be translated into formats that allow their circulation (for example, a video or a digital maps). Instead of being subject of interpretations or categorization, they wanted their ideas to be translated into communicative materials where their bodies and voices can become visible. Concretely, as part of the results we produced two short documentaries that present the lives and reflections of trans* people who analyze reality in the *zone of non-being*. The participants played the role of protagonists and/or co-directors. We also contemplate producing interactive maps with the opensource tool, Tableau Public, to provide a graphic visualization, from an intersectional perspective, of the tensions around inclusion practices in the city of San José.

Although these products were not originally contemplated in the plan of my thesis, from a militant research perspective, they constitute an effort to break with the *sociology of absences* and the *monoculture of knowledge*. At the same time, it is a way of mitigating the effects of epistemic violence, compensating for the time and effort that the participants donated for this research.

1.4. Some reflections on the research process

In order to understand the path we built together, it is important to mention some elements about the context in which the participants live, that determine the conditions in which this work is developed:

1. *The predominance of orality*: writing is not a quotidian activity for a great part of the participants. Some do not know how to write, others do it with difficulty. In any case, they prefer orality, sometimes

accompanied by dramatizations with their bodies. In this sense, the techniques were adapted to respect their preferred forms of communication and reflection.

2. *Informality*: participants in this research prefer informal spaces. Although I did some semi-structured interviews with participants, it was informal interviews and *parkour-interviews* that enabled deeper dialogues. Using a lavalier microphone helped to reduce the anxiety that a visible voice recorder can cause. The exercise of walking through the city allowed various themes to emerge that I had not originally contemplated. Likewise, it fostered spontaneous encounters with other people, with whom the participants engaged in rich dialogues and collective reflections on inclusion in the city.

3. *Temporality*: one of the main challenges, and at the same time one of the greatest lessons, was the need to embrace the what Santos (2016b) calls the *ecology of time scale*. The agendas of the participants that revolve around urgences to sustain their existence, clashed with the calendars of the universities organized in semesters. In addition, we had to deal with the complication of my mobility between Costa Rica and France, the differed communication due to time differences, and the transformations in the use of public space imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. To make this research possible, I had to adapt the methodologies, expectations and schedules to make them more flexible. Adjusting to their times and respecting them was a crucial element for horizontality, which allowed this process to be less disruptive to their dynamics and daily life.

4. *On the importance of trust*: This research was possible by the bonds of trust and solidarity cultivated over several years with the community of trans women in San José and other activists. I already knew some of the participants, others were referred by people with whom I have relationships based on trust. I do not mean to suggest that someone external to a community cannot develop a research process with important results. However, it would be another form of research, in which surely some of the reflections that are referred in the following chapters would not have emerged. In this sense, militant research enables a very rich approach for a decolonial perspective.

In any case, one factor that contributed to the development of trust was to make my position explicit, and to speak of my own privileges and the ways in which I try to work around them. As Pérez (2019) suggests:

Given that social location (ours and that of our interlocutors) affects epistemic judgments, it is fundamental to put "the researcher's cultural beliefs and practices" on "the display board--- to understand in what sense they make us participate in epistemic violence, and to imagine how we can begin to dismantle them. (10)

5. *On the importance of the “retribución²⁶”*: extracting without giving something back is the principle of destruction of life (Grosfoguel 2016b). As I have stated, I doubt it is possible to do research completely free of all forms of epistemic violence, but I believe that means of compensation are important forms of justice that we should implement.

As Radi points out, we must guarantee that “the knowledge obtained will be of use to the communities under study and... determining its usefulness is not in the hands of anyone outside the community” (53). Compensation should not be reduced to providing a final report in a form that is not accessible to the communities. On the contrary, the forms of compensation must be defined by the people who are sharing their time and knowledge with us.

Even in the case of spontaneous exchanges with strangers on the street, I always tried to maintain a position of deep respect for the knowledge that was being shared with me. I listened to everything that the informants and participants wanted to tell me, regardless of whether it related to my research topic, because sometimes they just needed to be heard. Attentive listening is a principle of respect for the people who share their time and knowledge with me. In different opportunities, people with whom I crossed informal dialogues on the street thanked me for my humility. The use of that adjective caught my attention and made me reflect on the arrogant ways in which sometimes academics approach a community.

Another element that I was forced to address in this study was hunger. After two years living outside of Costa Rica, when I returned in 2019, I was shocked to see the massive worsening of poverty and dispossession in the city. Every time I went out, I came across at least one person who asked me to buy them food. They did not ask me for money, they asked for food. This emergence became so boisterous that it transformed in a whole chapter of this thesis. Whenever I could, I tried to donate food to the people begging in the streets as well as to the collectives working against hunger in the city.

I also volunteered for any kind of task that participants thought I could be useful for. Over this time, I have helped them write and translate letters and project proposals for funding their organizations. I have accompanied them to file complaints in public institutions when they have been discriminated. I have worked as a security volunteer in activities organized by people who are LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers. Since the pandemic started, I have been involved in a solidarity network that seeks to gather resources to buy food and basic necessities for trans* people living in precarious conditions. And

²⁶ “Retribuir” has no exact translation in English. I use “compensation” in this text, to name the act of giving something back to the communities. This should not be understood as a payment since it does not inscribe in the logic of capitalism, but rather in the key of sharing and reciprocity.

sometimes I just listen to them, offering my shoulder, a hug or a smile. I intend to sustain these forms of solidarity beyond the schedule of this thesis.

I am aware that, as a salaried employee of a university, I am part of a reduced sector of privileged trans* scholars in Central America, and while I received a scholarship every month, the people who feed these pages are still struggling to survive day to day. Our compensation will never be enough, reciprocity will always be mined by capitalism, but it is the least we can do for the communities that nourish the papers for which we receive wages and grants.

6. *On the possibilities of an affective research*: Authors like Orlando Fals Borda have incorporated the concept of *sentipensar* in discussions on research approaches and epistemology. Patricia Botero Gómez (2019) tracks the origins of this notion in Afro-descendant people in Colombia: “Sentipensar means acting with the heart using the head’. Sentipensar constitutes an affective lexicon of these pueblos (peoples) who, by linking together experience and language, create a revolutionary promise, a grammar for the future” (302).

This concept condenses two verbs (‘sentir’ – to feel, and ‘pensar’ – to think) that merge in a simultaneous approach on reality in our cultures. Affections have a central place in this attempt to build appropriate methodologies for our contexts. “Sentipensar is a radical vision and practice of the world, insofar as it questions the sharp separation that capitalist modernity establishes between mind and body, reason and emotion, humans and nature, secular and sacred, life and death” (Botero 2019, 302).

For decades, modern science has been reluctant to give affectivity a place in our projects, papers and lectures. Scientist, even social scientists, must appear neutral, silent, expressionless, as if we were above the problematics we study, above the subjects from whom we extract the knowledge that builds our theories and careers. We write as disembodied intellectuals. A *sentipensante* research is an attempt to decolonize the university. Based on all the above, and always taking decoloniality as an ethical/epistemic framework, in the chapters that follow, I try to give an account of this process in the key of a *sentipensante* ecology of knowledges.

Part I: Biopolitics and coloniality: A Costa Rican brew

*Mentira la verdad que inventan desde ese lugar
tienen el poder, se lo tenemos que sacar
y no para tener poder sino para poder
repartir sin dividir...²⁷*

Sara Hebe, Movimiento Social del Deseo

Having established the ethical/epistemic framework from which this research is developed, this first part intends to outline the context in which the different analyzed projects operate. This context is not merely a scenario. It is the confluence of historical processes that produce material conditions and processes of subjectification, within which power relations condense, take shape and become entangled.

The chapters contained in this part attempt to give an account of the theoretical, historical and conceptual framework with which I approach the analysis and interpretation of the projects and situations analyzed. We could say that they are the crystals of the pluriversal kaleidoscope through which I observe reality (Borghi 2020). I argue that the discourses and practices of inclusion that are developed today in the city of San José are traversed and configured by national imaginaries about what it means to be Costa Rican. In this sense, I understand inclusion as inserted and linked to a series of discursive processes that produce normativities around what Costa Ricans should and should not be, normativities on their bodies, their actions, their behaviors. Likewise, they establish normativities about spaces, about what the city should be and what should be allowed or prohibited there. In a country whose identity has been constructed through admiration and aspiration to the ideal of the European "I", these imaginaries impose a colonial normativity, a normativity that perpetuates coloniality.

In this line, studies on biopolitics offer important tools to understand how power apparatuses are configured, the ways in which control is exercised and/or the ways populations are managed in the city. However, in order to develop a decolonial approach, in the key of pluriversality, I try to put in dialogue the theorizations in the field of biopolitics with other epistemic traditions, which are closer to our realities, in order to complement an analysis susceptible of accounting for the complexity in which power operates in the discourses of inclusion, in a country in the Global South that dreams of

²⁷ Free translation: The truth that they invent is a lie / they have the power, we have to take it away from them / and not so we have power but to be able to distribute without dividing... Sara Hebe, Movimiento Social del Deseo

being the Global North of its region. I argue that an analysis of biopolitics in our context must be complemented with a reading of the coloniality of power and knowledge, which acquire nuances that are different in a colonized country than in a country with an imperial history of colonization.

This part contains two chapters. Chapter 2, *The Central American Switzerland": a historical perspective*, attempts to trace the historical conditions that produce the national imaginaries and the Costa Rican identity: whiteness, innate peace, eternal democracy, equality and the divine protection of the nation blessed by the Virgin of the Angels. I analyze these imaginaries from the logic of the coloniality of power, and attempt to problematize them by contrasting them with the realities experienced by different people in Costa Rica today. As I will develop in the following parts of this thesis, I consider that these imaginaries determine the ways in which inclusion is understood and constructed in Costa Rica and in San José. Chapter 2 also proposes a critical analysis of the instruments that have been used to construct official statistics on ethnicity in Costa Rica, and their role in the reproduction of the imaginary of whiteness. This analysis leads to a reflection on the ways in which mestizaje has been whitewashed, and inquires about possible alternatives for a critical and radical mestizaje, which does not seek to assimilate itself to the European colonial ideal of whiteness, but aims at the recognition of its variegated roots, and commits itself to the liberation of the peoples of Abya Yala.

Chapter 3, *Biopolitics of embodied imaginaries*, discusses theoretical and conceptual developments around the notions of biopolitics, biopower, with authors such as Michel Foucault (1978; 2003; 2009; 2008b), Giorgio Agamben (1998), Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri (2013), Paul B. Preciado (2013), Sam Bourcier (2017). Likewise, this chapter takes up the notion of necropolitics proposed by Achille Mbembe (2013), and the work developed by Sayak Valencia (2010) to understand the forms that necropolitics take in contemporary capitalism, especially in Latin American contexts. The chapter addresses some of the main critiques around the way in which authors such as Foucault and Agamben approach racism in their conceptions of biopolitics. I explore the critiques of authors such as Ramón Grosfoguel (2012) and Allison Howell and Melanie Richter-Montpetit (2019) on implications of Eurocentrism in the field of biopolitics, where coloniality and gender constitute important epistemological absences. In the key of pluriversality, I try to establish a dialogue with epistemologies of the peoples of Abya Yala, in order to consider the contributions that the experience of surviving and re-existing five centuries of coloniality can provide to studies on biopolitics.

The chapters contained in this first part account for the ways in which coloniality hierarchizes life in a "peaceful country" such as Costa Rica. This is the substrate that feeds multiple systems of oppression and expressions of violence. However, these chapters also address processes of resistance and

affirmation of life in the midst of power apparatuses, collective and community efforts that seek to create other narratives, other stories, other forms of relationships that do not crush the existence of those beings that dissent from the normativity of the nation.

Hombre²⁸

(Jorge Debravo)

Soy hombre, he nacido,
tengo piel y esperanza.
Yo exijo, por lo tanto,
que me dejen usarlas.
No soy dios: soy un hombre
(como decir un alga).
Pero exijo calor en mis raíces,
almuerzo en mis entrañas.
No pido eternidades
llenas de estrellas blancas.
Pido ternura, cena,
silencio, pan, casa...
Soy hombre, es decir,
animal con palabras.
Y exijo, por lo tanto,
que me dejen usarlas.

²⁸ Free translation of the poem *Hombre*, of the Costa Rican poet Jorge Debravo: **Man** / I am a man, I have been born, / I have skin and hope. / I demand, therefore, / that I be allowed to use them. / I am not god: I am a man / (like saying a seaweed). / But I demand warmth in my roots, / lunch in my entrails. / I do not ask for eternities / filled with white stars. / I ask for tenderness, dinner, / silence, bread, home... / I am a man, that is to say, / an animal with words. / And I demand, therefore, / that I be allowed to use them.

2. “The Central American Switzerland”: a historical perspective

“la tarea de descolonización nos corresponde a las y los mestizos tanto como al mundo indígena²⁹”
(Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui 2015, 99)

Image 1:
House in Central Av., San José



Caption: Tag on the left: “Screw the Homeland”
Banner in the middle: “For rent”

The starting point in an attempt to break with the coloniality of knowledge, is to understand the particularities of the context where discourses, experiences and knowledge is produced. Great theories and concepts offer us tools to understand reality, but we must pay careful attention to their scopes and limitations in a specific context. Even a critical theory like decolonial feminism needs to be read to context to understand the forms that coloniality of power, gender and knowledge take in a given time and space. We know racism, patriarchy and capitalism configure material conditions and subjectivities around the world, but the particular ways in which these systems of oppression entangle and squeeze the lives and bodies of the oppressed are determined by historic, cultural and economic factors. Assuming that power relations work in the same ways everywhere, that coloniality takes the same shape in the Global North and in the Global South, is falling into the trap of universalist thought, and reproducing the epistemic violence that we seek to combat.

In this chapter, I will revise the historical conditions that produce the narratives that make up the Costa Rican identity as a nation that was “misplaced” by god in the forgotten waist of the Americas.

²⁹ Free translation: the task of decolonization corresponds to mestizos as much as to the indigenous world.

This chauvinist discourse sustains that Costa Ricans' culture, bodies and values are closer to Europe's white, "high" culture, than to their racialized and impoverished Central American neighbors. How these narratives originated and how they persist in discourse are necessary questions to understand how the matrix of oppressions operates today. These questions guide the analysis that I develop in this chapter. Although this chapter does not pretend to formulate a genealogy, since the systematicity and depth that this would require is beyond the objectives of this study, it is inspired by the genealogical approach, as conceived by the Costa Rican philosopher Luis Adrián Mora:

La genealogía no narra el pasado, sino los procesos de indagación que narran el pasado y explican el presente ... para comprender cómo llegó a ser un "problema"³⁰ (2010, 3).

Following this vein, I will delve into the origins of the Costa Rican national imaginaries in the quest to understand how they reproduce relations of domination and how they configure notion of inclusion that has become mainstream today. For this, I will go back to colonial times and the first years after the independence of this nation, where these narratives of exceptionalism emerged.

I begin by exploring the main imaginary of Costa Rican exceptionalism: whiteness. I trace its historical origins and some of the ways in which this narrative has established structural racism in Costa Rican law and culture. Next, I explore other imaginaries linked to that of whiteness, in the key of coloniality of power: innate peace, eternal democracy, equality, and the divine protection of this nation chosen by the Virgin of the Angels. I contrast the discourse of these imaginaries with the realities that are lived today in the Costa Rican territory, in order to problematize the universalist vision of equality and welfare that these narratives sustain.

In the second part, I propose a critical analysis of the instruments used to construct official statistics on ethnicity, pointing out how they [re]produce the imaginry of whiteness, and impose a version of ladino, whitened mestizaje, which produces a *monoculture of the naturalization of differences*. Faced with this, I discuss the contributions of Lélia Gonzalez on *amefricanity* as a political-cultural category, and of Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui on *Ch'ixi mestizaje*, which provide important elements for a critical experience of mestizaje, committed to the liberation of peoples and bodies in Abya Yala.

Finally, as a way of conclusion, I recount some experiences of resistance through activism developed by racialized and mestizo people, which offer creative ways to oppose the imaginaries about Costa Rican identity and the coloniality of power that they harbor.

³⁰ Free translation: Genealogy does not narrate the past, but the processes of inquiry that narrate the past and explain the present ... to understand how it came to be a "problem".

2.1. Imaginaries of a whitewashed nation

National imaginaries have been in the eye of critical analysis by philosophers and social scientists in Costa Rica during the past decades (A. Jiménez 1998a; Dobles et al. 2012; Sojo 2010; Acuña 2002). These studies go beyond a descriptive interest; they share a concern for the effect that these imaginaries have on social relations and material conditions.

National identities are grand narratives fabricated to regulate and police other identifications (Sandoval 2004b). As Costa Rican philosopher Alexander Jiménez (1998) states, in order to sustain the daily life of nations, it is crucial to produce an imagined community and an induce forgetfulness of historical differences and determinations (6). As discourses, these narratives are not static, they are sustained over time through imaginaries about who we are and what makes us different. National imaginaries can be understood as inventions of stories and networks of meaning about what life on the nation is and should be. They are a terrain of dispute, interpretation, and struggle of forces, where affects, ideological interests and notions of truth meet (Araya 2010, xx).

These disputes take place in the realm of normativity. By trying to affirm a sort of essence of the national being, fueled by heroic historical narratives, national imaginaries serve a pedagogical function, by establishing what all citizens of the nation "should be". In this sense, it is not that there is a real homogeneity that unites the inhabitants of a nation, but rather that what is imposed as the "should be", this sort of nationalistic normativity, inferiorizes and subordinates other diverse or dissident cultural forms.

National imaginaries operate under a binary normative logic, drawing two [supposedly] opposites poles that are affirmed in the differentiation: us and the others. "National identities are imagined communities but also, and perhaps more important, they are formations constructed on the basis of difference and inequality" (Sandoval 2004b, 1). These imaginary constructions sustain the nation, provide cohesion and continuity among the inhabitants (Jimenez 1998, 5), erect borders in which differences are often exacerbated in order to delimit an "us" that stands out for its exceptionality in relation to others.

Discourses of the nation act on other identifications by sorting through them in different ways, recognising some, refusing recognition to others. Recognition or non-recognition are not the only possibilities however: national discourses may systematically misrecognise previously formed identities (Johnson 1993, 207).

In this sense, it is important to understand how in Costa Rica, as in other geographies of Abya Yala, national imaginaries have constituted a tense process of dispute and colonial domination, where Eurocentric values are treasured over native cultures, in a hierarchization that has devastating effects. "The hegemonic versions of nationhood in Costa Rica, for instance, have been constructed as a

predominantly white—implicitly male—middle-class population, located in central geographic areas” (Sandoval 2004b, 2). These imaginaries permeate social relations, they configure power relations and the daily life of people in the *zones of being and non-being*.

Some people say Costa Rica is the Global North of Central America. I rather say that that is what we Costa Ricans like to think we are. “Costa Rica ha decidido narrarse a sí misma una historia improbable: sin pasado colonial, sin mestizajes, reducida a una Meseta que es su centro imaginario³¹” (A. Jiménez 1998b, 10). Our small country proclaims itself the “Central American Switzerland”. The origins of this slogan have been traced to foreign (European) voyageurs that travelled around Central America during the colonial times (Acuña 2002; Giglioli 1998). The words of white Europeans that compared the geographic characteristics of the Costa Rican central valley with the landscapes of the Swiss countryside permeated the nationalist discourse with great force, inserting in the Costa Rican identity an imaginary bridge, a fantasy Giruno train line that connects us more quickly with European whiteness than with the colors of the tropics we inhabit.

Image 2:
The Switzerland of Central America



Source: Image by Lors Design, published in Huellas Culturales blog, (<https://huellasculturales11.files.wordpress.com/2015/06/suiza-centroamericana-switzerland-of-central-america-lugares-traducidos-twitter-costa-rica-viral-ilustracion-lorenzo-lors-design.png>)

This narratives were followed by a discourse of exceptionality that exalted white bodies, and a series of ideological constructions that linked this dominant whiteness with the idea of a sort of moral

³¹ Free translation: Costa Rica has decided to tell itself an improbable history: without a colonial past, without mestizaje, reduced to a plateau that is its imaginary center.

superiority, which implanted in the Costa Rican people an innate peace and a profound democratic will.

Despite its external origins, or perhaps because of that, the idea of the Switzerland of Central America provoked a fascination in our people, who quickly gobbled it up and incorporated it to our national identity. I grew up hearing this expression repeatedly. It is common to find it the media, it is sung in the lyrics of patriotic hymns. We even find it reproduced in the narratives of NGOs and scholars. For instance, on November 21st, 2019, I was invited by Transvida collective to do an observational exercise in a session of the process of construction of the *National Trans Policy*, in which they work together with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). This session was conducted by a group of sociology students from the University of Costa Rica and their professor. The students presented the results of a qualitative study in which they investigated, among other things, the reasons why trans people in our country feel constantly depressed, the multiple forms of violence we face, and the reasons why we often have suicidal thoughts.

I found it curious that these were the contents chosen to be presented in front of a gathering of trans people from all over the country. After all, no one knows these conditions of oppression and pain better than we who incarnate them, and it is inevitably revictimizing to hear them once again projected with graphics and textual quotations on a screen. However, what struck me most was the choice of words for the title: "Being trans in Switzerland of Central America: Challenges, obstacles and difficulties of the system to welcome them and ensure them a dignified life".

Image 3:
Being trans in Switzerland of Central America



I thought perhaps this title was intended as irony, but the irony never arrived. In any case, the use of metaphor shows how deeply rooted this idea is in the imaginary. From its origins, these imaginaries seek to separate our country from Central America, and appeal to a supposed superiority of Costa

Rica, a country that does not deserve its geopolitical position because of its exceptionality. In this sense, Costa Rica constructs its imaginaries by opposition to Central America: a positive image that opposes admirable features of Costa Rica to negative features of neighboring countries (Acuña 2002, 45). We can find examples of this discourse since the 19th century, as illustrated by this fragment of a letter from Fabián Volio, then secretary of foreign affairs of Costa Rica, to Luis Molina, a Costa Rican diplomat of Guatemalan origin:

Lo mismo que Ud. nació yo centroamericano; pero solo quiero ser costarricense, y nada deseo tanto como que en el exterior se sepa que esta República nada tiene de común con las que en un día formaron la Federación, en buena hora tan ilógica y tan imposible que no volverá a pensarse en ella mientras subsistan las condiciones actuales de aquellos pueblos³² (Volio cited by Acuña, 2002, 69)

We continue to encounter this type of discourse today. In an interview with a representative of the Diversity Chamber of Commerce (CCDCR for its acronym in Spanish), he explained to me that they find it difficult to promote tourism to Costa Rica in Europe, due to the generalized image of insecurity in Central America. For this reason, he has chosen to avoid mentioning Central America when explaining where Costa Rica is located:

Cuando uno está allá [en Europa], y es cierto, Centroamérica es otra historia, verdad. O sea, ¿pero adónde está Costa Rica? Está al norte de Panamá, que es en Centroamérica. Y hay que decirle a la gente así para que se ubiquen a veces. Pero sí, la ventaja que nosotros tenemos es que es Costa Rica, y Costa Rica tiene un nombre propio. Y aunque estamos en la misma región, verdad, nosotros siempre hacemos la lucha, porque obviamente lo tenemos que hacer por un tema de competitividad, desmarcarnos del resto de Centroamérica³³ (Calvo, in discussion with the author, October 10, 2019).

We must distinguish ourselves from the rest of Central America because we are exceptional among them. The slogan of the Switzerland of Central America condenses a series of colonial imaginaries that produce the Costa Rican identity as "peaceful", profoundly democratic people, who are "whiter", "wealthier" and "more educated" than our Central American neighbors (Jiménez 1998). The effects of these imaginaries on our identity induce a form of internal coloniality that gives us a quite distorted image of who we are. At the psychosocial level, the effects of this internal coloniality translate into the naturalization of various stereotypes and forms of discrimination. This metaphor synthesizes a

³² Free translation: Like you, I was born a Central American; but I only want to be Costa Rican, and I want nothing so much as to let it be known abroad that this Republic has nothing in common with those that once formed the [Central American] Federation, in good time so illogical and so impossible that it will never be thought of again as long as the present conditions of those peoples subsist.

³³ Free translation: When you are there [in Europe], and it is true, Central America is another story, right. I mean: but where is Costa Rica? It is located north of Panama, which is in Central America. And you have to tell it to people that way so that they can understand sometimes. But yes, the advantage we have is that it is Costa Rica, and Costa Rica has its own name. And even though we are in the same region, we always fight it, because obviously we have to do it for competitiveness reasons, to distinguish ourselves from the rest of Central America.

series of practices of exclusion and violence, rooted in the belief that we are better than the rest of the countries in our region. Internalized coloniality makes us look towards Europe with admiration and towards our neighbors with contempt (Dobles et al. 2012, 73). It creates the illusion that we, a nation blessed by god's grace, are closer to white Europeans that inhabit the *zone of being*. And the materialization of this discourse, as I will develop in this study, provokes expressions of racialized violence that denote the cruelty that sustains the foundations of coloniality.

2.1.1. The construction of whiteness

“Nada es tan común como ver a un costarricense asomado a la cuna de un compatriota recién nacido y oírlo exclamando: ‘¡Pero, qué hermoso, si es blanquítico!’”³⁴ (Giglioli 1998, 17). This scene, parodied by Costa Rican philosopher Giovanna Giglioli, is very common in households all over the country, regardless of their ethnic background or material conditions. As Giglioli affirms, racialized history, cultural heritage or skin color do not matter for the Costa Rican eye that will always look for the smallest physical trait that can serve to claim the whiteness of our offspring, the European marker that differentiates us. Whiteness in Costa Rica is understood as a natural and innate right, in Giglioli's words: as private property can be (Gigliolo 1998, 17).

Whiteness is associated with beauty, but also with civilization, with high culture and democracy, with progress and success. In Costa Rica pale skin is a marker that operates in a transtemporal axis. When families celebrate the white beauty of a newborn, they are conjugating ideas about the past, the present and the future, about the inherited conditions of possibility that that baby has and will have. Regarding the past, it recalls and nurtures our internal coloniality and the history of systematic efforts to whitewash our origins. Ideas of the future revolve around the possibilities that pale skin will open to that baby: he will become a professional, she is going to “marry well”, he will grow up classy and educated, she will be elegant and respectable (Giglioli 1998). And in the present, the [imaginary] whiteness of this baby is a victory for the family and the nation. It is a fantasy shield, a territory-body-land, to use Lorena Cabnal's (2021) concept, that is proclaimed as a fort, as a flag that the dreadful neighbors failed to stain. It represents the living proof of the Costa Rican superiority. When Costa Ricans celebrate the [imaginary] whiteness of a newborn, they are celebrating the coup of conquerors, but specially, the persistent triumph of modern coloniality. This is how our history has been written, this is how our identity has emerged.

One of the most dangerous national imaginaries in our nation, as philosopher Alex Jiménez (2005) states, is the narrative of a land of exceptionality, inhabited by white people, and isolated from the

³⁴ Free translation: Nothing is so common as to see a Costa Rican peering into the cradle of a newborn compatriot and hear him exclaiming: 'But how beautiful, he's so white!

historical process of our neighbor countries (88). But where did this idea come from? How did this myth originate? And how does it affect social relations in the present? Must studies that analyze the imaginary of Costa Rican place its origins in the first decades after the independence in 1821. However, historian Victor Hugo Acuña (2002) suggests that this narrative may have originated even before the independence, as a result of a servile relationship with the Spanish Crown, in which Costa Rica sought to position itself as Spain's favorite son, trashing its siblings to keep out competition. As mentioned above, reports from European travelers also served as catalyzers for the elites' whitewashed aspirations as well. For example, Irish traveler Thomas F. Meagher highlighted the purity of its Spanish blood, which, he affirmed, in ninety percent of the cases had not been impaired with a mixture of "black or Indian" (Acuña 2002, 67).

During the last decades of the colonial period, Costa Rica was the poorest province in the region. While other provinces (including the northern neighbor, Nicaragua) had managed to advance in consolidating trade relations and building colonial towns, Costa Rica was mired in a sluggish poverty. This situation led the rulers of the time to seek the protection of the Spanish Crown, exalting their absolute submission. As Acuña points out, governors and traders from the elites wrote letters to the Crown, claiming that poor Costa Rica had always been faithful and loyal to the Monarchy. They clamored for the support of the Monarchy, arguing that Costa Rica had remained free from the revolts and uprisings that neighboring provinces had shamefully experienced. As I will develop later, they attributed this to racial reasons: in Costa Rica, they argued, the traders were white Spaniards, not mestizos like their neighbors, who's "Indian blood" warmed the thoughts of revolution. The Municipal Acts of Cartago in 1812 stated that, fortunately, the natives of Africa here were very few (Acuña 2002, 63). Identity, since then, was based on the denial of racial diversity and the presence of black African and indigenous peoples.

The submission of Costa Rica to the Crown was such that when the news of independence arrived (for which the people of this territory did not fight), it caused so much fear in the rulers that they were paralyzed. The elites did not know what to do with this new freedom. A part of them considered that it was safer to stay under the Spanish mandate than to form autonomous governments. Submission and the fear of autonomy was such that part of the authorities tried to voluntarily annex to the Iturbide Mexican Empire. They even formalized a request, which was not materialized in part because the Empire was beginning its decline, and in part because the conditions demanded by Costa Rica denoted the ideas of colonial superiority of its elites (Acuña 2002).

These ideas of a white, privileged nation became stronger after the independence, nurtured by the national elites that managed to accumulate capital and overcome the misery of the colonial times. In

the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the independence, an editorial in the National Gazette stated that Costa Rica was a happy nation, of rapid growth and surprising progress, integrated by a homogenous race (Acuña 2002, 70). In fact, the population in Costa Rica was more diverse and quite less white than the elites wanted to recognize. According to sociologist Carlos Sojo (2010), the construction of the Costa Rican identity as white is based on three false considerations: (1) that the colonizers of these lands were all white, (2) that over that colonial period there were no processes of *mestizaje* in these lands, and (3) that indigenous peoples were scarce when the conquerors arrived (341). These three considerations have been refuted by different studies.

Regarding the first consideration, Sojo states that, since the conquest of Costa Rican lands occurred in a late period (between 1520 and 1560), it was actually carried out by a generation of *criollos* (descendants of Spaniards born in the Americas) and mestizos, with armies that involved enslaved black African and indigenous men from Nicaragua (Sojo, 2010, 335). Furthermore, historians Rina Cáceres (2001) and Diana Senior (2007) have documented the presence of African and Afro descendant population in the territory since early times in the colonial period.

The second consideration has also been refuted, both by genetic studies (Sojo 2010, 336) as well as historic research that confirm that *mestizaje* was more common than the elites wanted to recognize. However, official history systematically denied or concealed this diversity, with the purpose of sustaining the imaginary construction of a white and homogenous Costa Rican population (M. M. Pérez 2018, 2). For example, Sojo (2010) analyzes contradictions in the ethnic categorization of Costa Rican citizens between the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, showing that siblings from the same parents were inscribed sometimes as *mestizos*, sometimes as *criollos*, depending on the location where they were registered. He even notes that a same person had been registered as Spaniard, and years later as *mestizo*, while his sister was registered at birth *mulata*, and years later as *mestiza* (Sojo 2010, 337)

To address the third consideration, it should be noted that there are different hypotheses about the number of people who populated these lands before the Spanish invasion. According to historian Juan Carlos Solórzano Fonseca (2017), a maximalist position points to the existence of a population of 400,000 inhabitants from different villages (Dobyns 1966; Cook and Borah 1971; Denevan 1976; Lovell and Lutz 1995), dispersed throughout the territory we now call Costa Rica. A minimalist position suggests that the population hovered around 27,000 inhabitants (Thiel and Hoffmann 2011; Rosenblat 1967; Kroeber 1976). The differences between the estimates respond to the hypotheses and methodologies used to make their calculations. Specifically, the minimalist position states that, although the native peoples had a significant demographic growth and development over time

(evidenced, for example, in large constructions such as those found in the ruins of Guayabo National Monument), in the centuries prior to the colonial invasion these peoples would have "involved" due to political and climatological reasons, suffering a significant decline.

Image 4
Guayabo National Monument³⁵



Source: Photo by Pucci & Pucci, Costa Rica Aérea

(<https://www.facebook.com/costaricaaerea/photos/a.315144201977725/866505923508214/>)

The minimalist position is closer to the estimates made by the Spanish explorers and colonists. Thus, from a decolonial perspective we view it with suspicion. This statement by Solórzano illustrates the reason for the distrust:

Al comparar la cifra de casi medio millón de habitantes señalada con frecuencia como la población nativa del país al momento del arribo de los españoles, con los supuestos 9000 que había 1680, no queda más que concluir que el descenso de la población en Costa Rica fue catastrófico. La aceptación de esta cifra sin cuestionamientos críticos, ha llevado a enfatizar en el impacto que trajo la conquista española en la población indígena, que habría sido entonces de proporciones dantescas. Sin embargo, si nuevamente se considera la cifra de 27 000 habitantes, propuesta hace más de cien años para Costa Rica por Bernardo Augusto Thiel, **el supuesto derrumbe demográfico causado por la conquista española aunque dramático, no habría tenido la repercusión catastrófica indicada**³⁶ (Solórzano 2017, 338-339, emphasis added).

³⁵ Guayabo National Monument is an archeological site consisting of a group of pre-Hispanic architectural structures made of stone that were built between 1000 BC and 1400 AD. It is estimated that this city held a prolonged occupation of approximately 2,400 years (SINAC).

³⁶ Free translation: When comparing the figure of almost half a million inhabitants, frequently pointed out as the native population of the country at the time of the arrival of the Spaniards, with the supposed 9000 that existed in 1680, one can only conclude that the decline of the population in Costa Rica was catastrophic. The acceptance of this figure without critical questioning has led to emphasize the impact of the Spanish conquest

In any case, whether they were 27,000 or 400,000, genocide and massacres are always a catastrophe, and it is problematic to minimize the impact of this colonial necropolitics on the basis of statistics (which are nevertheless voluminous). Furthermore, colonization was a not simple and peaceful process in Costa Rica. On the one hand, as historian Claudia Quirós Vargas and anthropologist Margarita Bolaños Arquín (1989) point out, the domination of the native peoples in Costa Rica was a long and complex process. "Colonial occupation itself was a matter of seizing, delimiting, and asserting control over a physical geographical area-of writing on the ground a new set of social and spatial relations" (Mbembe 2013, 173). However, in these lands native peoples were dispersed throughout the territory in several warrior *cacicazgos* (chiefdoms), without forming large compact population centers. This made it difficult for the Spaniards to control the population, but also to count it. For this reason, as part of the colonial domination, they began to force the displacement of the indigenous peoples to concentrate them in what were called "pueblos de indios" or "pueblas": villages that were built on the peripheries of the colonial cities, where they located the indigenous people that they exploited under the *encomienda* system³⁷.

On the other hand, there are records of important rebellions and resistances of native peoples in this region. During the 16th century, the cacique Garabito and chief Quizarco led resistance movements against the "pacification" that the Christians proclaimed. Other leaders such as Camaquire and Cocorí also led attacks. Later, in the XVII century, an indigenous man named Guaycorá gathered settlers from different regions and assaulted the village of Talamaca, setting fire to the church and houses of the town (Carvajal 2011, 18). The most notable insurrection was led by Pabru Presbere, cacique from the Bribri people, and Comesala, cacique from the Cabécar people. Together, they organized the great uprising in Tierra Alta, in 1709, in which they managed to unite the Cabecar, Bribri and Terbis peoples, despite the internal differences they had, to fight against the Spanish oppression. They conducted a surprise and simultaneous attack on several of the towns that were under Spanish domination. The

on the indigenous population, which would have been of Dantesque proportions. However, if we again consider the figure of 27,000 inhabitants, proposed more than a hundred years ago for Costa Rica by Bernardo Augusto Thiel, **the supposed demographic collapse caused by the Spanish conquest, although dramatic, would not have had the catastrophic repercussions indicated by the Spanish conquest.** (Emphasis added).

³⁷ The *encomienda* was a system implemented by the Spanish conquistadors for the exploitation of indigenous peoples. Since the Spanish Crown claimed itself the owner of the territories of Abya Yala and all its resources (including the indigenous people), it could then dispose of these bodies. Therefore, the Crown entrusted (*ecomendaba*) a "group of Indians" to a Spaniard to educate, evangelize, and protect them. In exchange, the Indians who were subjugated in *encomiendas* had to pay tribute, usually in the form of slave labor, although in some cases it was tribute in kind. By keeping families together, this system of control of the bodies allowed the Spaniards to reproduce the labor force at no cost (Quirós and Bolaños 1989). However, the conditions of exploitation and violence in the *encomiendas* were such that by the 17th century, the system could no longer be sustained, as a consequence of the drastic decrease in the population of subjugated indigenous people in the Central Valley region (Solórzano 1997). *Encomiendas* illustrated biopolitics and necropolitics at the dawn of modernity.

Spaniards were forced to retreat to Cartago (then capital). Subsequently, the Spaniards reinforced their army and regained control, arresting hundreds of indigenous people. Pabru Presbere was brutally murdered by the authorities, who charged him for his betrayal of the Crown (Solórzano 1997, 174).

The savages are, as it were, 'natural' human beings who lack the specifically human character, the specifically human reality, 'so that when European men massacred them they somehow were not aware that they had committed murder'" (Mbembe 2013, 172). The erasure of history of the native peoples and their resistances was an economic and biopolitical project, based on internal coloniality that materialized in the exploitation and segregation that the Spaniards and Criollos held towards indigenous, afro, and brown peoples (Murillo 1998, 48).

2.1.2. Racist policing

On September 15, 1821, the Central American territories achieved independence from Spain, after a process in which the Costa Rican elites were not very involved. The independence came to reinforce the imaginary of Costa Rican whiteness, which was now defended by *criollos* and *mestizos* who sought to distinguish themselves from their neighbors.

Es incuestionable, no obstante, que en la práctica la independencia se dio únicamente para los criollos o mestizos, quienes desde ese momento se conciben a sí mismos como occidentales. Por el contrario, para las comunidades indígenas sobrevivientes, después de la Independencia continuó la expropiación y la marginalización³⁸ (Hernández, Ibarra, and Quesada 1992, 398).

As of 1821, Costa Rica began to consolidate its legal apparatus as an independent nation, a law elaborated by and for the white and whitewashed elites. Following this line, we find a series of laws that seek to regulate migration, encouraging the arrival of white Europeans, while restricting the entry of "parasitic immigrations", "races that were not pure" (Chen 2013, 81). Table 1 summarizes the chronology of these laws.

³⁸ Free translation: It is unquestionable, however, that in practice independence occurred only for the *Criollos* or *mestizos*, who from that moment on conceived of themselves as Westerners. On the contrary, for the surviving indigenous communities, expropriation and marginalization continued after independence.

Table 1
Anti-immigration legislation based on racial criteria

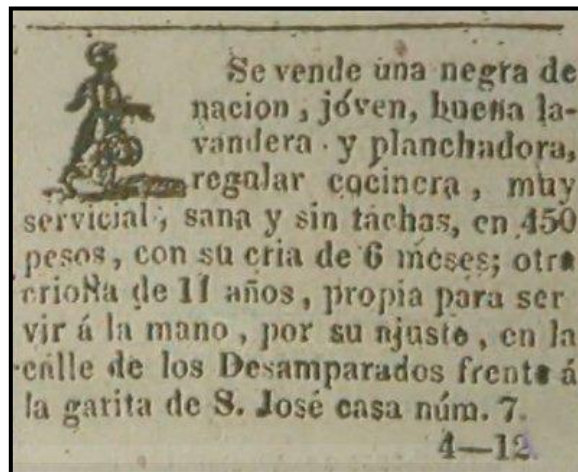
Year	Name	Contents
1862	Ley de Bases y Colonización	Offers benefits for Europeans interested in colonizing the countries territories. Colonization by African and Chinese races would not be allowed.
1896	Decreto Ejecutivo No. 59	Enables the Executive Power to reject the immigration of races that their judgment are harmful to the country, or to circumscribe them to certain regions.
1897	Decreto Ejecutivo No. 6	Prohibits the immigration of individuals of Chinese nationality
1902	Decreto Ejecutivo No. 1	Prohibits entry to individuals of the "Cooli race" (an appellation used to designate low-skilled workers from India, China and other Asian countries).
1903	Decreto No. 1	Requested local governors to create a registry of Chinese individuals and residents.
1904	Decreto Ejecutivo	Prohibits the entry into the country of individuals of various "races", including Arabs, Turks, Syrians, and Gypsies of any nationality
1905	Decreto Ejecutivo	Extends the 1904 prohibition to immigrants with mental disorders, diseases such as leprosy, bubonic plague, indigents, anarchists, individuals prosecuted for crimes or offenses, permanent physical impediments to work or with physical deficiencies [sic] such as the blind and deaf-mute [sic].
1930	Ley de Creación del Registro de Identificación Inmigratoria	Establishes the categories of "distinguished foreigners" and "suspicious foreigners", based on ethnic and racial criteria.
1934	Ley No.31	Prohibits the employment of persons of color in the Pacific region.
1942	Reglamento del Departamento de Inmigración	Reinforces the prohibition for Chinese, Arabs, Syrians, Turks, Armenians, Gypsies, foreigners of "black race" to enter the country. It also prohibited the entrance to people with mental disorders, criminals and individuals who would threaten the country's order and progress

Source: Elaborated by the author based on documentary review

In the early years as an independent nation, discourses on Costa Rican whiteness intended to attract white, European colonizers, while restricting migration of those who were considered inferior. For instance, in 1862 the Ley de Bases y Colonización (Bases and Colonization Law) was decreed. This law offered a monetary fund and a piece of land, ranging from 17 to 34 acres, as an incentive for European families who wanted to settle in these territories (M. M. Pérez 2018, 2). The same law stated, in its first article, the prohibition for "African and Chinese races" to colonize Costa Rican lands, and warned that, if considered necessary, the introduction to the country of individuals "belonging to these races" could be precluded or limited (Gaceta Oficial 1862, 5,). The choice of the words is not fortuitous: to introduce is not the same as to enter. While the latter suggest an action that is carried out by the subject, "to introduce" suggests that the action is carried out by a third party, someone who introduces an alien species to the country.

This warning responded to a context in which Asian³⁹, African⁴⁰ and later also Afro-Caribbean⁴¹ racialized people were imported to do forced work. Weather openly sold as slaves⁴², as shown in image 5, or disguised as free workers (that had to work in brutal conditions, without any rights, and isolated in camps under the prohibition of circulating outside the property to which they were awarded to work), racialized workers in the peaceful Costa Rica of the 19th and early 20th century were imported as beasts, locked by the fences of coloniality and capitalism.

Image 5
Black woman for sale



SOURCE: Posted by Tatiana Lobo in Facebook on May 4, 2020
(<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10157660362711312&set=a.10156453796836312>)

Caption: "A young black woman for sale, a good laundress and ironer, a regular cook, very helpful, healthy and flawless, sold for 450 pesos, with her 6-month-old baby, another 11-year-old criolla, own to serve by hand, for her setting, on Calle de los Desamparados in front of the San José gatehouse, house number 7".

Costa Rican racial politics seem to illustrate what Grosfoguel (2012) points out as the line that separates the zones of being and non-being. Racialized bodies were not citizens, because they were not considered human. They were not counted as part of the Costa Rican population. They remained locked up and controlled, and their permanence in the territory was considered always temporary and instrumental. This illustrates what decolonial thinkers point out when they affirm that the dynamics of power during the European colonization of Abya Yala set the fundamentals for modernity (Mora

³⁹ Asian migration in Costa Rica came mainly from China (Chen 2013).

⁴⁰ Enslaved people brought to the country came from Equatorial and West Africa, mainly from the Bantu group of Congo and Angola (Corrales 2008, 793).

⁴¹ Afro Caribbean migration came mainly from Jamaica, Cuba, Haiti, Santa Lucía, Saint Keith, Gran Caimán, Trinidad and Tobago, Dominican Republic, Providence, Aruba, Barbados, Guyana, San Andrés, Curaçao, Belize, Honduras, Nicaragua and Colombia (Senior 2007, 55; M.M. Pérez 2018, 3).

⁴² Sojo (2010) recalls that slaves were sold in the capital's main square (339), and Murillo (1995) affirms that by the end of the 19th century, Chinese slaves were sold by the unit (in Lobo 1998, 34).

2010, 2). The diverse forms of spatial, physical, and religious domination uphold the foundations of heteropatriarchal racist capitalism.

As table 1 shows, racist policies did not end in the XIX century. The first half of the 20th century anti-immigration policies intensified. During the 1930s Costa Rica approved strict laws to try to regulate unwanted migration. For example, in 1930 the Ley de Creación del Registro de Identificación Inmigratoria (Law for the Creation of the Immigration Identification Registry) established a difference between “distinguished foreigners” and “suspicious foreigners”, based on ethnic and racial criteria (Pérez 2018, 9). In 1934, the government ordered the suspension of visas to “black people” (Pérez 2018, 10). Until then, racialized workers had remained confined in the Caribbean region, but with the expansion of the banana production to the south Pacific areas of the country, came the fear of losing control over the circulation of these inferiorized bodies. Therefore, another law (Law No.31, 1934) was issued to forbid “people of color⁴³” from working in the Pacific.

Authors like Mónica María Pérez believe that this Law could be the origin of a popular believe in Costa Rica, which states that, for many decades, the Afro Costa Rican⁴⁴ population was prohibited from entering the city of San José. I grew up listening to this in school and in my family. It even came up in an interview with Jacob, while he reflected on the racism that he faces as an Afro Caribbean asylum-seeker in Costa Rica:

en lo personal yo lo he vivido. Desde que me dicen: ¿de dónde sos vos? Y cuando yo digo Nicaragua, me dicen: en Nicaragua no hay negros. Y eso a mí me cala, porque obviamente en Nicaragua hay... O sea, Nicaragua es Nicaragua, pero existe el Caribe sur y el Caribe norte. Obviamente Costa Rica lo invisibiliza porque, obviamente, hasta hace poco entraron en temas de ciudadanía e interculturalidad, a la cual, incorporaron León, eh, Limón, a que pudiera venir a entrar acá [a la ciudad de San José] (Jacob, in discussion with the author, October 30, 2019)⁴⁵

People shake their heads in shame as they speak about this racist prohibition, and they usually end with a statement of the type: “thanks God it is no longer like that, and today Costa Rica is not a racist country”. However, as researchers have shown, even today Afro Caribbean people are still thought of

⁴³ Meaning African and Afro Caribbean migrants, and their descendants who were not recognized as Costa Rican citizens, despite being born in the country.

⁴⁴ I had doubts about which term was preferred by Afro Costa Ricans. For this reason, I consulted with Afro Costa Rican researcher Vanessa Smith, who has developed numerous studies on the subject, and with Afro feminist activist Zulay Martinez, who recently concluded her thesis with Afro Costa Rican women. Both agreed that the term on which there is more consensus is Afro Costa Rican, so it is the one I will use throughout the study.

⁴⁵ Free translation: Personally, I have lived it. Since people ask me: where are you from? When I say Nicaragua, they tell me: there are no black people in Nicaragua. And that hurts me, because obviously there are, in Nicaragua... I mean, Nicaragua is Nicaragua, but there is the southern Caribbean and the northern Caribbean. Obviously, Costa Rica can't see it because, obviously, because until recently they entered into issues of citizenship and interculturality, to which, they incorporated León, no, Limón, so that they could come and enter here [the city of San José].

as foreigners in our country, and Limón (the Caribbean region) is thought as an annex without integration to Costa Rica (Z. Martínez 2021). The idea that racist policies are a thing of the past causes an effect of effacement or attenuation of the structural racism that permeates our culture, and a tranquilizing effect, a sort of expiation of guilt, that exempts us from the responsibility that each one of us has in the maintenance of racism in the present.

Although officially this spatial instruction never existed, the prohibition against hiring racialized workers in the Pacific established an imaginary border with material implications: if the only possibility of subsistence was working in exploitative conditions on Caribbean plantations, then racialized people were materially tied to that region, and the possibilities of circulation were very scarce. It is a way of stating spatial racist policies, without officially tracing a border.

This prohibition was in effect until 1949, when Congress revoked the paragraph referring the prohibition. The repeal, however, must be read in context. It did not happen spontaneously, as a result of the new government's awareness of structural racism. It is a product of the sustained struggle of black activists, such as Alex Curling (who later became the first Afro Costa Rican congressperson). Curling sent a letter denouncing this racist legislation to the League for the Defense of Human Rights at the United Nations, which incremented the international pressure over the Costa Rican authorities (Soto 2005, 128). The whitening maneuvers that operated through the denial of the humanity of racialized people gave way to a partial recognition of these beings as subhuman. Nonetheless, although a certain degree of autonomy was recognized for them, they were still identified as essentially different and inferior.

In the early 1940s, while white and *mestizo* Costa Ricans were experiencing the haven of progressive reforms and social guarantees promoted during the times of the reformist State, racist migration policies intensified. On April 26th, 1942, Decree N.º4 was issued to enforce Law N.º 37, defining as undesirable people of “black race”, Chinese, Syrians, Gypsies, criminal fugitives, and people considered to be “lunatics”, because of their “pests and conducts” that were contrary to the Costa Rican values.

The country's immigration policies during the first half of the 20th century were sustained over biopolitical normativities. However, in 1943, in the context of the Inter-American Demographic Congress held in Mexico, an important problematization of racist policies took place. States were urged to eliminate restrictions based on racial criteria for immigrants in the Americas. This put a lot of pressure on Costa Rica, where the political climate was already tense, so on December 29th, 1943, the Congress passed Law No. 51, which abolished the restriction on Chinese immigration, based *exclusively* on the nationality or race of the immigrants (Soto 2005, 128). The key here is in the qualifier

"*exclusively*", because from then on, the State made use of the imbrication of race and class to perpetrate its exclusion policies, requiring racialized immigrants to demonstrate solvency, carrying a considerable amount of money at the time of entry into the country.

In terms of statistical records, racialized inhabitants were not counted as Costa Rican population. Not even racialized people who were born in the territory could opt for Costa Rican nationality, since their ethnic origins were considered alien and contrary to the Eurocentric essence of being Costa Rican (Pérez 2018, 7). This racist governmentality operated through a double movement: on the one hand, it restricted the entry of undesirable bodies to the country and regulated the circulation of those who were already in the national territory, and on the other hand, it whitewashed the Costa Rican population statistics, by means of granting citizenship only to those bodies that exalted the imaginary of Costa Rican whiteness. In this way, statistics served to protect the official whiteness of the Costa Rican people and reinforced the subordination of racialized peoples.

Until the 1950s, Afro Caribbean people experienced all kinds of obstacles to access "naturalization" processes as Costa Rican citizens, even if they were born in Costa Rica (Pérez 2018, 11). A series of racist policies were created to impede African and Afro Caribbean immigrants, as well as second and third generation Afro Costa Ricans to opt for the Costa Rican citizenship. This had serious consequences for Jamaican migrants, who were considered neither Jamaicans nor Costa Ricans, leaving them stateless, and, therefore, in a condition of extreme vulnerability (Pérez 2018, 13). Again, these barriers were torn down through the struggles of black activists and politicians. In 1955, congressman Alex Curling promoted a reform to the immigration laws, aimed to eliminate the obstacles that hindered the naturalization of Afro Caribbean people residing in the country. The reform was approved under Law No. 1902, which contemplated an exemption from the high costs of naturalization process for people who had lived for more than 25 years in the country (*Ley de Servicio de Obtención de Documentos de Identidad Para Los Ciudadanos, Opción y Naturalizados de Nacionalidad Extranjera Nacidos En La República o Hijos de Costarricenses Nacidos En El Extranjero* 1955).

2.1.3. Racist discourses

Alongside the laws and statistics, eugenic discourses were common among politicians, intellectuals, and oligarchs of the time, who used metaphors such as the "black invasion" (Pérez 2018, 9), and reproduced stereotypes about racialized people. Chilean-Costa Rican writer Tatiana Lobo compiled comments published in newspapers in 1894 that illustrate these discourses. For example:

“Señores, los hijos del pueblo de Costa Rica somos blancos. No somos negros ni somos indios para que nos quiten el derecho a votar. No podemos compararnos con los indios brutos de Guatemala⁴⁶” (Lobo 1998, 41).

Strong and violent prejudices about the Chinese population also circulated:

Los chinos en general, los que vienen como concertados, tienen vicios de educación altamente perjudiciales a nuestras costumbres, al mismo tiempo que tienen males de organización o de raza más perjudiciales aun a la salubridad pública. En lo general son jugadores y ladrones; insubordinados, crueles y vengativos, cuando se consideran en mayor número y más fuertes; el abuso del opio y la decidida inclinación al suicidio⁴⁷. (Murillo, cited in Esquivel and Fernández 2014, 75)

Following this vein, a great biopolitical concern of the ruling elites was *mestizaje*, the “darkening our blood”. For instance, Clodomiro Picado, one of the most renowned Costa Rican scientists of all times, wrote in a letter published in the *Diario de Costa Rica* on May 20th, 1939:

¡NUESTRA SANGRE SE ENNEGRECE!, y de seguir así, del crisol no saldrá un grano de oro sino un pedazo de carbón. Puede que aún sea tiempo de rescatar nuestro patrimonio sanguíneo europeo que es lo que posiblemente nos ha salvado hasta ahora de caer en sistemas de africana catadura, ya sea en lo político o, ya en aficiones que remedan el arte o la distinción, en tristes formas ridículas⁴⁸ (Picado 1939, 1)

These excerpts depict racialized people as sub-humans, inferior in their education, taste, politics, hobbies, health, hygiene, personality, vices, and even mental health. What Fanon (2004) described as the damned of the Earth is illustrated by these discourses. It is not surprising that contemporary expressions of racism in Costa Rica frequently target migrants, especially Nicaraguans, who are caricatured because of their accent, their customs, their “poor tastes”, and their skin tone, supposedly darker than ours. In opposition, Costa Rican culture is portrayed as educated and well-mannered, as reflected in this sign, that today adorns the exterior wall of a restaurant in San José:

⁴⁶ Free translation: Gentlemen, we, the offspring of the Costa Rican people, are white. We are not black nor are we Indians for them to take away our right to vote. We cannot compare ourselves with the brute Indians of Guatemala.

⁴⁷ Free translation: The Chinese in general, those who come as concerted, have educational vices highly detrimental to our customs, at the same time that they have organizational or racial illnesses that are even more detrimental to public health. In general, they are players and thieves; insubordinate, cruel and vengeful, when considered in greater numbers and strong; the abuse of opium and the determined inclination to suicide.

⁴⁸ Free translation: OUR BLOOD IS TURNING BLACK! And if we continue like this, not a grain of gold will come out of the melting pot, but a piece of coal. It may still be time to rescue our European blood heritage, which is possibly what has saved us until now from falling into systems of African cattiness, either in politics or in hobbies that mimic art or refinement, in sad, ridiculous ways

Image 6

We are in a country that claims to be educated



Caption: We are in a country that claims to be educated and cultured, if you are educated you know how to read this: “Please DO NOT litter or tag the walls.” If you are educated you will not do it, if you are a foreigner you will demonstrate the culture of your country. In short, ever day we see more and more people with rights and less duties. Thank you for your attention. Casa Alameda.

This culture/savagery dichotomy, where culture is the property of white citizens and savagery is the abhorrent condition of immigrants and racialized people, can be found even in critical discourses. For example, the writer Yolanda Oreamuno, one of the most important figures in Costa Rican literature, wrote in an essay published in 1939:

Acá no había cultura. La culpa de todo esto viene de viejo... Nuestro pueblo no se ha hecho a sí propio: la civilización le vino como un regalo y la cultura continúa llegando como un producto de importación que todavía sufre impuestos prohibitivos. Heredamos la civilización europea como un capital que manos extrañas hicieron, manos extrañas que vinieron en plan explotación, nunca con la intención de afincar, y que si afincaron fue como parásitos porque no había mucho que explorar⁴⁹ (Oreamuno 1939, 142).

In her eagerness to criticize the problems of Costa Rican culture, she reproduces a series of problematic ideas. Her essay reproduces a colonial logic, in which the notions of progress and modernity are central. She identifies the Costa Rican people with mediocrity, a taste for the small,

⁴⁹ Free translation: There was no culture here. This is a long-standing problem. Our people has not build itself: civilization came as a gift and culture continues to arrive as an imported product that still suffers prohibitive taxes. We inherited the European civilization as a capital that foreign hands made, foreign hands that came with the intentions of exploitation, never with the intention of settling, and if they settled it was as parasites because there was not much to explore.

timidity and the fear of greatness, and she regrets that the "courageous blood" of the "daring Spaniards of whip and sword" has not remained in our culture (Oreamuno 1939). The metaphor of civilization as a gift is problematic as well. On the one hand, it denies the violent, genocidal and ethnocidal character of the civilizing enterprise perpetrated by Europeans in Abya Yala. On the other hand, it is an assertive speech act, which attributes civilization to Europe and at the same time implies that there were no pre-Hispanic civilizations in this territory, or that their culture was inferior.

The imaginary of whiteness has deep roots in the construction of the Costa Rican nation-state. Even today we still find traces of the racism provoked by this discourse, both in conservative sectors and in those who claim to be progressive. Whiteness is not only related to an aesthetic or an ideal of beauty, but also to a supremacist notion of culture and civilization, which attributes to whiteness attitudes and traits such as initiative, intelligence, willingness to work, as well as values such as peace, democracy and equality (G. Esquivel and Fernández 2014; Murillo 1998; Giglioli 1998). As I will develop throughout this study, the problematic knot of these imaginaries does not lie in the field of subjectivity. What is problematic about the construction of the identity of a people that believes to be white is the way in which it inscribes hierarchies of bodies and subjectivities, and produces power relations that provoke conditions of exploitation, exclusion and death. In this sense, it is not a matter of identity politics, but a biopolitical and necropolitical problem.

2.2. The imaginary exceptionality of Costa Rican

Following the colonial narrative that Spain brought civilization to Costa Rica, and that the inhabitants of this country are mainly white, the idea was established that whiteness also determined character traits and behaviors, such as respect for the law, democracy, love of peace and 'good manners' (Esquivel and Fernández 2014, 150).

An important observation about the narratives of nationhood is that most nations are portrayed as unique. Paradoxically, uniqueness seems to be a common self-attribute of nationhood in differing contexts, emphasizing those factors that can be favorably compared with other cases (Sandoval 2004b, 2).

In Costa Rica, this exceptionality revolves around whiteness. Anchored to the imaginary of whiteness, the imaginaries of peace and democracy appear as a sort of essence of the Costa Rican being. Thanks to their whiteness, from which the working spirit is derived, the Costa Rican people are presented as egalitarian and homogeneous. This same whiteness has inherited to the Costa Ricans a deep devotion to God, who in return has blessed this land with that exceptionality that makes it stand out as a Switzerland lost in the middle of a tropical farm.

2.2.1. Democracy

Even before independence, the discourses of official history indicate that Costa Rica has always been exempt from major conflicts, and this exceptionality is attributed to the whiteness of its population, which, unlike its neighbors, has not been so influenced by the indigenous peoples, who are considered violent and savage. Although it is not true that Costa Rica has been free of conflicts (political history recounts coups d'état, civil wars, border conflicts, among others), the truth is that this country has not faced the severity of socio-political conflicts and dictatorships that the rest of the Central American peoples have suffered.

This history, with certain blanks and a bit sugar-coated, feeds on the idea of a deep democratic vocation of the Costa Rican people. Former President Oscar Arias Sanchez, a controversial figure of the political and economic elites who received a Nobel Peace Prize⁵⁰ for his role in the peace processes in the Central American armed conflicts of the 1980s, has demonstrated the commercial potential of marketing the discourses of peace and democracy. In 1989, he celebrated one hundred years of democracy in Costa Rica, erasing facts such as the dictatorship of Federico Tinoco between 1917 and 1919. He did not consider as a democratic contradiction the fact that women in Costa Rica were excluded from the right to vote until 1949 (Sagot and Díaz 2019, 12). Nor did he mention the multiple obstacles that Afro Caribbean and indigenous people have faced for decades to be recognized as Costa Rican citizens, which has been a way to exclude them from the democratic-electoral system. In fact, between 1870 and 1913, the official census was used to limit the exercise of political citizenship to a small group of white landowners. This situation changed, not because of a concern to eradicate racist and classist practices of exclusion, but because the political parties wanted to add new voters to their ranks, so they pushed to be able to register anyone, regardless of their ethnicity (Sojo 2010, 354).

Costa Rican's natural affiliation to democracy is posited as the direct product of ethnic, cultural, and economic homogeneity (Sojo 2010, 350). However, contemporary reality is far from such equity. A study by the World Bank, placed Costa Rica among the 10 most unequal countries in the world (Salazar 2019). That a neoliberal authority, partially responsible for the dispossession and impoverishment in Abya Yala, such as the World Bank, points to Costa Rica as a country where inequality is too great,

⁵⁰ Activists and social organizations in Central America question the awarding of this prize to Arias, as they consider that it reproduces an individualistic approach, which overemphasizes the personal figure of Arias (a white man belonging to Costa Rica's political and economic elite), while erasing the work of organizations and communities throughout the region in peace processes. They also question Arias' closeness to the U.S. government, whose involvement in the Central American social conflicts has left thousands of deaths. Recently, feminist groups have called for this Nobel Prize to be withdrawn, in the face of several complaints for sexual harassment and rape filed by various women. His response of contempt and indifference has led feminist groups to denounce his misogyny, and to argue that someone who systematically assaults women in conditions of subordination cannot be recognized as a representative of peace.

speaks of the depth of this reality. Despite these undeniable inequalities, the imaginaries persist. Sojo (2010) proposes that three normative referents sustain this illusion of equality: horizontal coexistence, tolerance, and pacifism. Inscribed in a normative key, and entangled with the racism, classism, and elitism of a society that denies the evidence of *mestizaje*, these values define a particular type of democracy: liberal democracy, which has been established in the country's political discourses and practices (350).

In this context the question arises, as pointed out by this tag on a wall in downtown San José asks, what is democracy in Costa Rica?

Image 7
Tag: Democracy?



This is a question that also preoccupies the participants in this study, who, traversed by conditions such as forced exile, wonder how democracy works in Costa Rica:

...muchas veces hablamos de derechos humanos, pero no contextualizamos ni sabemos si es el mismo significado, el entender de qué derechos humanos o qué es democracia. Hay conceptos que aún tienen que ser más como desmenuzados... porque en realidad deja mucho que desear⁵¹ (Jacob, in discussion with the author, November 26, 2019).

The notion of democracy needs to be contextualized. Costa Rican researcher Laura Álvarez has studied political and popular discourses on democracy, concluding that the democratic imaginary continues to be effective in sustaining the model of political identification and the construction of citizenship (Álvarez 2014, 50). Álvarez affirms that the construction of the notion of democracy in Costa Rica is

⁵¹ Free translation: We often talk about human rights, but we do not contextualize or even know if it is the same meaning, to understand of what human rights or what democracy is. There are concepts that still have to be like broken down ... because in reality it leaves much to be desired.

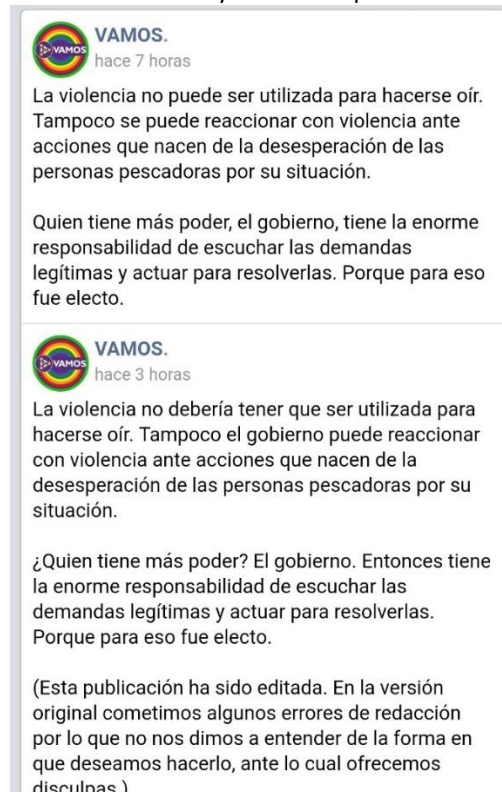
traversed by a national ideological framework, which acts as a model of imaginary and symbolic identification that associates the Costa Rican being with a definition of liberal/procedural democracy. In a study with participants from different social and political groups, she concludes that participants have a minimal notion of democracy, which consists of the protection of civil and political liberties through institutional procedures (Álvarez 2011; 2014). In this way, political actions that question the state order are perceived as threatening (Álvarez 2014, 50). This causes that, in situations of conflict, the imaginaries of peace and democracy are used as a privileged mechanism to obtain legitimacy, condemning any practice that deviates from this scheme as "violent" and therefore "anti-Costa Rican" (Álvarez 2011, 238). This notion of democracy has a pacifying effect, which has important implications for social movements and protests.

Social psychologist Marco Fournier analyzes the notions of what politics means to the Costa Rican population, based on the results of a national survey conducted within the framework of the project: "Elecciones 2010: participación ciudadana y cultura política". Most of the respondents identified politics with elections (91%). In second place came activities linked to electoral politics, such as actions within political parties (86%), and to representative democracy, such as the work done by congresspeople (83%). To a lesser extent, respondents identified actions related to direct democracy, such as struggles of communities (50%), protest demonstrations (49%), and street barricades (40%) (Fournier 2013, 85). In the same vein, there is a higher citizen participation in social organizations of a normative nature such as religious organizations (39.8%), than in organizations of struggle such as unions (6.2%) (Fournier 2013, 96). This reinforces what Álvarez (2011; 2014) and Sojo (2010) stated about the notion of democracy in Costa Rica, which privileges a liberal/procedural democracy, with a strong orientation towards representative democracy, while looking with suspicion at actions oriented towards direct democracy.

Democracy, for many people, is reduced to voting every 4 years, whereas protests are often condemned as anti-democratic. We can find these positions even within sectors that claim to be progressive, such as VAMOS Party (a local political party in San José, whose agenda focuses on the defense of patrimonial rights for gay & lesbian couples, and the right to the city for the upper-middle classes). To cite one example: in June 2019, tensions between the Government and the artisanal fishing sector (who opposed a tax reform that worsened their already precarious financial situation) culminated in the strong police repression of a protest in front of the Presidential House, where several fisherpeople resulted injured. In the midst of this situation, the VAMOS Party issued a Facebook post condemning "the use of violence to make one's voice heard". Faced with strong criticism from queer and trans* activists who reminded them that the rights we have today were

obtained through protests and street struggles that were stigmatized as violent by the authorities, they toned down their publication:

Image 8
VAMOS Party condemns protests



Source: VAMOS, 09/25/2021.
(<https://www.facebook.com/VamosCR/posts/634985946912061>)

The original post stated: “**Violence cannot be used to make oneself heard**. Nor can one react with violence to actions that are born out of the desperation of fisherpeople because of their situation. The one who has the most power, the government, has the enormous responsibility to listen to legitimate demands and take action to resolve them. Because that is what they were elected to do” (emphasis added). The edited post said: “**Violence should not have to be used to make oneself heard**. Nor can one react with violence to actions that are born out of the desperation of fisherpeople because of their situation. Who has more power? The government. So, it has the enormous responsibility to listen to the legitimate demands and take action to resolve them. Because that is what they were elected to do” (emphasis added). In an additional paragraph they explain: "This publication has been edited. In the original version we committed some wording errors, so we did not make ourselves clear in the way we wished to do so, for which we offer our apologies". However, the matter goes beyond a wording error. There is an important difference between what is stated in the original post and what they corrected after they were strongly criticized. The phrase: “Violence cannot be used to make oneself heard” constitutes a representational speech act, an action in which the speaker utters a

proposition with the intention of asserting it as a truth (Searle 1979). In this case, an opinion (violent protests are not a legitimate way of making oneself heard) is presented as an incontrovertible truth. Furthermore, this statement can be analyzed in terms of implicature, meaning that it says something without saying it explicitly: that the fisherpeople's protest is a form of violence. This is linked to the next sentence, which frames the government's repression as a reaction to the protest as a first form of violence. The edited post attempts to amend the problem, and corrects not only the verb (*should not*, instead of *cannot*), but adds a second verb that changes the connotation of the statement: *have to* be used. It is not the same *to use* violence as to *having to use* violence. The first, without context, can refer to a volitive action, or in any case an action that can be motivated by an infinite number of factors. The second, on the other hand, eliminates the ambiguity and points to a context in which someone is pushed to perform an action, having no other alternative. In this sense, this first post fits within the notion of democracy pointed out by researchers such as Álvarez (2014) and Fournier (2013), insofar as it points to social protest as violence, places the violence of the protesters on a horizontal plane with the repression of the forces of law and order, and furthermore, places them in a logic of provocation-response.

This logic has not lost ground in Costa Rica. On the contrary, it is strongly entrenched in the country's political culture. In 2020, the government of President Carlos Alvarado, a self-proclaimed progressist who won the elections hoisting the rhetoric of human rights, passed Law 9808, popularly known as the "Anti-Strike Law." This Bill states, among other things:

- Strikes in the public sector may not last longer than 48 hours.
- Any strike that involves blockades of public roads, that prevents access to public facilities or services, or that prevents the right to work of workers who are not on strike, will not be considered peaceful.
- Strikes are prohibited in sectors considered as essential services, including: Health services, at all levels of care; Railway, maritime, loading and unloading services at docks and piers; Firefighters and rescue services; Services necessary to ensure the supply of drinking water, sanitary sewage and sewage treatment; Services necessary to ensure the supply of electric power; Services indispensable for the importation, transportation, distribution and supply of fuel; School canteen services, as well as protection, care and/or shelter services for children and youth, older people, people with disabilities or in a state of vulnerability; Public security services; Air traffic controllers and immigration control at airports, ports and border posts (Asamblea Legislativa 2020)

In sum, the right to strike is now forbidden for most public employees, and the mechanisms of struggle that have been traditionally used by social movements in the country are banned. Although scarce, there have been a few conflictive situations, where street protest has been considered a legitimate mechanism of struggle, leading to large-scale street demonstrations throughout the country. In recent history, one experience brought to the fore the complex effects of this notion of liberal/procedural democracy. In the context of the discussion on Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) with the United States, probably the ultimate neoliberal project implemented in Costa Rica so far, huge demonstrations were organized in opposition to its approval. However, in 2007, a referendum was called to bring the decision on the approval of the treaty to the ballot box. After a long process of popular organization, a lot of money spent on campaigns by the elites, and many allegations of fraud, the treaty was finally approved with a margin of 48,844 votes (51% to 48%), and an abstention rate of 40% (Raventós 2018, 264). In reality, what this referendum showed was a divided, undecided and hesitant society. However, this relocation from the street to the polling station provoked an effect of incontestable legitimacy on the result, which made it unquestionable, since it was the ultimate exercise of democracy: the triumph of the majorities.

This logic of the "majorities" (which sometimes are not even really majorities in terms of numbers, as in the case of CAFTA mentioned above), is dangerous in that it tends to hide the processes of dispossession experienced by those who live in the *zone of non-being*.

In this regard, the participants in this study contest the idealized image of the Costa Rican democracy. Their perspective, which is traversed by their own experience of exclusion, brings into focus the ensemble of systems of domination that generate the great contrasts between those two very different Costa Ricas. On the one hand, the land of peace, equality and democracy that some people enjoy and advertise. On the other, the profoundly unequal country, where not everyone has the same rights and where certain bodies and certain populations face violence on a daily basis. Cassandra, who identifies herself as a *travesti* who survived the war against trans women on the streets of San José, reflects on this:

Una de las primeras preguntas que yo me hago es ¿Cuál democracia? Si Costa Rica no es un país democrático. Es un país capitalista, con un disfraz de democracia terrible. ¿Pero dónde está la bendita democracia?⁵² (Bogantes 2022).

⁵² Free translation: One of the first questions I ask myself is: What democracy? Costa Rica is not a democratic country. It is a capitalist country, with a terrible disguise of democracy. But where is the so-called democracy?

The discourse of democracy encounters a limit, since it is not accessible for all people, since it hierarchizes or excludes some people for reasons of class, race, gender, sexuality, among others. In this vein, Jacob affirms “hay que ir demandando y denunciando esas desigualdades, para vivir en un mundo en realidad en democracia⁵³” (Jacob, in discussion with the author, October 30, 2019). They both call for the overthrow of these systems of oppression, for the defense of life, of all lives, and this, as José points out, goes beyond progressive legislation or advances in education.

2.2.2. Peace

Alongside the discourse of innate democracy, we find that of a peace-loving people (Acuña 2002; Sojo 2010; Giglioli 1998). As mentioned above, this idea has accompanied the construction of Costa Rican identity even before it became an independent nation, although it undoubtedly gained more strength in the mid-twentieth century, with the abolition of the army. From very early in its history, Costa Rica defined itself as a peaceful people. The notion of peace, since then, implied the absence of conflicts, but also a Christian devotion and an anti-revolutionary vocation. During the colonial period, the rulers of the small province of Costa Rica tried to ingratiate themselves with the Crown, exalting their loyalty to the Monarchy. The Costa Rican elites insisted that, not only had they not participated in the anti-fiscal movements promoted in Nicaragua and El Salvador against the high taxes charged by Spain to the colonists, but they had even contributed with soldiers and weapons to suppress these insurrections (Acuña 2002, 48). A few years later, with the arrival of independence, the First Superior Governing Board, at the end of its first term of office, on November 9th, 1922, declared:

En el momento que os reconocisteis en su pleno goce, aborreciendo las exaltaciones y negros sentimientos de muchos pueblos del septentrión [los pueblos centroamericanos], solo os movió la mira religiosa de perpetuar la paz que os es como innata y adherente⁵⁴ (in: Acuña 2002, 51)

With this representative speech act, the First Superior Governing Board declared peace as an innate trait of the nature of Costa Ricans. During the first decade of independent life, the discourse of the elites was aimed at consolidating Costa Rica's image as a country full of political virtues such as peace, order, legality, harmonious and conflict-free coexistence, prudence, and neutrality in the face of regional conflicts (Acuña 2002, 55).

This idea of peace, like other imaginaries, is also constructed in opposition to the violent and subversive character attributed to our Central American neighbors, and the causes of this difference

⁵³ Free translation: it is necessary to demand and denounce these inequalities in order to live in a truly democratic world.

⁵⁴ Free translation: The moment we recognized ourselves in our full enjoyment, abhorring the exaltations and dark sentiments of many peoples of the north [Central American peoples], we were moved only by the religious aim of perpetuating the peace that is innate and adherent to us.

are associated, once again, with the heritage of white/European blood that has not been “stained” by *mestizaje* as in other countries:

por su aislamiento de los demás Estados ha podido librarse del contagio de las perniciosas influencias del desorden general y del maligno influjo de los perversos, conservando de este modo la sencillez de sus costumbres: que por la homogeneidad de sus habitantes ha gozado de la paz que da la armonía de hombres que viven bajo las mismas leyes...⁵⁵ (Francisco María Oreamuno, Secretary General of the Government of Costa Rica, cited in Acuña 2002, 61).

Race as a determinant of the peaceful or violent character of the Costa Rican people is a racist and colonial conception. This idea is reflected in patriotic hymns, which have been critically analyzed by researchers like María Isabel Carvajal Araya (2011). For example, the Hymn to Christopher Columbus, exalts the figure of Columbus as a light that came to illuminate the "New World", where mystery and ingenuity reigned. When referring to Columbus and Spain, the lyrics speak in terms of glory, of fortune, genius and courage, a star that guides the way. On the contrary, references to the Americas refer to darkness, ignorance and the brutality of the indigenous peoples (66). Similarly, the Hymn to the Annexation of Guanacaste⁵⁶ suggests that the attributes related to rationality (culture, knowledge, the sublime virtues) come from Iberia, while savagery, barbarism and bravery come from the indigenous world (70). Likewise, the Himno de la Raza tells a version of history in which the Spanish conquest is justified and considered as the salvation of the continent, while at the same time it subdues and disregards the indigenous existence, suggesting that the peoples of Abya Yala were able to elevate their human condition only through the mixing of blood (forced *mestizaje*) (61). Costa Rica's national anthem itself reflects the contradiction of the imaginary construction of peace. While the anthem proclaims that work and peace will always live in Costa Rica, its harmonization is a military march: “la letra está concebida desde una óptica bella letrística pero entretejida en una partitura de caracteres bélicos⁵⁷” (Carvajal 2011, 56).

Following this line of colonial argumentation, the image of whiteness is linked to social peace and Christian values (also inherited from the conquistadors) (Giglioli 1998, 25). Racial homogeneity was since then pointed out as a pillar of social peace, thus implying that heterogeneity and plurality can

⁵⁵ Free translation: because of its isolation from the other States it has been able to free itself from the contagion of the pernicious influences of general disorder and the evil influence of the wicked, thus preserving the simplicity of its customs: which, because of the homogeneity of its inhabitants, has enjoyed the peace that gives the harmony of men living under the same laws...

⁵⁶ Guanacaste is a region in the north-west, bordering Nicaragua. After the independence of the Central American territories, this small region on the edge of the Pacific Ocean was left in an adverse political and economic situation.

In the 1824's, the citizens who had the right to vote decided to annex these territories to the Costa Rican state.

⁵⁷ Free translation: the lyrics are conceived from a beautifully lyrical point of view but interwoven in a score of warlike characters.

jeopardize this peaceful coexistence. This idea that is dangerously close to fascism and white supremacism, where diversity is signaled out as a threat to be eradicated.

Se ha supuesto que el origen europeo aportó el temple necesario para salir adelante de las limitaciones y miserias de la colonia, permitiéndole a los españoles y sus descendientes, reconocerse como los únicos actores en la gesta de una Costa Rica caracterizada por ser eminentemente rural y en donde la democracia tiene cabida en la medida en que se funda sobre el individualismo y la pobreza generalizada de los labriegos sencillos⁵⁸ (Murillo 1998, 46).

Abolition of the army

Throughout the liberal period, the racial ideology that whitewashes its population continued to be emphasized, and democracy was appealed to as a feature of Costa Rican nationality (Acuña 2002, 218). In this context, a historical milestone forcefully marked the imaginary of peace: the abolition of the army in 1949. The official history narrates this event as a product of this innate love for peace. However, researchers from critical history perspectives have problematized the reasons behind this historic decision, as well as the consequences it had in terms of control within the country. For example, historian Mercedes Muñoz (1990; 2014) points out that the abolition of the army should be read as a strategic measure of the government in the midst of the convulsive situation after the civil war.

At the beginning of the 1940s, a fragile alliance was forged in Costa Rica between Social Christian politicians, the Catholic Church and the Communist Party, which allowed the approval of a series of laws and reforms to protect the proletariat (white and male). This period is known as the Reformist State, within which important institutions such as Social Security and the University of Costa Rica were founded. The Labor Code was created (which established the 8-hour workday, minimum wage, right to vacations, national holidays, Christmas bonus, severance pay and the right to strike). These reforms provoked great opposition from the elites. Aside from the social reforms, President Rafael Ángel Calderón Guardia signed in 1940 a Military Agreement with the US government that allowed strengthening the country's armed forces, including those for the internal control of the population (Muñoz 2014, 218).

The anti-communist discourse was already beginning to gain strength in the country. José Figueres Ferrer recovered the discontent of the elites who sought to abolish social guarantees. Figueres was a

⁵⁸ Free translation: It has been assumed that the European origin provided the necessary mettle to overcome the limitations and miserias of the colony, allowing the Spaniards and their descendants to recognize themselves as the only actors in the creation of a Costa Rica characterized by being eminently rural, and where democracy has a place insofar as it is based on individualism and the generalized poverty of the simple peasants.

caudillo who, far from being a revolutionary, was an anti-communist liberal businessman with political aspirations (Muñoz 2014, 219). Figueres organized a paramilitary group called the National Liberation Army (ELN), which did not share libertarian ideals but rather liberal ones. After a turbulent electoral process in 1948, the ELN rebelled and a 44-day civil war was unleashed, in which the forces commanded by Figueres triumphed. This led to the establishment of the Founding Board of the Second Republic. Muñoz (2014) characterizes this Board as a de facto government, although it had an important support and legitimacy among the people. The situation after the armed conflict was tense, and Figueres faced the pressures of the commitments he had acquired with national and international political-economic elites (220). However, this new government did not have the U.S. endorsement to acquire arms and ammunition. In this context, the abolition of the army was declared in the 1949 constitution, in force until today, with a pacifist and unifying discourse, which revived the imaginaries of democracy and peace. Beyond the slogan: "an army of teachers, not soldiers", Muñoz (2014) highlights that this act should be read in the framework of Figueres' political calculations. He sought to consolidate his hold on power and avoid or mitigate measures against him by the Inter-American System.

In any case, Costa Rica has managed to sustain itself as a nation without an army for more than 6 decades, possibly, because civilian control is feasible in small democracies (Feaver 1997, 67), but also because the imaginary of peace is so strongly intertwined with that of whiteness and religion, that are at the core of the knot that organizes power relations within this nation. Life in a country without an army has its particularities. Having grown up without a military culture, without being exposed to that imagery, makes some (dare I say, still many) of us feel uncomfortable or at least nervous when we see heavily armed police officers the streets or in the institutions. However, beyond the romantic vision of the peace imaginary, the fact is that the Costa Rican police have powerful weapons and their officers receive professional training in militarized academies in different countries. In addition, the civilian population is heavily armed. Data from 2014 estimated that in Costa Rica there were around 450,000 firearms circulating in the hands of the civilian population, between legal and illegal firearms. This means 1 weapon per 11 inhabitants. Given the increase in conflict, violence, drug trafficking and violent murders, we can imagine that this number has increased throughout this decade. In other words, we have a nation without an army, but well armed.

It is important to note that the imaginary of a peace-loving people has been articulated with an anti-revolutionary sentiment. Anti-revolutionary positions were probably strengthened by the anti-communism discourse after World War II, but they derived from the internal coloniality since the early beginnings of the nation-state. The anti-revolutionary sentiment, the imaginary of peace, are linked

to the imaginary of whiteness, as shown in this excerpt from a speech by Cleto González Víquez, twice president of the republic in the first half of the twentieth century:

Somos un pueblo de buena raza, laborioso, pacífico, gobernado con moderación y seriedad. No padecemos de la enfermedad que a otros aflige de frecuentes convulsiones y trastornos - los enemigos del progreso-, y cuando por excepción hemos sufrido algún movimiento de desorden, en una hora se liquida casi en paz, pues ni amamos el derrame de sangre, ni tenemos hábitos ni temperamentos revolucionarios⁵⁹ (González, cited in Esquivel and Fernández 2014, 198).

As Muñoz (2014) points out, anti-communism has played a fundamental role in ensuring and maintaining internal order in liberal democracy, setting the course for the ideologization of police and paramilitary forces, as in the case of the armed wing of the Movimiento Costa Rica Libre (MCRL), a far-right organization that was very active during the Cold War (222).

The case of Viviana Gallardo, an 18-year-old revolutionary who was murdered in jail, should be read in this context. In 1981, Viviana Gallardo was attacked with a machine-gun by a policeman, while she was imprisoned in a cell of the 1° Police Station in San José, together with two of her comrades who resulted also wounded, Alejandra and Magaly, who was 8 months pregnant. In a strategic move, the Costa Rican State self-denounced itself before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, admitting that it did not guarantee protection measures for the detained revolutionaries. However, in its argumentation it presents the murder as an isolated event and omits to mention any responsibility of the high hierarchies of law enforcement and government forces in the planning and execution of the crime. This contrasts with the investigations carried out by Miguel Regueyra, a professor and researcher at the University of Costa Rica involved with the organization, who has collected a series of documentary evidence indicating that this State crime was carefully planned, involving high-ranking government and police officials. Regueyra's research also indicates that other members of this organization who were detained for their political activities report having suffered physical and psychological torture in prison. The murder of Viviana Gallardo is claimed today as a State femicide, whose objective was not only to end the life of the young communist, but to teach the entire population (especially women) about the consequences that would befall those who dared to revolt against the liberal model and the interests of the elites in the country (Bonilla and Regueyra 2021).

⁵⁹ Free translation: We are a people of good race, industrious, pacific, governed with moderation and seriousness. We do not suffer from the disease that afflicts others of frequent convulsions and upheavals - the enemies of progress - and when by exception we have suffered some movement of disorder, in an hour it is settled almost in peace, for we neither love the spilling of blood, nor have we revolutionary habits or temperaments.

This occurred in the country that proclaims itself to be the purest and most stable democracy in Central America, identified by its love for peace, as described by former President of the Republic, Abel Pacheco, in his inauguration speech:

Los costarricenses hemos hecho de la paz y la civilidad una forma de ser; de la libertad y la democracia una vivencia cotidiana; de la solidaridad el fundamento de nuestro tejido social⁶⁰ (Pacheco 2002 in Esquivel and Fernández 2014).

Expressions of dissidence are minorized but one can find their traces in the streets, sometimes in demonstrations, sometimes in popular movements, sometimes in tags on the walls:

Image 9
Anarchist tags in San José



Caption: Tag on the left: (President) Alvarado sell-out to capital.
Tag on the right: No more pacifism.

Nevertheless, today anti-communist and anti-revolutionary ideas still persist in a large part of the population. In a collective research we conducted in 2010 regarding the nationalist discourses that were mobilized around a border conflict between Costa Rica and Nicaragua, we were able to observe how the imaginary of peace today contains a contradiction that cannot be thought of in binary terms. On the one hand, the interviewees affirmed that in Costa Rica we have peace, democracy, innate pacifism and diplomacy. But in affirming this, the tone was not always of pride or relief, but rather often it revealed a kind of rancor, a complaint (emotional and rationalized) that expressed their frustration towards these attributes, insofar as they are considered a sign of weakness and submission (Dobles et al. 2012, 97). Although the people interviewed did not dare to explicitly and directly question the value of peace, they indicated that in cases such as this one (conflicts with Nicaragua), the path of peace that the country has taken puts it in a position of disadvantage. We called this

⁶⁰ Free translation: We Costa Ricans have made peace and civility a way of being; freedom and democracy a daily experience; solidarity the foundation of our social fabric.

arguments *passivism*, to name the passivity that the interviewees reproached. In their opinion the absolute attachment to pacifism and a culture of peace limited the country's scope of action, bogging us down in an inept democracy (103-105). This led several interviewees to raise the need for armed forces, or to request the foreign intervention of armies of countries such as the U.S. or Germany. However, this warmongering drive should not be confused with a questioning of the status quo. It is not a subversive call, nor a critical reading of passivity such as that launched by Yolanda Oreamuno in 1939:

Dos son los cargos que, con caracteres de enfermedad nacional, sí merecen un estudio serio: la ausencia casi absoluta de espíritu de lucha, y la deliberada indiferencia hacia cualquier peligroso valor que en un momento dado conmueva o pueda conmover nuestro quietismo... Esta no necesidad de lucha trae como consecuencia un deseo de no provocarla, de rehuirla... Al que pretende levantar demasiado la cabeza sobre el nivel general, no se le corta. ¡No! Le bajan suavemente el suelo que pisa, y despacio, sin violencia, se lo coloca a la altura conveniente⁶¹ (Oreamuno 1939, 134).

The warlike impulse and the criticism of inept democracy do not break with the anti-communist and anti-revolutionary positions that permeate the peace imaginary. The limits of this imaginary are questioned not from the side of direct democracy or popular organization, but from a position that places the demand for security on the authorities, and calls for the use of arms, force and authoritarian measures for control and defense. As Lobo rightly captures it: "Aquí no hay anarquistas. No aborrecemos la autoridad, al contrario, la amamos tanto que cada uno de nosotros querría ser el supremo poder⁶²" (1998, 42).

The discourse of the peace imaginary constructs the idea of an idyllic utopia sustained on the basis of white nationalism. Peace is anchored to submission, whose supreme goal is to preserve an environment social purity. The imaginary also dictates that this state of peace was not achieved through popular or libertarian struggles, but through the hard work of Costa Ricans (Carvajal, 2011: 53), as dictated by our national anthem: "¡Salve, oh patria!, tu pródigo suelo / dulce abrigo y sustento nos da; / bajo el límpido azul de tu cielo, / ¡vivan siempre el trabajo y la paz!⁶³".

In *Security, Territory and Population*, Foucault stated:

⁶¹ Free translation: Two are the charges which, with the characteristics of a national disease, do deserve serious study: the almost absolute absence of combative spirit, and the deliberate indifference towards any dangerous value which at a given moment moves or may move our quietism... This lack of need for struggle brings as a consequence a desire not to provoke it, to avoid it... Whoever tries to raise his head too high above the general level, is not decapitated, no! He is gently lowered to the ground, and slowly, without violence, placed at a convenient height...

⁶² Free translation: There are no anarchists here. We do not despise authority; on the contrary, we love it so much that each one of us would like to be the supreme power.

⁶³ Free translation: Hail, oh homeland, thy prodigal soil / Sweet shelter and sustenance it gives us; / Beneath the limpid blue of thy sky, / Long live labor and peace!

...the idea of perpetual peace, which already existed in the Middle Ages, but always as an aspect of the final Empire or of the Empire of the Church, replaces, I think, the idea of the final Empire, and whereas in the Middle Ages the final Empire was the fusion of all particularities and kingdoms in a single form of sovereignty, the idea of perpetual peace will be the dream of a link between states that remain states (Foucault 2009, 342).

The ideal of peace is a pillar that sustains the nation-state, which, as I have developed, is a colonial project that imposes a certain vision of the world, constructed on the basis of opposition, hierarchization and domination of the bodies and the peoples. Perpetual peace implies submission and oppression, that can only be justified under the logic of coloniality⁶⁴, where the domestication of the savages is necessary to maintain order, progress and tranquility of the good white citizens.

2.2.3. Equality and homogeneity

The imaginary of racial homogeneity has its economic correlate: the idea of an egalitarian country, with a broad middle class, where there are no major contradictions between the rich and the impoverished classes. This supposed equality exists only on an imaginary level, because in reality Costa Rica is one of the countries with highest inequality indexes in the region and in the world (Araya et al. 2021).

The imaginary of equality grew around the belief that Costa Rica is a people composed entirely of landowners with small or large plots of land (Acuña 2002, 59). This idea was strongly interlocked with the imaginary of whiteness. Likewise, it was linked to the imaginary of peace. The intended subdivision of land was thought of as a way to prevent revolts in the country's former president Ricardo Jiménez stated in his speech:

... el secreto de nuestra estabilidad política está en la gran subdivisión de la tierra; en que casi todos los campesinos son propietarios... Ayudemos al bienestar de los agricultores en pequeño; y será como si tomáramos una póliza de seguro contra las revueltas y el retroceso⁶⁵ (Jiménez, cited in Sojo 2010, 345).

In reality, Costa Rica was a very poor province during the colonial period, due to the fact that it had not been able to develop fruitful commercial relations. It was under these conditions that it received the news of its independence, which frightened elites due to their economic and political dependence on Spain. As mentioned above, this led to the implementation of laws and policies that encouraged

⁶⁴ Foucault proposes racism as the configuration that makes it acceptable to give death in a society of normalization: the death of the other, of the bad race, the inferior or the abnormal (Foucault 2003). I will address this in greater depth in the next chapter, but it is worth noting that there are decolonial and postcolonial critiques of the Eurocentric way in which Foucault conceives of racism, which is why I consider it important to place coloniality in this discussion.

⁶⁵ Free translation: ... the secret of our political stability lies in the great subdivision of the land; in that almost all the peasants are proprietors... Let us help the welfare of the small farmers; and it will be as if we were taking out an insurance policy against revolt and setback.

the "colonization" of "virgin lands" by white foreigners, criollos and white-mestizos. Thus, although it is true that, in the beginning, some small peasants had access to the ownership of parcels of land, it is important to remember that they were white men. In any case, their small parcels of land, which in no way compared to those of the great elites, eventually passed into the hands of large producers, provoking a progressive concentration of land, processing and commercialization of goods (Sojo 2010, 334). In any case, their small parcels of land, which in no way compared to those of the great elites, eventually passed into the hands of large producers, provoking a progressive concentration of land, processing and commercialization (Sojo 2010, 344). With the expansion of commercial relations in the economy, the elites became richer and a coffee oligarchy emerged, with a liberal and Eurocentric ideology, where the imaginary of whiteness played a fundamental role.

The intellectual branch of this oligarchy of bourgeois men, often educated in Europe, is known as the "generation of the Olympus". The appellation Olympus alludes to their attitude and their claim to enlighten the popular classes with their liberal and positivist thinking. This movement played an important role in the consolidation of the Liberal State, directly influencing politics and education. Its postulates included the secularization of the State and education, which contributed to limiting the power of the Catholic Church in the life and control of bodies. However, this did not translate into libertarian processes for the popular classes, who were thought to harbor a series of vices and customs that hindered progress and clashed with the imaginary of the Costa Rican being

In the early 1900s, under the influence of the liberal oligarchy, a series of public policies were developed to professionalize the police, improve the penitentiary system and promote charity organizations as ways to manage populations that were considered antisocial and undesirable, such as sex workers and criminals. In fact, since the 19th century in Costa Rica, acts that attempted against morality, such as sodomy, bestiality, indecency, corruption and prostitution of minors, were prosecuted. Likewise, women victims of rape were forced to prove their innocence, and were often blamed and criminalized for the aggression they suffered. This type of conduct was punishable by imprisonment. However, before the creation of women's detention centers, the tendency was to confine women "of dubious reputation" in what were called "honorable houses", administered by ecclesiastical authorities or charitable associations that sought to reorient these women towards good moral values (Rodríguez 2005, 319). Until then, however, control in the city operated under a model of surveillance and punishment, a disciplinary apparatus driven by Christian morality. With the liberals, Christian ideology saw its power diminished, and in its place a secular morality, which exalts reason and is functional to capitalism, gained strength (Palmer 2002, 19).

Inspired by the discourse promoted by the Olympus generation, the liberal elites established the idea of social hygiene and prophylaxis as the path to progress and turned it into a state policy. This turn in governmentality not only transformed the bases of morality that imposed the dominant normativity, but also transforms the mechanisms through which power is exercised. We could say that it is a biopolitical turn, in which the production of statistics played a fundamental role. Thus, institutions were created to mediate political and class confrontations, but also to produce information about the conditions of the impoverished working classes, hoping they could serve as a basis for anticipating and preventing social crises and to increase the capacity of the state to educate the working classes in matters of moral decency, honest hard work, social hierarchies and national productivity (Palmer 2002, 51). For example, in 1908 the Police of Order and Security of San José was created. The novelty is that, besides from investigating criminal activities, this police was charged with the task of producing, accumulating and centralizing data on those suspected of engaging in behaviors such as vagrancy, sex work, theft, alcoholism, gambling, or people who appeared to be insane (Palmer 2002, 37). Traditional empirical medicine and midwives were also persecuted by a Public Health and Hygiene Police (Palmer 2002, 50).

Strongly anchored in their internal coloniality, the biopolitical proposal of the liberal elites sought to "civilize" popular cultures through literacy processes, crossed by a Europeanist and Europeanizing aspiration, and the imposition of normative values such as hygiene, labor and sexual discipline (Quesada 2008). In this sense, liberal pedagogy was not only hygienist, but also contributed to the construction of the white imaginary of the nation. Through this pedagogy, centered in the villages of the Central Valley, they perpetrated colonial domination, strengthening the image of a country of racial and cultural homogeneity, under the pattern of a civilized western nation (Quesada 2008). Those who were not part of this homogeneous race, the racialized groups, were pushed to the margins, spatially (the country's peripheries), politically (practical exclusion from democratic life) and economically (dispossession and impoverishment) (Palmer 1995, 117).

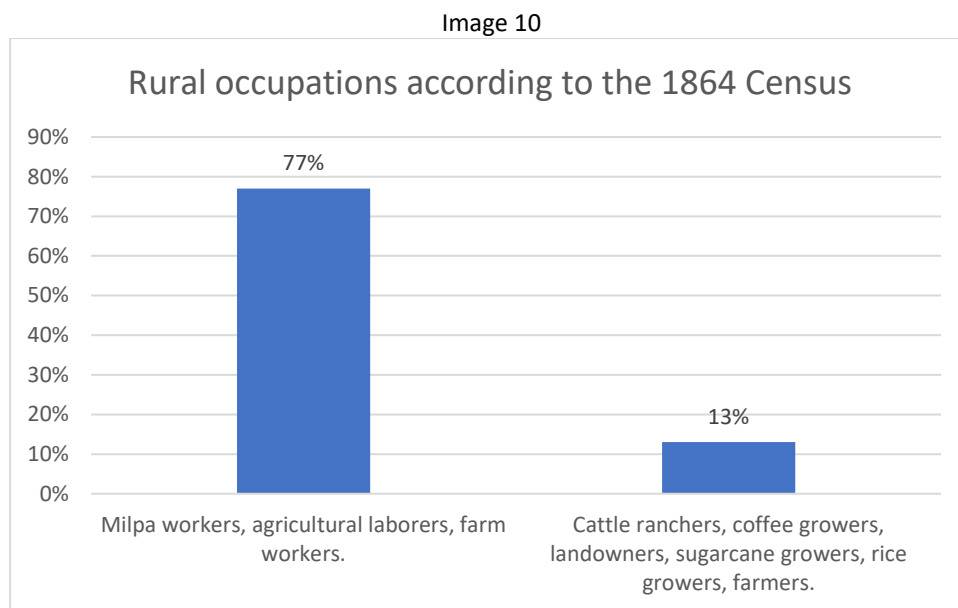
Sojo (2010) affirms that the proclaimed Costa Rican equality at all levels of social life is an explicit expression of racism, machismo and classism:

El enunciado explícito es profundamente racista, machista y clasista. Los próceres del pasado, muchos de ellos mestizos de pleno derecho, se esmeraron por cultivar el ideal igualitario sobre la base de la ignorancia y el ocultamiento de las diferencias que integraban a la sociedad⁶⁶ (Sojo 2010, 333).

⁶⁶ Free translation: The explicit statement is deeply racist, sexist and classist. The forefathers of the past, many of them full-fledged mestizos, strove to cultivate the egalitarian ideal on the basis of ignorance and concealment of the differences that made up society.

The idea of the distribution of land ownership and production consolidated the representation of an egalitarian middle-class society, which, despite distancing itself from the material reality of the Costa Ricans of the time, played a fundamental role in the shaping of identity. “As a consequence of the exclusion of most peasant and indigenous populations, the liberal nation was rather a nation of ‘ladinos,’ citizens and people with some access to the written culture (Acuña 1992, translated in Sandoval 2004, 82).

Despite these discourses, even the official statistics of the 19th century showed a different reality, as illustrated by image 10:



Source: Source: Own elaboration based on data from the 1864 Census

The National Census of 1864 indicates that an enormous majority of Costa Ricans were paid workers. In other words, even before the coffee expansion, there was already significant social inequality and capital accumulation (Sandoval 2004, 73). Inequality and land concentration have continued to worsen to the present day, with particularly serious consequences for women. In her thesis, researcher Alejandra Bonilla analyzes state policies on agrarian and rural matters. She indicates that between 1963 and 1988, only 11.8% of the land awarded by the government went to women, a trend that is repeated in terms of housing allocation through institutional programs (2017, 163). This situation not only exacerbates the conditions of dispossession faced by rural women, but also imposes compulsory heterosexuality on them as the only means of subsistence.

This fragment from an article published in the journal *Mentor Costarricense* in 1944 portrays the condensation of various imaginaries:

Aquí se palpa el excelente carácter de nuestro pueblo: pacífico, laborioso y apasionado de la diversión, su constancia y eficacia para gozar, es solamente comparable al teñón y actividad con que trabaja; y lejos de mirar con ceño o envidia los recreos de las clases superiores, él se asimila a ellas, las imita y procura siempre mejorar⁶⁷ (in Acuña 2002, 63).

In fact, equality never really existed except in nationalist and pacifist discourse. Instead, we find patriarchy, capitalism and racism in close colonial imbrication (Sandoval 2004, 11). The fragment above reproduces the idea of the submissive and pacified impoverished citizen, who does not suffer from class hatred, nor questions the system that precarizes their material conditions; a naive and docile person who accepts their place in the matrix of oppressions, who does not fight to abolish inequalities, but dreams of becoming rich, and when they fail, at least pretends to be so, as if the imitation of that upper class would appease their hunger, their tiredness and their pain. This is the logic behind one of the most popular words today in the discourse of governments, NGOs, international cooperation agencies and even in public universities: entrepreneurship. Today's entrepreneur is often someone who has been expelled from the waged world, who invests intellectual, physical and material capacities in an uncertain project in search of some kind of economic stability. What the discourse of entrepreneurship as an ointment for poverty omits to say, is that in practice the same rules of the market, determined by class, race, gender and coloniality continue to govern, where the impoverished classes always enter with a series of disadvantages knotted in their bodies, disadvantages that pull them down, in this supposedly free competition.

⁶⁷ Free translation: Here the excellent character of our people is palpable: peaceful, industrious and passionate about fun, their constancy and efficiency to enjoy, is only comparable to the tenacity and effort with which they work; and far from frowning or envying the recreations of the upper classes, they assimilate themselves to them, imitating them and always striving to improve.

Image 11

Tag: The only dangerous class are the rich



Caption of tag on the wall: The only dangerous class are the rich

Today, the severity of the economic crisis, which has plunged 26.2% of the population into poverty (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos 2021a), and the tremendous contrasts observed in the city, and between the city and the countryside, make it difficult to sustain this imaginary of equality and the majority middle class. In fact, by 1998 the middle class no longer exceeded 30% of the population (Salazar 2019). San José is rather a city of contrasts. Its streets, plagued by 4x4s and recently also by bicycles that cost more than what a domestic worker earns in 6 months, are at the same time the residence of an increasing mass of people who do not have their basic needs covered. As I will further discuss in the following chapters, outside the luxury residential towers and the restaurants with expensive menus available only through a QR scanned with a smartphone, the unhoused residents of the city set up little cardboard houses where they try to shelter from the rain and the cold, from the cold of the passers-by too, who, when they do not attack or throw the police at them, look at them with disgust and contempt, or in the best of cases, with fear.

2.2.4. Protected by God and the Virgin's grace

Tschannen (2004) states that in Latin America the practice of secularism suffers from a legal weak point, since regardless of what is established by law, religious groups continue to be interlocutors in the political debate, and the State relies on the legitimacy provided by the religious apparatus to increase its social influence (194). But in the case of Costa Rica it is even worse, since it is a confessional State. Costa Rica is the only confessional state in the Americas, the only country in the region that constitutionally recognizes an official state religion. Religion is present not only in private life but also

in the public sphere, in public spaces, in institutions, in education, in discussions in Congress and in presidential campaigns. Private schools promote their Christian ideology to attract clients, and use the classes and public space to evangelize passersby in San José:

Image 12

Olmos School, Barrio Escalante



Image 13

Ten Commandments, Barrio Escalante



Even law enforcement has its Catholic division. After a long history of collaboration between the Catholic Church and law enforcement, in 1995 the government formalized this relationship through Executive Decree No. 24269. The decree officializes an ecclesiastical division called the Vicaría Episcopal de la Fuerza Pública (Episcopal Vicariate of the Public Police Force), which according to its profile on Facebook today has more than twenty chaplains to support the work and to evangelize the officers of the public force. According to the official website of the Ministry of Public Security of Costa Rica, some of the functions of the Episcopal Vicariate are:

- 1) To provide the sacraments, prior preparation, to members of the Public Force who request or require it according to the circumstances.
- 2) To teach courses of ethical and religious instruction in training places, police delegations and different units of the Public Police Force.
- 3) To provide spiritual, religious and moral consultation and guidance services.
- 4) To bless and inaugurate facilities and equipment (this means, blessing the weapons) for the use of the members of the Public Force (Ministerio de Seguridad Pública de Costa Rica, n.d.).

This religious omnipresence that permeates our culture has its origin, of course, in the Spanish coloniality. But the inoculation of religion in the Costa Rican identity is largely explained by the myth of exceptionality, granted to our white people by the grace of God and the Virgin of the Angels who fell in love with this nation.

In Costa Rica, as in many other places in Abya Yala, the Catholic Church required a series of mythological strategies to counteract the resistance of the native peoples to Christian evangelization.

In addition to the use of force and discipline, Costa Rica employed a strategy that was widely used throughout Abya Yala, which consisted of spreading the legend of the apparition of a virgin to indigenous or mestizo villagers. This legend in Costa Rica was embodied in the figure of the Virgin of the Angels, popularly known as "La Negrita". *Negrita* means little black women, and it is a reference to the color of the stone of the image of the Virgin. This legend is at the heart of most Costa Rican homes and provokes one of the country's biggest mass phenomena.

According to legend, on August 2, 1635, Juana Pereira, an impoverished and racialized woman who lived in the Puebla de los Pardos⁶⁸, entered the forest and, on a rock, she found a figure: the image of a woman with a child in her arms, carved in dark stone. She took the stone home and kept it in a box. The next day, again in the forest, on the same rock, she found another small stone doll, exactly like the previous one. She took it home and when she reached to put it next to the first one, she could not find the original figure. The same thing happened on the third day, but then she took it to the priest of La Puebla, Alonso de Sandoval, who kept it in a box at the church. The next day, he opened the box and the doll was gone. Juana again found the image on the rock in the forest, and once again took it to the priest, where the same scene was repeated. Consequently, the priest declared that it was a message from the Virgin Mary, who wanted to be in the forest. Therefore, they built a temple on the stone in her honor (today the Basilica of the Angels, located in the city of Cartago), around which the inhabitants of the Puebla de los Pardos began to congregate.

Actually, the cult of Our Lady of the Angels originated in Getafe, Spain, near Madrid, and was brought to Abya Yala by the Spanish conquerors. Similar stories can be found in several countries in the territory we now call Latin America. Research also suggests that Juana Pereira did not really exist as such. It is said that Monsignor Victor Sanabria, second archbishop of San Jose in 1940s, tried to recover the story of the woman who found the Negrita, and not finding her identity, he named her Juana Pereira, since they were the most common name and surname among racialized women of the time (Redacción Catholic.net n.d.). Juana Pereira, then, could be anyone, and thus, racialized people had their Virgin, to whom a series of miracles were attributed in the following years.

⁶⁸ A neighborhood outside of Cartago, then capital of the Province of Costa Rica, designated for the habitation of indigenous and racialized people who were not worthy of living in the village. In the words of Sojo (2010): a ghetto of the excluded, which constituted an ordinary practice sustained by racist and religious motivations, as well as by political purposes of domination and control (337).

Image 14:
La Negrita



Source: Notimérica, (<https://www.notimerica.com/cultura/noticia-agosto-dia-patrona-costa-rica-virgen-angeles-celebra-fecha-20180802025956.html>)

At the beginning and for a long time afterwards, the devotion to the image was strong only among the impoverished classes, indigenous people and Afro Costarricans of the Puebla, who lived segregated from the white citizens of Cartago (Sojo 2010, 337). However, at the end of the 18th century, the tradition of the Pilgrimage to the Virgin of the Angels was consolidated, which today still constitutes the largest mass activity in the country. At the end of the 19th century, the Virgin of the Angels became part of the nation's repertoire of signs. She was declared patron saint of Costa Rica and protector of the Americas by Pope John Paul II.

Every year, pilgrims walk to the Basilica from all corners of the country, sometimes for several days, to pay tribute and request miracles to the Virgin of the Angels. The pilgrimage reaches its climax during the night of August 1 and the early morning of August 2. On August 2 a Solemn Mass is celebrated outside the Basilica, in the presence of thousands of believers. It is also attended by the president of the Republic and representatives of the Executive and Judicial Branches are invited (Madrigal 2012). In the previous days, a dress contest is held, in which the congregation, especially women, weave dresses for the stone image. It is said that the Virgin will choose the dress to wear on that day. Estimates by the School of Statistics of the University of Costa Rica calculate that between 15% and 20% of the country's total population participates in the pilgrimage. The same survey reflects that 77.9% of responders have attended the Basilica of Los Angeles in Cartago at least once in their life, to visit the Virgin (Madrigal 2012).

Image 15:
La Negrita salutes the people



Source: Conozca su cantón, (<https://conozcasucanton.com/noticias/historia-y-cultura/un-viaje-por-la-historia-y-las-curiosidades-de-la-negrita-5985/>)

In 2010, Bishop Francisco Ulloa officially declared President Laura Chinchilla, the first woman president in Costa Rica, a "beloved daughter" of the Virgin Mary in a mass celebrated the day after her victory in the national elections.

Image 16:
Laura Chinchilla at Basilica of the Angels



Source: Monge, César
(<http://cesarmonge.blogspot.com/2013/07/la-negrita-prefiere-dona-laura-que-usted.html>)

In the Solemn Mass of August 2, 2013, still under the government of Chinchilla, the three powers of the republic (Executive, Legislative and the Supreme Court of Justice) offered the consecration of the supreme powers, the people and the entire country to the Virgin of the Angels, thus deepening on a symbolic and discursive level the confessional State. For his part, Bishop Óscar Fernández, president

of the Episcopal Conference, declared August 2 as the Day of Consecration of Costa Rica (Redacción Informa-tico 2013).

Miraculous powers have been attributed to *La Negrita*, such as the protection of Costa Rica against disasters like earthquakes, and it is even said that in gratitude to the devotion of the people, her hand has diverted hurricanes to the north. This may seem like popular mythology, but in 2020, during one of the worst moments of the Covid-19 pandemic, Costa Rican authorities joined with the Church and private enterprise to organize a flyover of *La Negrita* throughout the national territory, in order to bring protection to Costa Ricans against the lethal disease that was spreading throughout the world:

Image 17:
La Negrita boarding Costa Rican Air Force plane



Source: La Nación

<https://www.nacion.com/el-pais/servicios/virgen-de-los-angeles-sobrevuela-pais-para/NGBNHGWCLJEIVO6E3REFJMZOB4/story/>

It is worth mentioning that, as a result of not having an army, it is not feasible to impose quarantine measures in Costa Rica. There are no legal mechanisms that allow a government to establish restrictions on the movement of its citizens. For this reason, the government only managed to impose a "sanitary vehicle restriction", which limits the circulation of vehicles according to license plate number. It also decreed the temporary closure of some businesses and parks, but people could move freely throughout the territory. In this scenario, all we could do was to appeal to divine protection. Thus, on Saturday May 9 and Sunday May 10, 2020, the image of the Virgin of the Angels flew over all the provinces of the country to bring faith to Costa Ricans during the pandemic. The operation, called *The Flight of Hope*, was coordinated with the Church, the National Commission for Emergencies, the National Fire Brigade and the Air Surveillance, and is said to have been financed by the private sector.

Thousands of people came out with mirrors and handkerchiefs to greet the passing of the Virgin through the skies. This event shows the importance of this leyend in Costa Rican culture.

Image 18
Flying Negrita



Source: Amelia Rueda (<https://www.ameliarueda.com/nota/conozca-recorrido-aereo-de-la-negrita-este-fin-semana-proteccion-covid-19>)

The legend of *La Negrita* consolidates the popular imaginary of Costa Rica as a nation protected by God. Sojo (2010) proposes that, in a very real way, the leyend of *La Negrita* and the construction of the Catholic patronage around the Virgin of the Angels, constitutes one of the important knots in the secessionist distinction between the whitened society and the universe of the "pardos", the racialized people (337). Religion, and more specifically the cult of the Virgin of the Angels, was instrumentalized as an element of common identity of the popular sectors that created a sense of unification despite racial and class differences (Acuña, 2002). In this sense, the imaginary of the nation protected by God and the Virgin is assembled with the previously described myths of a racially pure and homogeneous society, where peace, democracy, and good Christian values reign. As a popular patriotic song dictates:

Tan linda es mi Costa Rica
Que la Virgen de los Angeles bajó
Y cuando la vió tan bonita
Al cielo jamás regresó

...

Por ser tan linda Costa Rica la llaman
La Suiza Centroamericana
Por ser tan linda Costa Rica la llaman
La Suiza Centroamericana⁶⁹

⁶⁹ So beautiful is my Costa Rica / That the Virgin of the Angels came down / And when she saw it was so lovely / She never returned to heaven / ... For being so beautiful Costa Rica is called / The Central American Switzerland / Since Costa Rica is so beautiful they call it / the Central American Switzerland

2.3. Mestizx, which side are you on?

2.3.1. Statistics don't lie, they bleach

Perhaps one of the clearest examples of the imaginary of whiteness in discourse can be found in the official statistics of the Costa Rican population. Every 10 years, the National Institute of Statistics and Census (INEC) carries out the ambitious statistical operation of a population census. It is a huge and very expensive device, in which hundreds of interviewers travel throughout the country to collect information from every person who lives in each house or shelter in the territory.

In *Society must be defended* and *Security, Territory and Population*, Michel Foucault (2003; 2009) analyses the role of statistics in biopolitical governmentality. The development of statistical science introduces a new form of knowledge/power, which has the population as its object. Population is not exactly society, nor is it the individual, but a new body, says Foucault, a multiple body (2003, 245). The introduction of the notion of population as an object of governmentality, produces a shift in the way the State exercises power, from the disciplinary control of the individual-body to the action on the possibilities and probabilities of the masses, of the population as a sort of mass-body. This in no way means that biopower replaces disciplinary power. Foucault suggests that both apparatus (*dispositif*) of power can overlap and in fact coexist (Foucault 2008b).

someone who governs must know the elements that enable the state to be preserved in its strength, or in the necessary development of its strength, so that it is not dominated by others or loses its existence by losing its strength or relative strength... this knowledge of the things that comprise the very reality of the state is precisely what at the time was called "statistics." Etymologically, statistics is knowledge of the state, of the forces and resources that characterize a state at a given moment. For example: knowledge of the population, the measure of its quantity, mortality, natality; reckoning of the different categories of individuals in a state and of their wealth... (Foucault 2009, 354)

Biopolitics as a technology of power studies the population as a political, economic, biological problem (Foucault 2003, 230). Demographers use statistics to study the characteristics of the population, to quantify, classify and even predict or control its behaviors. Nonetheless, statistics, like any science, are not neutral. Statistics create standards that are then translated into norms. Its normativizing function has been well explored and denounced by different social movements (for example, collectives of afro, trans, intersex people, people with disabilities, and so on). Official statistics, therefore, constitute an important field for the analysis of knowledge-power.

However, instead of focusing on the analysis of official statistical indicators, I wish to draw attention on a previous operation: the surveys for collecting information. That is, the instruments that are supposed to reflect reality as accurately and as unbiasedly as possible. Even more than in opinion

surveys, reliability and validity are fundamental in censuses, since they intend to measure not subjective opinions or attitudes, but objective data on the population and its living conditions.

Theoretically,

governments use census data to apportion their legislative bodies, set boundaries for political districts, distribute government funds for social programs, track the nation's economy, measure crops to predict food supplies, and monitor people's commute to work to determine where to improve the region's infrastructure (Cantwell 2008, 91).

The information is collected through a standardized questionnaire, in a face-to-face interview with one respondent per household. Interviewers receive extensive training with instructions to adhere strictly to what the questionnaire says, in order to avoid inducing bias throughout the interview. For its part, the standardized questionnaire is an instrument that undergoes a long process of construction, which also attempts to reduce biases as much as possible. Items must ensure construct validity, meaning that the measurement, as worded, properly reflects the construct it attempts to quantify (Holyk 2008, 657).

According to Trobia (2008) there are four necessary conditions for constructing questions in a survey: (a) theoretical knowledge of the subject, (b) valid and reliable operationalization of concepts and hypotheses of research, (c) experience in writing questionnaires, and (d) knowledge of the target population (652). In this sense, we can affirm that the construction of each item in a questionnaire responds to a thorough research process, in which each question is reviewed, validated with experts in the field and tested with segments of the target population. This means that the wording is never random but has been carefully considered.

Traditionally, questions in a survey have been understood as a stimuli that provokes a response (the answer to the question) (Shamir 2008). However, more and more researchers in the field of discourse analysis insist on the importance of recognizing that survey questions are not neutral, and that, on the contrary, they tend to reproduce dominant discourses (Shamir, Ziskind, and Blum-Kulka 1999; Franzosi 2004; Peer 1992; Kinder and Sanders 1990). In Shamir's words: "survey questions also may be viewed as responses, where those who formulate the questions are responding to meaningful social forces and conditions. Thus, survey questions can be excellent indicators for public discourse" (2008, 666). The interview setting itself has also been considered as part of the social discourses, since it is a form of social interaction (Shamir, Ziskind, and Blum-Kulka 1999, 345) traversed by processes of production of knowledge, normativity, and truth.

Distancing from the idea of neutral stimuli, Kinder and Sanders (1990) view survey questions as a part of the "elite discourse and political debate" (66). Furthermore, they believe that "surveys not only

measure public opinion but also shape, provoke, and occasionally create it” (74). In this sense, they propose that the systematic analysis of the wording and thematization may unveil ideological leaning and cultural biases embedded in statistical operations. Taken as discourse fragments, survey items provide “critical historical instances in the form of mini-texts, in which major themes on the public agenda, assumptions, and ideologies are crystallized in the form of questions” (Shamir 2008, 668).

From a Foucauldian perspective, Peer (1992) suggests that polls exercise disciplinary power by normalizing, correcting, and validating discourse. Aside from disciplinary, I would say, with Foucault, that population statistics are also biopolitical technologies. What I am interested in pointing out with the discursive analysis of the questions regarding race and ethnicity, is not the effects of statistical production on the control of bodies and subjectivities, but the ways in which the production of statistical knowledge can be a biopolitical instrument in itself, insofar as it [re]produces the reality that it intends to reflect and describe in a neutral way.

Van Dijk (1990) proposes the metaphor of icebergs to understand discourses: only the information at the top is visible as information expressed in the discourse itself (96). Underwater lies a number of formulations that, intentionally or fortuitously, say things without saying them. It is along these lines that I would like to analyze the questions regarding racial/ethnic identity in the Costa Rican censuses, in terms of implicature, speech acts and value theory.

2.3.1.1. *The ethnic minorities approach*

In 2011, for the first time the Costa Rican census questionnaire introduced the multicultural perspective, with a question regarding ethnic/racial identity. Before the 2011 Census, the subject had been explored in statistical operations from the angle of “ethnic minorities”. For example, in the 2000 Census the questionnaire asked for each member of the household:

Image 19
Question about ethnic/racial origins. Census 2000

6. ¿Pertenece ____ a la cultura ...	
... indígena?	<input type="radio"/> 1
... afrocostarricense o negra?	<input type="radio"/> 2
... china?	<input type="radio"/> 3
Ninguna de las anteriores	<input type="radio"/> 4

Source: INEC, Boleta Censal 2000

(https://www.inec.cr/sites/default/files/documentos/inec_institucional/metodologias/boletas/boleta_censo.pdf)

This can be translated as: “Does _____ belongs to the culture:

01. Indigenous
02. Afro Costa Rican or black
03. Chinese
04. None of the above.”

I start by analyzing the presuppositions and the implicature in this question. Presuppositions refer to a type of information that, although not explicitly indicated, can be inferred from the statement. It assumes that all parties involved in a communicational exchange share a common knowledge. In this sense, presuppositions are anchored to a specific context and to a particular communicational setting. In this case, the census interviewers ask questions formulated by a group of experts who assume that respondents have a common set of knowledge that will enable them to understand the questions and respond in accordance with what the question is intended to measure. “To be valid and reliable, survey questions must be formulated in a way that carries shared meaning” (Shamir, Ziskind, and Blum-Kulka 1999, 355).

Some of the presuppositions we can identify in the question used in the 2000 Census are:

1. Some respondents belong to ethnic minorities.
2. Ethnic minorities are cultures.
3. The main ethnic minority groups in Costa Rica are: Indigenous; Afro Costa Ricans or black; or Chinese.

As Shamir (2008) affirms, analyzing “question presuppositions offers indicators of the ‘taken for granted’ in public discourse, mutually known to all participants and often linked to ideological stances” (667). Thus, an analysis of implicature becomes relevant, as it allows us to trace these ideological stances that are reproduced in discourses. Implicature is the act of saying something without explicitly saying it. “Implicit meanings are related to underlying beliefs, but are not openly, directly, completely or precisely asserted, for various contextual reasons” (Van Dijk 2001, 104). Forms of implicature include figures of speech (such as hyperboles, metaphors, litotes, etc.) and modes of speech (relevance, strengthening, limiting, etc.). Although it is more common in argumentative or persuasive discourses (such as opinion articles and political speeches), several researchers have demonstrated the uses of implicature in texts that are socially assumed to be neutral (such as news, scientific reports, medical records, etc.) (Cuvardic 2008; Van Dijk 1990; Fournier 2007).

To begin, it is important to analyze the wording of the question used in the 2000 Census. A first consideration is the choice of the verb. The item asks if the person in question *belongs* to a certain

culture. *To belong* is a passive action, where the subject is designated as part of a group. This designation could be the product of a conscious and volitional process on the part of the subject who identifies with that culture, or it could be an external process of social labelling, in which the subject is classified as part of a given group, independently of the will or the own processes of identity construction. This is particularly important since the respondent answering this question provides information for each person living in their household. In this sense, what the question measures is the respondent's reading of cultural belonging of the people with whom they live. The response provides information about the respondent's regard, which is traversed by the historical construction of the imaginaries I have been discussing in this chapter. This may or may not coincide with what the person concerned affirms and embodies, but the way in which the question is constructed does not allow us to know this. In any case, the wording in the item places it within the discursive frame of racialization processes, insofar as it seeks for the respondent to judge the belonging of another subject to a group that is considered an ethnic minority.

Segato (2016) says that race is not about an essence, but about how that person is read. As a system of domination, race is a sign: something that means something to someone. In this sense, racialization is always contextual. This does not imply falling into a depoliticized relativism that denies racism. Race hierarchizes and dichotomizes; it is a system of domination that produces human beings and beings stripped of their humanity. In this sense, Segato proposes that in Brazil no one knows better how to read raciality than the police, who persecute and repress with special cruelty those bodies marked by the racializing gaze. In this line, it seems that more than racial identity, this question of the 2000 Census registers the reading of this sign, placing the respondent in the place of a racialization police.

Another choice of wording that merits analysis is response option number 3: *Chinese*. In this case, '*Chinese*' operates as a synecdoche. Synecdoche is a trope that functions by means of a metonymic relation where a part substitutes the whole, or vice versa (Quinn 1982). In this case, *Chinese* is used to refer to the diversity of Asian migrants in Costa Rica. In fact, studies suggest that most Asian migrants in Costa Rica effectively come from China. Chinese migration had its peak in the mid-19th century, with the importation of Chinese laborers to work in precarious conditions (quite close to slavery, despite it was abolished in 1824), in fields such as railroad construction, mining, and later domestic work, commerce and agriculture (Bermúdez-Valverde 2012, 74-75). However, there are other Asian migrants from different origins that may not identify as Chinese, but who suffer the effects of racialization of their bodies.

In the history of anti-immigrant legislation in Costa Rica, "Chinese" has been used more as a racial marker than as a nationality, categorizing Asian migrants of other nationalities (such as Japanese) as

"Chinese" (Bermúdez-Valverde 2012, 76). The 2000 Census follows this construction. The use of this synecdoche in a population survey reproduces the popular imaginary that erases the cultural, historical and political diversities among Asian people and their bodies, which leads to racist expression such as: "all Asian people look the same", like image 20 illustrates:

Image 20
Racist comic strip



Source: El Cometa. III N° 65. 21/10/1911, 8

Caption: - What is your name?

- Chan – Cho – Co – Chi – No – Ja – Món – Le – Chón – Pi – Chón⁷⁰

- You are already registered: look at your picture (the truth is that they are all the same...)

- No, sir; I can't be registered; Me disembark last night in Golfo Nicoya... with Chinese fellow who are witnesses⁷¹.

Racism against Asian migrants, especially Chinese people, has been traced by historians back to the late XIX century (Galeana de Valadés 2014; Soto 2005; Chen 2013). For instance, an article published in the journal *El Heraldo de Costa Rica* in 1875 stated:

Por lo que a los defectos orgánicos, la experiencia ha demostrado que la raza china inmigrante, tiene en sí misma un principio o germen de una de las enfermedades que más daño han causado y causan a la humanidad y que parece que se desarrolla de una manera mortal con la unión de nuestra raza...⁷² (in Soto 1998, 275).

⁷⁰ This is actually a pun. The Chinese man is supposed to be pronouncing his name syllable by syllable. The syllables resemble Chinese phonemes. However, when we put those syllables together in Spanish we have: Chancho Cochino Cochino Jamón Lechón Pichón, which translates to: Pig Boar Ham Piglet Pigeon.

⁷¹ The original text in Spanish reproduces some spelling mistakes intended to mock the pronunciation of Chinese people in Spanish, such as the exchange of the R for the L, or the wrong conjugation of verbs.

⁷² Free translation: As far as organic defects are concerned, experience has shown that the immigrant Chinese race has in itself a principle or germ of one of the diseases which has caused and is causing the most harm to mankind and which seems to develop in a deadly manner with the union of our race.

This association of Chinese migrants with diseases reappeared with force in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. In Costa Rica, as in many other countries, the pandemic has exacerbated the already existing expressions of racism, which we can see, for example, in the comments in social media:

Image 21
Contributions of the Chinese to
Costa Rica



Image 22
Racist comments on Amelia Rueda



Source: Amelia Rueda, 09/19/2021

(https://www.instagram.com/p/CUBA5eqNDKs/?utm_medium=copy_link)

In the context of the celebration of 200 years of independence, the online media *Amelia Rueda* published this infographic entitled "Contributions of the Chinese to Costa Rica", which refers to infrastructure works and coffee exports. The publication points out the existence of xenophobia and racism, as well as the prohibition for them to enter the country that once existed. Image 22 shows some of the comments on the post, where we can read the following expression: "The Chinese do not sew without a thimble. They also brought us Covid". The circulation of this type of comments led the Hapa Collective (an art collective of Asian migrant women) to develop a campaign to raise awareness about the racism suffered by Asians in the country.

Image 23

Costa Rica discriminates Asian communities



Source: Hapa Colective

(https://www.instagram.com/p/CM-sBPRBu1U/?utm_medium=copy_link)

All these elements draw a context in which the use of the Chinese synecdoche to represent Asian cultures is not accidental but reflects a chain of meanings and stereotypes that have been constructed around the racialized bodies of Asian people for decades.

Beyond the Chinese synecdoche, these question carries other implicatures. The response options of this item offer four choices: Indigenous, Afro Costa Rican or Black, Chinese and None of the above. This leads to another presupposition: Anyone who is not part of these ethnic minorities can be grouped in one large category. By providing these options, it appears that what this item intended to measure was the condition of “otherness”, the percentage of the population that belongs to one of these cultures that are different from the average Costa Rican. This is consistent with the “minorities” approach taken in this Census. It is noteworthy that what is referred to as *culture* appears as something to which these minorities belong, something that characterizes them and differentiates them from the bulk of the population. These *cultures* enlisted in the response options are all racialized. In this vein, it seems that this question intends to measure the number of “different” bodies (not cultures) residing in the country, the percentage of inhabitants who do not identify with the dominant (white) culture, stating a difference between “us” (the majority) and the rest (the minorities). “Different” in this case is not a neutral category. It signals the “otherness”, the strange, the foreign, the exotic at best.

The response to this question (and to most questions in a census questionnaire) can be characterized as an illocutive speech act of the representational type. Representative speech acts “commit the speaker (in varying degrees) to something's being the case, to the truth of the expressed proposition” (Searle 1976, 10). In this sense, when respondents choose: “None of the above”, they are therefore affirming a difference, committing to the truth that they are not part of those racialized cultures. They differentiate themselves from these "others" through a negation, a representational speech act that, by affirming "None of the above" separates them from the *ethnic minorities* and places them on the side of the majority, of the great mass, of the population. A person who is not indigenous, Afro or Chinese, what would they be then? A neutral form of culture? An absence of culture? Not at all. "None of the above" groups the bulk of the Costa Rican population, that is neither exotic, nor strange, nor foreign. Their culture is none other than the Costa Rican culture, which has been framed as white and euro descendant for over two centuries.

2.3.1.2. The multicultural illusion

The results of the 2000 Census question turned out disastrous: 95% of the responses were “None of the above”. For the 2011 Census, the INEC moved from the “ethnic minorities” approach to a multiculturalist one, with the intention of improving the validity and reliability of the question. Multiculturalism supposedly shifts the paradigm to a more horizontal one, where cultures are not hierarchized but recognized in their diversity. They used a separate question for indigenous peoples ([Name] considers himself or herself Indigenous?), followed by a question on ethnicity:

Image 24
Question about ethnic/racial origins. Census 2011

10. [Name] considers himself/herself...			
... black or afrodescendent?	<input type="radio"/> 1	... White or mestizo?	<input type="radio"/> 4
... mulatto?	<input type="radio"/> 2	Other	<input type="radio"/> 5
... Chinese?	<input type="radio"/> 3	None	<input type="radio"/> 6

Source: INEC, 2011 Census form
(https://www.inec.cr/sites/default/files/documentos-biblioteca-virtual/04._boleta_censal_version_ingles.pdf)

A first change that we can observe is the wording of the question. The verb *belongs to* is replaced by *considers (himself/herself)*, shifting from a passive form of action to an active one. To consider oneself as [Black or Afrodescendent, Mulato, Chinese, White or Mestizo, or other] situates us in the plane of identity. Identity is something that is constructed and affirmed in a psychosocial process, traversed by diverse factors that transcend the individual will. Nevertheless, this wording puts the focus on the self-

perception of subjects in question, instead of the interpretation of a third party of the racialized culture to which they *belong*.

However, an analysis of the item's implicature yields other considerations. The wording of the response options presents a new categorization of what is understood as ethnicity in the Costa Rican population. The Chinese synecdoche appears again, but Afro identities are disaggregated into three options, organized into two different categories: Black and Afro descendants in option #1, and Mulatto in option #2. The use of the word "mulatto" is certainly controversial. There is an ongoing debate about the term, which has been criticized by various authors and collectives (especially Afro women's collectives), who point out that it is a derogatory term in several spheres (Falquet 2020, 187). They point out that etymologically the term appears to come from "mule", which is the cross between two equine species: a horse/mare and a donkey (L. R. da Silva 2018, 77). This etymological root is not fortuitous, as it reflects the bestializing effect that structural racism has perpetrated on the bodies of Afro peoples for centuries, that has been described by decolonial feminist María Lugones (2016) as an expression of the coloniality of gender. On the other hand, the term is commonly used (and this is the meaning recalled in the census item) to refer to the process of *mestizaje* between afro-descendant peoples and white, *criollo* or *mestizo* peoples. Criticism in this regard has pointed to the fact that the term has been used in racialized judgments to signal the bodies that are neither black enough to be considered "black", nor white enough to be considered "white" (Fundación Activos Culturales Afro 2020). Furthermore, decolonial Afro-feminist Ochy Curiel notes that the mulatto category is problematic, as it continues to present as fundamental the Spanish heritage, and not the African or Indian one (Curiel 1999, 42).

Despite these critiques, this is not necessarily the expression of the imaginary of Costa Rican whiteness, but a tendency that reflects a particular form of Latin American racism. We can find the mulatto category in other censuses in the region, for example in Cuba and Colombia. In this vein, Jules Falquet draws attention to the way in which certain categories are used as a symbolic form of whitening:

un colorisme orienté vers l'éclaircissement, où chaque nuance de «couleur» est nommée, disséquée et soupesée, conduisant à l'établissement d'une rigide échelle sociale dans laquelle la plupart des gens s'efforcent de blanchir ou de faire blanchir leurs enfants pour progresser socialement... (Falquet 2020, 163-164)

In Costa Rica many people use this term to identify themselves. In fact, according to the 2011 Census, more people identified as Mulatto (6.6%) than Black or Afro descendant (1.1%). However, the introduction of the Mulatto category separated from Black or Afro descendant has some ideological implications. Traditionally, questions have been characterized in discourse analysis theory as directive

speech acts: they are an attempt by the speaker to get the interlocutor to do something, another speech act (Searle 1976, 356). In the census interview, a question is asked (directive speech act) and an answer is expected (representative speech act that affirms a truth about the respondent). But questionnaires are not just any questions. They present the response options, which delimit the frameworks within which the respondents are expected to position themselves. In this sense, the response options can be understood as representative speech acts themselves, insofar as they affirm a classification system with categories that are mutually exclusive. This implies a series of presuppositions about the knowledge shared by the institution formulating the questions, the interviewer, and the target population that will answer this question. It is not a matter of abstract knowledge, but of a series of culturally shared meanings, which will inevitably be traversed by historical constructions and ideology.

As Shamir (2008) affirms, "the response alternatives should be exhaustive and mutually exclusive... if the researcher is not careful, the selection of response alternatives may bias respondents by framing thinking and by predetermining what are considered 'appropriate' answers" (658). In this questionnaire, respondents who considers themselves a "mulatto" cannot at the same time identify as Afro-descendant, since they are presented as categories of a different nature. The response options are problematic because there are people who identify themselves as mulatto, but who also recognize themselves as Afro-descendants or Afro Costa Ricans, as a vindication of their roots and their history.

The key to understanding how the imaginary of Costa Rican whiteness is expressed as a representational speech act in this question can be found in the relations of closeness, distance, and differentiation that it inscribes between bodies and identities. "Mulatto" is in fact a form of *mestizaje*. It is named as such, for example, in the Cuban census (the option reads "Mulatto or mestizo"). However, in the Costa Rican 2011 Census we found two separate categories: mulatto and mestizo. A representative speech act performed here states that mulattos and mestizos are not the same. How can a respondent know the difference between these two categories? By means of the effect of truth established on the basis of relations of closeness or distance.

Image 25
Relations of closeness and distance in Census question

Black	Afrodescendent	Mulatto	Chinese	White	Mestizo
Different, yet close categories		Different from Afrodescendent. Different from mestizo	Different from all other categories. Synecdoche contain Asian descendants	Different, yet close categories	

Image 25 presents a graphic representation of the relations of closeness and distance between the response options. A sort of racial/ethnic melting pot is drawn, and even if it is not presented as linear,

the order of the categories seems to trace a continuum in which we have the Black/ Afrodescendent pair at one end, and the White/Mestizo pair at the other. The following presuppositions can be identified:

1. Black is similar to Afro descendant
2. Mulatto is different from Black or Afrodescendents
3. Mulatto is different from Mestizo
4. Mestizo similar to White
5. Mestizo is closer to White than to Mulatto, Chinese, Black or Afrodescendent

The way in which the category "mestizo" is used in the census deserves an analysis of implicature in the context of Costa Rican imaginaries of whiteness. Costa Rica is the only country in the Central American Region that uses the same response option for white and mestizo. The white/mestizo pair is not found in any other census questionnaire in Latin American countries⁷³. In Cuba, as I mentioned, *mestizo* is paired with *mulatto*. In El Salvador, *mestizo* is defined as the mixture of white and indigenous people. And in Honduras, *mestizo* is a separate category from white. Why, then, did the INEC-Costa Rica make the decision to merge these categories into one response option for the 2011 Census? Perhaps based on the presupposition that the majority of the *mestizo* population in Costa Rica identifies as white, or on the presupposition that *mestizo* is very close to white. In any case, it reflects the reproduction of an imaginary of whiteness that has been brewing for centuries. These imaginaries were in part fostered by travelers' accounts such as this one:

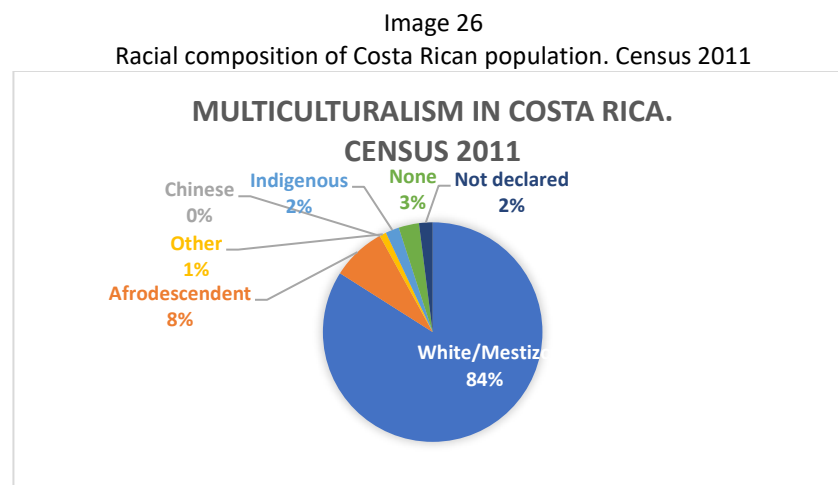
Entre todos los neohispanos, los costarricenses son los que tienen menos mezcla de sangre indígena... son los menos infectados, por este motivo, de vicios físicos... Por su cultura están mil escalones arriba que Nicaragua... el pueblo de Costa Rica es el más tolerante que he conocido en materia de religión⁷⁴ (Marr, in Lobo 1998, 39).

Some centuries ago, the Spanish Crown had a different perspective. In 1778, the Spanish Crown made an attempt to measure the racial composition of the population. The Bourbon census of 1778 indicated that the Costa Rican population was made up of 60% mestizos, 18% mulatto people, 12% indigenous people and 10% Spaniards (H. Pérez 2010, 11). These were official Spanish statistics, so there could be an underestimation of the indigenous populations, but in any case, this contrasts with the travelers' accounts, replicated by the colonial elites. The Spaniards (despite their dubious census techniques) had it clear: mestizos are not white. Yet this imaginary persists and continues to

⁷³ Most of the census ballots used in Latin America can be accessed on this page of ECLAC, United Nations: <https://www.cepal.org/es/temas/censos-de-poblacion-y-vivienda/enlaces-institutos-nacionales-estadistica-america-latina-caribe>

⁷⁴ Free translation: Among all the neo-Hispanics, the Costa Ricans are the ones with the least mixture of indigenous blood... they are the least infected, for this reason, of physical vices... For their culture they are a thousand steps above Nicaragua... the people of Costa Rica are the most tolerant I have known in matters of religion.

shape power relations today. Costa Ricans appropriated these narratives and built their identity as the whitest people in Central America. As image 26 shows, this is reflected on the 2011 Census results:



Source: Own elaboration based on data from Campbell, 2012.

The State declares me white

In 2011, I was the respondent for my household. I remember my surprise when we got to this question. The interviewer read the options and I responded: “mestizo”. “OK, white-mestizo”, he said. “No, no. Mestizo, not white, I consider myself mestizo”, I replied. “Yes, it is the same”. “No, it is not”, I insisted. “It is the same category, see”, he replied, showing me the formulary. I could not believe it. After years of struggling with my own internal coloniality, years of trying to move away from the imaginary of whiteness, of resisting the racist education I received, and years of constructing my identity as a mestizx, a radical mestizo who betrays his colonized part and claims the roots of Abya Yala, the State was declaring me white.

This is a declarative speech act that does not change my daily life, but it does inscribe a truth in terms of population. The State declares a white majority, produces it, creates it, regardless of what we mestizos feel.

The analysis of the questionnaire allows us to understand that these data present a misleading truth. This truth is produced through an illusion of choice, a choice that is framed within a rigid grid of predetermined options for recording the ethnic identity of the population. Furthermore, the white/mestizo pair constructs a truth: that mestizo bodies are closer to white bodies than to racialized ones. It imposes on us a form of *mestizaje* that aspires to whiten itself, a *mestizo* body that desires to “pass”, that wishes to settle in the *zone of being*, mirroring white power. This item does not ask the respondent about their racial identity, it suggests it. It tells the 3.597.847 respondents who identified in that category: you, *mestizo*, are almost white. This has social implications. Imaginaries are networks of meanings that allow for cohesion and continuity (Jiménez 1998). Statistics are often used for disciplinary and biopolitical control of the population (Peer 1992; Foucault 2008b). The census

reinforces the imaginary of whiteness, and its correlate, racism *a la tica* (racism in the Costa Rican way). In this case, the biopolitics of race are fueled by the replication of the imaginary of whiteness.

2.2.2. On *Amefricanity* and *mestizaje ch'ixi*

Mestizo is a complex category. In the context of Abya Yala, it bears the traces of the history of colonial violence. Boaventura de Sousa Santos affirms:

...muchas de ellas [cosmovisiones y filosofías indígenas y andinas] se oponen a la idea de mestizaje, porque está anclado históricamente en el hecho de mujeres indias que fueron violadas por hombres blancos, sin excepción. Entonces hay una raíz de violencia en el mestizaje que te descaracteriza y que es un pasado que duele⁷⁵ (Rivera Cusicanqui and Santos 2015, 98).

As Jules Falquet (2020) points out, *mestizaje* as an ideology has been strongly criticized by feminists in Abya Yala, since it is linked to the normalization of the rape of racialized women by the colonizers, from the period of the conquest to the present (158). "Mestizaje has not only masked racialized representations but also gender issues, since the "mixing" of Spanish and indigenous peoples was frequently characterized by rape committed by landowners and public authorities, including priests (Sandoval 2004b, 84). In this sense, *mestizaje* is a technology of power that uses rape and violence as a form of domination of bodies and peoples. Colonial penetration acquires a dreadful literal sense, perpetrating the invasion of women's bodies, their *territory-body-land*. This invasion is not only an expression of domination on a vertical plane (the male colonist over the colonized woman), but also on the horizontal axis, at the level of the community (Segato 2016), implanting their progeny by force, and breaking the ancestral lineage of the peoples. As *mestizxs*, we are the offspring of this violence. We bear that colonial wound, and the complex contradiction of carrying in our bodies the traces of the oppressor, but also the legacy of the resistance of the peoples of Abya Yala. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui affirms:

entiendo que la gente deseche el término mestizaje porque el mestizaje ha sido una política oficial, nacionalista, impuesta, obligatoria, autoritaria... Nos han convertido en mestizos a la fuerza⁷⁶ (Rivera Cusicanqui and Santos 2015, 98).

This political history of *mestizaje* has been popularly described in Abya Yala as "the Malinche Curse", referring to "*la Malinche*", a Nahuatl woman who has been alleged as an accomplice in the conquest of

⁷⁵ Free translation: Many of them [indigenous and Andean cosmologies and philosophies] oppose the idea of *mestizaje*, because it is historically anchored in the fact that indigenous women were raped by white men, without exception. So there is a root of violence in the *mestizaje* that de-characterizes you and is a past that hurts.

⁷⁶ Free translation: I understand that people reject the term *mestizaje* because *mestizaje* has been an official, nationalist, imposed, obligatory, authoritarian policy... We have been forced to become *mestizos*.

the Aztec people. *La Malinche* was enslaved by conqueror Hernán Cortez in what today is known as Mexico. She served as a translator and mediator for Cortés, and eventually bore his son, one of the first mestizos of the Americas. The Malinche Curse refers to the repetition of this complicity with the invader, or what today we could call internal coloniality (Rivera Cusicanqui and Santos 2015), in which mestizo peoples of Abya Yala position themselves in alliance with the oppressors from the Global North, while rejecting or betraying their own people and other peoples of the South, as portrayed in the popular song composed by Gabino Palomares:

Maldición de Malinche

Del mar los vieron llegar
 mis hermanos emplumados
 Eran los hombres barbados
 de la profecía esperada
 Se oyó la voz del monarca
 de que el Dios había llegado
 y les abrimos la puerta
 por temor a lo ignorado
 Iban montados en bestias
 como demonios del mal
 Iban con fuego en las manos
 y cubiertos de metal
 Solo el valor de unos cuantos
 les opuso resistencia
 y al mirar correr la sangre
 se llenaron de vergüenza
 Porque los dioses ni comen
 ni gozan con lo robado
 Y cuando nos dimos cuenta
 ya todo estaba acabado
 Y en ese error entregamos
 la grandeza del pasado
 Y en ese error nos quedamos
 300 años esclavos
 Se nos quedó el maleficio
 de brindar al extranjero
 nuestra fe, nuestra cultura
 nuestro pan, nuestro dinero
 Y hoy les seguimos cambiando
 oro por cuentas de vidrio
 y damos nuestra riqueza
 por sus espejos con brillo
 Hoy, en pleno siglo 20
 nos siguen llegando rubios
 y les abrimos la casa
 y los llamamos amigos
 Pero si llega cansado
 un indio de andar la sierra
 lo humillamos y lo vemos
 como extraño por su tierra
 Tú, hipócrita que te muestras
 humilde ante el extranjero

Malinche's curse (Free translation)

From the sea they saw them coming
 my feathered brothers
 They were the bearded men
 of the awaited prophecy
 The voice of the monarch was heard
 that the God had arrived
 and we opened the door to them
 out of fear of the unknown
 They were riding on beasts
 like demons of evil
 They rode with fire in their hands
 and covered in metal
 Only the courage of a few
 resisted them
 And as they watched the blood flow
 they were filled with shame
 For the gods neither eat
 nor enjoy the stolen goods
 And when we became aware
 everything was already ruined
 And in that mistake we surrendered
 the greatness of the past
 And in that mistake we remained
 300 years enslaved
 We were left with the curse
 of offering to foreigners
 our faith, our culture
 our bread, our money
 And today we continue to exchange them
 gold for glass beads
 and we give our wealth
 for their shining mirrors
 Today, in the middle of the 20th century
 Blondes still come to us
 and we open our house to them
 and we call them friends
 But if an Indian arrives tired
 from walking the sierra
 we humiliate him and see him
 as a stranger to his land
 You, hypocrite who show yourself
 humble before the foreigner

pero te vuelves soberbio
con tus hermanos del pueblo
Oh, maldición de malinche
enfermedad del presente
¿Cuándo dejarás mi tierra?
¿Cuándo harás libre a mi gente?

but you become arrogant
with your brothers of the people
Oh, curse of malinche
disease of the present
When will you leave my land?
When will you set my people free?

Gabino Palomares wonders when will the Malinche Curse finally end? In other words, when will we be able to free ourselves from internal coloniality in Abya Yala? In resonance with Gabino Palomares, Afro Costa Rican writer Shirley Campbell states:

¿Por qué es que los costarricenses nos decimos blancos? Porque da un estatus; ¿por qué es que no reconocemos nuestro ascendente afro? Porque la historia nos enseñó que ser afro es ser feos, es ser animalizados, cosas que han cambiado, pero que otras muchas están instaladas en la mente⁷⁷ (Campbell 2019, ¶137).

Various feminists in different geographies have tried to build some exit routes. This is the case of Chicana feminists, for example, who have done powerful work on the borderlands, the borders they inhabit and the borders that inhabit them (Anzaldúa 2012; Moraga and Castillo 1988). They reclaim their conditions as *mestizas* and they appropriate this identity, but instead of betraying their peoples, they ally themselves with them (Anzaldúa 1988a; 1988b; Moraga 1988b; 1988a). They recognize *mestizaje* as sexual violence, but at the same time they rescue the history of survival of women. They recover the figure of the Malinche (Malintizin), but in a politicized way (Alarcón 1988). In this sense, it is a *mestizo* movement that recognizes itself as such, that does not deny the history of violence from which they come from, but vehemently refuses to perpetuate its reproduction.

Chicana feminists provide us with tools to think of ourselves as *mestizo* peoples, recognizing that we do not live under the same conditions of oppression as indigenous or Afro peoples (that is, recognizing that we inevitably benefit to some degree from white privilege), but understanding that the reproduction of the Malinche Curse is a volitional act. As *mestizxs*, we have the possibility of recognizing ourselves in those roots, and thus taking a critical stance towards the coloniality of power.

¿Dónde queda el sujeto mestizo, que no se autonombra ni se distingue con una peculiar etnicidad? Creo que es necesario pensar en el mestizo como una identidad colonizada que, para poder encubrir este carácter, a su vez coloniza a los demás⁷⁸ (Rivera Cusicanqui in Rivera Cusicanqui and Santos 2015, 97)

⁷⁷ Free translation: Why do we Costa Ricans call ourselves white? Because it gives a status; why is it that we do not recognize our Afro ancestry? Because history taught us that to be Afro is to be ugly, is to be animalized, some things that have changed, but many others are installed in our minds.

⁷⁸ Free translation: Where is the mestizo subject left, who neither names himself nor distinguishes himself with a peculiar ethnicity? I think it is necessary to think of the mestizo as a colonized identity that, in order to cover up this character, in turn colonizes others.

The mestizo identity harbors this contradiction of being both colonized and colonizing. Recognizing ourselves as a colonized identity does not imply denying the white privilege we may benefit from in different spheres. On the contrary, it entails recognizing and problematizing it, and above all, it implies taking action against the structural racism that continues to sustain a system of privilege and oppression based on the colonial notion of race.

Back to the census, the *mestizo* category does not seem to follow this logic, but rather the ideology of *mestizaje* as a form of internal coloniality. As Nancy Stepan affirms “the educated upper classes in Latin America wished to be white and feared they were not” (1991, 45). The pair white/mestizo suggests that the categories are interchangeable or comparable, or that in practice they are almost the same thing. In terms of oppression, we can agree that mestizo people experience lots of privileges and less violence than Afro Costa Ricans, Asian people and indigenous people, and in that case, focusing on the positionality on power relations, we may even agree with the fusion of both categories into one: white-mestizo. But this questionnaire had no intention of registering incidence of violence or discrimination. It intended to create official statistics on the ethnic/racial identity of the Costa Rican population. In that sense, this instrument reinforces the imaginary of Costa Ricans as white, and sends the message that mestizo is just another name for white. “Being mestizo is generally interpreted as synonymous with whiteness” (Sandoval 2004b, 84). Even if the respondent wanted to get out of that pair, as in my case, it was not possible. If we look only at the results of the census, published in scientific reports and articles, we can conclude that Costa Rica is one of the whitest countries in Latin America (Lizcano 2005).

Image 27

Meme: The most beautiful thing about being Latino?



Source: Facebook Page Ken y Ken Mariquitas de bien⁷⁹, 04/25/2019
Caption: The most beautiful thing about being Latino? Our European blood.

⁷⁹ This Facebook page is continuously closed down by the Facebook administration. It is a satirical page that criticizes the coloniality, racism, misogyny and classism of the Latin American gay elites. Its creators reopen it under similar names over and over again, making it difficult to trace the hyperlink to the images.

In the face of this whitewashed *mestizaje*, Afro and indigenous feminists also propose other paths. Lélia González, a key author for the development of Afro and black feminisms in Brazil, analyzes the way in which racism operates in our societies. She identifies two types of racism: overt racism (*racismo abierto*) and veiled racism (*racismo vedado*). The first one, characteristic of Anglo-Saxon, Germanic and Dutch societies, establishes that a person is black if they have black ancestors. This is known as “the rule of blood”, and *mestizaje* is therefore impossible. Thus, this kind of racism operates by the means of segregation (*racismo por segregação*) (Gonzalez 2021, 136).

The second kind is what Gonzalez calls *racismo por denegação* (racism by denial) and is the form she identifies in Brazil and other Latin American societies. This is a form of racism that denies its existence. It operates through theories of assimilation and racial democracy that intend to attenuate the racist violence. *Mestizaje* plays a key role, understood as a way of whitening the race (136).

No Brasil, uma simples pele clara, às vezes, é capaz de possibilitar a alguém passar-se por branco em determinadas ocasiões. Diferente da “regra de uma gota de sangue”, o branco-Aqui (Brasil) comparado ao branco-Lá (EUA) é um não-branco, mesmo quando possui fenótipo considerado de branco. Isto é, na sociedade brasileira, seria considerado um branco-branco (branco mesmo), porém, na sociedade estadunidense, seria branco não-branco, ou etnia, ou mais concretamente, “latino”, “brasileiro”, um não-branco”⁸⁰ (Cardoso 2014, 44)

In a similar way, in Costa Rica the imaginary of whiteness makes us believe that we are white, almost European, the whitest in Central America. *Veiled racism* operates through the ideology of whitening, turning against the bodies that are living testimony of our African and Indigenous roots (Gonzalez 2021, 134). It manifests itself through a compulsive desire to whiten or even “clean” the blood, which is internalized along with the simultaneous denial of one's own raciality (137-138). At the cultural level, processes of *mestizaje* in Abya Yala are considered positive because they are understood as a form of whitening (Falquet 2020, 157). As an ideology, racism produces material conditions that subordinate racialized people within the most exploited classes (Gonzalez 2021, 137).

As an alternative to resist this racism by denial, Lélia Gonzalez proposes the concept of *amefricanidad* (amefricanity). In dialog with Bety Milan and M.D. Magno (1981), Gonzalez highlights this concept that puts the emphasis not on the European (Latin) colonial influence, but on the bridges that unite Abya

⁸⁰ Free translation: In Brazil, a mere light skin is sometimes enough to make it possible to pass oneself off as white on certain occasions. Unlike the “one drop of blood rule”, the white-here (Brazil) compared to the white-there (USA) is a non-white, even when someone has a phenotype considered white. That is, in Brazilian society someone would be considered white-white (really white), but in the US society they would be non-white, or ethnic, or more specifically, “Latino”, “Brazilian”, a non-white”.

Yala with Africa. The so-called Latin America, Gonzalez sustains, is much more Amerindian and *Amefrican* than anything else (136).

The concept of *amefricanity* is nourished by the categories of *pan-Africanism*, *negritude*, and *Afrocentricity*. It seeks to shift the emphasis from the idea of America (in Gonzalez view, still very present in concepts such as African-American or Afro-American), to the intense historical process of adaptation, resistance and reinterpretation that the peoples of Abya Yala have sustained, where the African heritage has given rise to the creation of new cultural forms of *negritude* and black existence. Her approach is to resist the whitewashing of history, and to sustain an Afro-centered regard of these new cultural forms (140). In her words: “reconocer un gigantesco trabajo de dinámica cultural que no nos lleva hacia el lado del Atlántico, sino que nos trae de allá y nos transforma en lo que somos hoy: amefricanos⁸¹” (143).

In a similar line, researchers Isis Campos and Enrique Molina (2009) produced the documentary called *Si no es Dinga*, a film that traces the influence of black heritage in Costa Rican culture. They navigate through language, food, music, history and bodies, to demonstrate how blackness throbs vigorously in Costa Rica. At the same time, the documentary shows clear examples of what Gonzalez calls racism by denial: the intense attempt by Costa Ricans to whitewash their history, the stubborn denial of one’s own raciality, and the distorted conception of their own bodies, provoked by focusing only on white/European traits, denying the living archives of that *amefricanity*. This has been an important resistance strategy for movements in Latin America and the Caribbean (Curiel 1999).

From another standpoint, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2010; 2018; 2011) also proposes a critical comprehension of the ideology of *mestizaje*. In dialogue with cosmovisions from Aymara peoples, she calls for another possible path for *mestizaje*. She brings into dialog René Zavaleta’s concept of *sociedad abigarrada* (variegated society) with the concepts of *chejchi* in Quechua or *ch’ixi*⁸² in Aymara, to speak of a condition in which the opposites coexist without merging. It is a condition that entails contradiction, but not in the Marxist conception that pushes towards a synthesis. It is a mixed existence that embraces contradiction, a dialectic without synthesis (Rivera Cusicanqui and Santos 2015, 84).

⁸¹ Free translation: recognize a gigantic work of cultural dynamics that does not take us to the other side of the Atlantic, but brings us from there and transforms us into what we are today: Amefricans.

⁸² In Aymara, the word *ch’ixi* refers to a color produced by the juxtaposition of small dots or spots of two contrasting colors, which confusingly mix together in perception, without actually ever fully blending. In this sense, it responds to the Aymara cosmovision, in which something can be and not be at the same time (Rivera Cusicanqui 2010, 69).

In response to the bleached *mestizaje*, in resistance to internal coloniality where the white component crushes everything, Rivera Cusicanqui introduces the concept of *mestizaje ch'ixi* as a form of "dotted" identity:

es una identidad donde lo indio está manchado de blanco y lo blanco está manchado de indio; y en esa mancha, en ese abigarramiento, está la fuerza de la descolonización⁸³ (Rivera Cusicanqui and Santos 2015, 99).

The *ch'ixi* *mestizxs* have a double and contentious ancestry. They are inhabited by the white colonizer and by the indigenous in resistance, in perpetual contradiction. The *indianidad*, the indigenous spots of the *mestizx*, says Rivera Cusicanqui, can come from the blood, from the landscape, from having had an indigenous caretaker who carried one's childhood (Rivera Cusicanqui and Santos 2015, 97-98). A *mestizaje ch'ixi* is an existence that supposes the recognition that one's indigenous dimension is paradoxically colonized by oneself, by our education, by one's own family, by the State, in a process of acculturation and alienation that Rivera Cusicanqui identifies as "colonization of the imaginary". However, this identity also holds the possibility of liberation. By developing dialogical forms of knowledge construction, echoing the indigenous cosmovisions that opt for the difference instead of homogeneity, it is possible to emancipate one's own ancestral Indian half (2010, 71). The *ch'ixi* is the path to another form of *mestizaje*, where we do not aspire to whiten ourselves, where we do not seek an alliance with the oppressor, where raciality is not a reason for shame, but the opposite: raciality as a fertile field that harvests multiple possibilities to decolonize our everyday life.

This *mestizaje ch'ixi* has a stronger presence in Bolivian than in Costa Rican imaginaries. The 2001 Nacional Population Census in Bolivia reflects that, while 49% of the population speaks a native language, 62% of the population identify themselves as indigenous. As Rivera Cusicanqui points out, this suggests that in Bolivia many urban, *mestizo* people, feel indigenous, and they are willing to be "*indigenized*" (Rivera Cusicanqui and Santos 2015, 96). A very different scenario can be found in Costa Rica, where only 2% of the population identify as indigenous, and where the *mestizo* identity ties itself with whiteness, in a powerful colonial alliance.

Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui and Lélia Gonzalez invite us to break with the black/white binary, but not from a depoliticized perspective such as those that seek to overcome the question of race. Their proposal is to break the binary by dismantling that border, by squatting the white domains, not with the intention of appropriating the culture and history of the oppressed, not to dispossess and exploit

⁸³ Free translation: is an identity where the indigenous is stained with white and the white is stained with indigenous; and in this stain, in this variegation, is the strength of decolonization.

them, nor to relativize the material conditions of oppression that racism continues to provoke today, but as a sort of counter-gentrification of space, culture and identity.

Image 28

Meme: We are all the same working class



Source: Facebook Page Ken y Ken Mariquitas de bien, 04/25/2019

Caption: Slavery? Haha don't be ridiculous after all we all belong to same working class!

The path towards the decolonization of the *mestizx ch'ixi* consists in positioning oneself alongside the struggles of Afro and indigenous peoples, in uniting our bodies to occupy the colonized territories and expropriating the oppressor. The *mestizo* body that is an archive of that history loaded with violence and pain, must dissociates itself from the place of colonizer and resist white normativity. This dispute is not only played out on the ideological and cultural level. It is about transforming the material conditions of existence for the peoples in Abya Yala.

2.2.3 Dissident mestizxs and their paths of resistance

PROMUEVO BARRICADAS...

(Susy Shock)

en medio de la legislatura que nace en tu cerebro,
esa que llena de leyes chatas la bata de tu deseo,
que dice que ahora no,
que dice que el sueño agota,
que dice qué limpito el piso,
que dice que mejor semáforo que paloma.

¡Quemo el recinto de tus leyes!
piquetera trans de la aurora⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Free translation: I PROMOTE BARRICADES... (Susy Shock 2011) in the middle of the legislature that is born in your brain, / that which fills the robe of your desire with flat laws, / that says not now, / that says that dreaming exhausts, / that says how clean the floor is, / that says better a traffic light than a pigeon. / I burn the enclosure of your laws! / piquetera trans from the dawn

In a warm dialogue with Boaventura de Sousa Santos' *Epistemologies of the south*, Rivera Cusicanqui argues that the challenge lies in building south-south bonds, in affirming the bonds with neighboring communities, with currents from Africa and Asia (2010, 73). It is the call that Enrique Dussel (2013; 2020) also makes, the south-south dialogues for a philosophy of liberation. Shaking the gaze that is fixed on the North, will allow other forms of knowledge to emerge. The *ecology of knowledge*, says Rivera Cusicanqui, is a *ch'ixi* epistemology in which an intermediate sphere emerges, where difference enriches creative dialogues (Rivera Cusicanqui and Santos 2015, 93).

Following this proposal, I would like to conclude this chapter by mentioning some forms of resistance that activists, artists and social organizations weave collectively with rage, irreverence, pride and humor. I rescue these experiences that give us back a smile in the face of the cruel and hopeless panorama that shapes the imaginaries of being Costa Rican.

2.2.3.1. In resistance to white-washing imaginaries

Autodefinida como blanca, la sociedad costarricense termina “blanqueada” y “blanqueándose” por medio de un proceso de uniformación sentado en la constitución de una imagen “occidentalizada” del “querer ser⁸⁵” (Sojo 2010, 29). On the path of amefricanity, we find several art projects that seek to pay tribute to the African roots of our culture, and at the same time build bridges with that history that the imaginary of whiteness has tried to steal from us. In this line I mentioned above the documentary “*Si no es dinga...*” (Campos and Molina 2009), which makes a journey through language, showing that the African heritage is kept alive in the words we use every day. The documentary is both a denunciation and a tribute, a call for attention to the structural racism that distorts our gaze, and a celebration of Afro Costa Rican culture and the racialized bodies that give life to it and defend it.

Another documentary on this vein is *Tierra Púrpura's: Waak An Danz (Aquí cuando la gente camina baila)*, directed by Esteban Richmond and produced by Paola Jinesta. *Waak An Danz* (2020) was filmed in the province of Limón and shows the relationship of a number of Afro Costa Ricans with dance. Through their stories and moves, this documentary addresses the place of dance in Afro-Caribbean cultures as a form of communication, creation, resistance and re-existence.

In a similar spirit, the documentary *Calypsonians de hoy* (2021), directed and produced by musician and anthropologist Ramón Morales rescues the history of Calypso, a Caribbean cultural/musical genre that has had a prolific production in Costa Rica. Through 10 years of affective and participatory

⁸⁵ Free translation: Self-defined as white, Costa Rican society ends up "whitewashed" and "whitening" itself through a process of standardization based on the constitution of a "westernized" image of "wanting to be".

research, Morales, who is also a calypsonian musician, documented everything, from concerts and festivals to improvisations in the intimacy of domestic spaces. His interviews show us the affective reflections of calypsonians of various generations on calypso as a way of life. In this sense, maintaining calypso alive for these people is a vital issue. Defending calypso through vibrations, sharing the music and the dance, is their commitment to the defense of life.

In another domain, the documentary *Salir a Volar* (2015), produced by Ana Lucía Faerron, Sarita Bonilla and Daniela Martínez, tells the story of two women of impressive mettle: Claudia Rodríguez, an elderly peasant woman who has dedicated her life defend native seeds, and to fighting for the right to land, access to water and the right to live freely as a peasant; and Esperanza Jurado, a Ngäbe indigenous woman who dedicated her life until the end to the struggle for the right to land and autonomy. Both were members of the *Red de Mujeres Rurales*, a powerful experience of popular organization, which links together more than 500 rural and indigenous women throughout the national territory in the struggle against capitalism, patriarchy and coloniality. Although Esperanza died shortly after the documentary was completed, her words convey what her name proclaims: hope.

Los indígenas no tienen que ser esclavos de los blancos. Si son esclavos nunca tendrán casa nunca tendrán donde vivir. Nosotros tenemos el derecho de ser libres, ser autónomos... He luchado por todo el territorio indígena. Este es mi orgullo. Mi mentalidad está volando por todo lado. Soy libre⁸⁶ (Esperanza Jurado in IberCultura 2016)

Without exhausting the possible examples, this last one is notable for its interregional, intergenerational nature, and for the process of collective construction it entails. The song *Vengo de una tierra* (2021), produced to commemorate the International Day of Afro descendant People, unites singers Guadalupe Urbina, Mike Joseph, Stephie Davis, Kumary Sawyers, Fabrizio Walker, Nelly Juárez, Huba Watson, Danny Williams, Alfonso Golbourne "Gianty", Junior Emilio Álvarez. Written by Guadalupe Urbina, Mike Joseph, Andrés Cervilla, Luis Porras, Kumary Sawyers, Huba Watson, Danny Williams, Manuel Monestel. The lyrics dance between Spanish and criollo English.

Vengo de una tierra

Vengo de una tierra que tiene
calor de llanura y mares.
Y vengo de una tierra ardiente
que solo es para una gente
que sabe sentir
que quiere vivir.
Soy la semilla que nace en cada rincón
Soy Madre África, en movimiento
Soy la celebración, "Nowhere like Limón"

I come from a land (Free translation)

I come from a land that has
the heat of plains and seas.
And I come from a warm land
that is only for people
who know how to feel
who want to live.
I am the seed that is born in every corner of the world.
I am Mother Africa, on the move
I am the celebration, "Nowhere like Limón".

⁸⁶ Free translation: The indigenous people do not have to be slaves of the whites. If they are slaves they will never have a home, they will never have a place to live. We have the right to be free, to be autonomous... I have fought for the all the indigenous territories. This is my pride. My mentality is flying everywhere. I am free.

Te lo digo que, yo soy el beat
 el alma del pulso
 el tambor que hace latir
 que baila en lo profundo
 Mi paso es el retumbo
 Mi baile es conjuro
 He cruzado el mar y eché raíz por todo el mundo.
 Yo estoy en la suma de todas las huellas
 Del Guanacaste, tierra bella, a la costa caribeña,
 del Valle Central a Puntarenas
 Llevo "roots and culture" por mis venas
 representando a la madre de las tierras
 Man I sing fi dem and give them the flieva
 Vengo de una tierra que tiene
 calor de llanura y mares.
 ¡África!
 vengo de una tierra ardiente
 que solo es para una gente
 que sabe sentir
 que quiere vivir.
 Mi a feel the drums them call to dance and vibin'
 Like the "cabin in the watta" them a styling
 What an outcome!
 Our people getting stronger like the rondon
 Somos de tierra caliente,
 una misma nación
 Alma de otro continente,
 la misma revolución.
 Somos suma de esas huellas
 en sagrada proyección.
 I say, I feel the roots inna me blood
 Feel the culture inna me blood Now!
 Estoy en la suma de todas las huellas
 en un canto cimarrón, calypsonian y el zumbar de la
 marimba
 Semilla que resiste
 en un viaje que no acaba
 Desde el punto de origen
 los ancestros no me fallan.
 Ciudadano del mundo,
 en tierra extraña no me confundo
 Inspiro y creo cultura,
 pues es lo que acostumbro
 Me llaman candombe, calipso, rap y también reggae
 I live on the drums, move the lration dhe dhe
 Instruyo y les muestro que se puede
 La tribu está eufórica,
 el trago está en su punto
 Mis especies mueven pies
 y con rimas secundo
 Como la semilla, crezco en lo profundo
 From Guanacaste to Port Limón
 we are the same black people
 History tell us the truth
 May we know
 we are the same roots.
 From África to Costa Rica
 we are the same black people
 History tell us the truth
 May we know
 we are the same roots.
 ... ¡Africa!
 Retumba la tumba que tumba caramba,

I tell you, I am the beat,
 the soul of the pulse,
 the drum that makes the heart beat,
 that dances in the deep.
 My step is the rumble
 My dance is a spell
 I have crossed the sea and taken root all over the world.
 I am in the sum of all footprints
 From Guanacaste, beautiful land, to the Caribbean coast,
 from the Central Valley to Puntarenas.
 I carry "roots and culture" through my veins
 representing the mother of all lands.
 Man I sing fi dem and give them the flieva
 I come from a land that has
 The heat of plains and seas.
 Africa!
 I come from a warm land
 that is only for one people
 who know how to feel
 who want to live.
 Mi a feel the drums them call to dance and vibin'
 Like the "cabin in the watta" them a styling
 What an outcome!
 Our people getting stronger like the rondon.
 We are from warm land,
 one nation.
 Soul of another continent,
 the same revolution.
 We are the sum of those footprints
 in sacred projection.
 I say, I feel the roots inna me blood
 Feel the culture inna me blood Now!
 I am in the sum of all footprints
 in a cimarron song, calypsonian and the hum of the
 marimba
 Seed that resists
 in a journey that does not end.
 From the point of origin
 the ancestors do not fail me.
 Citizen of the world,
 in a strange land I do not get confused
 I inspire and create culture,
 because that's what I'm used to
 They call me candombe, calypso, rap, and also reggae.
 I live on the drums, move the lration dhe dhe
 I instruct and show them that it can be done.
 The tribe is euphoric,
 the drink is at its peak
 My species move the feet
 and with rhymes I second
 Like the seed, I grow in the depths.
 From Guanacaste to Port Limón
 we are the same black people
 History tell us the truth
 May we know
 we are the same roots.
 From África to Costa Rica
 we are the same black people
 History tell us the truth
 May we know
 we are the same roots.
 ... Africa!
 Rumbles the tomb that tombs gosh darn it,

Quijongo del Congo que baila en mi hombro...
De costa a costa
Del Pacífico al Caribe
y del Caribe al Pacífico
De mar a mar
Amar

Quijongo of the Congo that dances on my shoulder...
From coast to coast
From the Pacific to the Caribbean
and from the Caribbean to the Pacific
From sea to sea
To love

The song is a celebration of *amefricanity* and black culture. It draws a bridge between two regions that are often thought of as alien or disconnected: Limón and Guanacaste. In a decolonial key, this song narrates the living history of another Costa Rica, which vibrates in those racialized bodies that refuse to be colonized.

2.2.3.2. *In resistance to the confessional state and religious fundamentalisms*

From tags on the walls to street performances, feminist, queer and secular movements are confronting the totalitarianism of religious discourse. With irreverence, a series of interventions have been carried out in the context of the August 2nd pilgrimage to the Virgin of the Angels. For example, in 2008, in the context of tense discussions on the legalization of same-sex unions, this banner was hung on the side of the road that pilgrims pass by on their way to Cartago:

Image 29:
Banner hung on the pilgrimage's road



Source: Casa de herrero, cuchillo de palo Collective,
(<https://casadeherrerochillodepalo.blogspot.com/2008/08/vivan-la-uniones-de-todos-los-sexos.html>)

Caption: Long live unions of all sexes. Blow 4:20

Although the banner was removed after a few hours, during the time it was hanging it bothered thousands of parishioners who condemned homosexuality and sexual pleasure in the name of God.

From a feminist activism approach, the collective La Tule carried out during its years of existence a series of street performances during the pilgrimage. The last of these interventions, carried out in

collaboration with other feminist activists, consisted of carrying the image of a *Santa Panocha* (a vulva that resembles the shape of a virgin). Advancing in the opposite direction to the pilgrimage, the group faced insults, condemnations, threats and finally a police interrogation, which was documented in the video *La Santa Panocha en la Romería* (La secta del Gozo Perpetuo, 2015). The video shows how, after a long negotiation in which the activists had to assure the officers that they were not part of any satanic or terrorist group, and that they were only expressing their devotion to vulvas and clitoris, the police let them advance, but not without warning them that their integrity was at risk, as they could not guarantee their safety.

Image 30

Collage: La Santa Panocha in the pilgrimage



Source: Snapshots from *La secta del Gozo Perpetuo* (<https://youtu.be/S5qja7xJazg>)

In a similar humorous manner, in the context of the 2018 elections, the queer/feminist batucada La Concha Tronadora composed a song for Christian fundamentalist candidate Fabricio Alvarado. In the face of his threat to "restore" homosexuals, and his promise that homosexuality could be cured through faith, the batucada staged a cover of the song o Wilfrido Varga's *Qué será lo que quiere el negro*, which went like this:

Mami, Fabricio está rabioso
 quiere restaurar locas,
 las locas no se dejan.
 Mami qué será lo que quiere Fabri?
 Curarnos!
 Mami qué es lo que yo le digo a Fabri:
 Restáuremesta!
 Restáureme esta, restáureme esta, restáureme esta,
 restáureme esta, restáureme esta...

Mommy, Fabricio is rabid
 he wants to restore fags,
 the fags won't let him.
 Mommy, what is it that Fabricio wants?
 To cure us!
 Mommy, what do I tell Fabri?
 Restore-me-this-one⁸⁷!
 Restore me this one, restore me this one, restore me
 this one, restore me this one, restore me this one,
 restore me this one...

⁸⁷ This is a play on words with a dirty expression that alludes to the genitals.

Source: Facebook, La Concha Tronadora
(<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1667210896677653>)

On a different line, it is worth mentioning the experience that the Departamento Ecu­m­é­ni­co de Investi­ga­cio­nes - DEI (Ecumenical Research Department) has developed over several decades. Based in Costa Rica, the DEI is an organization that brings together dozens of researchers and activists in polyphonic and pluriversal dialogues. The DEI organizes seminars, conferences, meetings and publications, with representatives of churches of different denominations and communities of faith committed to the struggle for freedom and the defense of diversity. Thus, the DEI has opened spaces for black theology, feminist theology, queer and gay/lesbian theology and indecent theology, which propose a critical and contextualized reading of the scriptures, and a close work with communities. They have also undertaken the commitment to analyze the situation in Abya Yala and to provide tools to counteract the advance of religious fundamentalisms in countries such as Brazil, Colombia and Costa Rica.

The importance of their work lies in the fact that they open a space for communities of faith (which are of great importance in Costa Rica), from a decolonial, critical, anti-patriarchal, anti-racist and anti-capitalist logic. At the present time, the DEI opened a shelter for people in exile, which has served as a temporal refuge for dozens of LGBTIQ people seeking asylum, who come to the Costa Rica fleeing violence and necropolitics in their countries of origin.

2.2.3.3. In resistance gender coloniality and the white/mestizo normativity.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the experience of the folklore dance group *Translirio de Oro*, a group made up exclusively of trans women.

Image 31
Translirio de Oro in the Ruins of Cartago's Temple



Source: Facebook Translirio de Oro (<https://www.facebook.com/Translirio-de-oro-1473741529345938/photos/3983337705052962/>)

The artistic project of *Translirio de Oro* celebrates trans bodies, their beauty, their strength, their creative capacity and their diversity. But the field of folkloric dances is not just any field. It takes us back to the aesthetic and cultural values of the construction of the Costa Rican being, crossed by all the imaginaries analyzed in this chapter. From this perspective, the transgression performed by these women who dance smiling to the rhythm of patriotic songs takes on a profound dimension that undermines the very foundations of coloniality.

Image 32

Translirio de Oro in protest outside the Congress



Source: Facebook Translirio de Oro (<https://www.facebook.com/Translirio-de-oro-1473741529345938/photos/2896176290435781/>)

Some of the members of this group are Central American migrants. Others are migrants from the countryside to the city. Their racialized bodies transgress gender norms and the imaginary of Costa Rican whiteness. This group has managed to infiltrate their artistic project into spaces that are still deeply conservative today, such as public ministries, theaters and universities. Their dance and joyful approach shakes the eyes of astonished Costa Ricans, who do not quite understand what they are seeing. Their saucy smiles in front of the colonial eye defend and celebrate life, theirs and those of so many *compañeras* that are not here anymore. In this celebration of their bodies, in the appropriation of their history and culture, these trans women, mestizas, migrants, racialized and impoverished, embody those other radical *mestizajes*, that resist the whitening, the coloniality of gender, the Christian control of their bodies, and the concealment of the inequalities that continue to impoverish them today.

These are just a few examples of a multiplicity of bodies that come together to collectively resist the coloniality imposed by the imaginaries of the Costa Rican being. Although they are dissident experiences, their creativity, strength and courage crack the hegemonic discourses that impose a whitewashed and colonial normativity. Much remains to be deconstructed on this path, but it is important to highlight that there are people and collectives advancing along these alternative paths.

Un mar de fueguitos
(Eduardo Galeano)

Un hombre del pueblo de Neguá, en la costa de Colombia,
pudo subir al alto cielo.
Y a la vuelta, contó.
Dijo que había contemplado, desde allá arriba,
la vida humana.
Y dijo que somos un mar de fueguitos.
- El mundo es eso - reveló -.
Un montón de gente, un mar de fueguitos.
Cada persona brilla con luz propia entre todas las demás.

No hay dos fuegos iguales.
Hay fuegos grandes y fuegos chicos
y fuegos de todos los colores.
Hay gente de fuego sereno que ni se entera del viento,
y gente de fuego loco que llena el aire de chispas.
Algunos fuegos, fuegos bobos, no alumbran ni queman;
pero otros, otros arden la vida con tantas ganas
que no se puede mirarlos sin parpadear,
y quien se acerca, se enciende.

Sea of Little Fires⁸⁸
(Eduardo Galeano)

A man of the town of Neguá, on the coast of Colombia,
was able to climb to the high heaven.
On his return, he told a story.
He said he had contemplated, from above,
human life.
And said that we are a sea of little fires.
The world is that—he revealed—
A cluster of people, a sea of little fires.
Each person shines with their own light among all others.

No two fires are alike.
There are large fires and small fires
and fires of all kinds and colors.
There are people of serene fire, unaware of the existence of
wind,
and people of crazy fire, who fill the air with sparks.
Some fires, foolish fires, do not shine or burn;
but others burn life so heartily
you cannot observe them without stopping to blink,
and whoever gets close, flares up.

⁸⁸ Translation by Tudobezeza on Eyes on Colombia blog (2018).

Chapter 3. Biopolitics of embodied imaginaries

Biopower doesn't infiltrate from the outside.
It already dwells *inside*.
Preciado 2013, 208

The concept of biopolitics, first introduced in 1905 by Swedish professor of political science, Rudolf Kjellén⁸⁹, was taken up by Foucault (1978; 2003; 2009; 2008a), who developed a theory around biopower and biopolitics, that seeks to capture the complexity in which the dimensions of politics, the body and life are interwoven in modern Western societies (Farneda 2012, 107). Based on Foucault's contributions, much has been written about biopolitics, expanding its fields of application, contesting its limitations, exploring its portals, pointing out its contradictions in different contexts.

Always interested in the study of power, in the apparatuses (*dispositifs*) through which it operates, the technologies it uses for control and/or management, the subjects it produces and the relationships it configures, the history of political and social transformations that affect today's societies, Foucault introduces the concept of biopolitics in an attempt to account for a shift in the exercise of power and the government of peoples, where the management of life occupies a central place. As we shall see, this turn more or less coincides with the advent of modernity.

Foucault (2003) proposes that racism plays an important role in the economy of biopower, inciting the death of the other insofar as it makes one biologically stronger as a member of the population. While Foucault acknowledges that racism first develops with the colonial genocide (Foucault 2003, 257), his theory does not go in depth in this respect, and he takes the Nazi State as the paradigmatic example of the role of racism in biopolitics. Different authors from critical, anti-colonial and decolonial perspectives, draw attention to an epistemological absence in Foucault's theory, and point out the link between the rise of biopolitical governmentality and racism as a system of domination, resulting from the conquest of Abya Yala and the development of the European colonial enterprise in the Global South (processes that trigger the emergence of modernity).

In fact, in most instances, the selection of races, the prohibition of mixed marriages, forced sterilization, even the extermination of vanquished peoples are to find their first testing ground in the colonial world. Here we see the first syntheses between massacre and bureaucracy, that incarnation of Western rationality... What one

⁸⁹ Kjellén proposed the concept of biopolitics to refer, on the one hand, to a conception of society, of the State and of politics in biological and pathological terms, and on the other, to account for a rationality and the mechanisms through which the State, politics and government take over the biological life of the human (Gunnflo 2015; Castro 2008).

witnesses in World War II is the extension to the "civilized" peoples of Europe of the methods previously reserved for the "savages" (Mbembe 2013, 171).

In this sense, Foucault overlooks the ways in which the incipient biopower germinates in the corners of the *zones of non-being*, inhabited by subjects who were never understood to be fully human (Howell and Richter-Montpetit 2019, 3). This has raised questions about his "methodological Whiteness" (Bhambra 2017), noting that his analysis reproduces "a Eurocentric account of the rise of biopower, in which Europe is treated as "self-generating," and (settler) colonial violence is disappeared" (Howell and Richter-Montpetit 2019, 10).

In spite of this, I consider that Foucault opened a great field with his notions of biopolitics and biopower, which carve several lines to examine and understand the apparatuses (*dispositifs*) of power and governmentality in our contemporary societies. For this reason, I undertake a reading of biopolitics and necropolitics in a decolonial key, following Farneda's (2012) incitation to take this theory as a conceptual toolbox in contexts where structures of colonial domination survive, such as Latin America (11).

How does biopolitics operate in a colonized country with Europeanist aspirations such as Costa Rica? What forms does necropolitics take in a country that identifies itself as the cradle of peace and democracy in Central America? How do we read today the critical knot between biopolitics and coloniality, what effects does it have on bodies, spaces, relations of domination and practices of resistance? If today we continue to speak of decoloniality is precisely because the biopolitics that shapes our existence is a form of colonial governmentality, and in this sense, it is important to study it in order to understand our realities.

This chapter reviews Foucault's contributions and some of the subsequent developments around the notion of biopolitics. Of particular interest is the concept of necropolitics (Mbembe 2013), as well as the developments of authors such as Paul B. Preciado (2013), Sam Bourcier (2017), and Sayak Valencia (2010), whose contributions provide important elements for the analysis of the situations addressed in this study. Likewise, I recover the decolonial readings that raise criticisms to the Eurocentrism and coloniality that are harbored in the elaborations of Foucault and a good part of his followers. With this, I wish to propose a decolonial reading of biopolitics in a context such as that of San José. In this sense, I seek a dialogue between the notions of biopower, biopolitics, bare life (Agamben 1998), and necropolitics, and the contributions of alternative cosmologies of indigenous peoples, recovered by authors such as Cabnal (2010) and decolonial theorists such as Grosfoguel (2012). Likewise, following the ethical-epistemological proposal of this study, in this thesis I try to put in dialogue the theoretical developments of academic knowledge with other forms of knowledge proposed by the participants in this study. Their reflections, embodied and tessellated in the streets of San José, together with the

observations that emerge from the ethnographic process, allow me to elaborate this proposal for a reading of some of the ways in which biopolitics operates in the city of San José.

3.1. Biopower and biopolitics

The concept of biopower, like many others, evolved over time in Foucault's work. It is neither a monolithic and finished concept nor a general theory, but rather a path that grew, not without contradictions and gaps. The concept appears for the first time in Foucault's work in 1974, in the lecture *La naissance de la médecine sociale*, dictated in Rio de Janeiro, where he presents it as a consequence of the emergence of social medicine. After this brief and incipient mention, Foucault will continue to develop the concept in *La volonté de savoir* (1976), *Il faut défendre la société* (1976), *Sécurité, territoire, population* (1977-1978), and *Naissance de la biopolitique* (1978-1979).

Biopower in *La volonté de savoir* is framed within his important work on the history of sexuality, and the ways in which sex and sexuality are captured for social control. In this context, biopolitics is introduced as one of the possible transformations of the sovereign right: “one might say that the ancient right to *take* life or *let* live was replaced by a power to *foster* life or *disallow* it to the point of death” (Foucault 1978, 138).

According to Foucault, sovereign power characterizes

a historical type of society in which power was exercised mainly as a means of deduction (*prélèvement*), a subtraction mechanism, a right to appropriate a portion of the wealth, a tax of products, goods and services, labor and blood, levied on the subjects. Power in this instance was essentially a right of seizure: of things, time, bodies, and ultimately life itself; it culminated in the privilege to seize hold of life in order to suppress it (Foucault 1978, 136).

From the 17th century onwards, says Foucault, power is configured around two poles, linked by a cluster of relations. These poles are not to be understood as opposites, but they are certainly different. On the one hand: the body, controlled through disciplinary power. An *anatomo-politics* that seeks to optimize the body's capacities and increase its usefulness and efficiency for its docile integration into the system. On the other hand: the population, regulated through a *biopolitics* that seeks to control aspects of the species body (Foucault 1978, 139). Alongside the institutions that Foucault points out as characteristic spaces of disciplinary power (the school, the prison, the asylum, the hospital, and so forth), another field of knowledge, political and economic practices emerges. This field observes and controls aspects such as birthrate, longevity, public health, housing, and migration, but not by the means of individualized training and vertical punishment. Biopower does not operate through impediment or destruction, but rather by inciting, monitoring, generating and managing forces

(Foucault 1978, 136). It is a life-administering power that “...exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavors to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations” (137).

Foucault will further develop the concept in *Il faut défendre la société*, in which he describes biopower as the power of regularization (Foucault 2003, 247), the power to manage and regulate the population. Population is understood as

a new body, a multiple body, a body with so many heads that, while they might not be infinite in number, cannot necessarily be counted. Biopolitics deals with the population, with the population as political problem, as a problem that is at once scientific and political, as a biological problem and as power's problem (Foucault 2003, 245).

Biopolitics does not target the body (man-as-body), but life reduced to its biological component (man-as-species) (Foucault 2003). This form of power does not operate through individualization in the way that discipline does, by dissolving multiplicity into individual bodies that it can control, train, and punish. Rather, biopolitics operates through a kind of massification, influencing this global mass (Benente 2017, 19), the man-as-species that is the population (Foucault 2003, 242–43).

As a technology of power, says Foucault, biopolitics

is centered not upon the body but upon life: a technology which brings together the mass effects characteristic of a population, which tries to control the series of random events that can occur in a living mass, a technology which tries to predict the probability of those events (by modifying it, if necessary), or at least to compensate for their effects. This is a technology which aims to establish a sort of homeostasis, not by training individuals, but by achieving an overall equilibrium that protects the security of the whole from internal dangers (2003, 249)

In *Security, Territory and Population*, Foucault (2009) deepens the analysis of biopolitics. Biopower is an exercise oriented towards the administration of life. Life, therefore, must at the same time preserved and managed, turning it into a substrate, an engine and a channel for power relations. Biopolitics must therefore maintain life, preserve it since it is a necessary condition for the existence of society.

Foucault also takes on the notion of *governmentality*, to analyze the point where government and rationality meet to influence, shape, or affect the actions of the population. Foucault understands governmentality as

the ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument (Foucault 2009, 108).

Governmentality consists in the management of the population, but in order to do so, it requires a specific type of knowledge, a rationality that serves the act of governing,

...I think this is where we should look for the origin, the point of formation, of crystallization, the embryonic point of the governmentality whose entry into politics, at the end of the sixteenth and in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, marks the threshold of the modern state. The modern state is born, I think, when governmentality became a calculated and reflected practice (Foucault 2009, 165).

Governmentality, says Foucault, is the process by which the state of justice became the administrative state (2009, 108-109). As a result of this shift, the modern state emerges and consolidates. I will return to this later, since some of the critiques to Foucault's arguments from decolonial perspectives revolve around the little importance he gives to colonial domination in the emergence of governmentality and the modern state. For now, I would like to focus on the forms of (Western) knowledge that make possible biopolitical governmentality. The social sciences, together with medical knowledge, are useful tools for the design of policies and instruments transformed into technologies of power that control and regulate the population in a relatively indirect, or at least non-coercive manner, framed within certain conditions of freedom.

In this sense, as I mentioned in chapter 2, the development of statistics is fundamental for biopolitics: science at the service of control in that discursive amalgam that Foucault rightly identifies as knowledge-power. A detailed knowledge of the biological characteristics of the population makes it possible to establish standards of normality and, consequently, to signal the deviations as abnormal. Regulatory mechanisms based on statistical knowledge of the population intend to establish an equilibrium, a sort of homeostasis within the population's aleatory field (Foucault 2003, 246-47). It is a technology of power that operates through actions, that seeks to regulate the life of the population not through prohibition, but through inciting and driving their actions.

... within the field of biopower, we can use the term 'biopolitics' to embrace all the specific strategies and contestations over problematizations of collective human vitality, morbidity and mortality; over the forms of knowledge, regimes of authority and practices of intervention that are desirable, legitimate and efficacious (Rabinow and Rose 2006, 197).

It is important, nevertheless, to note that the apparatuses (*dispositifs*) should not be understood as a linear succession of the forms of power. Foucault insists that biopower does not replace disciplinary power, but in fact penetrates it, complementing it in a potent arrangement of technologies for the administration of the body and the population (Foucault 2003, 241). What circulates between disciplinary power and biopower is the norm,

we can say that there is one element that will circulate between the disciplinary and the regulatory, which will also be applied to body and population alike, which will

make it possible to control both the disciplinary order of the body and the aleatory events that occur in the biological multiplicity that circulates between the two is the norm... The normalizing society is a society in which the norm of discipline and the norm of regulation intersect along an orthogonal articulation (Foucault 2003, 252–53)

Therefore, discipline and biopower operate simultaneously, one through the training, punishment, and control of the body, and the other through the regulation of life of the population. Biopolitics seeks to regulate, to normalize life with the use of technologies of power. Rather than imposing a norm, as the discipline would do, biopolitics normalizes, it tries to keep the population within the limits of the "normal curve", using the predictive power of statistics and applying political-economic instruments that directly affect the collective everyday life. Public policies are effective the means by which power relations are exercised to address issues that affect the lives of the population, such as health, employment, poverty, cost of living, among others.

3.1.1. Security apparatus

Foucault (1993) proposes that the exercise of power has been part of human relations since their beginnings. Societies are organized and function on the basis of these dynamics, which are transformed by different historical events, changing the spaces and forms in which power is exercised, adapting to each context. Thus, throughout human history there have been different apparatuses (*dispositifs*) in which power is exercised. Within these we find disciplinary apparatuses and, of particular interest to this study, security apparatuses.

As summarized by Hardt and Negri:

Putting this society to work and ensuring obedience to its rule and its mechanisms of inclusion and/or exclusion are accomplished through disciplinary institutions (the prison, the factory, the asylum, the hospital, the university, the school, and so forth) that structure the social terrain and present logics adequate to the "reason" of discipline. Disciplinary power rules in effect by structuring the parameters and limits of thought and practice, sanctioning and prescribing normal and/or deviant behaviors (Hardt and Negri 2013, 216).

By the means of training and permanent control of the individual, discipline establishes a division between those who can comply with the norm, and those who are unsuitable or incapable, producing in turn a difference between the normal and the abnormal (Foucault 2009, 57). Discipline concentrates, focuses, and encloses, it regulates everything, allows nothing to escape (44-45). However, while this is possible in a form power that operates on individuals, on each of their bodies, for the population it would be an impossible task. The population, understood as both the source and the root of the state's power and wealth, requires an apparatus that will ensure it will work properly, in the right place, and on the right objects (69). This is why Foucault points to another form of organization of power, which focuses on the population: the security apparatus.

The apparatus of security first inserts social phenomena

...within a series of probable events. Second, the reactions of power to this phenomenon are inserted in a calculation of cost. Finally, third, instead of a binary division between the permitted and the prohibited, one establishes an average considered as optimal on the one hand, and, on the other, a bandwidth of the acceptable that must not be exceeded (Foucault 2009, 6).

This transformation introduces a distinction between normation and normalization. Disciplinary apparatuses would operate under the logic of the former, while biopolitical apparatuses deal with the latter.

Due to the primacy of the norm in relation to the normal, to the fact that disciplinary normalization goes from the norm to the final division between the normal and the abnormal, I would rather say that what is involved in disciplinary techniques is a normation (*normation*) rather than normalization (Foucault 2009, 57).

In this regard, Foucault introduces the security apparatus, which organizes power relations in a different way, putting biopolitical governmentality into practice. Security apparatus, he says, operate in the logic of normalization, deploying techniques that develop from and below the law, sometimes in its margins, sometimes even against it (Foucault 2009, 56).

Même si le mode sécuritaire s'appuie encore sur des technologies disciplinaires, il se distingue radicalement du régime disciplinaire. Il est dans le laissez-faire plutôt que dans le contrôle, dans la circulation plutôt que dans l'espace clos. Il se situe au-delà du « code binaire permis/défendu. » Il est dans la normalisation plutôt que dans la « normation ». *La population est à la fois le sujet et l'objet de ce régime sécuritaire là* (Bourcier 2017, 77).

In the security apparatus, the production of knowledge is aimed at demarcating the different curves of normality in a population (both normal and abnormal). Normalization, says Foucault, "consists in establishing an interplay between these different distributions of normality and [in] acting to bring the most unfavorable in line with the more favorable" (Foucault 2009, 63). Contrary to the strict control in disciplinary apparatuses, security apparatuses adopt the *laissez-faire* principle. It does not signal things as good or evil, nor does it prescribe what is obligatory or what is forbidden. How to make the population maintain a certain predefined course without imposing a code of mandates and interdictions, and without pointing out in an authoritarian and blunt manner the limits of the path? This is the key point of security apparatuses. In Foucault's words:

the law prohibits and discipline prescribes, and the essential function of security, without prohibiting or prescribing, but possibly making use of some instruments of prescription and prohibition, is to respond to a reality in such a way that this response cancels out the reality to which it responds—nullifies it, or limits, checks, or regulates it (2009, 47).

Security apparatuses paradoxically pose the need to combine social control with the idea of freedom. Freedom is a condition for the apparatuses of security to operate, and desire is one of the means through which they operate. Individuals act out of desire, says Foucault. Desire mobilizes the interests of individuals; therefore, acting on the conditions in which desire emerges is a fertile field for population management.

The production of the collective interest through the play of desire is what distinguishes both the naturalness of population and the possible artificiality of the means one adopts to manage it... management of populations on the basis of the naturalness of their desire, and of the spontaneous production of the collective interest by desire... (Foucault 2009, 73).

In security apparatuses power acts not on bodies but on desire. It is no longer a question of getting the subjects to obey the sovereigns will, but “having a hold on things that seem far removed from the population, but which, through calculation, analysis, and reflection, one knows can really have an effect on it” (Foucault 2009, 72). Biopower faces a complex challenge: it requires a degree of rationalization that allows it to act not on individuals or on their desire in particular, but on the conditions in which this desire arises:

Pour réguler ou transformer la population, le pouvoir va réagir en calculant ce que ça va coûter, les risques et les dangers, nous dit Foucault. *L'économisation, qui est l'un des principaux traits distinctifs du monde sécuritaire du pouvoir, prend donc le pas sur la morale du régime disciplinaire* (Bourcier 2017, 77)

The function of governmentality within biopolitics consists not in drawing limits or repressing desire but in creating the conditions that shape desire. Normativity regulates desire, drives it, empowers it as a dynamic force of particular ways of being and behaving that result in a convenient lifestyle for the fulfillment of the multiple goals of governmentality (Fréitez 2008, 57). It is a regime of truth capable of bringing power to a capillary level in everyday life (Sequera 2014, 72).

In this governmentality, fear has proven to be an effective and very lucrative technology of power that allows the paradoxical conjugation of freedom and social control. In a very simplified manner, we could say that within the security apparatus, fear is used in the following way: there are risks, real dangers that threaten the population. These risks are detected, quantified and analyzed through statistics. However, the meticulous calculation makes it possible to identify and offer a number of measures that can reduce the impact or even the incidence of these threats. These measures are mostly in the hands of the State, international organizations or transnational corporations, and a good part of them come from the sphere of economic policy. These security measures, moreover, are instrumentalized as technologies of power that are effective precisely because the threats exist. In other words, fear and security are two complementary technologies for security apparatuses. In order for the State, international cooperation or corporations to offer us a fragment of security in exchange

for a dose of regulation, they need a frightened population, and they need a detailed knowledge of its fears.

The individuals of the population would have the possibility to freely decide what they want, however, if they wish to avoid the dangers and move safely, they must stay within the boundaries established by the biopolitical normativity. Fear and its counterpart, security, or the desire for security, become a tool for the management of populations. In modern democracies, the political use of fear is a common strategy, worked systematically and carefully to induce certain desired behaviors in the population⁹⁰.

Since these measures (we may call them promises of security), are in the hands of the ruling classes, they will be permeated by their interests and their project for society. Therefore, they will often be restrictive palliative measures, which barely attenuate the intensity of the risks, but always keeping the menace, leaving an open the road for population management. The promises of security never completely eradicate fears, as they would lose their potential to exert power.

Security apparatuses wear a powerful camouflage that makes us confuse them with *free-choice*, or even with conveniences. These measures appear offered as optional, as mere alternatives within which individuals, on the basis of their freedom, can choose. They generally imply waivers of rights or freedoms in exchange for the security they promise, but always insisting on their volitional, non-imposing, intrinsically democratic character.

These situations allow population management to be exercised through a mirage: it would seem that the people choose their own path. It may even seem as if people were requesting or demanding the measures that regulate their lives. In fact, these "choices" were permeated by the calculation and manipulation of risks, indirectly furrowing their path. In this way, the political use of fear encourages the intensification of repressive measures, the reduction of freedoms that is assumed by the populations as a necessary and inevitable renunciation in exchange for a meager fragment of security.

As we will see in the following chapters, the discourses of fear and security have produced violent practices of exclusion in the city of San José. As is to be expected, some of these practices are embodied by the police forces and local governments, but others are put into practice by the some of the city's inhabitants. Governmentality palpitates in their subjectivities, leading them to exchange conditions of freedom in exchange for an illusion of security.

Biopower is a form of power that regulates social life from its interior, following it, interpreting it, absorbing it, and rearticulating it. Power can achieve an effective command over the entire life of the population only when it becomes an integral, vital

⁹⁰ For concrete examples of the use of the fear/security set as a technology of power, see: Valencia 2010; Fréitez 2008; Fournier 2009.

function that every individual embraces and reactivates of his or her own accord.
(Hardt and Negri 2013, 216)

What Hardt and Negri point to is the subjectivization effect of biopolitics, the construction of subjectivity that biopower requires for its functioning. In this line, Rabinow and Rose (2006) identify three dimensions on which the strategies of biopower are configured: (1) a regimen of truth about living beings, with its consequent array of authorities considered competent to speak that truth; (2) intervention strategies to manage life and health upon collective existence; and (3) modes of subjectification, in which individuals interiorize the norm (Rabinow and Rose 2006, 203).

Following their model, a series of questions arise: which modes of subjectification does biopolitics inscribe in a colonized country, such as Costa Rica? What nuances does biopower take in a population of racialized bodies that insist on whitening their history and self-image? Throughout this chapter and those that follow, I will try to elaborate some answers (not finished or total, of course) about the complex forms that biopolitics takes in bodies, spaces, culture, subjectivities and relationships, taking on Hardt's and Negri's (2013) affirmation that biopolitics is both about production and reproduction, structure and superstructure, life in the fullest sense and politics in the proper sense (Hardt and Negri 2013, 222).

3.1.2. The lethality of *race*

I have discussed up to this point the biopolitical mechanisms for regulating life and enhancing its efficiency, but if biopolitics is inscribed in the logic of making live and letting die, what would be its relationship with death? What would be the political operations around death? It is here that Foucault positions racism as a mechanism of power exercised by modern States, "a way of introducing a break into the domain of life that is under power's control: the break between what must live and what must die" (Foucault 2003, 254). I will address the critiques of his notion of racism later, but for now I will focus on the place that Foucault gives to racism within biopower.

Foucault (2003) posits racism as the introduction of distinctions and hierarchies among the biological continuum of the human race of races, where certain races are described as good and others as inferior. Foucault makes a brief mention of the pedagogy of death that was put into practice in the European colonies, but he centers on the form of racism in the Nazi State.

"Biopolitics' last domain is, finally... control over relations between the human race, or human beings insofar as they are a species, insofar as they are living beings, and their environment, the milieu in which they live" (Foucault 2003, 245). But we must remember, as I developed in chapter 1, that the condition of humanity is not attributed to all beings of the human species, or, we could say, that the condition of humanity is taken away from countless individuals who are produced as subhuman or

inhuman in the *zone of non-being*, and that race plays a fundamental role in delimiting the boundaries between the human and the non-human (Grosfoguel 2012). In this vein, Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe proposes that this

control presupposes the distribution of human species into groups, the subdivision of the population into subgroups, and the establishment of a biological caesura between the ones and the others. This is what Foucault labels with the (at first sight familiar) term *racism* (Mbembe 2013, 166).

Racism introduces a new conception of danger and risk, a new construction of the enemy, which is no longer a political threat, but a biological threat. "In a normalizing society, race or racism is the precondition that makes killing acceptable" (Foucault 2003, 256). In this sense, killing the menacing other becomes not only an acceptable possibility, but a vital imperative.

‘The more inferior species die out, the more abnormal individuals are eliminated, the fewer degenerates there will be in the species as a whole, and the more I—as species rather than individual—can live, the stronger I will be, the more vigorous I will be. I will be able to proliferate.’ The fact that the other dies does not mean simply that I live in the sense that his death guarantees my safety; the death of the other, the death of the *bad race*, of the inferior race (or the degenerate, or the abnormal) is something that will make life in general healthier: healthier and purer (Foucault 2003, 255).

This is how biopower mobilizes huge populations in the name of life necessity. This marks a break in the way warfare operates. The sovereign loses its centrality as a figure for whom one must give one's life, and the population takes center stage. The life of the population must be defended (even if it costs the lives of subjects and implies the destruction of bodies) (Foucault 1978). "In the economy of biopower, the function of racism is to regulate the distribution of death and to make possible the murderous functions of the state" (Mbembe 2013, 166).

In order to sustain life of the population, the death of the other is necessary. To put to death, says Foucault, is not only the violent act of murdering someone:

When I say "killing," I obviously do not mean simply murder as such, but also every form of indirect murder: the fact of exposing someone to death, increasing the risk of death for some people, or, quite simply, political death, expulsion, rejection, and so on (Foucault 2003, 256).

This proposition is fundamental for the analysis I intend in this study, since "letting die" in a country like Costa Rica, that decades ago abolished the death penalty and the army, operates by means of exposing the "other" to death, launching them, in Foucault's words, to that political death that implies a considerable increase in the risk of death in situations of extreme vulnerability.

3.1.3. Homo Sacer and bare life

How is this annihilable other constructed? What makes a person to be labeled as killable, their life disposable, undesirable? What makes their death be considered necessary for the life of the population? Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben turns to the concept of *homo sacer*, a complex construction of Ancient Roman law, to explore these questions in light of Foucault's notion of biopolitics.

Agamben takes up the Greek concepts of *zoe* and *bios* to track what he considers to be the origins of biopolitics. *Zoe* designates "*bare life*", life in its plain form, the simple fact of living common to all beings. *Bios*, on the other hand, refers to a qualified life, the possibility of a "*good life*" that human beings harbor in society (Agamben 2013). The *bios* implicates the politicization of *bare life*, that is, the transformation by which the human-animal obtains its humanity. All human beings are born in regard to *bare life*, we share this condition of being alive, but the politicization of life gives another sense to the fact of living, transforming it into a valorized existence, contained and produced in the realms of civilization.

... almost as if politics were the place in which life had to transform itself into good life and in which what had to be politicized were always bare life. In Western politics, bare life has the peculiar privilege of being that whose exclusion founds the city of men (Agamben 2013, 139).

Through language, the human-species develops complex forms of organization and technologies for the management of nature and life. The polis, the city, the government, the Law, constitute boundaries that separate *bare life* from qualified life. The State, therefore, takes a fundamental part in today's administration of life, granting its citizens the promise of the good life. The State has the power to transform *bare life* into *good life*, in an operation that implies the exclusion of the former so that the latter may emerge. But a promise is not the *good life* itself, and *bios* does not seem to be a universal trait of the human as a species.

In *The Perplexities of the Right of Man*, philosopher Hannah Arendt (2013) discusses the contradictions inherent to the modern concept of humanity and human rights:

... humanity, which for the eighteenth century, in Kantian terminology, was no more than a regulative idea, has today become an inescapable fact. This new situation, in which "humanity" has in effect assumed the role formerly ascribed to nature or history, would mean in this context that the right to have rights, or the right of every individual to belong to humanity, should be guaranteed by humanity itself. It is by no means certain whether this is possible (91).

In this context, Agamben's concept of *homo sacer* becomes relevant. Agamben (1998) takes up the figure of *homo sacer* from the Ancient Roman Law. Originally, this concept seemed to designate an

exceptional political status assigned to certain criminals, that prohibited them from being sacrificed, but at the same time decreed them as unpunishably killable. This apparent contradiction is in fact a complex position in relation to society's moral values. Sacrifices implied the offering of a life to please and honor the gods. However, certain crimes were considered to make that life unworthy of sacrifice for the gods, and in that sense, the *homo sacer* could not be sacrificed. Nonetheless, the *homo sacer's* life was devoid of any social value, it was no longer conciliable with the *good life*. Deprived from all his rights as a citizen, *homo sacer* was thrown into *bare life*, and in that sense, his existence could be ceased without any punishment. As a non-political existence, *bare life* is excluded from the law. Violence done to *homo sacer*, says Agamben, did not constitute sacrilege; "... homo sacer belongs to God in the form of unsacrificeability and is included in the community in the form of being able to be killed. Life that cannot be sacrificed and yet may be killed is sacred life" (Agamben 1998, 82).

The sovereign, says Agamben (1998), for ages exercised the power which determined the boundaries of the *bios*, that is, who is included into the political body and who was to be excluded from it, leaving them with nothing but their living body (*zoe*), a *bare life*. Biopower comes to introduce the *bare life* in its calculations, producing knowledge that is suitable for the management of life, in the intend to transform *bare life* into *good life*, and to exclude, by the means of exception, the *homo sacer* that is not suitable for *good life*. This leads Agamben to suggest that even if biopower is prominently displayed in the modern state, it can actually be traced back to the beginnings of sovereignty in the West.

I would like to focus for a moment on this last point. I believe Agamben's works provide us with important elements for analyzing power relations and the forms that biopolitics takes in our societies today. However, I find his contributions to be quite centered on the evolution of European states, and, therefore, inevitably anchored in the coloniality that gives birth to modernity. Both Foucault and Agamben constantly refer to Ancient Greece as the cradle of democracy and law. In this sense, I think it can be interesting to contrast these insights with reflections woven in other contexts and cultures. I will elaborate further on alternative worldviews in the section on *A decolonial approach to biopolitics*, in dialogue with the cosmovisions of some of the indigenous peoples of Abya Yala. For now, I will say that the notion of *bare life* is a concept that reflects the Western worldview in which the human being is hierarchized over other beings (living and inert), a vision that coincides with the dichotomies imposed during colonization in which culture is opposed to nature, and civilization to savagery.

The fundamental categorial pair of Western politics is not that of friend/enemy but that of bare life/political existence, *zoe/bios*, exclusion/inclusion. There is politics because man is the living being who, in language, separates and opposes himself to his own *bare life* and, at the same time, maintains himself in relation to that *bare life* in an inclusive exclusion (Agamben 2013, 140).

Peoples advance towards civilization with the promise that the State can come to provide them with the *good life*. Civilization is what saves the savage from the *bare life*, and it is civilization that in turn expels the *homo sacer* who does not fit within its normativities. This ethnocentric and linear civilizing vision reproduces the idea of progress so deeply rooted today in neoliberal capitalism, an ideal of progress that has also shaped colonial violence for centuries in Abya Yala. These dichotomies are at the basis of systems of domination such as racism, speciesism, ableism and patriarchy. The segregation and hierarchization of bodies, and the consequent [de]valorization of human life, produces the material conditions in which some can access the *good life* and others constitute a threat to it.

For Agamben (1998), *bare life* designates the simple fact of living, of being alive, common to all living beings, while *bios* speaks of a political category, proper to humans. This resonates with Grosfoguel's (2012) reading of racism based on Foucault and Fanon, in which he argues that race is that line that separates the human from the inhuman and subhuman, the *zone of being* from the *zone of non-being*. A life that may be killed by anyone is what Grosfoguel identifies as a body in the *zone of non-being*, a life that does not achieve the status of humanity, and is therefore exploitable, killable, disposable. In short, the condition of the figure of the *homo sacer* that Agamben locates in Roman law, is what authors such as Grosfoguel (2012), Fanon (2004) or Mbembe (2013) identify as the racialized subject, with the difference that the former is excluded because of the crime he has committed, while the latter is excluded by the mere fact that his existence, his body and/or his culture have been decreed inferior.

Back to Agamben's work, he offers some keys to understand how the *homo sacer* is configured today. Exploring the boundaries of *bare life*, he poses a question formulated by Karl Binding in an essay dedicated to discuss the unpunishability of the killing of a life in the context of suicide and euthanasia⁹¹: "are there human lives that have so lost the quality of legal good that their very existence no longer has any value, either for the person leading such a life or for society?" (Agamben 1998, 139). At what point does a life cease to be politically relevant and becomes *sacred life*? Agamben stresses the juridical category of "life devoid of value", a life that is unworthy of being lived, to signal the forms that the *homo sacer* takes in modern societies: "incurable idiots, either those born as such or, those -- for example, those who suffer from progressive paralysis -- who have become such in the last phase of their life" (Agamben 1998, 138).

⁹¹ From Agamben's description we can infer that Binding's concept of euthanasia does not refer only to the volitional act of assisted suicide, but it also flirts with eugenics policies, that later inspired the Nazi regime's euthanasia program, aimed to end lives that constitute more of a cost than a profit for society.

INCURABLES

This quote inevitably reminds me of a protest held in Costa Rica in 2013, in the context of an international conference starring Dr. Jokin de Irala, a Spanish physician who promised to be able to "cure" homosexuality. The conference was declared of national interest by the Ministry of Health, despite the fact that the Costa Rican Federation of Psychology had already promulgated a statement that clearly indicated that homosexuality is not a disease or disorder and, therefore, prohibited conversion therapies.

The government's declaration of public interest implies, among other things, the allocation of public funds for the activity and permission for public employees to take time off from work to attend the conference. In response to this pathologizing discourse, several collectives and independent activists organized protest actions. Among them, a march called "Incurables" and a graphic campaign promoted by photographer Ariela Muñoz. The campaign covered the walls of the city with pictures of queer and trans* people wearing a straitjacket, accompanied by phrases of resistance to diagnosis, pathologization, medical and psychiatric violence.

Image 33
Incurables campagin



Source: Vincenzo Bruno's personal collection

Reading the discussions about the threshold that separates livable lives from lives unworthy of being lived, the images of this campaign jumped in my head, intermingled with the stories of violence and re-existence told by trans women who survived the lethal forms that hygienism took in the 80's and 90's in the city of San Jose. While Karl Binding wonders what to do with those lives that seem devoid of value, I listen to the stories of those who survive this lethal violence, the biopower wielded by the State that labels them as *homo sacer*, and marks their bodies as vital threats that need be eradicated.

Who, then, are today's *homo sacer*? What are these lives devoid of value? "... in the age of biopolitics this power becomes emancipated from the state of exception and transformed into the power to decide the point at which life ceases to be politically relevant" (Agamben 1998, 142). Binding already suggested the "mentally ill", the "incurable idiots". Agamben also places here the refugees, who, as we shall see, in Costa Rica also seem to be thrown into the *bare life*. We could also mention, among

others, undocumented migrants, countless anonymous racialized bodies, street sex workers, unhoused residents of the city, and a sector of impoverished trans women in the city of San José.

This is modern democracy's strength and, at the same time, its inner contradiction: modern democracy does not abolish *sacred life* but rather shatters it and disseminates it into every individual body, making it into what is at stake in political conflict. And the root of modern democracy's secret biopolitical calling lies here: he who will appear later as the bearer of rights and, according to a curious oxymoron, as the new sovereign subject (*subiectus superaneus*, in other words, what is below and, at the same time, most elevated) can only be constituted as such through the repetition of the sovereign exception and the isolation of corpus, bare life, in himself (Agamben 1998, 124).

Modern democracy harbors within it a profound and lethal violence, the power to decide which lives are worthy of living, and which can be discarded without remorse. In a country like Costa Rica, where we do not fight wars in the official sense of the term, biopower is perhaps even more diffuse and fragmented. The biological threat of the "other" that racism sustains is not channeled through an open war that permits and incites their annihilation. The law, in this case, will continue to signal a killing as a homicide. However, as Jacob affirms:

Que hay cuerpos que pesan... Y en estos cuerpos que pesan, pesan más los cuerpos desde el estatus social, económico, político... Sí, Costa Rica en parte tiene cosas buenas, pero esas cosas de la clase siempre va a estar latente, y latente en los cuerpos que son más visibles, y aquí, el negro o la negra, obviamente es un focus visible, pero obviamente vive discriminación, porque no somos blancos, no somos ojos claros, ni los... ni los "machos" así, porque aquí le dicen "macho" a la gente "chela", o a la gente blanca⁹² (Jacob, in discussion with the author, November 26, 2019).

What Jacob seems to signal is that life is hierarchized on the basis of the classification exercised on the bodies. Race, class and gender are some of these systems that mark bodies and [de]valorize their lives. In this sense, those who embody these lives unworthy of being lived are exposed to various forms of violence that are barely sanctioned or prosecuted. An unpunishable violence takes place in the depths of city of San José, where the eyes of the law do not reach, and society conjures up a kind of jouissance that is aroused by the sight of *homo sacer* being beaten and excluded. This violence of modern democracy can be read as a colonial inheritance, a violence that emerges from this operation of hierarchizing bodies and granting some of them the privilege of humanity.

⁹² Free translation: There are bodies that weigh... And in these bodies that weigh, the bodies from the social, economic, political status weigh more... Yes, Costa Rica has some good things, but when it comes to classism it will always be latent, and latent in the bodies that are more visible, and here, the black man or the black woman, obviously is a visible focus, obviously lives discrimination, because we are not white, we are not light-eyed, nor the... nor "machos", because here they call "macho" to the "chela" people, or to the white people.

3.1.4. Biopower in today's neoliberalism

Foucault (2002) has been emphatic in pointing out that power is not something to be held, it is not an object to be earned, nor is it something possessed by the ruling elites. Power is exercised, its nature is relational. As we have seen, power is not transhistorical. The technologies and apparatuses (*dispositifs*) through which power acts permute in order to respond to the historical conditions in which it operates. For this reason, rather than trying to fit reality into the molds of a theory, it is pertinent to analyze how biopower operates today, and what particular forms it can take in a context such as Costa Rica.

Biopolitics in times of neoliberalism does not manage life or production directly, but the apparatuses (*dispositifs*) of power, inciting, facilitating, enhancing and channeling energies and actions of the population (Sequera 2014, 72). Within biopolitics, governmentality organizes the way in which power relations are exercised, taking as constitutive knowledge the political economy, but increasingly incorporating other forms of knowledge (psychology, medicine, anthropology, communication, sociology, etc.). The application of this within today's neoliberal societies would find its practical materiality not so much in the imposition of laws and restrictions, asynchronous with the principles of neoliberalism, but in the practice of governing through the self-limitation of the State, leaving it to market dynamics to establish the guidelines by which the population life should be channeled.

Political philosophers Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri point out the role that multinational and transnational corporations play today in the structuring global territories biopolitically. Even when capitalism has always had global aspirations, the authors affirm that it is during the second half of the twentieth century that corporations begin to take a strong part (Hardt and Negri 2013, 223). This is especially sensitive in the countries of the so-called "Third World", where transnational capital has been infiltrating the political agenda and culture for decades, engendering relations of dependency in the most diverse productive and reproductive fields.

As we have mentioned, the neoliberal political economy attempts a difficult task: without imposing or restricting desire, it would seek a way to regulate its conditions of existence, of possibility, the situations in which it is produced, as a kind of regulation that at the same time is spontaneous. That is to say, biopower does not operate in a coercive and vertical logic, but through normativities that knot together the subjective and the material planes. It is a complex gearing system:

Rationalities, strategies and technologies of biopower changed across the twentieth century, as the management of collective life and health became a key objective of governmentalized states, and novel configurations of truth, power and subjectivity emerged to underpin the rationalities of welfare and security as well as those of health and hygiene (Rabinow and Rose 2006, 204).

Our subjectivities are configured in this machinery. Hardt and Negri (2013) speak of a biopolitical and globalized machine, an economic-industrial-communicative machine that produces an imperial normativity (230). In a country like Costa Rica, penetrated by imperialism, Hardt and Negri's reading makes sense, although I want to insist on the importance of not falling into the trap of the universal subject. Imperial normativity does not operate in the same way in a colonizing country as in a colonized one. Hence, it is important to broaden the perspective for the analysis of biopolitics, taking into account other axes and dimensions that various authors in the field of biopolitics have proposed to understand the interweaving of oppressions.

Paul B. Preciado, for example, turns the eye back to sexuality which, as Foucault (2003) had already said, is a field of vital strategic importance, the point where body and population meet (252-253):

In keeping with the intuitions of Michel Foucault, Monique Wittig, and Judith Butler, I refer to one of the dominant forms of this biopolitical action, which emerged with disciplinary capitalism, as *sexopolitics*. *Sex*, its truth, its visibility, and its forms of externalization; *sexuality* and the normal and pathological forms of pleasure; and *race*, in its purity or degeneracy, are three powerful somatic fictions that have obsessed the Western world since the eighteenth century, eventually defining the scope of all contemporary theoretical, scientific, and political activity (Preciado 2013, 69).

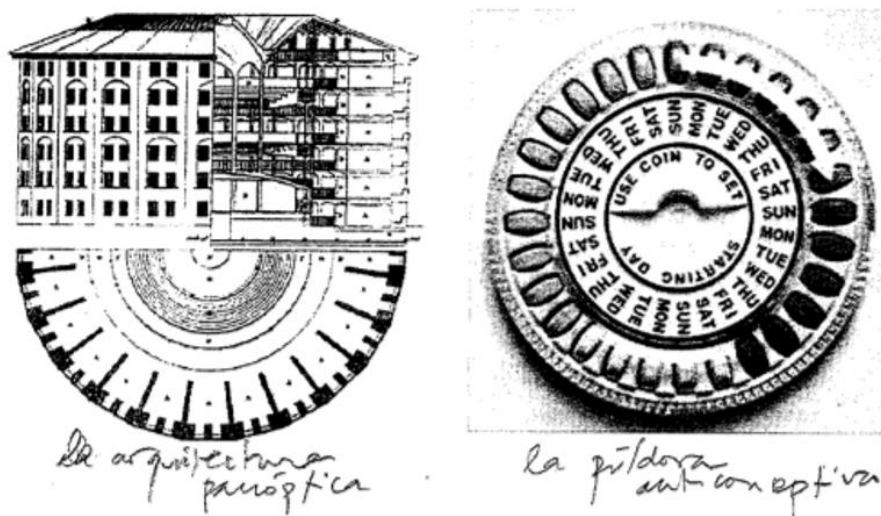
Biopolitics rides on these fictions pointed out by Preciado, delineating their normal curves. As Stryker pointed out, when we think of gender as a system that entraps all bodies from the moment of birth (or even earlier, thanks to prenatal technologies) and produces material effects that are managed by the state throughout life (Stryker 2014, 39), it seems clear that gender, like these fictions Preciado describes, is an apparatus through which power operates. Biopolitics not only inscribes our genders in our identity cards, but also configures them in the most diverse planes, establishing aesthetic, hormonal, physiognomic, behavioral, affective and even cognitive standards for the population of men and women. What makes biopower so difficult to dismantle is that it acts in a capillary way, as I have mentioned, on bodies, actions, and desires. Thus, biopolitics has managed not only to indicate to us what is the normal way of being a man or a woman, but also to make us work on ourselves, investing time, sweat, blood, tears and other fluids to try to get closer to that ideal. All this is articulated in a discourse of freedom, where the norm is confused with desire, a desire that we spend our lives trying to fulfill.

In a biopolitical system, not only states manage the population but also corporations. Not only from scientific knowledge is employed for regulation but also from scientific industry, the great market of big pharma, in innovative forms of normativities that take the form of bodies and desires, of subjects desiring pornographic bodies and pleasures, feeding the production of power and, parallelly, the production of the subject (both subjugation and subjectification) (Preciado 2013, 161). This is what

Preciado identifies as techno-soma-subjectivities, the soft technologies of microcontrol that adopt the form of the body, eventually becoming a part of it (79). This scenario, he affirms, demands new elaborations on the theory of biopolitics.

With a potent metaphor, Preciado illustrates the plasticity of biopower. He takes the example of scientific breakthroughs in the twentieth century in the field of hormones, and the market they inaugurate, to show how the panopticon goes from being a spatial technology of disciplinary power to a corporeal biopolitical technology, which shapes bodies and subjectivities.

Image 34
Edible panoptic



Source: (Preciado 2008, 134)

Panoptical architecture, says Preciado, is a technology of subjectification that seeks to produce the subject they claim to shelter: the student, the worker, the patient, the convict... (2013, 205). Whereas today, in an era where economy is dominated by the industry of the pill, the masturbatory logic of pornography, and the chain of excitation-frustration (40), the panoptic is integrated in our bodies by means of an illusion of freedom and sexual emaciation that promises us control over our own bodies.

In the pharmacopornographic era, the body swallows power. It is a form of control that is both democratic and private, edible, drinkable, inhalable, and easy to administer, whose spread throughout the social body has never been so rapid or so undetectable. In the pharmacopornographic age, biopower dwells at home, sleeps with us, inhabits within. (Preciado 2013, 207)

Although control is lodged in the body, the body does not contain it. Biopower overflows the bodies, flows through them, over the channel of that great mass that is the population. And in this stream the waters of the different systems of oppression converge. Back to the example of the contraceptive pill,

Preciado untangles some of these knots of oppression. The pill, promoted as a method of birth control, is an edible hormone that, in addition to fertility, modifies physiological traits. Thus, as the consumption of these hormones becomes popular, the bodies of millions of girls and women all over the world are transformed, drawing closer to normative standards of feminine beauty. But the matter does not end there. The birth control pill has a history of racist and colonial violence. The pill, like many other drugs, was developed in clinical trials conducted on racialized bodies in the Global South (in this case, mainly in Puerto Rico), and/or on the bodies of those subjects that Agamben would identify as *homo sacer* (in this case, homosexuals and trans* people, declared mentally ill, whose bodies were made available for sterilization) (Preciado 2013, 165).

“Social orthopedics is mutating into pharmacopornographic microprosthetics” (2013, 202) says Preciado. Technologies for control, regulation and, also, for our pleasures, continue to be tested on abject bodies, all framed within colonial logics that never end, traversed by racism, organized by patriarchy, hierarchized in compulsory able-bodiedness. In the era of neoliberal capitalism, these are the technologies that produce us as subjects.

A network of power, knowledge, and capital would determine where and how different fluids, tissues, organs, and bodies circulate, creating differences along gender, sex, race, disability, and class lines... Racialized bodies on the paths of slavery or extermination and bodies stigmatized as “handicapped” or sexually abnormal would be rapidly inserted into this industrial system of capitalization of the living (Preciado 2013, 165).

In his book *Homo Incorporated: Le triangle et la licorne qui pète*, sociologist and queer and transfeminist activist Sam Bourcier expands the biopolitical critique into domains that at first glance might seem counter-hegemonic or anti-establishment: namely, LGBT politics. Bourcier shows us how the struggles for equal rights are easily recuperated by biopolitical governmentality, making the rainbow flag a banner of neoliberal capitalism. His book presents a series of examples of diversity management in the French context. As we shall see, despite the differences that exist between a colonial country like France and a colonized country like Costa Rica, Bourcier's analysis provide important elements for understanding the ways in which systems of oppression manage to continue reproducing their practices of exploitation and exclusion, cloaked in fine discourses of equality and inclusion.

With regard to biopower, Bourcier notes:

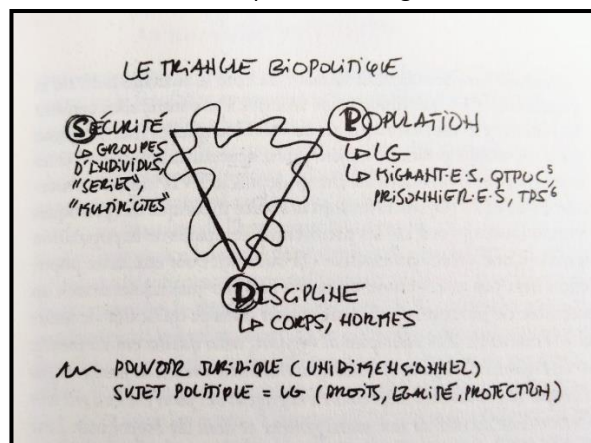
Sa fonction est notamment de produire la nation et de viser sa sauvegarde, et d'alimenter la nationalisation. Qu'il s'agisse de la sécurité sociale, de l'état civil, des politiques de l'immigration, de l'éducation, de l'armée, du système pénitentiaire, le management de la population continue de tabler sur la racialisation et la gendérisation à l'aide de catégorisations et de récits qui mettent en cause ceux qui ne

font pas partie de la nation ou qui la menacent : *la welfare queen* aux Etats-Unis, les mères dans les banlieues françaises qui voient leurs allocations familiales soumises à condition si leur enfants sont dans la rue le soir, les migrant·e-s et les réfugié·e-s, les putes et les pauvres. Celles-ceux-là même qui son exclu·e-s depuis le début de la redistribution des richesses voire de l'aide sociale (Bourcier 2017, 54).

As I will develop along the next chapters, the dialogues with people who are not part of the nation or who threaten it (racialized asylum seekers, sex workers, unhoused residents of the city, impoverished trans women, queer people with disabilities) show us the cruelty and violence that inhabits the rainbow. Inclusion discourses and practices take the citizen as their subject. As Bourcier points out, many gay and lesbian activists have fought vigorously to be recognized as citizens, submitting to biopolitical normativity, that with its great plasticity creates homo and lesbo normativities on a par with heteronormativity. The gay & lesbian subjects' claim for integration does not challenge systems of oppression. On the contrary, it often reproduces them, for integration is frequently sustained by the dispossession and exclusion of others. The individualistic representation of discrimination, says Bourcier, understood vertically as an act committed by a malicious or violent individual agent against others, diverts attention from other structural forms of discrimination that threaten the lives of thousands of individuals (among them queer and trans* people), such as the barriers to access to housing, health and work, which are at the cradle of biopolitical administration (Bourcier 2017, 45). We thus see the emergence of some of the violent forms that the affirmation of queer subjectivity can take when it gets trapped in the webs of biopower, such as homonationalism, pinkwashing, or queer regeneration. Biopower also throbs under the skin of sexually diverse subjects, controlled by their own panopticon of normality.

Bourcier offers a graphic representation of how biopolitics operates today:

Image 35
Bourcier's Biopolitical Triangle Scheme



Source: (Bourcier 2017, 67)

This triangular scheme is a useful device for testing the degree of biopolitical resistance of minorities politics. On one of its vertices, we find the management and regulation of the population (P), thoroughly discussed above. A second vertex shelters disciplinary technologies (D) that impose norms on the bodies. Finally, technologies of security (S) are located in the third vertex. These three modalities for exercising power overflow the political sphere of the government. The forms of governmentality that they produce (the management of the population and security apparatus) spread through the actions of the individuals and groups that concern this study, but in quite uneven ways. I will return to this scheme in the conclusions, following Bourcier's invitation to examine at what and to whom the three points of the triangle correspond in a particular political struggle.

In sum, we can affirm that biopower is more alive than ever. Biopolitics has mutated its forms, optimizing its mechanisms of control and extending its domains to places that seemed unimaginable. In neoliberal times, biopolitics are able to capture even those subjectivities that claimed to be dissident. In Preciado's words:

Spilling beyond the boundaries of the legal realm and punitive sphere, it becomes a force of “somato-power” that penetrates and composes the body of the modern individual. This power no longer plays the role of a coercive law through a negative mandate but is more versatile and welcoming, taking on the form of “an art of governing life,” an overall political technology that is transformed into disciplinary architectures (prisons, barracks, schools, hospitals, etc.), scientific texts, statistical tables, demographic calculations, how-to manuals, usage guidelines, schedules for the regulation of reproduction, and public health projects (Preciado 2013, 68).

3.1.5. Necropolitics

Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe undertakes an interpretation of contemporary biopolitics in light of the politics of death and the political death that modern states inflict on certain populations. His analysis places race as the central axis of these lethal policies. Mbembe questions if the notion of biopower is still adequate and sufficient to interpret contemporary political economy, where millions of people are pushed into precarious living conditions, and entire sectors of the population are doomed to the quotidian risk of death. Thus, he proposes the concepts of *necropower* and *necropolitics* to explain a new grammar, an evolution of biopolitics, one could say, that consists, not in making live or letting die, but in deciding who must die (Mbembe 2013, 161).

This grammar presents us with a difference that, although subtle, is not minor. To let (live or die) denotes a passive character, where the agent of the action is absent. It is this absence that permits life or paves the way for the conditions that provoke death. But to make live or die implies an active position, the deliberate action that brings about life or death (Farneda 2012, 14).

Reflecting on the power to kill that biopower harbors, Foucault argues:

how will the power to kill and the function of murder operate in this technology of power, which takes life as both its object and its objective? How can a power such as this kill, if it is true that its basic function is to improve life, to prolong its duration, to improve its chances, to avoid accidents, and to compensate for failings? ... It is, I think, at this point that racism intervenes. (Foucault 2003, 254)

Foucault takes the case of the Nazi State to suggest that racism is what allows the death of the other in times of biopolitical governmentality. Racism fragments, classifies, hierarchizes the population in a biological continuum. With the emergence of biopower, racism is inscribed in the mechanisms of the State. If before the sovereign had the power to cause death, the modern State finds in racism a way of inserting the power of death within biopolitical democracy. "How can the power of death, the function of death, be exercised in a political system centered upon biopower?", asks Foucault (2003, 254). Racism allows the killing of the other in the name of life, in the name of the nation, in the name of the population.

However, Mbembe, like other authors, perceives a gap in Foucault's theory, which only briefly mentions the colonial origin of racism that eventually condensed in Europe in the Nazi State. Mbembe takes up an alternative temporality, in which he argues that the mechanisms of extermination were tested and developed by European countries in the times of colonial imperialism. Subjugation of the body, health regulations, social Darwinism, eugenics, medico-legal theories on heredity, degeneration, and racism were serialized between the Industrial Revolution and the First World War, but they already existed in Western European social and political formations, only that they were applied to the racialized peoples of the colonized territories, deemed as savages (Foucault 2003, 254).

... colonies are similar to the frontiers. They are inhabited by "savages." The colonies are not organized in a state form and have not created a human world... the colonies are the location par excellence where the controls and guarantees of judicial order can be suspended -the zone where the violence of the state of exception is deemed to operate in the service of "civilization." (Mbembe 2013, 172)

While Agamben positions the Nazi death camps as the space where the modern *homo sacer* is most consolidated, Mbembe takes the example of the slaves in the plantations and the "savages" in the colonies, to point out that these racialized populations were marked as *bare life*, lives that could be killed outside the law, long before the rise of Nazism (Montag 2013, 200). "Las experiencias coloniales se constituyen, indefectiblemente, en la grilla de inteligibilidad para la violencia y el terror contemporáneo que se resumen en la necropolítica⁹³" (Farneda 2012, 20).

Biopolitics is characterized by systematically producing death with the argument of maintaining life. This began to be tested during the conquest: the gradual administration of death in Abya Yala in order

⁹³ Free translation: Colonial experiences unfailingly constitute the grid of intelligibility for contemporary violence and terror, which are summarized in necropolitics.

to extend life in Europe (Farneda 2012, 13). In this sense, the cradle of racism and biopower is not Western Europe as a geopolitical space, but modern Western Europe as a political project.

Mbembe questions the exceptional character that Foucault confers to the power of death, and considers that, nowadays, necropower is part of the political economy and the forms of government in which we live. Although the state of exception and the state of siege are tangible examples where necropower is exercised, states today make use of them with such frequency and laxity that the exception has become part of normality. In this sense, Mbembe takes examples of the late modern colonial occupation in Gaza and the West Bank, the refugee camps, or the enclave economies as spaces where necropower is deployed with force.

Necropower is exercised in the killing of the other. In this sense, Mbembe points to the machinery of death in our contemporary world, the weapons disposed for the massive killing of persons. He also notes another form of necropower: the creation of what he calls *death-worlds*, “forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*” (Mbembe 2013, 186). In these *death-worlds* groups and individuals are excluded, expelled, dispossessed, pushed to war and exposed to violence, multiplying their risks of death. The living dead, Mbembe says, is a form of social death.

Death, making die, is what structures living. Necropolitics thereby uncovers how certain bodies are cultivated for life and (re)production while others are systemically marked for death, constructing a constantly shifting borderline between subjects deemed ‘productive’ and ‘lawful’ and non-subjects branded as ‘illegitimate’ or ‘illegal’ (Quinan and Thiele 2020, 3).

In this vein, we find the figure of the political refugee as one of these bodies marked for death. As I will develop below, the situation of Central American asylum seekers in Costa Rica has different characteristics from those experienced in Europe and yet, it seems that here too, the figure of the asylum seeker is a condition that multiplies the risks of death and pushes these subjects towards a form of living death. The refugee condition reveals the paradoxes of democracy and biopolitical governmentality. That individuals who, in principle, seek the protection of a state under the doctrine which proposes that rights are universal and must be guaranteed for all people, receives a treatment that reflects back to them their fragmented, battered humanity, a treatment that reiterates to them that their life is not worth the same as that of the citizens. In the words of Hanna Arendt:

The prolongation of their lives is due to charity and not to right, for no law exists which could force the nations to feed them; their freedom of movement, if they have it at all, gives them no right to residence which even the jailed criminal enjoys as a matter of course; and their freedom of opinion is a fool's freedom, for nothing they think matters anyhow (Arendt 2013, 88).

That an imprisoned person has more rights than a person seeking asylum is an assertion that I would not dare to uphold. In any case, I believe that these would have to be analyzed on a case-by-case basis. Nonetheless, Arendt stresses the deadly potency of our democracies. To make live the judicialized "criminal" as a token of modern democracy and to let die the undocumented migrant who, as a foreigner, is not the responsibility of the State, places us on the terrain of biopolitics, because biopolitics too harvests the power of death. Those nameless bodies that are thrown to death become blurred statistics at best, numbers that say nothing, anomie of meaning, silences, emptiness, *homo sacer*, absences, nobodies. But let's consider the case of the asylum seekers, who are placed in the complex position of the wait. When the State lets a person who is seeking asylum remain in the territory with the promise of peace and rights that never arrive, and leaves them indefinitely in a position of instability and precarity, at the risk of death, in the guts of the security apparatus, the State is doing more than "doing nothing". The State is letting them die in an active *necropolitical* way. This is the case of some of the participants in this study, who have waited more than four years for their refugee status, and continue waiting. They are not even considered refugees yet, their rights are restricted, their dignity trampled upon, while uncertainty marks their daily lives because at any moment their application may be rejected, and instead of a refugee card they may receive a dated order to leave the country. It may seem like a contradiction, since the official discourse, supported by statistics, will always say that Costa Rica is a country of solidarity, the nation of peace, democracy and human rights. However, in this hierarchization of life, where the discourse is embodied by the racialized migrant, the State reveals its voracity.

Necropower, is not the opposite, nor of different nature from biopower. They are both fueled by processes of racialization. In biopolitical governmentality, life is subjugated to necropower, the power of death.

¿cuál es la especificidad que Mbembe le reconoce a la tecnología del necropoder?: la gestión de las multitudes, particularmente diaspóricas, y la extracción de los recursos naturales a través del ejercicio de masacres poblacionales que no discriminan entre enemigos internos y externos⁹⁴ (Farneda 2012, 25).

Biopower kills individuals considered to be a menace to the life of the population. Necropolitics provokes the death of sub-populations, masses that are framed as harmful for the whole population. Dwellers of the *zone of non-being*, their death is beneficial for the *good life* of the population. Their *bare lives* are not only unpunishably killable, they must in fact be killed, expelled or displaced. Necropolitics poses the question: who gets to live and who must die? But death inflicted by

⁹⁴ Free translation: what is the specificity that Mbembe recognizes in the technology of necropower? The management of the multitudes, particularly diasporic, and the extraction of natural resources through the exercise of population massacres that do not discriminate between internal and external enemies.

necropower is not a punishment of the sort of a death penalty. This is what differentiates necropolitics from the medieval sovereign right. The sovereign had the power to put an individual to death as a consequence of his actions. Necropower today pushes entire sectors of the population to death, not because of what they have done, but because of who they are. The death of anonymous sub-populations is portrayed as a necessary condition to sustain the life of the population.

Technologies of destruction have become more tactile, more anatomical and sensorial, in a context in which the choice is between life and death. If power still depends on tight control over bodies (or on concentrating them in camps), the new technologies of destruction are less concerned with inscribing bodies within disciplinary apparatuses as inscribing them, when the time comes, within the order of the maximal economy now represented by the "massacre" (Mbembe 2013, 181).

Necro economy and gore capitalism

When Foucault (2003) points out that the grammar of biopower is *to make live or to let die*, he does not mean letting some people be and die of "natural cause", but to create the conditions for some people to die. These conditions are not natural but produced, and in this sense, although they may present as apparently indirect, they respond to actions of governmentality.

Following the field of analysis opened by Mbembe, Warren Montag, Professor in Literature interested in political philosophy, proposes a critical reading of Adam Smith's assumptions, to conclude that his theory feeds a form of economics that is functional and necessary for necropolitics, which he calls *necro-economics*.

The question of necro-economics compels us to return to the notion of 'letting die' or of 'exposing to death' and not simply death in battle. This should not be taken as an alternative to necropolitics as understood by Mbembe but, again as its complement, as if the two were one and the same process understood in different ways (Montag 2013, 201)

Biopolitics contains a morality that forbids the unreasonable killing of other subjects, a morality that has been systematized in the form of human rights. But, at the same time, necropolitics requires killing other subjects, because it is an economy of death, which feeds on death, on bodies that are its fuel. The subsistence of the population, as we have discussed, requires the death of a number of individuals deemed as inferior or menacing.

Smith's economics, says Montag, is a necro-economics. Influenced by a providential doctrine, Smith confers the market as a meta-human domain, with an intrinsic homeostatic mechanism capable of autoregulating itself. Without human intervention (which Smith identifies as the source of imbalance and chaos), Smith's market serves as a mechanism that organizes each individual's drive for his own betterment at the expense of others, in a system of necessary cooperation that provides a share of

what it produces to every person and group implicated in its operation. Selfishness, he says, is a natural attitude of all human beings, but the market organizes this drive in forms that serve the collective wellbeing. The rich's natural selfishness and rapacity pursues only their own benefit, but channeled through the market ends up employing thousands of workers:

The rich only select from the heap what is most precious and agreeable. They consume little more than the poor, and in spite of their natural selfishness and rapacity, though they mean only their own conveniency, though the sole end which they propose from the labours of all the thousands whom they employ, be the gratification of their own vain and insatiable desires, they divide with the poor the produce of all their improvements. They are led by an invisible hand to make nearly the same distribution of the necessaries of life, which would have been made, had the earth been divided into equal portions among all its inhabitants, and thus without intending it, without knowing it, advance the interest of the society, and afford means to the multiplication of the species (Smith 1982, 184).

In this sense, Smith sustains that the invisible hand of the market serves the interests of society and provides the means to the multiplication of the species, as it distributes the necessities of life. This distribution, of course, is not shared equally, and Smith does not seek to hide the role that death plays in self-regulatory mechanisms. When working classes exceed their ability to guarantee their own subsistence, the market liberally distributes malnutrition, hunger and necessity, adjusting the proportion of workers to the funds that are actually available for wages (Smith 2021, 107). Every society must avoid famine (which Smith believes is caused by clumsy human intervention), but, if it should occur, mortality would extend itself until the number of inhabitants are reduced to what could be effectively maintained. The biopolitical nature of the market lies in its function of managing the population. For Smith, "the market is the best of all possible forms of supply and that, truth be told, it rations not simply food, but life itself, allowing the greatest possible survival rate in a given circumstance" (Montag 2013, 209). Dearth and famine are the instruments for reducing the population, and mortality is the form they take. To restore the infallible rationality immanent in nature itself, some people must die.

"Smith's economics is a necro-economics. The market reduces and rations life; it not only allows death, it demands that death be allowed by the sovereign power, as well as by those who suffer it. In other words it demands and requires that the latter allow themselves to die (Montag 2013, 210).

Smith even points out that, at certain junctures, market dynamics have permitted the masters to lower wages to levels that barely allow the workers' to cover their basic needs, without generating organized resistance. "Their unwillingness to resist even a severe reduction in their level of subsistence may derive from their acute awareness of the competition for work characteristic of a specific market" (Montag 2013, 211). This argument reminds us of the concept of the *reserve army of labor* developed

by Marx in *Capital*. The reserve army of labor (also translated as industrial reserve army) consist of a mass of unemployed and underemployed people that in a capitalist society constitutes an exploitable human material resource, which is always available. This reserve army of labor is generated by the process that constantly frees a part of the workers, applying methods that reduce the number of occupied workers. Every worker is thus potentially disposable or interchangeable. Every worker can be suddenly pushed into the unoccupied or semi-occupied sub-population. This generates, of course, an intense competition that shapes the conditions that workers must accept in order to be hired (Marx 2009, 786–87).

This overpopulation of the working class is signaled by Marx as a lever of capitalist accumulation. He asserts that the reserve army of labor is a condition of existence of the capitalist mode of production. “Death establishes the conditions of life; death as by an invisible hand restores the market to what it must be to support life” (Montag 2013, 210). From a biopolitical point of view, we would say that the reserve army of labor constitutes a sector of the population subject to the technologies for the management of life, which is easily turned into a sub-population, a target of the technologies of death of the *necro-economy*.

To sketch the panorama in Costa Rica, for the IV quarter of 2019 (when I conducted most of the fieldwork for this study), the unemployment rate reached 12.4%, and in women it rose to 16.7% (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos 2020a). We do not have data for trans* people, but according to regional estimates, it is estimated that in Abya Yala, only 5% of trans* people have formal employment⁹⁵ (REDLACTRANS 2014; Goyhman 2020). In addition, 11.6% of the employed population is underemployed, and 46.5% work in the informal sector (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos 2020a).

Taking necro-economics, like Montag says, as a part of the same process of *necropolitics*, we can identify some of its effects on the production of subjects that inhabit the city of San José. Undocumented migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, unhoused residents of the city, sex workers, impoverished trans women, bodies that are pushed into precariousness, that survive hunger and cold, without a job, without housing, without access to health care (not even in times of pandemic), in short, subjects that have no access to the “universal” human rights. Those who, looked down upon with contempt by good citizens, embody the death sentence that Montag forewarns:

...alongside the figure of Homo Sacer, the one who may be killed with impunity, is another figure, one whose death is no doubt less spectacular than the first and is the

⁹⁵ These data have not been collected through national statistical operations, as no country in the region incorporates variables that allow for the identification of trans* people. These studies are based on estimates made by trans* organizations, based on their own records and local research.

object of no memorial or commemoration; he who with impunity may be allowed to die, slowly or quickly, in the name of the rationality and equilibrium of the market (Montag 2013, 213).

Transfeminist philosopher and performer Sayak Valencia reflects on the forms that necropolitics takes in contemporary neoliberal capitalism. Although her analysis is focused on Mexican society, riven by state corruption, violence product of drug trafficking and the business around the spectacularization of violence, she offers important contributions for thinking about our realities in Abya Yala. Valencia (2010) posits death as the nucleus of contemporary biopolitics, which transform into necropolitics. Mbembe had already stated that war machines share the features of both a political organization and a mercantile company (2013, 179). Valencia continues the path opened by Mbembe (2013), to point out that war has ceased to be a monopoly of the state, in contexts where large and complex organizations emerge as agents of necropower in the margins of the state.

Necropolitics is a reinterpretation and stark iteration of biopower and the capacity for upending it, based significantly on the logic of a *warlike clash of forces*. Necropolitics exercises a kind of freedom, “but it is a freedom that is constituted as the ‘power to deprive others. The bodies of dystopian dissidents and ungovernables are now those which hold power over the individual body and over the body of the population in general—though outside of humanist and rational logics, but inside rational-commercial ones. They have created a power parallel to the State without subscribing fully to it, while they simultaneously dispute its power to oppress. (Valencia 2018, chap. Necropolitics [2010, 143⁹⁶])

Within these agents, often referred to as parallel states, we find drug trafficking organizations, but also transnational capital and churches (which are also themselves transnational corporations). These agents often operate on the margins of the state, or even against it, but they also operate through states, penetrating them and permeating their practices and their governmentality.

We understand necropower to be the appropriation and application of government technologies of biopolitics to subjugate bodies and populations; its fundamental element is the hyper-specialization of violence, and its goal is to commodify the process of inflicting death on someone. Necropractices, for their part, can be understood as radical actions that aim to create bodily harm (Valencia 2018, chap. Necropolitics [2010, 147]).

In the practices of the parallel State, biopolitics reshapes, seizing and capitalizing the power to inflict death (Valencia 2018, chap. Necropolitics). Valencia depicts a complex panorama where the state and parallel agents exercise the power of death simultaneously. She coins the term *necroempowerment* to analyze the complex process by which, contexts of vulnerability and/or subalternity, are

⁹⁶ I worked with Sayak Valencia’s book in its original version in Spanish: *Capitalismo Gore* (2010), published by Melusina. For the inline citations in this thesis, I used the kindle version translated in English by John Pluecker, that was published by Semiotext(e) ... However, as a kindle book, it does not have page numbers. Following the latest instructions on citing ebooks without page numbers, I am referring the chapters where the quote can be located. In brackets, I’m including the page number for the book in Spanish.

reconfigured into possibilities for action and self-empowerment, through perverse and dystopian uses of violence (Valencia 2018, chap. Note 1 to Introduction). The violence in Central America that drives thousands of migrants seeking asylum in Costa Rica is part of these *necroempowerment* practices, linked to drug trafficking and gangs, but also to paramilitary forces that sustain dictatorships in the region.

Although in Costa Rica we do not see with such force the gravity of the violence that strikes the rest of Central America, we will see that it is not exempt from these *necropractices* either. In any case, and this is perhaps the most perverse side of biopolitics in Costa Rica, our state, the government, the institutions, the corporations and the NGOs, are directly and indirectly benefited from the contrasts that Central America harbors. The economy of human rights, the marketing of peace and the management of diversity attract large transnational capital to the country. As illustrated in the argument by a representative of the Diverse Chamber of Commerce cited in Chapter 2, the insistence on differentiating Costa Rica from the rest of Central America is justified as a matter of profitability. The discourses of peace, human rights and inclusion are nowadays highly valued in a sector of the market. And while some find a lucrative economy selling these discourses, the funds, the transformations and the human rights do not reach those sub-populations on behalf of whom the checks are written (Jacob, in discussion with the author, October 30, 2019; anonymous activists of Transvida, in discussion with the author, April 15, 2021; Bogantes 2022). These bodies that inhabit the *zone of non-being*, continue today naked in their *bare life*.

Valencia introduces the term *gore capitalism* to describe the amalgam of violence and neoliberalism that fuels our contemporary societies.

We take the term “gore” from a genre of films characterized by extreme, brutal violence. Thus, “gore capitalism” refers to the undisguised and unjustified bloodshed that is the price the Third World pays for adhering to the increasingly demanding logic of capitalism. It also refers to the many instances of dismembering and disembowelment, often tied up with organized crime, gender and the predatory uses of bodies. In general, this term posits these incredibly brutal kinds of violence as tools of *necroempowerment* (Valencia 2018, chap. Introduction [2010, 15]).

This new capitalism, Valencia affirms, is the same old savage capitalism, that now reveals its necropolitical violence without any shame or guilt. A “cynical and bloody capitalism”, that condenses in “the most intimal arena: the body itself” (Valencia 2018, chap. Necropolitics [2010, 159]). “Within gore capitalism, violence is used simultaneously as a technology for control and as a *gag*—a political tool” (Valencia 2018, chap. Introduction [2010, 21]). The spectacularization of violence has also proved to be a powerful money machine. As I discuss in chapters 4 and 5, the spectacularization of violence

and misery also generates a dynamic economy of affection, donations and commodities within charitable projects of inclusion.

In the global era, however, there are many more examples of this extreme infringement on personhood, visible everywhere from the public arena to the workplace and even in the most intimate spheres. It takes the form of the utter destruction of bodies stemming through predatory use and their incorporation into the deregulated neoliberal market as another commodity, from the sale of organs to exploitation as a quasi-enslaved labor force. In both cases, we lose our *property rights to our own bodies*. (Valencia 2018, chap. Necropolitics [2010, 140])

Power, says Valencia, operates on bodies, converting health, care, freedom, and the very preservation of the body into products. As Howell and Richter-Montpetit (2019) affirm, white capitalist modernity is a formation of terror, that takes certain lives as raw materials, exposing them to gratuitous violence not for instrumental reasons, but sampling for being (10).

3.1.6. A decolonial approach to biopolitics

Critiques to the Foucauldian approach to racism

As I have already mentioned in the previous pages, several authors have pointed out that Foucault's notion of racism, replicated in most of the subsequent elaborations on biopolitical theory, is problematic insofar as it reproduces a Eurocentric bias (Grosfoguel 2012; Mbembe 2013; Howell and Richter-Montpetit 2019). Perhaps we should begin by pointing out that in his notion of racism, central to his understanding of biopolitics and biopower, he assumes a sort of universal subject. While it is true that Foucault puts on the table the racial hierarchies that allow certain subjects to be killed in the name of life, his analysis leaves aside the ways in which racism operates outside Europe. Something similar could be said of Agamben. *Homo sacer*, killable insofar as they possess nothing more than their *bare life*, explains the ways in which the power of death has been organized in Europe, but does not necessarily fit other realities in the Global South. In any case, Agamben overlooks the fact that, since the configuration of the modern/colonial world, the practices of human disposability overflowed the notion of *bare life* (Mignolo 2007; Farneda 2012). In both cases, it seems that what is taken for granted is the universality of the human condition. Foucault and Agamben ask: what makes it possible to kill human beings in the name of life? But perhaps we should go a step further back, and think about the multiplicity of beings who are produced as sub-human.

This is not exclusive to the theorizations of Foucault and Agamben, but a practice that we continually observe, even today, in philosophy. We even find it, as Arendt (2013) points out, in international instruments most often cited by states and NGOs, like The Declaration of the Rights of Man. "When the Rights of Man were proclaimed for the first time" says Arendt, "they were regarded as being independent of history and the privileges which history had accorded certain strata of society" (Arendt

2013, 90). In a similar sense, decolonial theorists and critical scholars call attention to these problematic points in Foucault's theory. For instance, critical political scientists Allison Howell and Melanie Richter-Montpetit claim that "Foucault's reliance on an unspecified human as the object of biopolitics causes him to fundamentally misapprehend the constitutive and continuing role of genocide and enslavement in modernity/coloniality" (Howell and Richter-Montpetit 2019, 7). In dialogue with decolonial feminisms, I would also say that there is an important epistemological absence of gender in their theorizations, and of the particular way in which women, trans* people and feminized bodies in general have been exposed to violence and death worldwide.

"The concept of biopower—like that of discipline—", say Rabinow and Rose, "was not trans-historical or metaphoric, but precisely grounded in historical, or genealogical, analysis" (Rabinow and Rose 2006, 199). The question we must then ask is how was this genealogy constructed? Ramón Grosfoguel (2012) offers, in my opinion, one of the most complete analyses from a critical perspective. A first observation made by Grosfoguel is that the notion of race in Foucault's analysis of the "race war" is not equivalent to the racist notion of race. Instead, he sustains that "race war" should be understood as the wars of ethnic groups (Grosfoguel 2012, 83). This is not a subtlety, as it often leads to misreading of Foucault's texts.

For Foucault, Grosfoguel continues, the discourse of the "race war" refers to a subversive movement that revolted against the discourse of sovereign power, from the end of the 16th century and the beginning of the 17th century. It is, therefore, not equivalent to the nineteenth-century racist discourse. Racism, on the other hand, for Foucault emerges at the end of the 19th century (long after the discourse of the "race war"), as an intra-European phenomenon of state biopolitics (Grosfoguel 2012, 84).

Says Foucault (2003):

Racism first develops with colonization, or in other words, with colonizing genocide. If you are functioning in the biopower mode, how can you justify the need to kill people, to kill populations, and to kill civilizations? By using the themes of evolutionism, by appealing to a racism (257).

However, as Grosfoguel (2012) carefully observes, Foucault had stated a couple of months before in this same seminar that

racist discourse was really no more than an episode, a phase, the reversal, or at least the reworking, at the end of the nineteenth century, of the discourse of race war. It was a reworking of that old discourse, which at that point was already hundreds of years old, in sociobiological terms, and it was reworked for purposes of social conservatism and, at least in a certain number of cases, colonial domination (63).

With this statement, Grosfoguel notes that Foucault does not consider colonialism as constitutive of racism. Grosfoguel contest this idea with a historical review of racism in the enterprise of Iberian colonial imperialism. He affirms that the discourse of the purity of blood already existed in the Iberic peninsula at the end of the fifteenth century, hoisted by the Catholic monarchy to destroyed Muslim political power. This discourse led to a war of religions, and to the genocide of Muslim and Jewish populations (87). Grosfoguel points out that this discourse is a precursor of racism, a form of proto-racism, because although it defended the purity of blood, it did not question the humanity of the victims (88), as later happened with the native populations of Abya Yala and Africa. This is the particularity of racism: it marks a division between the human and the non-human.

In this context, when Columbus arrives in Abya Yala and characterizes the indigenous people as peoples without religion, he is performing a declarative speech act, which decrees those bodies as beings that had no souls, that is, as non-human animals (89). "In the eyes of the conqueror, savage life is just another form of animal life, a horrifying experience, something alien beyond imagination or comprehension" (Mbembe 2013, 172). As non-human animals, these indigenous beings are thought of as mere beasts that can be used in production processes as slaves, without this constituting a sin. The religious racist discourse, says Grosfoguel, gives rise to the biological racist discourse. In 1552, a trial was held at the School of Salamanca, in which it is finally determined that the "Indians" did have souls, but that they were barbarians who needed to be Christianized. This did not imply a liberation of the enslaved indigenous peoples, but a reorganization of their conditions of exploitation, now in the form of the *encomienda*, discussed in Chapter 2. From this point on, the Spanish empire rearticulated the international division of labor based on the idea of race, where African peoples were subjected to enslavement, since they had no soul (91). "The Middle Passage turned people from the African continent into *things*. Ontologically speaking, the slave is socially dead, mere *flesh* and, thus, structurally defined out of subjectivity" (Howell and Richter-Montpetit 2019, 6). It is no surprise that many of the biopolitical techniques have emerged in colonial contexts, where the notion of citizenship did not exist. Natives in the colonies were not citizens because it was a problem to deal with bodies that had an ethical value.

This absence in Foucault's theory leads Grosfoguel to assert that

su trabajo es ejemplo de una teoría crítica producida desde Europa que, al no dialogar con el Sur Global ni salirse de su unidad de análisis intra-europeo, no logra dar cuenta

de la relación entre la emergencia del racismo y la expansión colonial europea⁹⁷ (Grosfoguel 2012, 81).

And this is an important fissure because, as Howell and Richter-Montpetit state, “defining racialized people as outside of humanity has always already been central to biopower and biopolitics” (Howell and Richter-Montpetit 2019, 13). The forms of violence designed more than five centuries ago for the control of racialized and colonized populations illustrate what Foucault (2003) affirms: that disciplinary power and biopower are not mutually exclusive, but overlap and can coexist on their bodies. These forms of violence have evolved throughout history but have not been eradicated. We can see their traces today, for example, in the mechanisms of “legitimate” violence exercised by states against racialized populations subjected to detention, incarceration or invasion (police beatings, shock treatments, torture, rape) (Howell and Richter-Montpetit 2019, 6), as well as in the spectacularized violence that sustains the business of agents parallel to the state (Valencia 2010).

Foucault’s genealogy of biopower rests on an unspecified concept of the “human,” failing to account for how notions of “human” were constituted through the savage and slave other, how enslaved people were rendered into things, and how punitive, sovereign violence persists as a (settler) colonial technique of gratuitous, not merely instrumental, violence (Howell and Richter-Montpetit 2019, 2).

By overlooking the central place of racism in the constitution of modern Europe, and thus in the emergence of biopower, Foucault’s conceptions slide towards a universal “human” subject. In doing so, the hierarchization of life imposed by coloniality escapes him.

Both Foucault and FSS [Foucauldian Security Studies] ascribe racism a central role in the martial operations of liberal rule. However, because they rely on White humanist notions of man prior to racialization, the racism they deal with is a kind of racism-without-colonialism, more an unfortunate cultural artifact than a global system of expropriation fundamental to the conditions of possibility for the liberal way of war and biopolitical security assemblages (Howell and Richter-Montpetit 2019, 4).

I do not think this implies that we should discard the concept of biopower, which is undoubtedly a fundamental notion for analyze our realities. However, I do believe it is necessary to complement its reading with a decolonial perspective. Coloniality trenches abysses between the bodies it considers human and those it considers sub-human (racialized), and cruelty, violence, the right to kill (let die and make die) operates in a very different way on the white population than on racialized bodies, as it is also different on bodies who are read as men than on those read as feminized bodies.

From the eighteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, the great historical constructions of gender, race, and class were embedded in the organically marked bodies of woman, the colonized or enslaved, and the worker. Those inhabiting these marked

⁹⁷ Free translation: his work is an example of a critical theory produced from Europe that, by not dialoguing with the Global South or leaving its intra-European unit of analysis, fails to account for the relationship between the emergence of racism and European colonial expansion.

bodies have been symbolically other to the fictive rational self of universal, and so unmarked, species man, a coherent subject. The marked organic body has been a critical locus of cultural and political contestation, crucial both to the language of the liberatory politics of identity and to systems of domination drawing on widely shared languages of nature as resource for the appropriations of culture (Haraway 2013, 282).

This epistemological absence may explain Foucault's assertion: "Yet wars were never as bloody as they have been since the nineteenth century, and all things being equal, never before did regimes visit such holocausts on their own populations" (Foucault 1978, 136–37). This quote has often been criticized because it downplays the genocide of tens of millions of people during the conquest in Abya Yala, or the countless lives taken from Africa by the slave enterprise (Benente 2017, 20). I do not find it prolific to engage in a ranking of suffering that pretends to measure which genocidal mark is larger. What I do believe is that, in order to analyze contemporary biopolitics and necropolitics in times of gore capitalism, it is necessary to understand that the power of death was tested in the genocides in Abya Yala and Africa, and, therefore, that observing its traces, its effects, its evolutions provide us with important elements for a theory on biopower.

Any historical account of the rise of modern terror needs to address slavery, which could be considered one of the first instances of biopolitical experimentation... the slave condition results from a triple loss: loss of a "home," loss of rights over his or her body, and loss of political status (Mbembe 2013, 169)

"In order to move beyond methodological Whiteness, FSS needs to inquire into subjects who were never understood to be (fully) human in the first place" (Howell and Richter-Montpetit 2019, 3). Europe must turn its gaze towards Abya Yala, but first it must wash coloniality and Eurocentrism from its eyes.

3.2. Racialization: bodies that threaten the Costa Rican whiteness

In this section, I intend to follow some of the traces of racism in its Costa Rican version. I would like to discuss three forms of racialization (towards Afro Costa Rican and Afro-Caribbean people, towards indigenous peoples - particularly the Ngäbe people; and towards migrants - especially Nicaraguans) that, although they are not the only ones that occur in the country, may shed light to reflect on questions such as: How do racialization processes operate in Costa Rica? How does racism materialize on bodies? What are the material effects of producing these subpopulations as "threatening Others" (Sandoval 2014)? And what do theories on biopolitics, necropolitics and decolonial studies contribute to think about these forms that power takes in the country?

Analyzing the processes of racialization inevitably brings us to talk about the imaginary construction of a Self and "others". It is important to clarify that it is not my intention to reproduce this dichotomy. The logic that sustains racism and racialization processes is based on a binary way of thinking that not only draws imaginary and arbitrary borders, but also hierarchizes the beings that are crystallized on one side and on the other.

Racialization is a work of ideological representation under which biological or cultural characteristics are deployed to signify a sense of difference... a way of associating certain groups with a particular "nature" or "essence" that identifies them despite the internal differences present in any group and the similarities between the racialized group and those who construct such categorizations (Sandoval 2004b, 3).

Costa Rican researcher Carlos Sandoval, who has thoroughly investigated the processes of racialization that construct "others" as opposed to the Costa Rican Self, points out the importance of this imaginary dichotomy in the construction of national identity. National imaginaries are reinforced through opposition to these "others". The "others" are the people who do not fit within the normativity established by the national imaginaries. In this sense, in dialogue with Sandoval, we can identify "external others", embodied by an essentialist perception of migrants, especially Nicaraguans, and "internal others" constructed through a stereotypical vision of Costa Rica's Afro and indigenous populations. In short, the bodies that make visible the cracks in the imaginary whiteness on which our identity is based. In both cases, these populations that threaten the nation are constructed and defined through processes of racialization.

Racism constructs subjects, populations and spaces (Haritaworn 2015, 164); it produces power relations and conditions of oppression. Through processes of racialization, life is hierarchized, *bare life* is produced and death is distributed. We can see this clearly in the lethal racist violence that pulsates around the planet. But what keeps racism alive as a system of oppression are not only its most explicit and murderous expressions, but also, and especially, the subtler forms, the quotidian expressions, the forms that have been naturalized, normalized, and that permeate our relationships and our own structures of thought about who we are and who others are.

In Costa Rica, as in most of the societies of Abya Yala, a complex and entangled racist culture prevails. In our societies, a great heterogeneity of bodies evidences the difficulty of establishing binary borders in terms of race, and yet, the aspiration to whiteness and to a connection with Europe draws these borders in an arbitrary way. Although the average Costa Rican may recognize that their self-identification with an imagined whiteness is not the same as the whiteness of a European or an U.S. citizen, they consider themselves whiter (and therefore superior) than the rest of Central American. Thus, they target the bodies and cultures that make it clear that the Costa Rican population is not homogeneously white, but quite diverse. In this sense, racism is crossed both by the imperial

coloniality of the European "I", as well as by internal coloniality, which as I discussed in the previous chapter, makes us look at ourselves with eyes that bleach the variegated traces of mestizaje and amefricanity, and that make us feel closer to Europe than to our neighbors, or even to the native peoples who today are treated as foreigners in the land they have nurtured for millennia. Image 36 illustrates this situation with humor:



Source: LesDroo Facebook Page
(<https://www.facebook.com/Ahhuevon/photos/a.234485283726739/484170655424866/>)

Caption: What color are your eyes?

Nicaragua: I have brown eyes.

Panama: I have brown eyes.

Uruguay: I have brown eyes.

USA: I have brown eyes.

Costa Rica: Dude brown, but when I was a kid, I had green eyes, later they changed over time, but depending on the sunlight the change color.

I will not discuss whether or not in the other countries represented in the meme there is an imaginary that aspires to whiteness, but I can affirm that in Costa Rica there is. People proudly display their childhood photos to show that they once had blond hair and light eyes. As Afro Costa Rican writer Shirley Campbell points out, “En América Latina una gota blanca te hace blanco... Todos están buscando el antepasado blanco, como si los españoles fueran blancos⁹⁸” (S. Campbell 2019, para. 35). The Costa Rican imaginary reproduces coloniality, aspires to whiteness and rejects that Ch’ixi mestizaje (Rivera Cusicanqui 2018) where traces of color could be found. Whiteness is equated with beauty, culture, intelligence. It is a marker that translates into privileges and security, a marker that determines positionalities within the matrix of oppressions. In Jacob's words:

⁹⁸ Free translation: In Latin America a drop of white makes you white...Everyone is looking for the white ancestor, as if the Spanish were white.

Y la discriminación se vive desde lo público a lo privado... Y es bárbaro, porque aquí entre más blanco sos, con ojos azules... Pues blanco digo porque yo soy afrodescendiente, un ejemplo...⁹⁹ (Jacob, in discussion with the author, November 26, 2019).

In Murillo's words, our identity is produced by "mentalidades coloniales, forjadas en la explotación y segregación generalizada de los españoles y criollos hacia indios, mulatos, pardos y negros¹⁰⁰" (Murillo 1998, 48). In Costa Rica, the construction of the "other" that opposes the "good Costa Rican" is imposed on racialized bodies. As we will see, this has an impact on life, on the way in which life and death are administered in the country.

3.2.1. Racism above the law

"Often it has been argued that in Latin America issues regarding racial differences do not hold the same relevance as in the United States, where patterns of segregation are well known, obscuring the pervasive racialized inequalities in Latin American societies" (Sandoval 2004b, 4). Over the years that I have taught at the university, I have been shocked to repeatedly encounter students in the classroom who claim that there is no racism in Costa Rica, or that at least that it is not as bad racism in the United States. This idea does not only exist in the classrooms, it is a deeply rooted thought in the Costa Rican culture.

If we focus only in a legal plane, in what the legislation on racial discrimination in Costa Rica dictates, the outlook does not seem to be that unfavorable. Let's take some examples related to the Afro Costa Rican population. In Chapter 2, I exposed an account of anti-immigration legislation based on racial criteria, which accounts for structural racism in the formation of the nation-state. However, the struggles of Afro Costa Rican and black organizations, as well as international pressure, pushed for changes at the institutional level. As a result, various instruments were approved to combat racism and protect Afro Costa Ricans, who became constituted as a population subject to biopolitical management. From the second half of the twentieth century, we find a shift in Costa Rican policy in this matter, with the signing of international agreements and laws aimed at combating racial discrimination in Costa Rica:

Table 2
Anti-discrimination legislation in Costa Rica

Year	Name	Contents
1960	Ley n° 2694 Ley Antidiscriminación	Prohibits racial discrimination in the workplace.

⁹⁹ Free translation: And discrimination is experienced from the public to the private sphere... And it's terrible, because here the whiter you are, with blue eyes... Well, I say white because I am Afro descendant, for example.

¹⁰⁰ Free translation: colonial mentalities, forged in the generalized exploitation and segregation of Spaniards and Creoles towards indigenous, mulatto, brown and black peoples.

1967	International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)	ICERD is the international instrument of the Universal System for the Protection of Human Rights of the United Nations aimed explicitly at the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination.
1968	Ley n° 4123	Amends article 33 of the Constitution stating that “no discrimination whatsoever may be practiced among the inhabitants of Costa Rica on the basis of sex, religion or race”.
1968	Ley n° 4230 contra la Discriminación Racial	Imposes fines those who refused entry to black people to commercial establishments.
1970	Ley n° 4573	Costa Rica's Penal Code establishes fines for racially discriminatory practices.
1973	Ley n° 5360	Prohibits all immigration restrictions based on race conditions.
1994	Ley n° 7426	It replaces the "day of the race" (October 12) with the "day of cultures.
1997	Ley n° 7711	Promotes the elimination of Racial Discrimination in Educational Programs and in the Media
1999	Ley n° 7878	It establishes that primary and secondary school curricula must include all cultural and ethnic components in accordance with the pluricultural and multiethnic character of the Costa Rican people.
1999	Reform to article 76 of the Constitution	It ensures the maintenance and cultivation of indigenous native languages, although it does not protect Limon’s Creole English.
1999	Ley n° 7711	Amends article 33 of the Constitution stating that “everyone is equal before the law and no discrimination against human dignity may be practiced”.
2000	Ley n° 8054	Promotes the protection of ethnic and linguistic diversity in the country.
2001	Ley n°8107	Adds to the Labor Code the prohibition of discrimination based on age, ethnicity, gender and religion.
2011	Ley n°8938	Declares August 31 as the Day of the Black Person and Afro Costa Rican Culture.
2014	Decreto Ejecutivo n°38114	National Policy for a Society Free of Racism, Racial Discrimination and Xenophobia 2014-2015 and its Plan of Action.
2020	Ley n°20.989	Updates and expands legislation based on reforms to the Law to declare August as the historical month of Afro-descendants in Costa Rica, Law No. 9526, the Labor Code, Law No. 2, and repeal of the Law of the Day of the Black Person and Afro-Costa Rican Culture, Law 8938.

Source: own elaboration based on data from Pérez (2018)

In 1989, the Constitutional Court was created in Costa Rica to vindicate fundamental rights. This is the instance in charge of resolving complaints of racial discrimination. However, despite the quantitative and qualitative growth of anti-discrimination laws, which is undoubtedly an achievement of the Afro and black movements in the country, in practice these laws provide little protection. What Spade points out for the US context applies to Costa Rica as well: “anti-discrimination laws are not adequately enforced. Most people who experience discrimination cannot afford to access legal help, so their experiences never make it to court” (Spade 2015, 40). And even those who can afford a legal

process face enormous difficulties in getting a system that is structurally racist to recognize and sanction racial discrimination. Although the struggles of the anti-racist movements succeeded in advancing laws prohibiting racial discrimination, the courts remain deeply racist.

According to data analyzed by Mónica María Pérez (2018), between 1989 and 2014, a total of 16 cases were filed by Afro Costa Rican people, and 1 by a person of Chinese descent. The vast majority of the appeals were dismissed because the judges considered the evidence to be insufficient. As Perez's research shows, when reviewing the files, the evidence is quite substantial. However, as Spade points out, one of the traps within the law has been "creating a doctrine of anti-discrimination law that makes it almost impossible to prove discrimination" (Spade 2015, 28).

Thus, for example, Ruling No. 11435-05 addresses a case in which an Afro Costa Rican student who moved from Limón to San José was denied enrollment in a public school because he was asked to present his passport, a requirement that is not established in any norm or regulation, since the boy is Costa Rican by birth. The Court rejected the complaint because it did not consider that this implied discriminatory treatment (M. M. Pérez 2018, 71). In another case (Ruling No. 5134-05), a student of correspondence administration complained that, in order to graduate, she had to do a secretarial internship in human resources. She was part of a class of 300 students, 299 of whom were assigned to the secretarial internship. However, she, being the only black person, was assigned to cleaning duties in a warehouse. She also claims that she was referred to as "just a starving black woman and riffraff from Limón". The Court rejected the appeal, considering that it could not be proven that there was discrimination on racial grounds (M. M. Pérez 2018, 67).

The structural racism that characterizes Costa Rican imaginaries means that the justice system fails to understand the violence and racist discrimination in the country and ends up justifying or minimizing the acts denounced. Even worse, some of the arguments of the defense against the complaints are in themselves expressions of racism and discrimination. Ruling No. 7488-06 illustrates this. It involves a high school student who objects to the school's order for him to cut his dreadlocks, considering it an affront to his identity and his roots. The student argued that his hair is part of his culture and religion.

The defense counterargues:

Cabe indicar que si bien el estudiante J G expresa pertenecer a la secta religiosa denominada 'Rastafaris', ello no implica que el proceso educativo ni el sistema oficial permita que se desvirtúe todo su ordenamiento jurídico y social... en el país tal grupo mantiene su nivel de influencia muy bajo en cierto sector de la provincia de Limón... Tal congregación, de la cual se posee poca información, tiene principios y valores que se diferencian totalmente de los principios fundamentales del ser costarricenses... Tal fenómeno podría convertirse en peligroso portillo para que otros jóvenes por ejemplo se autodenominen 'Talibanes'... Consiste en dejar ensortijar su cabello sin ningún cuidado o lavado lo cual acarrearía que dentro de alguna cabellera 'rasta' se encontrase

ácaros o insectos, así como también la aparición de enfermedades que riñen con la Ley General de Salud y el derecho a la salud de las demás personas a convivir en un ambiente sano¹⁰¹ (M. M. Pérez 2018, 85–86).

The Court rejected the student's complaint, arguing that there is a regulation that does not allow long hair for male students. However, there was no mention to the deep racism of the argumentation, loaded with stereotypes about the culture and history of the Afro peoples. The argumentation of the defense is based on racist and hygienist criteria, and alludes to the common good of the population that is threatened by the culture of this student expressed in his hair. It is a biopolitical argumentation, which speaks about the construction of the binary antagonism between a Costa Rican "Self" and an "internal other" that constitutes a threat to the population. When the defense affirms that the Rastafarian congregation has principles and values that are totally different from the fundamental principles of the Costa Rican being, they are affirming that the people of this congregation, and Afro Costa Rican people by extension, are different and even endanger what is understood as the Costa Rican Self.

“...The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house”, says Audre Lorde (2007). And she continues:

They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support (Lorde 2007, 112).

These cases are clear examples of what Lorde denounces. The law is an apparatus of the nation-state. It is, therefore, a technology of power that does not manage to escape coloniality, but rather reinforces it. In spite of the laws, or beyond them, racism continues to throb in Costa Rican society. In those large interstices where the law does not reach, discrimination and racist violence occur on a daily basis, and produce effects on bodies and on the materiality of existence. As Spade points out:

The persistence of wage gaps, illegal terminations, hostile work environments, hiring/firing disparities, and bias-motivated violence for groups whose struggles have supposedly been addressed by anti-discrimination and hate crime laws invites caution when assuming the effectiveness of these measures (Spade 2015, 40).

¹⁰¹ Free translation: It should be noted that although the student J G expresses belonging to the religious sect called 'Rastafarians', this does not imply that the educational process or the official system allows the distortion of its entire legal and social order... in the country such a group maintains its level of influence very low in a certain sector of the province of Limón... Such a congregation, of which little information is available, has principles and values that are totally different from the fundamental principles of the Costa Rican being.... This phenomenon could become a dangerous gateway for other young people, for example, to call themselves 'Taliban'... It consists of letting their hair curl without any care or cleaning, which would lead to the presence of mites or insects in the 'rasta' hair, as well as the appearance of diseases that go against the General Law of Health and the right to health of other people to live in a healthy environment.

The racialized processes of *othering*, of social construction of the "other", do not imply only a symbolic exclusion. It is not only about silencing, invisibilization or stigmatization. "Racialization is inextricably related to class divisions but cannot be reduced to the latter... The racialization of the other not only is a matter of representation but plays a key role in the formation of social inequality" (Sandoval 2004b, 11).

Following this line, race becomes an indispensable category for analyzing class inequalities, since the processes of racialization structure power relations that make the lives of racialized people precarious. Race operates as a marker on the body that has an effect on the material conditions of existence (Falquet 2017, 3).

En tout état de cause, il existe une forte congruence entre position dominée dans les rapports sociaux de race et position dominée également, dans les rapports de classe (qu'il s'agisse de prolétariat urbain ou de population rurale), que l'on pourrait résumer par la double inférence: plus on est Noir-e, plus on est pauvre et inversement (Falquet 2020, 164).

In Costa Rica, this situation is even reflected in the official data, which, as discussed in Chapter 2, are prone to conceal power relations. Yet, for example, the 2011 Census shows that in terms of the percentage of families who own of the house they inhabit, there is a negative gap of 6 to 8 points between the population identified as Afro descendant¹⁰² and the population identified as white or mestizo. The Afro descendant population living in precarious housing conditions is 2 to 3 times more than the white mestizo population (E. Campbell 2012, 11). The Afro descendant population is the group with the highest levels of infant mortality (López and Delgado 2013, 26). The average years of schooling for the Afro descendant population is 7.7 years, compared to 8.7 for the white and mestizo population (López and Delgado 2013, 29). Afro-descendant people have the highest levels of open unemployment in the country (López and Delgado 2013, 41). The situation particularly affects Afro descendant women. Only 35.6% of Afro-descendant women have a paid job, compared to 72% of Afro descendant men. Consequently, only 16.1% of Afro descendant women have direct insurance from social security, compared to 30.7% of Afro descendant men (Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres 2018). In general terms, the Afro descendant population is hit hardest by impoverishment. According to the 2011 Census, 21.3% of the Afro descendant population lived below the poverty line (compared to 16.5% of white and mestizo populations), and 8.5% lived in extreme poverty (compared to 5% of the white or mestizo populations).

¹⁰² Let us recall that this is the category with which INEC groups people who self-identified as Afro descendants, black and mulatto.

As for indigenous peoples, official statistics also show significant gaps. It must be said that these data are constructed from a Western logic that understands the ideals of modernity as standards of progress, development and quality of life, which are not necessarily values adopted by indigenous peoples in their territories. With that caveat in perspective, let's analyze some data: by 2011, the percentage of households with unsatisfied basic needs¹⁰³ in the country was 24.6%, but within the indigenous territories it was 70.1%. Regarding education, the INEC records a school dropout rate of 40.6% in indigenous territories, compared to 23.6% for the entire national territory. It is likely that these data were aggravated during the Covid-19 pandemic, that involved the virtualization of public education throughout the national territory. Although these data are outdated, according to the 2011 Census, in the indigenous territories barely 15% of the people over 5 years of age were using information and communication technologies, while in the rest of Costa Rican territory, 63% were using them (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos 2013, 41–42).

These statistics show that, despite anti-discrimination laws, coloniality continues to unequally distribute life chances on the basis of race. Although there is no longer official legislation that establishes differences based on racial criteria, in practice, these populations face greater obstacles and expressions of structural violence that determine the lives they can live.

Racist violence is also expressed in the sphere of everyday life, in the social relations between subjects who occupy distinct positions in the matrix of domination, traversed by the biopolitical normativity condensed in national imaginaries.

Journalist and anti-racist activist Karla Scott, creator of the online platform "Mi vida afro", carries out a sustained work of analysis and dissemination of content in social media to reflect on the multiple ways in which racism operates in Costa Rica. Image 37 shows one example among many. The context is a controversy that arose as a result of an investigation for corruption against political scientist and economist Epsy Campbell Barr. Campbell was the first Afro Costa Rican woman to become vice president. In 2018 and 2019 she was involved in scandals related to appointments and trips she made when she held the position of Foreign Minister of the Republic. Annoyed by the hate Campbell was receiving in social media, in 2019, her daughter Tanisha Swaby Campbell published a tweet in which she referred to Costa Rica as a farm. This message offended a good part of the Costa Rican population.

¹⁰³ The index of unsatisfied basic needs is a measurement based on 4 indicators: 1. Access to decent shelter (quality of housing, overcrowding, electricity); 2. Access to a healthy life (physical and sanitary infrastructure); 3. Access to education (school attendance and school achievement); 4. Access to other goods and services (consumption capacity).

El índice de necesidades básicas insatisfechas es una medición que se construye a partir de 4 indicadores: 1.

Scott collects some reactions to Swaby's comment as a clear example that counters the claim that there is no racism in Costa Rica.

Image 37

There is no racism in Costa Rica



Source: Mi vida afro Facebook Page, 24/01/2019

<https://www.facebook.com/mividaafro/photos/a.1420463611360066/2417475648325519>

Caption: **Mario Enrique Solis:** Someone give a bunch of bananas to that family.

Lorena Calvo Rivera: Not only ugly, black but also a shit head, change your brain, nobody wants you here.

Minor Parreaguirre: Black motherfucker.

Cristian Lara: The three little monkeys of our farm

Lucio Vorenoaldebaran: It had to be a black.

Verita Cortez: That woman should not come to the farm because, she might come out more thick-lipped, if someone breaks the shit of her snout. Stop spewing venom you are only wasting it. And they already answered you by the Extra [sensationalist newspaper], chumica, what you are is burned.

María José Fernandez Arias: The free trips are over for that monkey.

As Scott demonstrates, many Costa Ricans have no qualms about signing their racist expressions with their name and profile picture. It is worth noting that in 2022 the Foreign Minister of the new government of President Chaves, Arnoldo André Tinoco (a white heterosexual man), was involved in a similar scandal related to official trips in the company of his partner. The situation by no means reached the level of virality that the news around Campbell arose. Nor did he receive a similar level of violence on social media. This contrast makes it clear that the outrage against Campbell is not only, or not so much, due to the possible act of corruption itself, but lies in the imbrication of race and gender in the body of this government official in a position of power.

We deny the undeniable. Here, racism is produced as an absence, an absence that allows the imaginary of whiteness to coexist intertwined with the imaginary of peace. However, in Costa Rica the effects of racism are devastating, and the fact that they are less visible does not make them less lethal. The effects of racism do not operate only at the imaginary plane. Power relations are knotted in bodies. Bodies are the substrate and fuel of oppression. It is not possible to think of racist biopolitics or necropolitics without bodies, because it is on bodies that the complex systems of exclusion that sustain modernity are materialized.

The caesura, or break, that race introduces into the body politic allows the population to be segmented and selected, enhanced or eliminated, according to biological notions of heritability, degeneracy, foreignness, differentness, or unassimilability—all in the name of “defending” society and making it “pure.” (Stryker 2014, 41)

Jacob shared some painful experiences of racism that he and his friends have faced in Costa Rica. They incarnate bodies where two of the imagined threats to the nation merge: they are Nicaraguan migrants, and they are Afro-Caribbean people.

Yo lo he vivido en muchas veces, desde que me monto en el bus y a veces estoy sentado, y pueden entrar miles personas, y si yo estoy sentado ahí, nadie va sentarse a la par mía. Entonces yo, siempre le pongo mente a la, a los mensajes subliminales que hay

...mi amiga que es de Bluefields, que también está exiliada aquí, que ella tiene más, como dos meses más que yo aquí. Ella tiene dos niños, y fijate que a sus niños en el colegio, los chavalos les dijeron: “primero, vos andate porque aquí no aceptamos ne:gros. Los negros son malos”. ¡Los estereotipos que hay! Esa fue la primera situación que pasó. A mí me caló mucho porque son dos niños. El niño es negrito y la niña es como más, como trigueña, no? Y luego la vez pasada: que los niños negros, los monos... ¡Así les dijeron! “Los monos no pueden estar en el aula de clases”. ¡Aquí!¹⁰⁴ (Jacob, in discussion with the author, November 26, 2019).

These children's expressions of racism should not be interpreted as an individual and vertical form of discrimination. What these children are displaying is the manifestation of the structural racism that is so deeply rooted and at the same time so widely denied in Costa Rican culture. Like these, we find manifestations of racism in the most diverse sectors. For example, anonymous informants provided me with these screenshots of the dating application Grindr, used mainly by gay men:

¹⁰⁴ Free translation: I have experienced it many times, from the time I get on the bus and sometimes I am seated, and thousands of people can enter, and if I am seated there, nobody is going to sit next to me. So I, I always think about the, the subliminal messages they are giving.

...my friend who is from Bluefields, who is also in exile here, she has been here longer, like two months longer than me. She has two kids, and look, her kids at school, the other kids told them: “first of all, go away because we don't accept blacks here. Blacks are bad”. The stereotypes that exist! That was the first situation that happened. It really got to me because they are two children. The boy is black and the girl is more like, like brown, see? And then last time: that black children, the monkeys! That's what they called them! “The monkeys can't be in the classroom”. Here!

Image 38



Caption: Handsome young man doesn't excite me, rich elder man doesn't impress me, I'm not here to satisfy anyone's curiosity. total relax.
 Ø Motels Ø Elderly men Ø Junkies Ø Obese
 Ø I dislike the smell of blacks.

Image 39



Caption: Man who likes neat and masculine men... Hairy and beard a huge plus... Ridiculous, they say the are exclusive with those faces of malecu natives... Hahahaha as if they were Germans to be exclusive...

The ideal of the gay man is configured here by Costa Rican imaginaries, by an imagined whiteness. One user self-represents himself as white, and at the same time establishes a discursive operation by opposition in which his referent of superiority, the one who can ask for caprices, is a German man, in contrast to the ridiculous men with indigenous traits. The other user flatly excludes elderly men and drug users, and flaunts his fatphobia and disgust for black people's bodies. I did not have access to any screenshots about Nicaraguan people, but informants indicated that they also frequently encounter profiles indicating "no Nicas".

On homonationalism, Bourcier states:

Et enfin, la patrie, en célébrant des droits excluants qui sont au fondement de « la Rép » exceptionnaliste, raciste et sexiste. (Bourcier). Des droits et des protections (homophobie, lesbophobie...) qui permettent de désigner des ennemis intérieurs et extérieurs comme les musulmanes, les Arabes et les femmes voilées. *Il ne manquait plus aux homonormatifs que de devenir homonationalistes pour devenir les complices actifs et parfaits du biopouvoir qui s'exerce sur les minoritaires, les corps (la discipline) et sur les populations (le management) avec les racialisations et les gendérisations que cela implique.* (Bourcier 2017, 58)

These screenshots above reflect homonationalism in its Costa Rican version, where the enemies would not be the Muslims, the Arabs and the women wearing veils that Bourcier points out, but the "blacks", the "Maleku natives" and the "Nicas". As the imaginary of whiteness is sustained in opposition to "others", it generates a series of stereotypes. Thus, anyone who deviates from the white normativity that reproduces the nation is not only considered inferior, but also alien to the Costa Rican essence. As synthesized by these screenshots, Afro Costa Ricans, indigenous people and Nicaraguan migrants face the weight of biopolitics and necropolitics that is deposited on their bodies.

3.2.2. The power of the nation over life

The case of Ngäbe people is another shameful example of how these "internal others" are constructed as threats in the country. As we have seen, Costa Rican official history tends to place the beginning of the country's biography at the time of the conquest and colonization, thus erasing all historical traces of indigenous and pre-Hispanic heritage (Giglioli 1998, 23). Even now, the word "indio" is frequently used as a form of derision (Sandoval 2004b, 83).

Racist policies in Costa Rica are not a thing of the past. Today, in the self-proclaimed "inclusive" Costa Rica, Ngäbe people continue to face the onslaught of structural racism. Ngäbes are one of the native peoples of these lands that were partitioned by conquerors and delimited in what we now call Costa Rica and Panama. Borders seem alien and artificial for the communitarian life of the Ngäbe people. They are known for their nomadic culture, which slides across the political borders that Western colonization has imposed. However, this ancestral resistance to the frontiers and the privatization of the land has served the Costa Rican State to perpetuate its racist policies.

It was not until 1991 that, after a long struggle led by indigenous peoples, that a law to grant the Costa Rican citizenship to indigenous people was finally approved. When I found out about this, I felt confused and shocked. I tried to understand why was this law necessary. What happened with the native peoples in relation to the Costa Rican State before 1991? What were the consequences of the lack of recognition of indigenous (especially Ngäbe) peoples as Costa Rican citizens?

The answer to the first question seems to lie in a continuum of racist policies described in table 1 (Chapter 2) and the history of the use of technologies of power for whitening the population. For the other questions, I interviewed Miguel Regueyra Edelman, a social activist and professor of Social Communication at the University of Costa Rica, that has accompanied the struggles of indigenous organizations, including the recent process for the renewal of the law that was finally approved in 2019.

Regueyra explained that before the 1991 Law, indigenous people encountered all sorts of barriers to get registered as Costa Rican citizens. This happened for all indigenous peoples in the country, but it was especially harsh for Ngäbe peoples, given their nomadic culture. These barriers were both material and cultural, and they clearly reveal the logic of coloniality that underlies these processes.

For instance, in indigenous communities, home births are common. Most hospitals are hours away from their territories, and some settlements require crossing large rivers or riding of horses to reach the paved roads. This, in addition to the ancestral distrust of Western medicine, leads them to prefer to give birth at home, assisted by the knowledge and healing practices of their people. This means that many of the children born within the territories do not appear in the hospital records, and therefore, their birth is not officially listed in the Civil Registry Office. Additionally, there are no branches of the Civil Registry in indigenous territories, so mothers or fathers have to carry out a long, tiring, and expensive trip to get to a town where they can register their children (Regueyra, in discussion with the author, June 8, 2021).

Beyond this, even for those who were able to make the trip, the registration process was not easy. Racist institutions made use of the bureaucratic technologies to question the right of these children to have access to a birth certificate. They asked for proof that the child was actually born in the Costa Rican territory, and given the difficulty of having material evidence of that sort, their word was not enough (Regueyra, in discussion with the author, June 8, 2021). Another common way to register a child as Costa Rican is to baptize the baby in the Catholic Church. This would award the child a baptismal certificate, which is accepted by the Costa Rican authorities as an official document (Regueyra, in discussion with the author, June 8, 2021). Once again, we see the tentacles of coloniality disguised as choice or opportunity. This is an example of how security apparatuses operate. An indigenous family will not be forced to baptize their child in the Catholic faith, as it happened during the first centuries of the Spanish invasion. However, if they want to provide their child with the conditions of stability that a having legal papers delivers, they are forced to betray their own worldview and surrender their child's name to fatten up the books of the Catholic Church, and, incidentally, provide them with statistics that are a mechanism of biopolitical power. In this way, dozens, perhaps hundreds of indigenous children were denied the Costa Rican nationality, leaving them in a situation of vulnerability and social exclusion similar to that experienced by undocumented migrants in the country.

Having discussed for many pages the effects of biopolitics, the use of statistics to manage populations, and the nexus between biopolitics and coloniality, perhaps the question could be asked: why would indigenous people want to get registered as citizens of the nation-state? Why would they want to be

part of the population? The answer is not simple. It is not really a matter of choice, and it has nothing to do with identity politics, politics of representation or visibility. It is a problem of a material nature, since it affects livelihood and the conditions of possibility for their existence. Regueyra gave some examples of how the undocumented status affects the material conditions of these communities. For example: access to welfare and scholarships, access to health care (only pregnant women and underage undocumented residents are covered by social security), access to stable jobs and labor rights (they can only be hired on irregular conditions, or they had to apply for a work permit as migrants), public housing and title deeds (for houses, vehicles, land), among others.

“If you do not have documents, you do not exist”¹⁰⁵

We speak of Ngäbe population, a cross-border, native population, as if they were foreigners. As with the Nicaraguan migrant population, let's say, without papers, children are allowed to enroll in schools. This is not refused. In the same way that, in general, pregnant mothers are not denied attention, nor health care for them and their children. True, that is a principle that is generally applied. However, the treatment is never the same...

Difficulties in accessing state benefits, for instance. Scholarships, scholarships for students. Scholarships are deposited in a bank account. Let's say your child is in school, the school principal says yes, the child's living conditions require a scholarship, but the scholarship is deposited in a bank account. If you don't have papers, you don't have an account. Then things get complicated. You ask for help from IMAS¹⁰⁶. Well, now all scholarships are managed by the IMAS, they are no longer managed by the Ministry of Education. So, that is an additional difficulty. It seems that they are allowing that, if I do not have papers, someone else can take responsibility for your situation... that is, if someone else goes and says: yes, I know this person and I lend my account, they may approve to deposit the scholarship. It is a risky situation, though, and not all people are willing to do it. So, that excludes a bunch of people.

Racism is institutionalized. I tell you this with an anecdote. Along this process, in which we have accompanied them in the fight for a law to get their identity cards, we stayed in some cabins in Gandoca [the Caribbean]. It was the only place where they could lodge us in quantity, 20, 30 people for a low cost. We had already gone there several times, we had already made friends with the people, local people, right, who had a farm and those cabins. And one day the husband of the lady who runs this little place asked me: "Why do you come here?" I told him about the law, the discrimination... He reflected for a moment and said to me: "see, you are right, you know? I had not thought about it. The Ngäbes are very hardworking. If you hire a Ngäbe laborer, they won't stop working until the job is done. But turns out that they are paid less than any other laborer". They work more and get paid less. They work for, I think it was, 1000 colones an hour [about 1.3 € an hour], and a laborer who was not a Ngäbe I think was paid 1500 [about 3 €]. So, this injustice is a consequence, not only of being indigenous, but also of being undocumented¹⁰⁷.

¹⁰⁵ This scrap presents translated fragments of the interview with Miguel Regueyra, in which he narrates with detail different forms of structural racism that Ngäbe people continue to experience in Costa Rica.

¹⁰⁶ IMAS, Instituto Mixto de Ayuda Social, is an institution that serves "the population in poverty of Costa Rica through the provision of subsidies and the realization of programs which provide financing and training to productive enterprises" (Instituto Mixto de Ayuda Social, Costa Rica n.d.)

¹⁰⁷ For a detailed analysis of the ways in which racialization materializes in the division of labor in the Caribbean agricultural plantations, see Philippe Bourgois' (2003) book: *Banano, etnia y lucha social en Centro América*.

The companies [Chiquita, Del Monte] separate the workers by ethnicity. Different functions are assigned according to one's ethnicity, in such a way that it encourages division. It is a really wicked strategy [I biopolitical strategy, I would add]. And the Ngäbes are assigned the unhealthiest jobs, the worst housing conditions and the worst wages. So, they face the same things as people that have no papers, same as the Nicaraguan population in the northern region... For example, one of the community's leaders told me he went and said to the boss: 'Boss, what you are paying me is not enough, I can't make a living with this'. And the man responded: 'Look, if you file a complaint, I'll fire everyone. I will call the immigration police on all of you, so they will come and take everyone away.' This is a consequence of not having papers. So it allows exploitation...

A year ago, I had a meeting with the deputy director of the Migration Department and with the police of that region, precisely because there were various complaints of expulsion of members of the community across the border with Panama and we reported it. One of the policemen had the nerve to say: "Bah! It's not that so bad, we have only thrown out 11 of them". Just like that, he says it without compunction.

I remember one morning, I am in a meeting at the university and one of the leaders calls me and says that one of his daughters had given birth in the hospital, and another of his daughters had come to pick her up from Limón. They were travelling back home, with the newborn and the mother, when they get stopped at a checkpoint. The police were going to expel them to Panama! We made some calls and we were able to stop the deportation, but these things happen all the time. In the context of the pandemic, there were people who were deported to Panama too.

In our society, with the current dynamics, if you don't have documents you don't exist. By this I mean, you do not exist before the State. Because you stop being a person for them. If you do not have a legal existence, you stop being a person... (Regueyra, in discussion with the author, June 8, 2021).

The above excerpts illustrate with concrete examples how the Ngäbe people continue to face colonial domination, even five centuries after the Spanish invasion. Granting indigenous peoples the Costa Rican nationality, the 1991 Law and its renewal in 2019 was an attempt to mitigate the conditions of exclusion and injustice that these forms of structural racism provoke. However, as Regueyra affirms, these laws are still deeply rooted in a colonial governmentality:

Como se va a ejecutar es que las personas que antes de la aprobación de la Ley que fue octubre del 2019, hubieran hecho cualquier trámite migratorio, ya sea que tuvieran permiso de trabajo o tuvieran residencia, aunque estuvieran vencidas, esas personas tenían derecho a optar por la nacionalidad. Pero están optando por la nacionalidad, por la naturalización... Hay un procedimiento para la naturalización que está establecido en la constitución política, no en la Ley, que implica el dominio del castellano y examen de historia. ¿Entonces qué putas vamos a hacer con la población Ngäbe? ... Hay Ngäbes que difícilmente hablan el castellano. Que hablan el ngäbere. Que obviamente no han ido a la escuela. Muchos son analfabetas. Muchos que tienen algún grado de escolaridad lo hicieron en Panamá. Entonces, ¿les vas a pedir un examen de lengua y de historia de los opresores?¹⁰⁸ (Regueyra, in discussion with the author, June 8, 2021)

¹⁰⁸ Free translation: How this work is that the people who, before the approval of the Law, which was October 2019, had carried out any immigration procedure, whether they had a work permit or had a residence, even if it has expired, those people have the right to opt for the Costa Rican nationality. But they are opting for nationality, that is to say, for naturalization... There is a procedure for naturalization that is established in the

Ngäbe people are treated legally and socially as foreigners, as “suspicious foreigners”, in harmonic continuity with the racist policies of the 1930’s.

Yo no sé qué va a pasar... Lo que habíamos hablado es que venía un recurso de inconstitucionalidad. Verdad, porque además contradice el artículo primero, la última reforma a la constitución: Costa Rica como país pluricultural y multilingüe¹⁰⁹.

Regueyra is referring an amendment to the first article of the Constitution which was approved in 2015, stating that “Costa Rica is a democratic, free, independent, multiethnic and multicultural Republic”. Further on, article 76 establishes: “Spanish is the official language of the Nation”. An amendment was introduced in 1999, following: “However, the State will ensure the maintenance and cultivation of the national indigenous languages”. In fact, multiculturalism in Costa Rica appears as an ornamental discourse, a form of simulated inclusion with few practical applications. Indigenous students from different cultures are forced to take all their classes in Spanish. Multiculturalism is restricted to one lesson of culture and language per week. Afro-Costar Rican people do not even have the recognition of their mother tongue. Deaf students do not receive lessons in Costa Rican Sign Language (LESCO). Neither do the hearing students, which limits quotidian communication for the Deaf community. The few schools that teach indigenous languages do so as a second language, just as English is taught in most schools in the country. The standardized tests to pass primary and secondary education are in Spanish. For all administrative procedures, Spanish is used. The forms of the social security system, the tax return, the scholarship forms, the emergency lines, the public services for mental health, the judicial procedures, the police interventions, all are carried out in Spanish.

The case of the Ngäbes people illustrates how a sub-population is produced as *bare life* by the coloniality. Their history, their wellbeing, their language, their culture, their lives have little importance. They matter so little that the colonial nation-state even puts up barriers to recognize them as part of the population. Their bodies are displaced and thrown across borders by the authorities, as if to get rid of a problem. The problem is their existence, which is living proof that this country did not emerge by spontaneous generation, and that its whiteness is a modern and fragile construction. The solution that the Costa Rican nation-state has found is to strip them of their status as citizens, and thus keeps them out of the system that guarantees "universal" and inalienable human

political constitution, not in the Law, which implies proficiency of Spanish language and a history test. So what the hell are we going to do with the Ngäbe population? There are Ngäbe people who hardly speak Spanish, they speak Ngäbere. They haven't gone to school, obviously. Many of them are illiterate. The ones who have some degree of schooling did so in Panama. So, are we going to give them a test of the language and history of their oppressors?

¹⁰⁹ Free translation: I don't know what's going to happen... what we have discussed is that there is a constitutional challenge, since it also contradicts the first article in the last reform to the constitution: Costa Rica as a multicultural and multilingual country.

rights. In this paradoxical situation, they face a continuum of violence, ranging from daily discrimination in public institutions to the torture and murder of indigenous leaders (Chaves 2021). Most aggressions occur with impunity, because that is how it works with the *bare life*. In peaceful Costa Rica, these people are produced as killable, and what produces them as killable is, without a doubt, coloniality.

3.2.3. Necropolitics in the land of peace: when property is worth more than life

In line with the previous section, when reflecting on the biopolitical production of the *bare life*, it is important to mention the case of Nicaraguan migrants, since they are the main group around whom the imaginary of the “external other” is constructed. Carlos Sandoval, who has studied the processes of racialization that produce Nicaraguans as an 'other' that opposes the Costa Rican identity, explains that

Thus it might be argued that racism constructs difference through biological or cultural attributes, whereas nationalism seems to construct a key opposition between citizens and noncitizens... the two are closely connected; Nicaraguans, for instance, are not only stigmatized through ethnic markers but are also labeled, in terms of citizenship, as illegal immigrants (Sandoval 2004b, 9)

Nicaraguan migration to Costa Rica throughout the 20th century and into the 21st century responds to economic, family, climate/natural crisis and political factors. Migration is not new, and neither is contempt and violence towards Nicaraguans. I grew up hearing racist jokes about Nicaraguans. The walls of San Jose still today are a canvas of contention between groups issuing threats and groups calling for solidarity with Nicaraguan migrants.

Image 40
Tags about migrants



Caption: ~~No one is illegal.~~ No one is illegal. Migrants welcome.

One of the spheres where the contradictions of the peace discourse in Costa Rica become evident is around the issue of migration, and more specifically, of Nicaraguan migrants. As Sandoval points out, “the current process of racialization of Nicaraguans is not a simple consequence of “immigration,” as the media has often argued, but a process closely related to the ways in which nation and race have been interlinked in Costa Rica” (Sandoval 2004b, 63).

Sandoval (2004b; 2004a) argues that Costa Rican identity has been constructed in a relational sense with Nicaraguans. Thus, Nicaraguan migrants have been stigmatized as uncivilized, not having the proper manners nor sharing the Costa Rican urban norms of sociability (Sandoval 2004b, 76). In this sense, they are often accused of undermining Costa Rican national identity (Sandoval 2004a, 435). At the same time that they are criminalized and racialized. Nicaraguan workers often face exploitative labor conditions, with low wages and insalubrious conditions that profit from the vulnerability caused by living without papers in this country (Sandoval 2004a, 435).

Throughout history, different political situations have put a lot of tension on the relations between Costa Ricans and Nicaraguans, as was the case of a territorial conflict around Calero Island (settled in international courts) in 2010-2015 (Dobles et al. 2012). Recently, the socio-political crisis that Nicaragua is facing, where President Daniel Ortega has established a dictatorship that persecutes, imprisons, tortures and murders any dissidence, has provoked important migratory flows to Costa Rica and other countries, especially since April 2018 (Jacob and anonymous participant, in discussion with the author, November 26, 2019).

Image 41
March 25 November 2019, San José¹¹⁰



Caption: The patriarchy is going to fall! and so will Daniel's murderous government!

¹¹⁰ Given the tense situation of persecution and threats that Nicaraguan activist face even living in exile in Costa Rica, it is important to state that Iris Barrera, the activist in the picture, gave consent to use this photograph portraying her face.

According to statistics of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, only in 2021 Nicaraguan migrants submitted a total of 111,600 refugee applications worldwide. For a country with a total population of 6,625,000, this figure is outrageous. This makes them the second largest group of asylum seekers in the world, surpassed only by people from Afghanistan, and followed by people from Syria. In addition, Nicaraguans constitute the population with the largest increase in refugee claims in 2021, quintupling the number of claims filed in 2020 (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2022, 31–32). This reflects the severity of the situation that is causing a massive exodus of people who, like several of the participants in this study, are leaving the country to protect their lives.

Image 42
Tag in Democracy Square



Caption: Freedom for the political prisoners!

However, despite the fact that the situation in Nicaragua has been widely commented on in the Costa Rican media, this does not seem to arise much solidarity towards Nicaraguan asylum seekers and refugees. This is nothing new. Data from the 2007 National Survey of Identities and Coexistence (ENIC), analyzed in the 2013 *National Human Development Report* by UNDP, indicate that the majority of Costa Ricans (87.4%) express their agreement to facilitate the entry of foreigners when they come for tourism, but support is reduced when it comes to investors (79.6%), or expats (69%), and it ostensibly drops if the motives are for work (59.4%) or as refugees (41.7%) (PNUD 2013, 198).

On August 18, 2018, hundreds of Costa Ricans took to the streets of San José in a demonstration against the migration of Nicaraguans, which had been increasing since April of that year. Fired up by fake news and sensationalist media, the demonstrators gathered in La Merced Park, a place that has historically been a meeting point for the Nicaraguan migrant community (Chacón and Valverde 2018). Nationalist demonstrators sang the national anthem and shouted supremacist slogans and calls for violence. The action was intervened by the police, who arrested 44 people and seized machetes, knives and 8 Molotov bombs (A. Mora 2018). The escalation of violence provoked concern and indignation among some sectors of the population, who a week later organized a mobilization against xenophobia and called for peace.

This situation, like many others related to Nicaraguan migrants, demonstrates the limits of the Costa Rican peace discourse. The fact that this country has no army and does not wage war does not mean that it is a country of peace, as reflected in this publication, which evokes a verse of the national anthem:

Image 185

We will take justice and defense into our own hands



Caption: Text from the Movimiento Nacionalista Costarricense: Do not let yourself be intimidated by the "swallows" of this nefarious government. Arm yourself, defend yourself, do not be compliant! "When someone pretends to stain your glory, you will see your brave and virile people, turn the coarse tool into a weapon..." [verse of the national anthem].

Text of the meme: Costa Ricans no longer believe in the "authorities", we will take justice and defense into our own hands.

How do you kill bare life without an army? How does necropolitics operate in a country of peace?

On November 10, 2005, an atrocious event occurred in the history of Costa Rica. I still remember the headline that I read on the front pages that were being sold on the street: "Dogs devour a Nica of 200 bites". The sensationalist newspaper Extra also showed photographs of the body ripped apart by the dogs. His name was Natividad Canda, a Nicaraguan migrant who, starving and in desperation, had entered a private property looking for something to sustain his existence. The property was guarded by Rottweiler dogs, which lunged at Natividad. When police arrived on the scene, Natividad was still alive. However, the officers failed to stop the attack. Thus, in front of the eyes of 8 police officers, Natividad was surrendered to death in the jaws of two dogs. Some time later, national and international pressure brought the officers to trial, from which they were acquitted because the judge considered that they acted in accordance with the circumstances in the case of two dangerous animals.

In the days following this tragedy, I felt sad, outraged and ashamed. I had nightmares of dogs devouring a human being. But what affected me most was not even the gore narratives in the news, the spectacularization of violence, but the reactions that it triggered. Jokes immediately began to circulate. I was not on social media at the time, so I received these memes by direct message, sent by people I knew and who knew me.

Image 44
Hail to our national hero



Caption: NOBLE DOG YOUR ROTWAILER BREED
expression of love you give us
AS LONG AS YOU HAVE A NICA IN YOUR SIGHTS
OUR HERO FOREVER YOU WILL BE
(This verse makes a play on words changing the lyrics of the national anthem)

Image 45
10.000 colones bill



The first image proposes to declare the Rottweiler a national hero. The second places it on the 10.000 colones bill, the highest denomination that existed at the time. The image of the Rottweiler is a recurring theme that comes up again in times of conflict, in narratives that joke, as can be seen on image 46 bellow. As Mbembe signals, a “...new cultural sensibility emerges in which killing the enemy of the state is an extension of play. More intimate, lurid, and leisurely forms of cruelty appear” (Mbembe 2013, 168).

After Natividad's death, I had several discussions with family members, friends and university classmates. A common argument used by people to minimize the gravity of the event was that, although they regretted his death, in a certain way he had brought it on himself for trespassing on

private property in search of something to steal. In other words, they believe that private property is above life, above the life of a migrant robber. In this country where the death penalty does not exist, dogs do the job of putting an end to threats to the nation.

Rabinow and Rose propose that “the economy of contemporary biopolitics operates according to logics of vitality, not mortality: while it has its circuits of exclusion, letting die is not making die” (Rabinow and Rose 2006, 211). And yet, Natividad was left to die in the jaws of the dogs, but in reality he was put to death. Natividad died, paradoxically, trying to preserve his life, in the desperation provoked by the precariousness of his material conditions of existence. Natividad was a living dead, in the sense that Mbembe (2013) signals.

As so many other Nicaraguans in Costa Rica, Natividad was dead long before the dogs devoured his body. His death, like that of so many others, would have gone unnoticed before our eyes. However, this gore killing was spectacularized generating a horror that for some people also provokes a sort of fascination, a joy at the sight of the severed body of the poor and thieving nica. His death is not only unpunishable, but a source of pride for the nation. Hunger pushed him to death, inaction and indifference killed him, and racist capitalism justified and excused his death. After all, what is a *bare life* versus private property?

During the context of the Covid 19 pandemic, inspections by the Ministry of Health that monitored compliance with sanitary measures revealed what many of us had been denouncing for years: that agricultural corporations keep undocumented laborers working in unhealthy conditions, sometimes bordering on slavery and human trafficking, using them as cheap labor and then dumping them at the border to avoid any possible employer liability (Chacón 2021; D. Díaz 2020). The same happened to the migrant domestic workers who clean the houses of bourgeois families in this country. In the context of the pandemic, a journalistic investigation documented how these women were locked up by their employers, deprived of their only day off and isolated from their own families and networks, under the argument that if they went out, they could bring the virus to their home (N. Esquivel 2022).

Xenophobia and racism spiked in Costa Rica in the context of the pandemic. The news about the Ministry of Health inspections did not provoke outrage about the slave labor conditions faced by migrants, but triggered a wave of violence in social media, in corporations, in the State and in the streets. For example, Alfredo Cordoba, mayor of the canton of San Carlos, made stereotype-laden statements attributing the precariousness of the conditions in which Nicaraguan migrants live in Costa Rica to cultural factors:

Sabíamos que en cualquier momento se iba a desordenar el asunto de los nicaragüenses, para nadie es un secreto que no tienen cultura para manejar una

cuarentena, ellos se amontonan en cuarterías, comparten platos, vasos y cucharas; no tienen cuidado y ellos tarde o temprano iban a provocar contagio en nuestra comunidad¹¹¹ (La Izquierda Diario de Costa Rica 2020, para. 3)

Despite the denunciations of collectives and academics against hate speech, Laura Bonilla, president of two of the agricultural companies closed for not complying with sanitary measures and president of the Costa Rican Chamber of Exporters, said in an interview that this is not a problem of xenophobia, and insisted that the problem was the migration of sick Nicaraguans in the northern part of the country (Navas 2020).

In this context, the border between Costa Rica and Nicaragua once again became a living dead camp. In July 2020, Ortega closed the border and required Nicaraguan citizens who wanted to return to their country to have a negative Covid-19 test, which was impossible to obtain at the border. Stranded between the two countries, more than 400 Nicaraguan migrants had to improvise a camp, where they slept in the open, shared a single toilet, and had no access to showers. In the midst of this critical situation, the conditions for the spread of Covid-19 and other diseases increased dangerously. However, pushed to the edge of the nation, they no longer posed much of a threat to Costa Rica. As one person told the newspaper *Voz de América*: “Acá no hay personas con COVID-19 (...) Acá nos están dejando morir totalmente, pareciera que la única forma que vamos a salir de aquí (es) de uno a uno en bolsitas, bolsas plásticas¹¹²” (Gómez 2020, para. 3).

Meanwhile, police cordoned off the *cuarterías*¹¹³ where a positive case was detected, which provoked insults, threats and even the throwing of objects by neighbors. Racism also targeted indigenous people. In Turrialba, neighbors burned mattresses in protest outside a shelter that was being temporarily used as an Attention Center to receive indigenous people with symptoms who traveled to the town to receive medical attention (El País.cr 2020).

The perception of the existence of the Other as an attempt on my life, as a mortal threat or absolute danger whose biophysical elimination would strengthen my potential to life and security - this, I suggest, is one of the many imaginaries of sovereignty characteristic of both early and late modernity itself (Mbembe 2013, 167)

¹¹¹ Free translation: We knew that at any moment the Nicaraguan issue was going to get messy, it is no secret that they do not have the culture to manage a quarantine, they pile up in rooms, they share plates, glasses and spoons; they are not careful and sooner or later they were going to cause contagion in our community.

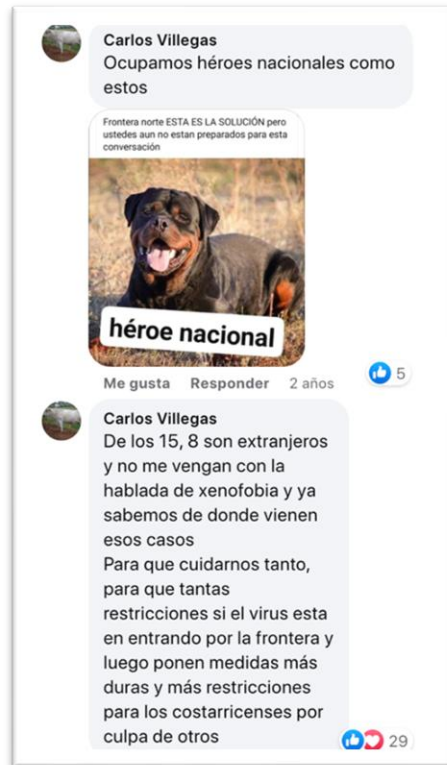
¹¹² Free translation: Here there are no people with COVID-19 (...) Here they are letting us die completely, it seems that the only way we are going to get out of here is one by one in bags, in plastic bags.

¹¹³ *Cuarterías* are a form of precarious housing, in which individuals and families rent rooms in a property, and share the bathroom, kitchen and other common areas.

Violence was also unleashed in social media. A United Nations study revealed that in 13 months of the pandemic, more than 180,000 xenophobic comments were registered in Costa Rica, most of them against Nicaraguans (Vásquez 2022). The rotweilers made a comeback:

Image 46

We need national heroes like this one



Source: Tome pal pinto Facebook Page

(<https://www.facebook.com/Tomepalpinto/photos/a.1130391827047379/3010567809029762/?type=3>)

Caption: Carlos Villegas: We need national heroes like this one.

Meme: Northern Border THIS IS THE SOLUTION but you are not ready for this conversation. National hero.

Carlos Villegas: Of the 15 [positive cases], 8 are foreigners and don't give me the xenophobia talk and we already know where these cases come from. Why are we so careful, why so many restrictions if the virus is entering through the border and then they put harsher measures and more restrictions for Costa Ricans because of others.

Natividad's death was a tragedy. The jokes that vindicate it are the manifestation of cruelty and necropolitics in this country of peace. While Natividad's case is marked history because of the horror of the situation and the violence in the discourses it unleashed, the truth is that in Costa Rica those who embody *bare life* are left to die every day. Sometimes they are made to die as well. Beyond the murders that constitute the extreme of the complex and winding continuum of violence, violence swarms in the streets, it is heard, seen and often normalized, justified, especially when it is exercised against those sub-humans who are but fuel for the world-system, those who are, as dictated by coloniality, raw material for capital and substrate for control and governmentality.

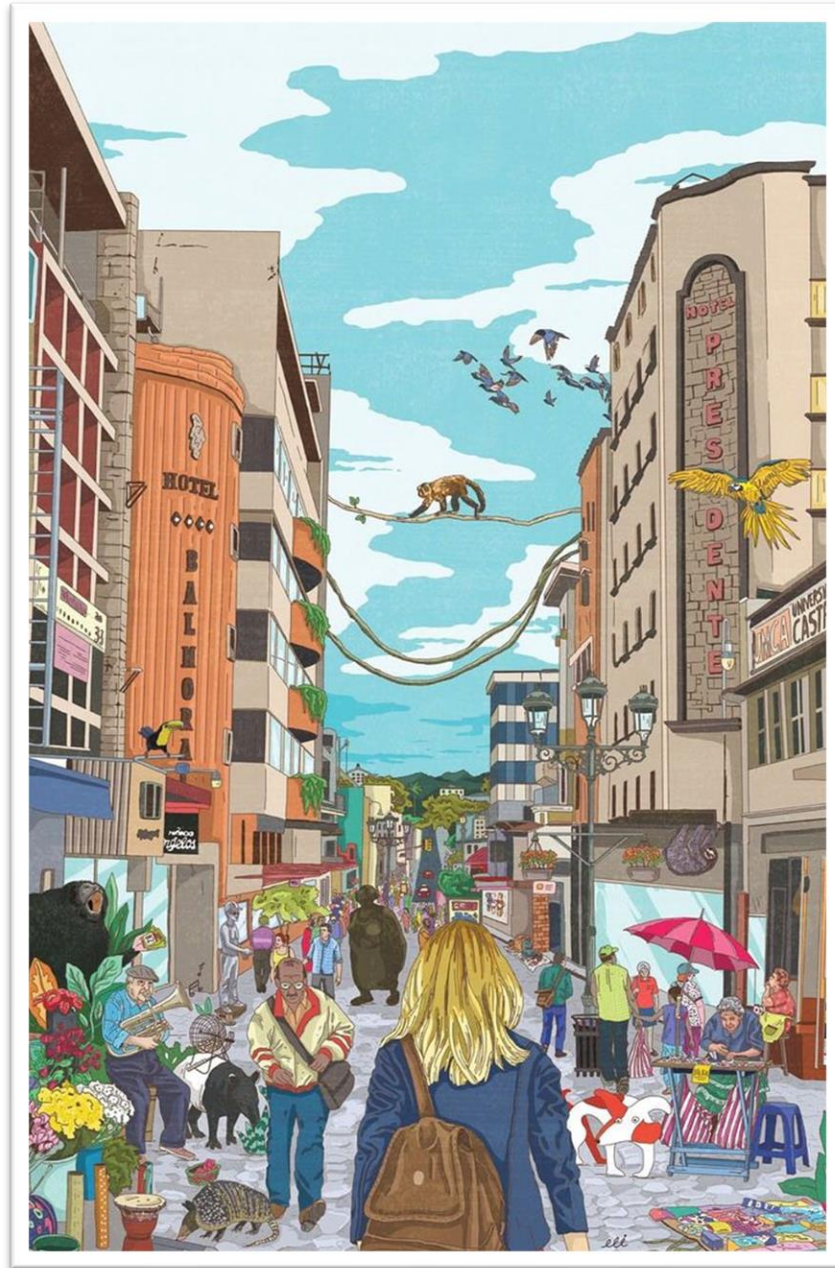
3.2.4. Coloniality in the city

Finally, I address a couple of situations that occurred spontaneously in the framework of observation exercises, which serve as examples to think about the less explicit ways in which racism is exercised in San José. On October 18, 2019, I attended the vernissage of a small art exhibition, that presented illustrations of the city of San José by various artists. The exhibition was held in Café Rojo, a bohemian, alternative restaurant in Barrio Amón, owned and managed by a gay couple. As is often the case in a small city like San José, I knew the owners and several of the artists. I walked around the room with one of the owners, looking at the drawings and talking about San José. We stopped at one particular piece by artist Elizabeth Argüello. She was standing beside her work. She recognized me from a social cartography workshop we had attended together that same week at the University of Costa Rica. I told her I was here doing an observation exercise for my thesis, which revolves around the city of San José. She started talking about her piece. “That’s me!”, she said pointing to the blond human figure walking towards the vanishing point of the painting.

In the picture, we see a self-portrait of the artists back as she walks the central avenue in San José. Her blonde hair stands out around other darker heads. We see a collage of elements that are typical of the city (street vendors, street musicians, some renowned buildings, the sculpture of “La Chola”, red taxis in the back). We also see some alien elements. Concretely, the street is filled with wild animals that we can usually find in the Costa Rican jungles, but not in San José.

Image 47

Argüello's illustration for Chepe de a pie expo



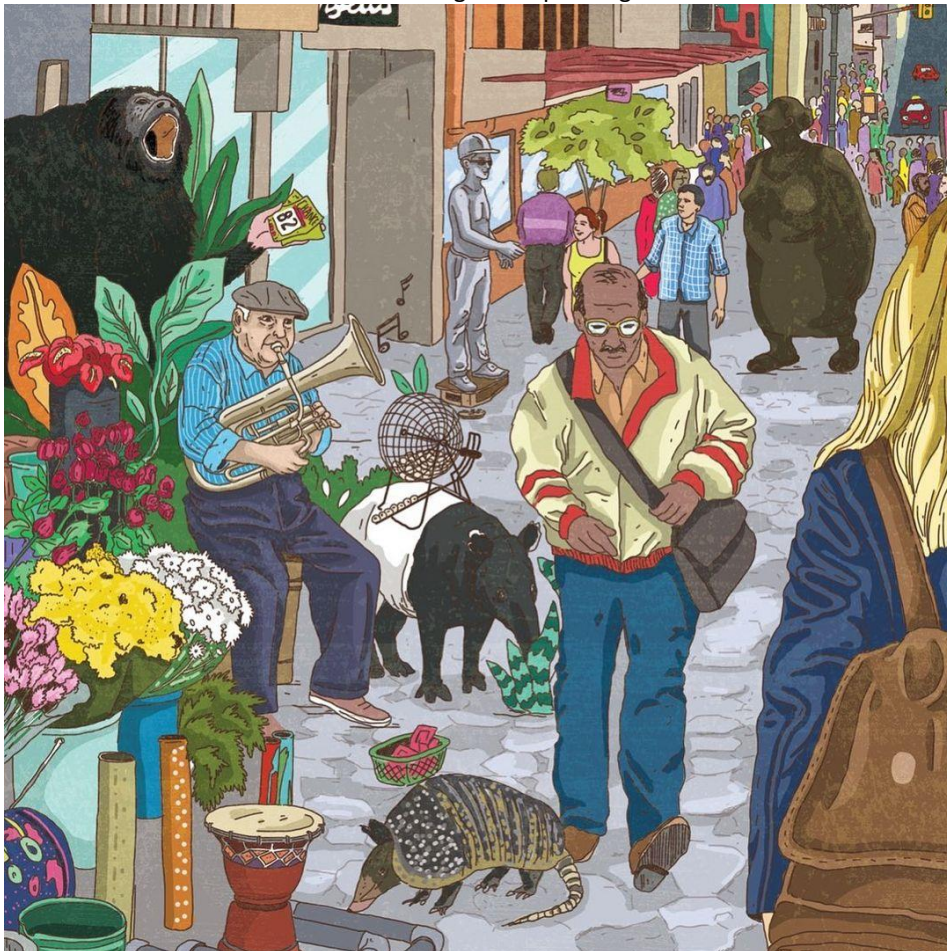
Source: Elizabeth Argüello Instagram Profile, <https://www.instagram.com/p/B30lZ5gnXuK/>

In that moment, someone in the room showed interest in the painting and commented on it. He told the artist that he found her concept very interesting. He reflected on how the same land where we were standing was once inhabited by beasts. Before we destroyed everything and built a city, there were probably monkeys and coatis walking around. The artist looked a little dazed by the man's environmentalist interpretation and clarified that the painting was actually inspired on a dream she had. "Yo tuve un sueño que estaba caminando por la ciudad y había un escándalo, un escándalo

terrible... O sea, para mí entre una señora vendiendo Claro [tarjetas sim] a gritos y un congo aullando no hay diferencia. ¡Es la misma vara!¹¹⁴”

She was referring to the giant representation of a howling monkey on the left:

Image 48
Zoom on Argüello's painting



Source: Elizabeth Arguello Instagram Profile, <https://www.instagram.com/p/B30lZ5gnXuK/>

The howling monkey on the picture is actually selling “Chances” (a lottery game managed by the State) not Claro sim cards, but for the purpose of her critique is probably the same. People who earn their living selling Claro lines work tireless hours in the streets for a very precarious wage. According to the listings in job banks like Joooble.org, a Claro salesperson earns around 165 € per month, working fulltime on the streets, exposed to rain, sun and quotidian mistreatment by passersby who, like the artist, are bothered by their noisy presence in the city. As the company does not demand high

¹¹⁴ Free translation: I dreamed that I was walking through the city and everything was so loud, terribly loud, so... I mean, for me a lady screaming, selling Claro [sim cards] in screams is no different than a howling monkey. It's the same shit!

education requirements or work experience, Claro salespeople are frequently migrants, both internal and international, who struggle to survive in that concrete jungle that the artist portrays.

I listened to her words with astonishment, and I found myself unable to reply. Our conversation ended there. The violence in her words shocked me. It was not an anti-speciesism reflection criticizing the hierarchization of human animals over other non-human animals. Her complaint went in the opposite direction. Her expression bestialized the lives of impoverished/racialized workers in the city. By comparing this worker's voice to the cry of a howler monkey, she was implying that their words are worthless, that their cry is unintelligible. As Farneda states: "... lo que se produce mediante las tácticas de la animalización son sujetos absolutamente "disponibles" y "desechables"¹¹⁵" (Farneda 2012, 26).

I spent the rest of the night chewing on her words, wondering if she realized her expressions were charged with classism and racism. Perhaps she did not, perhaps she would not consciously use racist or classist phrases. Nevertheless, comparing a racialized impoverished person to a monkey, affirming that their work is the same "shit" as the wild howl of an ape, is an expression of the Costa Rican whitewashed imaginaries, that reproduce the colonial opposition between culture and savagery, where the white Costa Ricans inherited the laudable values of European culture, while foreigners (migrants or natives) remain trapped in their wild ignorance.

Over the days, I reflected and *sentipensé* around that encounter with sadness. I thought of the pluriverse she is missing by refusing to listen to that lady who sells Claro, and to all the people that for her are unintelligible beasts. For instance: David. I met David in the street outside the central market, on October 29, 2019. He approached me asking for money to get back to his hometown in Limón. He looked in bad shape, as if he had been living in the streets for some time now. His hands were dirty and his arm was badly hurt. Interactions of this sort were a quotidian scene during my fieldwork in downtown San José, but what was particular about this one is that when David asked me for money, he did it rapping. Amazed, I gave him what I had on me: 1000 colones (about 1.3 €). He got very excited, even though it was not enough for him to travel to Limón. I asked him if he was hungry, he told me he just wanted to get back home. I complimented him on his rapping skills, and I told him I was carrying a voice recorder, so if it was OK with him, I would love to record him doing some freestyle rap. His eyes got as wide as his smile. I took out the recorder and he started to rap. He sang about his life and his story, about the city's hostility and the degrading treatment he received from strangers, about being black and being crazy, and about the time he spent locked up in the psychiatric hospital.

¹¹⁵ Free translation: what is produced through the tactics of animalization are absolutely "available" and "disposable" subjects.

I translate some fragments, the original transcription can be found on annex 2:

“... I’m here in downtown.
I denote myself with wit.
I have talent.
I’m not afraid.
I’m quick in the game
like a fucking pig or a mutant.
I am not afraid.
I’m going from the jungle,
I descend like a pig.
I break all style.
People despise me,
they speak nasty,
they humiliate me.
Denotes
they have no consciousness,
they have no culture.
...
I don’t give a damn about anything.
I just have talent.
I speak like a pig.
I’ve earned medals.
I remember the time in the psychiatric hospital.
Two months of destruction
A bit ugly,
eating but bread and water.
Crying,
talking to myself,
consciously.

But one day I made a decision
and I scaped.
I jumped a 3-meter fence
and I denoted.
I’m here with my friend
in the free,
speaking, yes.
Nothing else matters.
I denote as a loony.
I can speak in Russian,
here with style, it is a lot.
I’m here as a fucking black
speaking patuá , Hebrew, Aramaic, anyway,
like a giraffe,
like a mutant,
like a pig,
like a ninja turtle,
like Mario Bros in the Nintendo.
I have nothing.
I denote with talent.
Mi friend,
I’m a champion.
I’m not a thief.
I’m not afraid.
I am here.”
(David, in discussion with the author, October 29,
2019)

In his rap, David speaks of the forms of violence he experienced in the city. His constant references to animals and mutants seem to show the other side of Argüello’s metaphor. David could well have been one of the beasts depicted in the painting. He knows people look at him with despise, he knows he dwells in the *zone of non-being*, and yet, in the midst of that filth in which society has thrown him, he vindicates his mutant existence with his rap. He recognizes his difference; he recognizes that he does not fit into normality. He knows he is crazy, and also racialized and poor, and lonely in a city that loathes and locks up people like him. In spite of that, or maybe because of that, he decided to defend his life. In his act of escaping the asylum he is affirming his life, his monstrous humanity and the freedom to live his live that the world-system signals as unlivable. He later told that was how he hurt his arm, running away from the psychiatric institution where he thought he was going to die.

David’s story is not far from other stories I heard in the streets. Like Argüello, he is an artist who portrays the city through his eyes. The differences, however, is that while a white, educated painter can display her racist, classist glance on the walls of a trendy café in the “cultural capital” of San José, a black, psychiatrized impoverished rapper receives insults and harassment for trying to earn his way

back home through his rap. As David clearly states, he knows he is talented and he knows that is all he has got.

3.3. Reflections from a decolonial position

Throughout this section, I have discussed Foucault's notion of biopower, understood as

the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power, or, in other words, how, starting from the eighteenth century, modern Western societies took on board the fundamental biological fact that human beings are a species (Foucault 2009, 1).

I also explored subsequent elaborations that provide important elements for understanding the forms taken by biopolitics and the power of death in contemporary societies (Agamben 1998; Mbembe 2013; Bourcier 2017; Preciado 2013; Valencia 2018). Agamben (1998) introduces the concepts of *bare life* and *homo sacer*, "a life that may be killed by anyone -- an object of a violence that exceeds the sphere both of law and of sacrifice" (Agamben 1998, 86). Grosfoguel (2012), from a decolonial perspective, places race in a central place, and proposes a reading in which racism produces conditions of "dehumanization", where bodies are labeled as subhuman or inhuman, and therefore, are exposed to multiple forms of violence, including death.

In this vein, I have pointed out some of the main criticisms that have been raised from decolonial and anti-colonial perspectives, that can be summed up, as Farneda points out, in the argument that

la biopolítica moderna encuentra su fondo y fundamento en la constitución misma de la modernidad colonial, posible de fechar precisamente en la conquista y colonización de América, como el genocidio fundante de los genocidios biopolíticos contemporáneos... no ocurrida hace 500 años sino perpetuada desde hace 500 años¹¹⁶ (Farneda 2012, 105).

To close this section, I would like to go a little further. What can we, grounded in Abya Yala, contribute to the study of biopolitics, based on our experience of surviving centuries of coloniality? What can we say about the ways in which power is exercised over us? What can anti-colonial forms of resistance contribute to think about other possible worlds? To begin with, following Santos (2016b) we would have to say that a great part of the reflections, experiences and knowledge generated in Abya Yala have been produced as absences, even in some of the most critical approaches to biopolitics from the Global North.

¹¹⁶ Free translation: modern biopolitics finds its background and foundation in the very constitution of colonial modernity, which can be dated precisely to the conquest and colonization of America, as the founding genocide of contemporary biopolitical genocides... not 500 years ago but perpetuated for over 500 years.

Foucault's oversights provoke, not only the historical errors pointed out above, but also to overlook alternative forms of existence. In Abya Yala we find a plurality of voices and community experiences where life (not only human life) is at the center of social organization. This is perhaps the most unfortunate consequence of Eurocentrism in biopolitical studies: that Europe fails to understand that in the Global South other forms of vital and social existence, less violent, less lethal, have functioned for centuries and continue to function today. Coloniality has produced as absences these "cosmovisiones otras, ontologías denegadas por el pensamiento moderno, y que emergen en el medio del agotamiento material y de sentido de nuestras realidades"¹¹⁷ (Farneda 2012, 116).

As urban researcher Álvaro Sevilla Buitrago (2010) suggests, "debemos trabajar por una planificación biopolítica del espacio que no opere como autoridad ejercida sobre la vida, sino como la acción que acompaña a esta en su proliferación, articulando los procesos espaciales para su emancipación futura"¹¹⁸ (46). Whether biopolitics can become an emancipatory project is a matter still under debate. I have my doubts. However, I do not see why we could not squat the concept, to expand its boundaries to other places, with other logics, where life has a centrality, not as an object of regulation, not for commodification, not for domination, but for coexistence and *re-existence*¹¹⁹.

I will speak of Abya Yala because this is the place where I position myself and where this study is based. However, I do not want to suggest that this is the only alternative. On the contrary, I believe Dussel's (2013) provocation for South-South pluriversal dialogs to be a fertile land. What we will find is a multiplicity of world views, perhaps muted or erased by coloniality, but which present alternatives to think about ways of being in the world. What is powerful about these alternatives is that they abandon any universalist aspiration and are rather inscribed in the logic of *pluriversality*. In this sense, they should not be understood as replicable and expansive models, but as experiences that inspire creative re-existence in different contexts, for the creation of other ways of being in the world that can coexist, not in the logic of competition, but in a network of reciprocity.

¹¹⁷ Free translation: other worldviews, ontologies denied by modern thought, which emerge in the midst of the material exhaustion and meaning of our realities.

¹¹⁸ Free translation: we must work for a biopolitical planning of space that does not operate as an authority exercised over life, but as the action that accompanies it in its proliferation, articulating the spatial processes for its future emancipation.

¹¹⁹ Colombian intellectual and artist Adolfo Albán Achinte (2012) proposes the concept of re-existence (*re-existencia*) to name all those apparatuses historically generated by communities to re-invent their lives in confrontation with the patterns of power that have determined the way these populations must live (293). It is a concept that, as Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2017) points out, has become crucial in decoloniality studies, as it constitutes an active response in the face of power. Re-existence is "the political act of living, seeking, without any negotiation, to achieve dignity and to deconstruct the forms of power and domination that, from the material to the symbolic, are constructed and circulate in this era of unbridled and criminal capitalism" (Free translation from Albán Achinte 2012, 293).

In this sense, I find some keys in communitarian feminisms, systematized by Lorena Cabnal (2010), where the community plays a central role in sustaining life. It is important to highlight that, although Cabnal rescues the principles of life in the social organization of native peoples, she maintains a critical stance towards those practices and principles that reproduce relations of power and oppression. For instance, as a woman and as a communitarian feminist, she contests the native cosmogenous heteroreality (*heterorealidad cosmogónica originaria*¹²⁰) as one of the knots of oppression that still needs to be untangled.

Thus, from a critic perspective, careful not to romanticize the indigenous world, Cabnal offers us a problematized vision of its potentialities for the production of life. She mentions, for example, the notion of *Sumak Kawsay*, which has been translated (and often appropriated) in Spanish under the name of "*buen vivir*" (literally meaning good living or well living). *Sumak Kawsay*, explains Cabnal (2010), is an ancestral cosmogonic paradigm that arose in the philosophy of the indigenous peoples of southern Abya Yala (South America) (16). *Sumak* is a word in Quichua language that expresses the thought of a good life in its entirety. It is not about seeking a better life than others, nor the continuous striving to improve life, but simply a good life (16-17). *Kawsay*, interestingly complements this formulation, since it introduces the communitarian element. Coming from Aymara language, *Kawsay* refers to the action of living well with others, in sufficient internal harmony, a sort of collective good living (17).

For decades, indigenous movements in Abya Yala have organized their resistance in a network, defending their will to live under the principles of *Sumak Kawsay*. Even governments in the Southern Cone have recently tried to incorporate the discourse of "*buen vivir*" into their policies. This has driven some transformations, although with great limitations since it is difficult to sustain an alternative biopolitics in the form of the modern State, captured by coloniality and the voracity of neoliberal capitalism. Moreover, in recent times we have seen shameful practices of cultural appropriation by politicians, NGOs, entrepreneurs and corporations that manipulate the concept of "*buen vivir*" to transform it into policing, into marketing, into depoliticized discourses, and liberal products of "self-care" that are sold to white and whitewashed subjects who have the means to invest in their own wellbeing. In a similar vein, Fabiola explained that she feels upset by environmentalist discourses of the "green Costa Rica" that national politicians and corporations hold:

¹²⁰ By this concept Cabnal (2010) understands the norm that establishes, from an ethnic essentialism, that all the relations between humans and of humanity with the cosmos, are based on principles and values such as complementarity and heterosexual duality for the harmonization of life (16).

Porque vea, van... mucha gente, para nadie es un secreto, que van aquí, van a la Unión Europea... Que aquí profesan “que la Madre Tierra esto y aquello...”, y eso es puro negocio¹²¹.

The *Sumak Kawsay* is not an individualistic path. The body is central, in a way that is profoundly different from disciplinary or biopower. This centrality of the body is not bound to individualism (as happens so easily with gay and queer politics, or with certain white bourgeois feminisms). As Cabnal explains, it is about

la recuperación consciente de nuestro primer territorio cuerpo, como un acto político emancipatorio y en coherencia feminista con ‘lo personal es político’, ‘lo que no se nombra no existe’... asumir la corporalidad individual como territorio propio e irreplicable, permite ir fortaleciendo el sentido de afirmación de su existencia de ser y estar en el mundo¹²² (2010, 22).

The body as a territory to be decolonized, to be liberated, to be sown and filled with life. Cabnal (2021) insists on the importance that the relational premise “*territorio-cuerpo-tierra*” (territory-body-land) has for life. The historical structural framework of oppressions on bodies and land as territories, have misappropriated and colonized them. For this reason, resistance, liberation, emancipation cannot take place in a fragmentary way, in only one of these domains, but in an articulated and simultaneous way. “Si soy una feminista”, says Cabnal (2021), “que vivo la liberación en cierto aspecto, pero bebo el agua embotellada y lo que como es transgénico, creo que se rompe esa relación de vida en el cuerpo y en la tierra¹²³”. The proposal is to recover the *territorio-cuerpo-tierra*:

En el planteamiento de recuperación y defensa histórica de mi territorio cuerpo tierra, asumo la recuperación de mi cuerpo expropiado, para generarle vida, alegría, vitalidad, placeres y construcción de saberes liberadores para la toma de decisiones y esta potencia la junto con la defensa de mi territorio tierra¹²⁴ (Cabnal 2010, 23).

Sumak Kawsay is not an abstract philosophy. It is, we may say, an incarnated philosophy, nourished by the millenary and plural experience of a diversity of peoples who have attempted ways to exercise it, sustain it and improve it. In this sense, there are living records of the history of experiences that have attempted to organize societies around the principles of *Sumak Kawsay*. The *Tawantinsuyu*, for example, was a confederation of Inca peoples that who attempted a multiethnic and multilingual

¹²¹ Free translation: Because you see, they go... many people, it's no secret to anyone, they go here, they go to the European Union... Here they profess “that Mother Earth this and that...”, and it is all just for pure business.

¹²² Free translation: the conscious recovery of our first body territory, as an emancipatory political act and in feminist coherence with 'the personal is political', 'what is not named does not exist'... Assuming the individual corporeality as our own and unrepeatable territory, allows us to strengthen the sense of affirmation of our existence, of being (ser) and being (estar) in the world.

¹²³ Free translation: If I am a feminist who lives liberation in a certain aspect, but I drink bottled water and what I eat is transgenic, I think it breaks that relationship of life in the body and in the land.

¹²⁴ Free translation: In the approach of recovery and historical defense of my territory-body-land, I assume the recovery of my expropriated body, to generate for it life, joy, vitality, pleasures and construction of liberating knowledge for making decisions, and I gather this power together with the defense of my territory-land.

model of coexistence and organization. As a basis for development and politics, they took community work (of men and women on equal terms) and reciprocity among members of the community, with the aim of generating the common good (17).

These paradigms existed long before Foucault theorized on biopolitics, and long before the moment in which he locates the rise of biopolitics. The European world trampled these paradigms, colonization attempted to eradicate them, coloniality produced them as an absence, and yet they survive and throb today in Abya Yala. However, and this was for a long time a question that crossed my epistemological and political reflections, we could perhaps ask ourselves what can these paradigms contribute to those of us who inhabit the cities of Abya Yala and the world? Someone could even ask if they can contribute at all, when we have been convinced, as my high school history teacher used to say, that globalization is an inevitable process, that free trade is the only way to development, and that capitalism is the only civilizing path out of savagery. I recall a passage from Hanna Arendt's critical reflections on the notion of human rights:

If the tragedy of savage tribes is that they inhabit an unchanged nature which they cannot master, yet upon whose abundance or frugality they depend for their livelihood, that they live and die without leaving any trace, without having contributed anything to a common world, then these rightless people are indeed thrown back into a peculiar state of nature. Certainly they are not barbarians; some of them, indeed, belong to the most educated strata of their respective countries; nevertheless, in a world that has almost liquidated savagery, they appear as the first signs of a possible regression from civilization (Arendt 2013, 93)

This passage synthesizes the unfortunate idea that many people in the Global North (and also in the colonized subjectivities of the Global South) have about indigenous and "savage" peoples. To think that these "savages" live and die without leaving a trace, and the impossibility to recognize what their cosmovisions, their ways of life and social organization, their embodied and practical philosophy contributes to the common world, is in my opinion one of the most unfortunate and shameful effects of the coloniality of knowledge. On the contrary, if we acknowledge that the theories of the Global North, read critically and in context, can provide us with tools to analyze and transform our realities, why shouldn't other cosmogonies, geographically and historically closer to us, also provide us with transformative principles and practices? As we will see throughout the next chapters, despite living in the city, the daily resistance of some of the participants, their ways of being in the world, their forms of embodying life and the will to live, and the manner in which they relate to their communities, are closer to the principles of *Sumak Kawsay* than to the mandates of neoliberal governmentality.

Cabnal invites us to:

trascender el racismo internalizado y posibilitarnos verlo en nuestra construcción cultural, pues si no, la mayoría de lo que estamos haciendo para su erradicación, será

un trabajo parcial, pues lo miramos a lo externo. Pienso que proponer el proceso de *deconstrucción internalizada de manera consciente*, nos invita a remover la conciencia de opresión y nos invita a liberarnos, a reconocer que es necesaria la erradicación del racismo naturalizado y entrañado, para crear y recrear el pensamiento pluridimensional como riqueza¹²⁵ (2010, 20).

Arendt's passage quoted above reproduces an *epistemology of absences*, which hides from us a plurality of alternatives toward the *Sumak Kawsay*. Those forms of existence and social organization require a policy based on reciprocity, balance and respect for all beings (human and non-human), and a common commitment to life. “Una categoría de cosmovisión de los pueblos andinos que plantean la vida en plenitud, entendida en un equilibrio magnífico y sublime de lo espiritual y material tanto en lo interno como externo de la comunidad, para alcanzar lo superior¹²⁶” (Cabnal 2010, 17). May the passage of our body through the world be mild for the Pachamama and may its life inspire life and dignity.

This, of course, is not a discourse of domination. What is interesting, perhaps, is to think of it as part of a plurality. It is an emancipatory approach, insofar as it breaks with colonial impositions, but above all, it is a project in the key of pluriversality. It does not have an expansive or imperialist intention; it is not intended for massive replication. But if we approach these knowledges with respect and horizontal listening, without appropriating and without extracting, these other [¿bio?]politics can teach us a lot and bring enormous strength to our resistances, even the urban ones, and especially for radical mestizxs. This is, in a way, what I try to do in this study: I seek to patch together small pieces of fragmented dialogues with urban subjects about the oppressions they suffer, but also about the lives they live and the lives they want to live.

<p>Nocturno sin patria Jorge Debravo, poeta costarricense</p> <p>Yo no quiero un cuchillo en manos de la patria. Ni un cuchillo ni un rifle para nadie: La tierra es para todos, Como el aire.</p> <p>Me gustaría tener manos enormes, Violentas y salvajes, Para arrancar fronteras una a una Y dejar de frontera sólo el aire.</p>	<p>Nocturne without a homeland (free translation) Jorge Debravo, Costa Rican poet</p> <p>I don't want a knife in the hands of the homeland. Neither a knife nor a rifle for anyone: The land is for all, Like the air.</p> <p>I would like to have huge hands, Violent and savage, To tear away borders one by one And leave only the air as a border.</p>
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¹²⁵ Free translation: to transcend internalized racism and make it possible for us to see it in our cultural construction, otherwise, most of what we are doing for its eradication will be a partial work, because we look at it from the outside. I think that proposing the process of internalized deconstruction in a conscious way, invites us to remove the conscience of oppression and invites us to liberate ourselves, to recognize that it is necessary to eradicate the naturalized and ingrained racism, to create and recreate pluridimensional thinking as a resource.

¹²⁶ Free translation: A category of Andean peoples' cosmovision that proposes life in plenitude, understood as a magnificent and sublime balance of the spiritual and material, both internal and external to the community, in order to reach the superior.

<p>Que nadie tenga tierra Como tiene traje: Que todos tengan tierra Como tienen el aire.</p> <p>Cogería las guerras de la punta Y no dejaría una en el paisaje Y abriría la tierra para todos Como si fuera el aire.</p> <p>Que el aire no es de nadie, nadie, nadie, Y todos tienen su parcela de aire.</p>	<p>Let no one have land As they have a suit: Let all have land As they have air.</p> <p>I would take the wars from the tip And leave not one on the landscape And open the land for all As if it were the air.</p> <p>That the air belongs to no one, no one, no one, And everyone has their parcel of air.</p>
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Part II: The management of the abject bodies in the city

*Son los anónimos, los nadie, los oscuros, los mal vestidos,
los que de vez en cuando te duelen y luego dejas en frío,
los nunca tenidos en cuenta,
los que no cierran en tu cuenta.
Y aunque no quieras darte cuenta,
siempre regresan como resucitando del abismo,
merodeando en tu conciencia sin esencia,
como ángeles en resistencia¹²⁷.*

Actitud Calle, Los de abajo

On October 22, 2019, I participated in a large march in defense of public higher education and the university's autonomy. A large column of students, professors and administrative staff departed from the University of Costa Rica towards the Presidential House. The government of Carlos Alvarado, like so many other right-wing governments, was threatening the future of public higher education, with a budget cut with devastating effects. In response to this, students occupied several faculties in different university campuses around the country. The atmosphere was tense. We organized in the faculty to support the students in resistance. The students were receiving threats and pressure from the university authorities, and we even had to attend to students from the National University who were gassed and beaten by the police.

Image 50

March in defense of public higher education, October 22, 2019



Source: Karla Richmond (<https://www.ucr.ac.cr/noticias/2019/10/22/multitudinaria-marcha-de-universidades-publicas-en-defensa-de-la-educacion-superior-publica.html>)

¹²⁷ Free translation: They are the anonymous, the nobodies, the dark skinned, the poorly dressed, / the ones you feel sorry for from time to time and then you forget, / the ones who are never taken into account, / the ones that don't fit on your accounts. / And even if you don't want to notice / they always come back as if resurrecting from the abyss, / lurking in your consciousness devoid of essence, / like angels in resistance. Actitud Calle, Los de Abajo

This was the context in which that massive protest took place. I joined an improvised queer/feminist batucada in the street. We played music with anti-capitalist slogans, in defense of public education and autonomy. We advanced a few kilometers and when we reached the outskirts of the Presidential House, we attended the call for support of a group of students and anarchists who were holding a blockade under a bridge, in the ring road that borders San José. I recognized a couple of students at the blockade, but most were strangers to me. We drummed for a while to liven up the atmosphere until fatigue brought silence.

More and more vehicles were arriving and threatening to drive over the barricade. At that moment, I overheard the conversation of two girls next to me. One was telling the other that they needed to light a fire to scare away the drivers who were pushing to get through. She then pointed to an artisanal cardboard bed that an unhoused person had built under the bridge and exclaimed: "Look, there are those blankets from the indigents".

I turned around and looked at them in astonishment. I could not believe what I had just heard. They there were, the students, the anarchists, the living force of the anti-capitalist movement in this country, suggesting to appropriate and set fire to the precarious shelter of a stranger who embodies the worst of miseries, the worst of dispossession and class violence, that same violence that had us in the streets fighting against the neoliberal university model. I felt the blood rush to my head. I felt my face getting very hot. I thought of Fabiola, I thought of David, I thought of so many voices, faces, hands, stories, of all the people who over these weeks had told me about the hunger and cold they live in the streets of San José. I took a deep breath to search for the words that could stop that violent plan, and that could, at the same time, invite them to reflect on the way in which we reproduce violence and oppression without even realizing it. But the second girl was faster than me and replied: "No way girl, that shit must be full of fleas! Gross!".

My heart crumpled. A bucket of hopelessness drenched my existence. I took a breath and dropped the pedagogical intention. I approached them, and with a sad tone I asked them: "What do you want public education for, *compas*? If in the end you are going to reproduce the same dispossession against people who have already been stripped of everything by the system? Those blankets are somebody's home. What is disgusting is class violence and the system that provokes it, not the bodies that suffer it."

I walked away, thinking about how much we have yet to decolonize and dismantle, even among the left. Especially among the left.

This unfortunate episode speaks of how violence is reproduced in the *zone of non-being*, about how power operates in our relations, about how we ourselves serve as accomplices and agents of the interweaving of oppressions and the violence of gore capitalism. This II Part contains reflections along these lines. The following chapters analyze a series of projects that intervene on the bodies of the populations that embody dispossession, impoverishment and hunger in the city. The chapters address repressive and hygienist practices and projects, where vertical power relations are quite evident. But also, these chapters address other situations that are more complex, less transparent, where power

is more diffuse and is disguised as charity, rescue, cure, and inclusion. It is my intention to point out that there is a continuum between these practices, and that although the latter might seem less harmful than the former, they share the same logic, they are nourished by the same systems of oppression, and, thus, they are all inevitably violent.

Chapter 4, Hygienism: aesthetics of the "city for everyone," analyzes a series of policies, practices and projects that revolve around the discursive position of hygienism. The chapter begins with a brief discussion of the emergence of hygienist discourse and its arrival in San José. It then develops a historical reconstruction of trans* collective memory in dialogue with a group of trans women who survived disciplinary power and biopolitical management in San José. The chapter explores how the sanitation policies of the Municipality of San José continue to displace unhoused residents of the city, migrants, street vendors and sex workers on the streets of the city. A second section of this chapter analyzes the discourse and practices developed in the *Chepe se baña* project, a charity and harm reduction project. Pursuing a hygienist normativity, the project works through what they have called a socio-sanitary apparatus, in which they install mobile showers for unhoused people. The project seeks to conduct the actions of this population without them realizing that they are being conducted. The chapter closes with dialogues with people who resist the processes of institutionalization for detoxification, and share their experiences of rehabilitation on the street, and the potential for healing that the street holds for them.

Chapter 5, Hunger, addresses the situation of hunger and poverty in the city, in contrast to some projects venture into the food market, with a discursive position that commodifies Costa Rica's ancestral and urban cultures. The chapter begins by analyzing some figures on the situation of poverty, extreme poverty and hunger in Costa Rica. It continues by analyzing several projects and situations that occurred within the framework of ethnographic observation exercises, illustrating the way in which inequalities materialize in the city. Likewise, the chapter presents the reflections arising from an ethnographic observation exercise carried out in the activity called "The Street Games", a Christian charity event in which volunteers recruit unhoused people and organize them into teams that compete to win a plate of food. The chapter closes by recounting the experience of the La Feria Pinolera project, in which a group of women and trans* people who are refugees or asylum seekers organize themselves to sustain life, in a feminist solidarity economy project that attempts to break with neoliberal normativity.

Chapter 4. Hygienism: aesthetics of the “city for everyone”

*Qué triste se oye la lluvia
en las casas de cartón.
Qué lejos pasa la esperanza
en los techos de cartón.*

Alí Primera, Techos de cartón

Social hygienism had its greatest apogee at the end of the nineteenth century and during the first half of the twentieth century, when states began to pay attention to the conditions in which the population lived, as the possible origin of many of the pathologies that caused epidemics at the time (Quintanas 2011). States needed to sustain life in order to guarantee their labor force. Hygiene became an imperative, and governments adopted with impetus the project of public hygiene.

Thus, at the end of the 19th century, a utopian discourse of progress and hygienism circulated in the capital of the young republic of Costa Rica, as in other Latin American cities. This discourse had a strong impact on the coffee oligarchy and dazzled the "generation of the Olympus", who were committed to promoting liberal reforms to transform the obsolete, slovenly and aesthetically poor architecture of colonial times. However, this rupture should not be read as an anti-colonial gesture, but rather as a continuation of the coloniality that characterizes Costa Rican imaginaries. For example, the opinions of intellectuals and politicians published in 1894 newspapers celebrated the fact that "San José is a cosmopolitan city" and "Costa Rica is a much more civilized country than Nicaragua" (Lobo 1998, 41). With an eye on Europe, a series of interventions was promoted in the city of San José, which sought to emulate foreign metropolises, replicating a model of economic, cultural, moral, aesthetic and scientific development anchored in coloniality.

But what is hygienism and how does it operate? Hygienism is a movement that developed strongly on the European continent. In a study on the impact of hygienist measures on the popular classes, Anna Quintanas (2011) points out that the arrival of hygienism in Spain was late, compared to other states in the region, but when it finally arrived, it entered with force in the discourses of social medicine. Social medicine is a concept that could be misleading. At first glance, it seems to be a fertile field, medicine at the service of the community. However, what hygienism intended was not exactly this. We would say, rather, that it is medicine applied to the population, with the ultimate aim of improving the productivity of the proletariat and the profitability of industries (Quintanas 2011).

With hygienism, statistics once again served power. As Foucault (2009; 2003) explained, the careful study of population statistics served states to seek solutions to problems such as high mortality and morbidity. However, the records that could exist in hospitals and sanatoriums, or in the files of general

practitioners, were not enough. Hygienism broadens its spectrum of surveillance and control to everyday life. It became necessary to scrutinize bodies, but also dwellings, streets, factories, bars, and nightclubs. In addition to bodies and spaces, it was also important to study behaviors, habits, customs, leisure activities, sex-affective bonds, eating habits, clothing. Everything was examined in order to improve the population body-species (Quintanas 2011).

Public hygiene fuels governmentality, putting medical knowledge at the service of the science of government (Mateo Seoane in Quintanas 2011, 275). It is concerned with the health of the individual, but not as a human being, or living being, but as a worker, in terms of profitability. The labor force has its limits, the body clearly delineates them. A worker's illness is not only their individual disease.

As part of a production machinery, a sick, injured or dead worker implies losses for the factory, for the State and for the city. Quintanas (2011) makes an interesting review of hygienist texts from the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century in Spain, in which she shows, for example, how careful calculations and projections of the costs of avoidable death or disease (including so-called social diseases of a moral nature, such as alcoholism, prostitution, etc.), contrasted with the profits generated by a healthy worker, were used to convince governments of implementing hygienistic measures. For instance:

Este valor económico representa lo que cada individuo ha costado a su familia para vivir, desarrollarse e instruirse, pues es un empréstito que se hace al capital social hasta que se llegue a la edad en que el hombre adquiere fuerzas morales y físicas que le posibilitan para ganar su sustento por medio del trabajo y para rembolsar lo que ha gastado¹²⁸ (Ph. Hauser in Quintanas 2011, 277).

To sustain the life of the population was then to sustain the economy of the nation. Nourished by the authority invested by medical knowledge, this current of thought is intrinsically capitalist, but also heteronormative, patriarchal and racist. Quintanas rescues a passage from F. Murillo Palacios, which synthesizes this intertwining with brutal clarity:

La penuria de medios con sus inevitables secuelas de alimentación insuficiente, vivienda insalubre, fatiga prematura y desplazamiento de la mujer y de los hijos, engendran la *enfermedad* en la familia obrera, la *degeneración de la raza* y la *disminución de la capacidad productora colectiva*, lo que, en último término, representa una pérdida cuantiosa del capital nacional en vidas y haciendas¹²⁹ (Quintanas 2011, 277).

¹²⁸ Free translation: This economic value represents what the life, development and education of each individual has cost to their families, since it is a loan that is made to the social capital until they reach the age at which a person acquires the moral and physical strength that enables them to earn their living through work and to reimburse what they have spent.

¹²⁹ Free translation: The shortage of means, with its inevitable consequences of insufficient food, unhealthy housing, premature fatigue and displacement of women and children, engenders illness in the working class

Alongside the "illness of the working-class family", hygienism also fights against "social pathologies" that threaten the health of the population. Within this category, which we might well call "abnormality", we find all those actions, customs or situations that threaten the dominant political, economic and moral order: from alcoholism, smoking and prostitution, to begging, vagrancy, criminality, suicide, to strikes, riots and revolutions (Quintanas 2011, 276).

It is a powerful fusion of medical knowledge with statistical knowledge, that articulates a discourse of knowledge/power, which has been used to convince rulers to invest in the "social question". Adequate hygienist planning even promised to prevent riots:

Méndez Álvaro, por ejemplo, en su obra *De la actividad humana en sus relaciones con la salud y el Gobierno de los pueblos*, indica al gobierno que, en los principios de la higiene, puede hallar soluciones, no sólo para mejorar el nivel de salud de la población, sino también para luchar contra los desórdenes sociales y las revueltas políticas, así como fórmulas para evitar el retraso económico del país. A los patronos, por su parte, se les intenta mostrar que la aplicación de las medidas de higiene pública provocaría un aumento en el rendimiento y la productividad de los trabajadores¹³⁰ (Quintanas 2011, 275).

Medicine infiltrated the field of governmentality. The social physician could provide a kind of knowledge that was alien to politicians, diplomats and legislators, a versatile knowledge, useful for the discipline and for biopower: knowledge about the body, about health and disease in individuals and in the population.

Sevilla (2010) emphasizes the role of medicine in social hygienism. Taking up Foucault, Sevilla points out that biopolitics plays the role of a hinge between the body of the individual (body-as-organism) and the body of the population (body-as-species). Medicine, Quintanas adds, also plays an important role in the development of subjectivation processes through which we recognize and produce ourselves as subjects (Quintanas 2011, 273).

Hygienism promises to create the material, spatial, biological and behavioral conditions to safeguard health and thus maximize production. Appliances, spaces, venues, bodies, behaviors, passions, instincts, everything was in the sights of hygienism (Quintanas 2011, 276).

Para el higienismo, luchar contra la prostitución, el juego, los vicios asociados a las tabernas, la promiscuidad dentro de las relaciones familiares, o fomentar el orden, la

family, the degeneration of the race and the decrease of the collective productive capacity, which, in the end, represents a substantial loss of national capital in lives and property.

¹³⁰ Free translation: Méndez Álvaro, for example, in his work *De la actividad humana en sus relaciones con la salud y el Gobierno de los pueblos*, indicates to the government that, in the principles of hygiene, solutions can be found, not only to improve the level of health of the population, but also to fight against social disorders and political revolts, as well as formulas to avoid the economic backwardness of the country. Employers, on the other hand, are being shown that the application of public hygiene measures would lead to an increase in the performance and productivity of the workers.

disciplina, la limpieza, los hábitos saludables, y el ahorro, servía tanto para mejorar la salud y el bienestar de la población, como para aumentar la productividad económica y asentar el orden público¹³¹ (Quintanas 2011, 276).

In this line, in Costa Rica as in many other countries, a Law against Vagrancy, Mendicity and Abandonment, was enforced from 1864 until the end of the twentieth century. As we will see, for several decades this law was used to justify the repression, detention and confinement of trans women in the streets of San José.

Sevilla (2010) argues that this set of urban policies of industrial capitalism have fulfilled the objective of promoting the construction of a regime of governmentality, which manages labor forces. This governmentality operates by ensuring the inscription of citizens in the parameters of the fields of government, but also, Sevilla insists, through the formation of a new habitat and a new way of inhabiting in which new uses and conceptions of space and the city were written into the social body of labor. This includes urban planning techniques conceived from an economic perspective, such as the promotion of massive urbanization operations, urban regeneration programs in "depressed" areas or in areas of "opportunity" such as historical centers (45).

It should be noted that the macro perspective offered by hygienism does not cancel the individualistic conception that attributes individual responsibility to workers for the causes of the illnesses that afflict them. Hygienism analyzes the effects of diseases when they spread in large numbers over a mass of individuals. To improve the conditions of the social body, it was necessary to act on individual bodies and also on their actions, seeking that they themselves adopt the behaviors that will keep them away from disease and healthy.

This reflects the strong moral component that accompanies medical knowledge in hygienism. In the words of Sevilla, this model of urban planning sought to integrate in the cities processes of social reproduction, aspects related to existence and daily life, the production and care of the labor force, the codes of consumption and leisure, the processes of socialization, communication and mediation, the politics of identity, the production of memory and collective imaginaries, etc. (Sevilla 2010, 43).

Hygienist interventions are not only aesthetic or spatial. Urban planning is linked to a system of values that sustains the capitalist mode of production. The ordering of the city goes hand in hand with the ordering of bodies, of their actions and passions, of a civic morality that produces the citizens as a subject.

¹³¹ Free translation: For hygienism, combating prostitution, gambling, the vices associated with taverns, promiscuity within family relationships, or promoting order, discipline, cleanliness, healthy habits, and thrift, served both to improve the health and well-being of the population, and to increase economic productivity and establish public order.

Health as a duty entails a series of practices to be carried out and others to be avoided. Hygiene as a source of values and standards of conduct seeks to achieve a perfect balance between health, order, wealth and morality. It is a power that pursues the normalization of the population, although it also makes use of disciplinary technologies to impose the norm on the body. In this sense, as Quintanas (2011) states, public hygiene cannot be separated from politics and economics, but neither from a morality, which sought harmony between physical and moral functions (Quintanas 2011, 275).

M. Iglesias Carral, que fue inspector provincial de Sanidad, en *El médico social* (1916), habla de la tarea del médico social como de «una obra de catequesis», que tendría como principal objetivo predicar a la población sobre «el concepto firme de su *deber sanitario*»¹³² (Quintanas 2011, 279)

The rationality of hygienism fascinated the "generation of the Olympus". It was the large-scale deployment of order for progress. Consequently, at the end of the 19th century, the oligarchy encouraged the intervention of the State to promote the economic and commercial development of San José, based on the liberation of communal property towards individual autonomy. As noted by architect Roberto Villalobos (2014), this implied the ideological supremacy of individualism, and social stratification as a fundamental component in a hierarchical and well-ordered society.

At the spatial level, hygienism framed an intense formal and moral planning of the city of San José. In 1887, the so-called Ley de Ensanches (Expansion Law) was enacted, which sought to configure and align the city, following a process of territorial designation, which consisted of grouping populations in specific territories according to their social class. Between 1890 and 1930 important transformations were made in the urban space. The development of this expansion and urban planning projects were in the hands of doctors, engineers and politicians (mostly trained in the European metropolises they admired greatly), who took into account factors such as soil quality to determine which "sector" to locate in each corner of the capital.

To the north, where the land was firmer and had better topographic conditions, the necessary infrastructure was built for the comfortable living of national and foreign elites that the city wanted to attract (Villalobos, 2014). Some of these neighborhoods still preserve their names associated with the family names of the elites, as is the case of Amón and Escalante, which are part of the object of study of this thesis. Costa Rica's National Theater was also built during this period. Inspired by the Paris Opera, it is considered to be the most important and refined historical building in the capital. To the south of the city, the swampy lands were designated for the popular classes, the impoverished citizens and the working people. In these neighborhoods, Villalobos (2014) states, the "civilizing"

¹³² M. Iglesias Carral, who was provincial health inspector, in *El médico social* (1916), speaks of the task of the social doctor as "a work of catechesis", whose main objective is to preach to the population about "the importance of their sanitary duty".

project did not arrive. Public investment in infrastructure was minimal, and their inhabitants had to organize to demand basic services such as drinking water, plumbing, sewers and lighting. This in a city that (wrongly) takes pride in being the third city in the world and the first in Ibero-America to have electricity.¹³³

This segregation of the city should not only be understood as a rational and technical response to the city's development intentions, but also as a conscious goal of cultural segregation (Villalobos 2014, 107), a class project that gave the best lands to the rich and ensured their neighborhoods free of subhuman beings.

In terms of space, this segregation lasted for several decades. As the city grew, the central area was depopulated to make way for shops, institutions, private clinics and offices. The southern neighborhoods expanded further south, forming an extensive periphery, densely populated by working-class people. By the end of the 20th century, in the western and eastern peripheries of the city, neighborhoods for the wealthy classes were developed, with gated communities and shopping malls, where interactions are very different from those of downtown San José (M. del C. Araya 2010). Today we can still observe large Victorian-style homes and beautiful buildings in the northern neighborhoods of the central area that contrast with the small and humble homes in the southern areas. However, perhaps the most visible traces of hygienism are not found in these spaces, but in the relationships between the people who inhabit them.

Sevilla (2010) proposes to take the reproduction of social relations as a privileged node for reflection, insofar as they are the point of application of the biopolitics of urban planning. In a way, this is what I intend to do in this section. Rather than studying transformations in space, which have been critically analyzed by architects (Villalobos 2014), anthropologists (Araya 2010) and geographers (Jiménez 2017), I am interested in exploring the impacts of hygienist policies in dialogue with people who have suffered and resisted them. From their embodied perspective, they tell us about practices of violence and exclusion that have been implemented for decades in San José, in the name of the welfare of the population.

¹³³ In 1884, 25 light bulbs were illuminated on the streets of San José for the first time. It has been repeated ad nauseam that San José was the third city in the world to have public lighting, surpassed only by Paris and New York. This fact has permeated as a narrative of patriotic pride in the country. The last time I heard it was from the mayor of San José, Johnny Araya, who included this information in his speech on September 15, 2021, during the commemoration of 200 years of independence. The truth is that San José was not the 3rd city in the world to have public lighting, nor the first in Ibero-America (Santiago de Chile, for example, inaugurated public lighting in 1883) (Historia de Costa Rica 2021). However, we continue to proudly repeat this narrative that puts us on a par with Paris.

Thus, this chapter begins with a collective effort to historicize the violent disciplinary and biopolitical practices that trans women in San José have survived over the past 50 years. This history is analyzed in light of the hygienist policies that have been prevalent during Johnny Araya's long tenure as mayor and executive of San José. Next, based on discourse analysis and ethnographic observation, I discuss the hygienist project of greatest growth and importance in contemporary San José: *Chepe se baña*. Finally, in dialogue with two women who live in San José, I reflect on the possibilities of the city as a space for healing.

Optimistically, Sevilla (2010) proposes the possibility of applying the biopolitics of urban planning not for control, discipline and regulation of the population, but in emancipation. This chapter does not achieve that, as urban planning is not my field. However, it does attempt some dialogues that invite us to think the city from counter-hegemonic positions, and this, hopefully, could contribute in some way to these emancipatory projects.

4.1. History of a war in the capital of peace

In dialogue with the narratives of a group of trans women, I would like to trace the vestiges of hygienism in the city. Although hygienism had its heyday in the late nineteenth century, more than a century later it continues to shape everyday life in San José. Using the technique of discontinuous narratives, I seek to make a patchwork that sketches the disciplinary technologies of the 1970s, the biopolitical turn that occurs in the late 1980s, and the role played by Mayor Johnny Araya in the consolidation of sophisticated biopolitical practices in the city. This case does not cover the totality of the hygienist practices of our times, but I believe it provides important elements that allow us to see how disciplinary power and biopower overlap in the control and normalization of bodies in the city.

The testimonies for this section were collected in 2017, in the context of my master's research project (Fournier 2017). That study intended a process of collective and subjective historicization, susceptible to give rise to the memory, affects and meanings that the experiences of violence, resistance and the affirmation of life have on this community. The participants allowed me to record their conversations over coffee afternoons. We met at the house of Transvida, a grassroots organization of and for trans women, that has done extraordinary community work, and has led important struggles for the rights of transgender people in the country. Transvida has become a home for trans women, a house with open doors where they can come for help, companionship, rest or coffee. In that space, for a good part of 2017 we met every Friday with a group of older trans women. They consented to the use of the contents for this thesis and further work, on the condition that I acknowledge their names, which they have struggled so hard to defend. They insisted on the importance of this story being told by those who were the protagonists. That is why I use their names in the transcriptions, except for when

addressing issues that could put their integrity at risk. In those cases, which we analyzed together, we agreed that I simply refer to them as women.

Most of the trans women who participated in the construction of this story already exceed the life expectancy of their people. The oldest was 64 years old at the time we engaged in these dialogues. In late 2021 I met her again at a feminist demonstration in San José. She was still very active. Her friends, a few years younger than her, share with horror the memory of the repression they suffered when they began to "dress up" in the 1970s. They say it was probably the same in the 1960s, but no one survives to tell the tale. The story of their sisters adds to the list of absences that this society owes them, and we can only name them to honor their legacy and their resistance: Lucrecia, Petunia, Mireya, Carlos Mario, David, Patricia from Golfito, the other Patricia, Tania, Toro Mágico, Violeta, Rita, Rebeca, Teresa, Tiffany, Mari Trini, Berta, Coqui, Loco Hugo, Peggy, Brigit, Pollo, Castelán, China, Mariliz, Linda Carter, July, Bárbara, Samantha, Estela, Marcela, and all the others who lived and were left to die off the record.

All the participants engaged in sex work in their youth. Some of them even came to enjoy comfortable material conditions, but all of them have at some point experienced the violence of dispossession and precariousness, as well as imprisonment. Currently, several of them are unhoused residents of the city, or live in temporary shelters. Others rotate around the city, failing to find a room for rent where they can live in peace. Several of them are migrants, some in irregular status. For this reason, some of them are also racialized. Far from equal marriage or even changing their names, their main concern today is subsistence, as they cannot find a way to enter the labor market. Despite all these oppressions that are imbricated in their bodies, they smile and laugh all the time. They share joys, memories and affections around a cup of coffee. For them, memory is a personal and collective victory, the triumph of their resistance that, despite so much violence, has not been taken away from them.

The trans women who participated in these dialogues often refer to themselves as "war survivors". They laughingly introduce themselves with phrases like: "she is my friend, also a war veteran". This metaphor that they manage to transform into humor is actually quite close to reality. As we will see, they have survived some of the worst forms of persecution, criminalization, torture and violence that the city of San José has seen. The joy they sustain despite cruelty is the joy of survival.

4.1.1. Criminalization

The disciplinary apparatus that seeks the normalization of the bodies and the docility of the subjectivities of trans women in the city of San José, found in the figure of the prison an effective technology to exercise control. The circulation between the street and the prison marked the daily life

of these undisciplined people. But, given that transgenderism or transvestism were not considered crimes under the Costa Rican law in the 20th century, how is it that arrests became a routine procedure? Even at that time, when the dissuasive criminological model dominated, and inside the prisons penitence was confused with justice, in order to lock up trans women it was first necessary to make their existence a motive for detention.

Discipline is not the law, but it makes use of it. In the city of San José, trans women were criminalized using a hygienist law. The authorities relied on the Law against Vagrancy, Mendicity and Abandonment (Ley contra la Vagancia, la Mendicidad y el Abandono), which stipulated, among other things:

Artículo 2º.- Incurrirán en falta de vagancia:

- Las personas que teniendo aptitud para trabajar en ocupaciones útiles y compatibles con su edad, sexo, estado y condición y careciendo de medios lícitos conocidos para atender a su subsistencia, no lo hicieren;
- Quienes se encuentren habitualmente en horas laborales en bares, cantinas, lugares de juego o de prostitución o en centros de perversión, y que no tengan ocupación conocida;
- Las mujeres que escandalicen con su conducta inmoral; que habitualmente se encuentren en centros de juego o de prostitución, tabernas y otros sitios similares; o que en forma regular practiquen malas costumbres en parajes sospechosos (Ley No. 3550, 1965)¹³⁴.

The definitions of this law clearly illustrate what Quintanas (2011) notes, when she concludes that hygienist discourses placed special emphasis on shaping women's behavior to prevent them from deviating from the expected path of reproductive work. Using this article, female sex workers in the city faced raids and persecution for their "immoral behaviors" and "bad habits". However, in the case of trans women, they were not even recognized as women, so they were detained on the basis of the first two paragraphs. From this hygienist morality, they were read as non-men, as failure of masculinity, as abnormal. It is a morality that ties several failed mandates to their existence: work (since their bodies are assigned as men of productive age who are not in the formal labor market), family (since they do not produce children for the system, they do not contribute to the reproduction of the proletariat), consumption (their cash flow and consumption capacity was usually scarce), religion (since their mere existence goes against the clerical heteropatriarchal morality). In short,

¹³⁴ Free translation: Article 2º.- They shall incur in vagrancy offenses:

- Persons who, having the aptitude to work in useful occupations compatible with their age, sex, state and condition, and lacking known lawful means to provide for their subsistence, do not do so;
- Those who are habitually found during working hours in bars, taverns, places of gambling or prostitution or in centers of perversion, and who have no known occupation;
- Women who scandalize by their immoral conduct; who are habitually found in gambling or prostitution centers, taverns and other similar places; or who regularly practice bad habits in suspicious places.

under these conditions, these trans women embodied several contradictions with the imaginaries about the Costa Rican being.

It is in this context that we must read the punishments they faced. In countries such as Franco's Spain, the law prohibiting vagrancy explicitly targeted homosexuals and "sexual deviants". In Costa Rica, there was no specific clause for trans people at the time, but it was applied with the same ferocity. Being a trans woman was not officially a crime, because this identity was not recognized as such. But being a trans woman was criminalized, so they could not be seen in broad daylight without being repressed by the authorities.

María Antonieta: Pasa que en esa época nos agarraban los policías y nos daban duro.

Karina: Fue una época muy terrible. Porque era que vos llegabas a una esquina y no podías andar vestimenta de mujer.

Lupe: 70, por ahí, sí. Esas redadas. A veces se bajaba uno del bus ahí en la Coca Cola y no lo dejaban a uno ni 100 metros y ¡tan! le daban la pupa ya. Y ¡pum! Pa detención, y esa hediondez ahí.

Mar: ¿Y se las cargaban por estar vestidas?

Kassandra: Por todo: sodomía, escandalosas, irrespeto a la autoridad, faltas a la moral.

Mar: Ellos se inventaban lo que fuera...

Lupe: Cualquier cosa le ponían a uno¹³⁵.

They were arrested, searched, and locked up. Sometimes for one night, sometimes for several days, sometimes for months. Since they were not recognized as women, they were prosecuted as men. Some were teenagers, others had migrated to San José from different regions of the country or from other countries in the region. None had a formal job, because no one wanted to have a trans woman in their payroll. Nor were they in school, they had been expelled very early, when their feminine identity could no longer be hidden. Most of them were engaged in sex work, and although at that time they worked primarily in pensions and not on the street, they were also reprimanded for these activities.

The criminalization of trans women in Costa Rica was simultaneously sustained in the discursive operations of what has been called primary and secondary criminalization (Paredes 2015). In primary

¹³⁵ Free translation: **María Antonieta:** At that time the police grabbed us and gave us a hard time.

Karina: It was a horrible time. Because you went to the street and you couldn't walk around in women's clothes.

Lupe: 70s, around that time, yes. Those raids! Sometimes you would get off the bus there at the Coca Cola bus stop and they wouldn't let you walk one block and bam! To the cell, and that stench there...

Mar: And they would arrest you for being dressed as women?

Kassandra: For anything: sodomy, scandal, disrespect for authority, moral offenses.

Mar: They would make up anything then...

Lupe: They would put anything on you...

criminalization, explains Flor María Paredes, the State defines the behaviors it codifies as dangerous and the repressive responses to these, for example: the criminalization of vagrancy, and the surveillance and repressive response of the police force and the justice system. Secondary criminalization crystallizes the criminal act in the subjects. Enforcing stereotypes, those who exercise authority catalog the subjects of certain groups considered to be a threat, thus determining who will be the target of such criminalization (Paredes 2015, 72). In other words, this form of criminalization turns its vigilant gaze not to the conducts, but to those subjects that the norm fails to discipline.

As detailed by Paredes (2015), secondary criminalization operates through two movements: a discursive one, which establishes meanings and stereotypes about certain groups. Often reinforced by mass media, this discursive movement provokes fear towards certain groups, and promotes attitudes of rejection and aversion. The second movement operates at the level of judicialization, where the State makes use of criminal policy regulations to mobilize the police and judicial system towards persecution and imprisonment. This is the form of criminalization that we find in the testimonies of the participants. We do not know if there was an explicit order to detain trans women. Nor do we know when this process of stigmatization began or who was responsible for driving it. But the participants who survived these times recognize the moral judgment that was deposited on their bodies.

Kasandra: Tirarse a un jardín, este tirarse a un techo. Sabe qué, perrito, yo tuve que meterme en un basurero. [risas] Porque venía la patrulla y no tenía oportunidad de hacer así, menos que iba en minifalda. Veo perro lo último, la patrulla iba y venía porque sabía que yo no me podía haber desaparecido así. Entonces hicieron un tiro como que se fueron. Y yo me quedé un ratito esperando así, y después como tenía que empezar a mover así el tarro, y cuando se volcó vengo así y ¡pum! Veo la patrulla así...¹³⁶

Kasandra's sad story illustrates the level of fear they experienced on the streets, which led her to throw herself into a dumpster in order to avoid the arrest. Throwing herself into a dumpster is a strong metaphor of the message that the authorities so harshly gave them: garbage, that is what their existence was reduced to. The stories of the violence they suffered in the prisons explain why Kasandra preferred to sink into the garbage rather than let herself be arrested. It started with the detention:

Karina: Y te tiraban... Te cerraban varias horas... En el cajón. Y echaban baldes de agua si se ponían de malas.

¹³⁶ Free translation: Kasandra: Throwing yourself in a garden, throwing yourself over a roof. You know, Perro, I had to get into a dumpster once. [laughs] Because the cops were coming and I didn't have the chance to do leave, and I was wearing a miniskirt. The police car drove in circles because they knew that I could not have disappeared like that. So they pretended to leave. And I stayed a little while waiting like that, and then as I started to move the trashcan, it fell down and bang! I see the police car in my face...

María Antonieta: ... Nos tiraban orines, miados.

Karen: Hasta nos daban "paseos". Paseos por el parque donde está la biblioteca que tiene una gran pendiente. Y se venían desde arriba como la montaña rusa. Y todas pegábamos en el techo del cajón, para golpearlos, para agredirnos.

Karina: Sí, muy duro¹³⁷.

Next came the incarceration. Justified by the Law against Vagrancy, Mendicancy and Abandonment, they imposed fines that they had to pay to buy their freedom. If they were unable or unwilling to pay, they were taken to serve the equivalent of the bail in days in a penitentiary. Upon entering the prison, they were stripped of any item that might affirm their female identity. Their heads were shaved, they were dressed in stinky uniforms, full of fleas and lice. They suffered sexual abuse and physical torture at the hands of prison guards.

The exercise of discipline presupposes a mechanism that coerces by means of observation; an apparatus in which the techniques that make it possible to see induce effects of power, and in which, conversely, the means of coercion make those on whom they are applied clearly visible (Foucault 1995, 170–71)

From the street to the court, from the court to the penitentiary, from the penitentiary to the street and back again. This cycle marked the rhythm of their lives.

Kasandra: Y hubo un tiempo en que ya nos esperaban saliendo de la corte.

Mar: O sea, ¿las soltaban y se las volvían a cargar?

Lorna: Exactamente¹³⁸.

In the Costa Rica of the 1970s, criminalization was so naturalized that although the war survivors considered it unjust and arbitrary, they thought of it as something inevitable, as an inescapable punishment that would forever punish the feminized bodies they dared to inhabit. Today, however, they are taking a critical stance and reflecting:

Kasandra: Las cosas que teníamos que pasar, no un rato, no un día... Jessica no me deja mentir, salir 4 o 5 días seguidos de la Corte, ¿verdad? Que ni siquiera dejarnos ir a la casa.

Karen: Con hambre, con frío, sucias...

Kasandra: Con la misma ropa, mojadas.

¹³⁷ Free translation: **Karina:** And they would throw you... They would lock you for several hours... In the police truck. And they would throw buckets of water if they got angry.

María Antonieta: ... They would throw urine on us, piss on us.

Karen: They even gave us "trips". Trips by that park where the library is, which has a steep slope. And they would drive down from the top like a roller coaster. And we would all hit the roof of the truck. To hit us, to attack us!

Karina: Yes, very hard!

¹³⁸ Free translation: **Kasandra:** And there was a time when they were already waiting for us outside the court.

Mar: So, they would release you and then detain you again?

Lorna: Exactly.

Lorna: Según ellos, para ellos eso era inmoral, era anti... ético, ¿no? No, pero para la información de ustedes: yo tengo en la Corte 139 pasadas. ¿Creen ustedes que eso tiene sentido? Era en base a esos partes infundados que hacían ellos. Que faltas a la moral, vagancia...¹³⁹

4.1.2. Discipline: punishment and incarceration

The arrests were just the beginning of the chain of violence that characterized this era of criminalization of trans existence. Humiliation as punishment has been since then an instrument for domination. Detentions operated as a technology of dehumanization in the terms of Grosfoguel's (2012) scheme of the *zones of being and non-being*:

Jessica: Lo dejaban botado allá por el culo del mundo.

Karen: ¡Horrible!

Kassandra: ¡A Coronado [una montaña al norte de San José] nos llevaban! (...) Una detención exclusiva para nosotras. (...) Yo me acuerdo que pasaban los carros viejos. Y nos cargaban, nos llevaban a Coronado digamos a las 9 de la noche y nos soltaban a las 2 de la mañana, 3 de la mañana.

Natalia: Se las llevaban a chancheras en Coronado. A las chancheras las llevaban y las tiraban ahí. Las desnudaban y las mojaban con barro. Y después las tiraban a las 6 de la mañana. Burlada y todo, y cuando se montaban en los buses: aquellos monstruos! Porque todas llenas de barro y todo. ¡Uy no, qué fuerte!¹⁴⁰

When they recall these episodes, their voices have the color of horror and indignation. Dehumanization and objectification, the discipline of the population by the means of pain and humiliation over this monstrous bodies. Farneda states: "El monstruo no es aquello que sale de la

¹³⁹ Free translation: **Kassandra:** The things we had to go through, not for a moment, not for a day... Jessica won't let me lie, going to court 4 or 5 days in a row, right? They wouldn't even let us go home.

Karen: Hungry, cold, dirty...

Kassandra: In the same clothes, wet.

Lorna: According to them, for them that was immoral, it was anti... ethical, right? For your information: I have been in the Court 139 times. Do you think that makes sense? It was based on these unfounded reports that they made. Immoral conduct, vagrancy...

¹⁴⁰ Free translation: **Jessica:** They just dumped us out there in the middle of nowhere.

Karen: Horrible!

Kassandra: They would us to Coronado! [a mountain in the north of San José] (...) An exclusive detention for us. (...) I remember the old cars passing by. And they would load us up, they would take us to Coronado at, let's say, 9 o'clock at night and they would release us at 2 in the morning, 3 in the morning.

Natalia: They would take them to pigsties in Coronado. They would take them to the pigsties and throw them there. They stripped them naked and soaked them with mud. And then they would throw them out at 6 in the morning. Mocked and everything, and when they got on the buses: those monsters! Because they were all full of mud and everything. Oh no, so horrible!

norma, sino aquello que expone a la norma como ficción no solo represiva sino productiva, en términos de Foucault¹⁴¹ (2012, 123).

Discipline nests in the body, producing a relation of subjection in which the subject is produced:

the subject-function of disciplinary power is applied and brought to bear on the body, on its actions, place, movements, strength, the moments of its life, and its discourses, on all of this. Discipline is that technique of power by which the subject-function is exactly superimposed and fastened on the somatic singularity... Disciplinary power is individualizing because it fastens the subject-function to the somatic singularity by means of a system of supervision-writing, or by a system of pangraphic panopticism, which behind the somatic singularity projects, as its extension or as its beginning, a core of virtualities, a psyche, and which further establishes the norm as the principle of division and normalization, as the universal prescription for all individuals constituted in this way (Foucault 2006, 55)

Foucault (1995) describes the function of punishment as an exercise. Disciplinary punishment is essentially corrective (179), “it is not so much the vengeance of an outraged law as its repetition, its reduplicated insistence” (180). In a regime of disciplinary power, the art of punishing, says Foucault,

is aimed neither at expiation, nor even precisely at repression... it traces the limit that will define difference in relation to all other differences, the external frontier of the abnormal (the 'shameful' class of the École Militaire). The perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it normalizes (Foucault 1995, 182–83)

The city is not a confinement, but punishment operates in a similar way as it did in the disciplinary institutions described by Foucault. Punishment seeks to discipline that body, yes, but more than that it seeks to communicate to the rest of society that this will be the fate of anyone who dares to swim against the current. Punishment is not a criminal sentence; it is a pedagogy. To punish an action with cruelty seeks to prevent its repetition.

Morality functions as an arbitrary normative system. While the hygienist laws persecuted sex workers on the streets, inside the prison these same women were forcibly prostituted by the guards who served as pimps.

Mujer 5: A mí me compraron por 50 colones, el Negro Chita en la Peni [Penitenciaría Central].

Mujer 3: A mí también.

Mar: ¿Cómo? ¿Cómo?

Mujer 3: 50 colones, pa rajala.

¹⁴¹ Free translation: The monster is not that which deviates from the norm, but that which exposes the norm as a fiction not only repressive but also productive, in Foucault's terms.

Mujer 5: Es que, cuando uno llegaba a la Peni, los maleantes de ahí nos compraban. Entonces el Negro Chita pagó 50 colones por mí.

Mar: ¿Pero a quién se los pagó? ¿A usted?

Mujer 5: Al guarda.

Mar: ¡Al guarda! O sea, el guarda la vendía como si usted fuera un chunche. ¿Así?

Mujer 5: Entoes, el Negro Chita... yo estuve presa 3 días y los 3 días fueron 3 veces diarias que él...¹⁴²

50 colones (about 0.10 €) was not even half of what a trans sex worker charged a client for a service in those days. 50 colones for that body, that life. In prison, women were trafficked at a miserable price.

Punishment, in its pedagogical function, embodies strong expressions of patriarchal cruelty. The all-seeing eye of the panopticon appeared to be conveniently blind to the abuses suffered by trans women. Hygienist morality seemed to be more disgusted by ambiguous bodies than by the sexual abuse of a trans girl:

Los policías nos violaban. Nos agarraban y nos secuestraban, nos tiraban orines, miados, allá en los calabozos... Sí me llevaron a la Peni. Tenía 13 primaveras. Y me llevaron ahí a la Peni y en la Peni estaban los llamados, Hijos del Diablo. Hicieron fila india donde mí¹⁴³.

Who would think of taking a 13-year-old girl to the Central Penitentiary, where members of one of the most feared gangs of the time were held? The Costa Rican authorities, for whom this feminized body was not a woman's body. I rephrase the question: Who would think of taking a 13-year-old person to the Central Penitentiary, where some of members of one of the most feared gangs of those times were held? To the Costa Rican authorities, for whom that feminized body did not reach the status of humanity (Fournier, 2015).

A disciplinary regime is not essentially violent, although violence may be one of its predilected instruments. In a relationship of power, Foucault (1982) points out, violence is not in itself an end.

¹⁴²Free translation: Woman 5: They bought me for 50 colones, Negro Chita at the Peni [Central Penitentiary].

Woman 3: Me too.

Mar: What? What?

Woman 3: 50 colones, to tear you up.

Woman 5: Well, when we arrived at the Peni, the gangsters inside bought us. Then Negro Chita paid 50 colones for me.

Mar: But who did he pay to? You?

Woman 5: The guard.

Mar: The guard! So, the guard sold you as if you were a object. Just like that?

Woman 5: Yes, Negro Chita... I was in jail for 3 days and those 3 days were 3 times a day that he...

¹⁴³ Free translation: The police raped us. They grabbed us and kidnapped us, threw urine on us, pissed on us, there in the cells... They did take me to the Peni. I was 13 years old. And they took me there to the Peni and in the Peni were incarcerated the so-called Sons of the Devil [a criminal organization known for its cruelty]. They lined up to abuse me.

Violence is just another technology within the apparatus that seeks normalization. In this sense, the violence that the participants survived should not be understood as the individual expression of the abuse or hatred of the perpetrators (although we can imagine that it was in itself a source of *jouissance* for them). Nor should it be understood as a mechanical process of law enforcement and penitence. The violence, the punishment, the beatings, the humiliation that was deployed on the bodies of trans women was an instrument of normalization, whose objective was not the expiation of fault, but a kind of pedagogy. A pedagogy for the body and a pedagogy for city.

Decolonial feminist Rita Laura Segato (2016) introduces the concept of pedagogy of cruelty to reflect about the expressive function that violence against women serves for the perpetration of domination. In this sense, she identifies two dimensions of violence:

Toda violencia tiene una dimensión instrumental y otra expresiva. En la violación, toda violación, no es una anomalía de un sujeto solitario, es un mensaje de poder y apropiación pronunciado en sociedad. La finalidad de esa crueldad no es instrumental. Esos cuerpos vulnerables en el nuevo escenario bélico no están siendo forzados para la entrega de un servicio, sino que hay una estrategia dirigida a algo mucho más central, una pedagogía de la crueldad en torno a la cual gravita todo el edificio del poder¹⁴⁴ (Segato 2016, 79).

The expressive function of violence goes beyond punishment or revenge; it is also an exercise in communication. Segato (2010) proposes to read the expressive dimension of violence against women on both a vertical and horizontal axis. On the vertical axis, the aggressor speaks from a position of domination, he aims to discipline all women. On a horizontal plane, the aggressor speaks to his peers, seeks to demonstrate his power and reinforce domination through the violation of the women's bodies. Violence then becomes a visible and tangible expression of the lethal power of colonial, capitalist and racist masculinity.

The marks left by violence, the traces of brutality against abnormal or undisciplined bodies, give a message that says to society (in this case, particularly to trans women): this is what will happen to those who break the norm. This is what authors such as Radford and Russel (1992) have pointed out as the implicit statement that a femicide expresses for all women: "Step out of the norm and this can cost you your life".

¹⁴⁴ Free translation: All violence has an instrumental and an expressive dimension. In rape, all rape, is not an anomaly of a solitary subject, it is a message of power and appropriation pronounced in society. The purpose of this cruelty is not instrumental. These vulnerable bodies in the new war scenario are not being forced for the delivery of a service, but there is a strategy aimed at something much more central, a pedagogy of cruelty around which gravitates the whole edifice of power.

In this vein, Costa Rican sociologist and feminist researcher Montserrat Sagot (2013) points out the role played by the expressive dimension of violence for the domination of women, in the scenarios of femicide that she identifies as part of a gender necropolitics:

Por medio de esta política sexual letal se busca controlar a las mujeres que interiorizarán la amenaza y el mensaje de la dominación. De esta forma, se le pone límites a su movilidad, a su tranquilidad y a su conducta, tanto en la esfera pública como en la privada. El femicidio representa la expresión última de la masculinidad utilizada como poder, dominio y control sobre la vida de las mujeres¹⁴⁵ (Sagot 2013, 5).

Along these lines, sociologist and feminist researcher Mariana R. Mora (2022) analyzes the way in which cases of femicide and impunity in Costa Rica provoke feelings of fear and insecurity in women. Fear and insecurity have direct effects on women's lives, restricting their mobility, their field of action, their relationships, their practices, in short, limiting their freedoms. Mora (2014) has also developed research with cisgender women who exercise as sex workers in the Red-light district of San José. In this case, as is the case for trans women, the violence faced by sex workers in the streets (often at the hands of police officers), configures for them geographies of fear that restrict their ways of inhabiting the city (78). Furthermore, Rojas concludes that the places considered unsafe by sex workers are marked by death, poverty, exclusion and marginalization, where insecurity and violence severely deteriorate the urban coexistence perceived and practiced by women.

The survivors recount with sorrow that some suffered the worst fate and had their lives taken away from them in prison. Complicity or negligence, either way, they died under the guardianship of the authorities. Others were killed in the streets or died as a result of medical procedures performed with toxic materials in their bodies. This violence was perpetrated with total impunity. We could say that trans women embodied the *bare life*. Violence against trans women was not only unpunished, but also unpunishable.

...the double exclusion into which he is taken and the violence to which he finds himself exposed. This violence - the unsanctionable killing that, in his case, anyone may commit - is classifiable neither as sacrifice nor as homicide, neither as the execution of a condemnation to death nor as sacrilege (Agamben 1998, 82).

The tangled knot of the imbrication of oppressions tightly squeezes the bodies of trans women. For the morality police, their first crime is their gender, their proudly inhabited femininity, and their rejection of the mandate of virility that signifies an affront to fragile hegemonic masculinity. Their

¹⁴⁵ Free translation: This lethal sexual policy seeks to control women who will internalize the threat and the message of domination. In this way, limits are placed on their mobility, their tranquility, and their conduct, both in the public and private spheres. Femicide represents the ultimate expression of masculinity used as power, domination, and control over the lives of women.

second crime is poverty. Their class condition marked them undesirable beings. Hygienism insists on instructing their bodies, but the disciplinary exercise has a limit. There comes a point at which the body that has resisted so strongly to be disciplined is pushed to the edge until it falls into an abyss, ceases to be subjected, ceases to be a subject. There, when the abnormal are no longer considered human, they become the *homo sacer* described by Agamben, a killable body. They are no longer confronted with a power relationship, but with pure violence and destruction. The blood of their trans sisters stained the sidewalks of the city, the cells, the doctor's offices. They were killed or pushed to death without any consequences.

Discipline prescribes normalization through exercise, where adherence to the norm is rewarded. It is not necessarily a totalitarian regime, but rather one that trains subjects. It monitors, classifies and hierarchizes them, aggressively singling out those who are abnormal. The testimonies of the survivors of the 1970s speak precisely of this operation: of the way in which their very existence was pointed out as abnormal, and therefore, they were subjected to punishment and criminalization. Hygienist morality surveyed the streets of San José. Their bodies were subjected to strict controls, and they experienced all kinds of abuses, all in the name of order, public health and decency.

The stories of re-existence of this community, from the 1970s to the present, show that discipline continues to be an absolutely ubiquitous and brutal form of social control. The effects of the violence that the war survivors recount do not only operate on an individual and personal level. Their testimonies reflect the pedagogical dimension pointed out by Segato (2010). On a vertical axis, the violence seeks to discipline all trans women, and on a horizontal plane seeks to reinforce domination through the violation of these bodies, which becomes a visible and tangible expression of power. In their case, it is not only individual or groups of men who exercise a pedagogy of cruelty with their bodies, but also the State, the authorities, in a sort of state pedagogy of cruelty, a public pedagogy aimed to dissuade the presence of trans women in the public space, and probably even prevent their very existence. And yet, despite the bloody violence, this group of trans women fought to defend their lives.

4.1.3. A biopolitical turn in urban hygienism

In 1994 a ruling of the Constitutional Court repealed several articles of the Law against Vagrancy, Mendicancy and Abandonment, leaving it practically without effect. The argument supporting the derogation of the articles was that they persecuted individuals rather than the situation they sought to eradicate. In short, the Constitutional Court recognized that this law criminalized certain groups of people.

If the disciplinary apparatus is characterized by its mandate of strict obedience, biopolitics operates through a more diffuse form of power. Biopolitics does not seek to obtain the obedience of subjects to the will of the sovereign, nor does it seek the panoptic gaze that disciplines the body. Biopolitics seeks to influence things apparently distant from the population, but which, thanks to calculation and statistical analysis, can act concretely on the population. Together, “el biopoder, masifica e individualiza a un tiempo, inscribe los cuerpos en variables poblacionales (biopolítica) y los subjetiva disciplinariamente de manera individual (anátomo-política)¹⁴⁶ (Farneda 2012, 107).

In this sense, we can observe a shift in the way power is exercised in the city. When the Law against Vagrancy, Mendicity and Abandonment disappeared as a mechanism to criminalize and punish trans women, biopolitical hygienism became the new form of control. Biopolitics amalgamated with morality found in the discourse of hygiene and health a powerful instrument to manage bodies and life itself, to impose a normative way of living and being in the world. Anything that contradicted this normativity was considered dirty and pathological, and therefore became a problem of public health that the State had to control.

The pathologization and stigmatization of trans* people, legitimized by the medical and psy discourses, spread vigorously throughout the city. Hygienist arguments have been used by groups that advocate for the abolition of sex work, claiming that sex workers are sources of infection. This has been the mainstay of many programs with biomedical approaches to STI and HIV prevention.

A conjugation of these expressions of social hygienism violently struck the bodies of trans women between the 1980s and 1990s. All the stereotypes that linked sexuality with filth fell on them. They were stigmatized as homosexuals (which was the category with which they were identified, because trans* existence was still unpronounceable), as sex workers and as allegedly having a high incidence of STIs and later HIV (allegedly, because there were no epidemiological statistics on the subject).

Thus, the decade of the 1980s advanced like a tsunami that swept away the trans* bodies that inhabited the nights in San José. Repression took a biopolitical turn, and along with discipline and physical punishment, hygiene and health became instruments for the control of these dissident bodies. By the early 1990s, their existence was no longer just an immoral affront to decency but was considered a public health problem.

The police forces partnered with the Ministry of Health and the Municipality of San José to further restrict the movement of trans women in the city. They were forced to prove that their bodies were

¹⁴⁶ Free translation: biopower massifies and individualizes at the same time, inscribes bodies in population variables (biopolitics) and subjectively disciplines them individually (anatomy-politics).

free of sexually transmitted infections. The emergence of HIV further entrenched the idea of trans women as a health problem and legitimized the need to carefully control the circulation of their bodies. Repression not only surveilled their bodies, now it penetrated their flesh.

Estéfany: No pero cuando salió la enfermedad del SIDA no se acuerda que traían ese montón de portones para llevarnos a todas a... a la Sabana [el parque metropolitano]. A la Sabana que había una rueda así de pacos, yo no sé si usted se acuerda.

Kasandra: Era como para hacer un tamizaje.

Mar: ¿Pero las llevaban obligadas?

Kasandra: ¡Sí, claro!

Estéfany: A la fuerza.

Jessica: Todo mundo corría por San José

Estéfany: Inclusive, brincándose los techos y todo porque...¹⁴⁷

They were loaded in large groups and taken to a kind of human barnyard in La Sabana, where they were obligated to undergo blood tests and a physical examination of their mouth, anus and genitals. “Porque eras un foco de contagio” says Karen, “y cuando empezó el VIH a aflorar, aquello era... Era algo tremendo, de verdad¹⁴⁸”.

The police no longer only asked for the IDs (that denied their identity), but also for a card certifying the cleanliness of their bodies.

Karen: Algo que también alegaba la policía era que te pedía un carnet de salud.

Estéfany: ¡Ah sí!

Karen: Y si no lo andabas...

Estéfany: ¡Va pa arriba! Al Ministerio Público iba a parar una.

Mar: ¿Quién les daba eso?

Kasandra: El Ministerio de Salud¹⁴⁹.

¹⁴⁷ Free translation: **Estéfany:** No, but when AIDS came out, don't you remember, they brought a bunch of fences to take all of us to...to La Sabana [the metropolitan park]. To La Sabana, where there was a police caravan, I don't know if you remember.

Kasandra: It was like a testing.

Mar: But they took you there by force?

Kasandra: Yes, of course!

Estéfany: By force.

Jessica: Everyone was running around San José

Estéfany: Even jumping over the roofs and all because...

¹⁴⁸ Free translation: Because you were a focus of contagion and when HIV began to emerge, that was.... It was a tremendous thing, really.

¹⁴⁹ Free translation: **Karen:** Something the police also claimed was that they asked for a health card.

Estéfany: Oh yes!

Karen: And if you didn't have one...

Estéfany: Up you go! To the Public Prosecutor's Office.

Trans women, like cisgender sex workers, were required to carry a dispensary card. Anyone who did not carry the card went straight to detention. “Carnet de dispensario era como un permiso para putear¹⁵⁰”, says Kasandra. A sort of permission to exist granted by the Ministry of Health to those bodies that were able to demonstrate week after week that they were free of sexually transmitted infections. A circulation permit for their bodies, a body scan certifying that their existence did not constitute a threat to the health of the population. This, in addition, began to generate for the health system some incipient statistics on the bodies of trans women (at that time thought of as gay men or transvestites). Statistics, as we have mentioned, are a technology of biopower.

As Jessica points out, by 1987, it was almost impossible to exercise sex work. For trans* sex workers, it became increasingly difficult to work in the city. The influx of clients began to decrease, because when they were discovered with a trans woman, they were also subjected to medical/police scrutiny. Since sex work was the main or even the only form of subsistence for these trans women, this biopolitical shift had a direct effect on the accelerated impoverishment of this population.

While the hygienist discourse might make these measures sound like a progressive policy for promoting health in the population of San José, the truth is that in practice these technologies served to restrict the movement, control the bodies, prevent activities such as sex work, and in general manage the lives of trans women and sex workers in the city.

4.1.4. Keeping it safe: exclusion of the abject bodies

In the ceremonies of public executions, Foucault notes, “the aim was to make an example, not only by making people aware that the slightest offence was likely to be punished, but by arousing feelings of terror by the spectacle of power letting its anger fall upon the guilty person” (Foucault 1995, 58). A similar effect was provoked by the pedagogy of cruelty displayed on the bodies of trans women. They not only faced police persecution, but business owners began to close their doors to them.

The street became an even more insecure place, and trans women increasingly began to conceal themselves in private, sometimes clandestine places. They say it was a daily nightmare. Screams, running in high heels, hiding, escaping through the roofs. Their hideouts were the few family houses that respected them. In this context, some bars and discotheques saw a business opportunity. But with the advance of HIV, repression increased. Since trans and cis sex workers, alongside gay, were considered men as a health problem, their existence was no longer tolerated.

Mar: Who gave you that?

Kasandra: The Ministry of Health.

¹⁵⁰ Free translation: A dispensary card was like a license to exercise sex work.

They recount that they could not even buy a plate of food in a restaurant. They had to put a lot of effort in makeup and clothing in order to pass. No one wanted to have a trans woman in their quarters. They were banned from restaurants, diners, and other spaces labeled as "family friendly". Under this hygienist morality, the fear of the possibility that a shop would begin to be full of trans women resembles the idea of a plague. They were treated as undesirable beings whose presence was not welcome in spaces for good men and women who dwelled in the *zone of being*.

The police controlled not only public space, but also began to break into private spaces: pensions, brothels, bars, and homes were searched all the same.

Image 50
Raids in 1987



Source: La Nación, (<https://www.nacion.com/viva/cultura/repase-la-memoria-historica-de-los-movimientos-lgbti-en-costa-rica/OL5OF4UCHFA27JYFP2Q6DEMZ7M/story/>)

This article from March 1987 reports the details of an intense night of police raids in San José. In the story, Carlos Jiménez, press chief of the Ministry of Public Security, states that 253 homosexuals were arrested that night. How the chief knew they were homosexuals remains a mystery. In any case, we can presume that many of them were trans women, possibly even some of those who shared their testimonies in this study.

The police violently invaded bars, discotheques and even private homes, seeking to stop any meeting that summoned a group of these undesirable beings. Showing a photo of an autonomous trans pageant held in her house, Gata recalls:

Image 51
Gata passing her crown



Source: Gata's personal collection

Gata: Ese día fijate que fui a dar a la Peni [Penitenciaría Central] con todo y corona y con el vestido largo y todo.

Lupe: ¡Qué vergüenza!

Mar: ¿Y por qué, la agarraron o...?

Gata: Nos cargaron en el concurso.

Mar: ¡En pleno concurso!

Gata: Sí.

Mar: ¿Llegó una redada?

Gata: Sí. ¡Y montensen todas!¹⁵¹

Sometimes they did not even ask for the dispensary card or their IDs. Repression had become so naturalized that they did not even look for a reason to justify it. A trans woman found by the police out in the public space was immediately arrested:

¹⁵¹ Free translation: **Gata:** That day I ended up at the Peni [Central Penitentiary] with the crown and the long dress and everything.

Lupe: How embarrassing!

Mar: And why, did they catch you or...?

Gata: They detained us in the contest.

Mar: In the middle of the contest!

Gata: Yes.

Mar: They held a raid?

Gata: Yes. And everyone got in the truck!

Karen: Pero tocando el tema de la libertad, porque antes, diay verdad, que qué terrible, después de los 90s. (...) Fue una época muy terrible. Porque era que vos llegabas a una esquina y no podías andar vestimenta de mujer. Bueno en el 90, cuando yo salí. Y entonces ya, ni cédula te pedían. Te metían en el cajón y de una vez¹⁵².

This is how police disciplining of trans women has operated: control over the body, corporal punishment and physical and symbolic confinement. As a result of this intense hygienist repression, the vital field of trans women was restricted in spatial and temporal terms.

The spatialization of time produces what Foucault called an “anatomic-chronological scheme of action” that combines architecture, design, and body movement, transforming the user into an efficient (non-) reproducing machine (Preciado 2013, 198)

Through punishment and pedagogy of cruelty, they learned that it was safer to go out at night, with their faces covered by the shadowy atmosphere of the gloom, and their bodies blurred in the shade of the empty streets. In daylight they were a visible target, so they had to give up their daytime freedom. In crowded streets and public spaces, their presence was less tolerated, so they stopped frequenting them. They avoided walking long distances, restricting themselves to a small sector of the Red-light district in the northwest of the city. The restriction of circulation also obstructed their possibility of meeting, and, therefore, getting organized for resistance. They say that when they got together, the risk increased, and when they were discovered in a group, the weight of the discipline was even heavier on their bodies.

The tension provoked by the raids had important consequences both for the populations that were subject to repression and for the community of San José in general. The predominant affection with which they remember these times is fear: fear of going out, fear of dressing, fear of being arrested, fear of being raped, fear of HIV, poverty and death.

4.1.5. Mayor Quimby's clean-up policies

The participants describe the streets of San José at that time as battlefields, where they risked their lives for the cause of defending their existence. As we have seen, the police made use of disciplinary technologies to control trans women, while the Ministry of Health provided calculations and manpower for biopolitical management. The local government did not lag behind.

Johnny Araya, current Mayor of San José, is a controversial political figure who has been linked to the municipal regime for nearly 40 years. It began in 1982, when he was elected as city councilman. In

¹⁵² Free translation: **Karen:** But on the issue of freedom, because before, yes, how terrible it was after the 90s. (...) It was a very terrible time. Because you could not go to a street corner and you couldn't wear women's clothes. Well, in the 90s, when I got out. And then, they didn't even ask for your ID card. They threw you in the truck right away.

1991, when the figure of mayor did not exist, the Municipal Council elected him as Municipal Executive, the highest hierarchical position of the time. He served in that position until the figure of mayor was created, and in 2002 he became the first mayor elected by popular vote in San José. He remained in that position until 2013, when he resigned to devote himself to his campaign as presidential candidate in the 2014 elections, which he lost in the second round against candidate Luis Guillermo Solís, from the Acción Ciudadana Party. In 2016 he got elected as mayor again, and in 2020 he was reelected for the fifth time, for a term that will end in 2024.

Araya is a member of the National Liberation Party, the same party founded by José María Figueres Ferrer after the 1948 civil war. He comes from a family of politicians. Araya is popularly known as Alcalde Diamante (Mayor Quimby), due to his resemblance to a character from animated series The Simpsons, both in his physique and in his long career of corruption:

Image 52
Mayor Quimby



Source: Instagram Asamblea Memeslativa

In 2005, Araya was investigated for receiving illicit benefits from the Canadian company Entreprises Berthier Inc (EBI), owner of a landfill located in La Carpio, a neighborhood on the periphery of San José, where a high percentage of Nicaraguan and Central American migrants live. In 2011, the national audit office, Contraloría General de la República (CGR), recommended suspending him for 15 days without pay for determining that he was administratively responsible for the execution of illegal payments for the municipal cadaster renovation project, which cost the municipality close to \$2 million.

In 2018 the CGR also determined that Araya had administrative responsibility in degree of serious fault for a payment that had no technical basis, for ¢253 million colones (about 348,188.00 €) to the Spanish company Setex Aparki, in charge of the parking meter service in San José. He was subsequently investigated in 2021 for influence peddling in one of the most serious corruption cases the country has faced in the last decade. Araya is currently facing another investigation for one of the biggest corruption cases in the history of local governments in Costa Rica. For this reason, he was arrested in November 2021:

Image 53
Johnny Araya gets arrested



Source: Instagram Asamblea Memeslativa

He was suspended for 30 days. The case was dubbed by the judicial authorities as "Caso Diamante" (what would be Case Quimby):

Image 54
Caso Diamante



Source: Amelia Rueda (<https://www.ameliarueda.com/multimedia/por-que-se-llama-casodiamante-infografia-noticias-costarica>)

Corruption scandals have not been able to stop Araya's reign over San José. After some decades at the helm, we can say that he has forged the city to his liking. Araya has promoted a series of reforms in the city: he put police on every corner, he covered a good part of the walkable ground with paving stones (including a good part of the few remaining green spaces in the city), he promoted the development of luxury residential towers to repopulate the city (by wealthy citizens, that is) and he is

currently promoting a millionaire project that will convert the metropolitan zoo into a botanical garden, surrounded by luxury residential towers, to attract new settlers.

In culture he does not lag behind. He brought to Costa Rica the internationally famous Cow Parade (the "largest and most successful public art event in the world" according to their website), and in 2019 allocated ₡ 100 000 000 (about 137,624 €) to bring to Costa Rica an exhibition of sculptor Jimenez Deredia, a Costa Rican expat based in Italy for more than 40 years.

The open-air exhibition was displayed in the city for 4 months. Its main piece, *Génesis de fuerza ancestral* (Genesis of ancestral strength), is inspired by the stone spheres that native peoples made in these geographies before the colonial invasion. But his sculpture, which features the face of a woman with indigenous traits, is not made of stone but of Italian marble from Carrara, and it is not gray like the spheres of the native peoples, but white and European, as it should be.

Image 55
Genesis of ancestral strength



Source: Katya Alvarado, Semanario Universidad,
<https://semanariouniversidad.com/cultura/yo-no-hago-un-revival-de-las-culturas-precolombinas/>

Jiménez, whose pieces are also on display in the Metropolitan Cathedral and even in the Vatican, stated that the idea of this work was to provoke a reflection on how to enter globalization without being homologated. The project raised questions about its cost for the municipal coffers and the fact that he had not used national materials or local laborers for the production process. When the sculptor was asked if he considered it ethical to invest such a high amount of public funds in his work, when there was so much misery and unemployment in the streets of the city, Jiménez defended the project, assuring that "the indigent who stays alone at night will be accompanied by the sculptures" (Porrás 2019).

The reforms promoted by Araya are part of a discourse of urban rescue and reactivation. Every time I read these expressions, I cannot help but wonder: rescue the city from whom? Reactivate it for whom? A glance at Araya's policies illustrates how this rhetoric is based on a hygienist conception of the city.

When Araya arrived at the Municipality of San José in 1982, the hygienist raids had not yet begun. The Law against Vagrancy, Mendicity and Abandonment provided a sufficient excuse to keep the streets free of undesirable beings. However, the Law was repealed during his first term as Municipal Executive. The derogation of this law did not stop the arrests, but it did make it more difficult for the authorities to take trans women to court and to jail. With this, the circulation between the street and the prison stopped, and with it, a survival economy also came to a halt.

The alliance with the medical power for hygienic control was then consolidated. But this was not Araya's only strategy. In the midst of the bleak scenario of the 1990s, important transformations took place in the use of space, transformations that modified not only the daily dynamics of trans women, but also their material conditions of existence and even their relationships with those who, until then, had been their allies: cisgender sex workers.

Since the 1980s, the permanence of trans women in the pensions and brothels had already been affected by the hygienist raids that persecuted clients and criminalized sex workers. Even so, many of them continued to work or live in pensions around the Red-light district. They lived alongside cisgender women with whom they established alliances and friendships.

However, the raids certainly weakened the fabric of this network of women, and in the mid-1990s many trans women started going out to the streets, not so much because they were prohibited from working inside the pensions, but because the clients stopped coming. On the street they were more exposed, but they still went out in desperation because their economic situation was critical. They began to stand in the parks and on the corners of the Red-light district, and gradually expanded their work space to the south of the city.

In this context, they recall that when Araya was elected Mayor of San José for the first time, he came in with a strong policy that, aligned with the social hygienism of the last two decades, sought to get transgender people off the streets of San José. They say that those were very tense times, when the police would not let them work. The municipal authorities invoked the complaints of neighbors, who claimed to feel fear and disgust at the threat of trans* bodies, and wanted their urban landscape clean of trans women. The municipality embraced the project of clearing the streets of trans sex workers, with the promise of a clean and safe capital, enjoyable for families of good manners.

Lorna: Se hizo una lucha, se hizo una organización. Cuando Johnny Araya quedó de alcalde de San José, se luchó porque sacar a las travestis o transexuales, de que trabajaran en el área de la Clínica Bíblica [al sur de San José]. Entonces, en base a la lucha, y en base a protestas y en base a un montón de situaciones, no logró sacar a ninguna de ahí. Y más bien se expandieron.

Estéfany: Cierto, hasta el MOPT y aquí [un área más expandida al sur de San José].

Lorna: Y ahora por el Morazán [al norte del casco central], y Cartago [otra provincia], y...¹⁵³

Araya's hygienist project failed, and his moralistic promise caused a boomerang effect. Just like when someone kicks an anthill, the effect was expansive, as they began to occupy other areas where before they did not even circulate. The rabid trans women ran around corners and occupied the streets that were forbidden to them. They resisted, they protested, they fought with their bodies for their right to inhabit the city. They "inaugurated" new zones, in a displacement that took them from the northwest to the northeast and along the south of the city center, but also from the private sphere of the pensions to the public space of the street. Expansion, of course, also meant dispersion, and the loss of these spaces of encounter and complicity. The authorities' efforts did not succeed in eradicating trans women from the city, but they partially achieved to regulate their lives, by stripping them of some of the few affective bonds they had, and displaced them to a place of great loneliness and vulnerability.

4.1.6. The hygienist public show

Kassandra says that in those decades, they no longer needed to see the police car, they recognized the sound of the engine approaching and started to run before it appeared around the corner. Araya's hygienist policies were not concerned with hiding their ferocity. On the contrary, his repressive policies had, and continue to have, a great echo in the media:

Alexa: Antes sí, antes recuerdo que a las personas que se prostituían, eran maltratados, incluso en el periódico. O sea, los guardas, le alzaban a uno la cola, para que sacaran la fotografía y la fotografía salía en los periódicos. O sea, eso era una violación a todo.

¹⁵³ Free translation: **Lorna:** There was a quarrel, an organization was formed. When Johnny Araya became mayor of San José, there was a quarrel to get transvestites and transsexuals out of working area in the Clínica Bíblica [south of San José]. So, based on the quarrel, and based on protests and based on a lot of situations, he did not manage to get any of them out of there. And they expanded.

Estéfany: Right, all the way to the MOPT and here [a greater area in the south of the city].

Lorna: And now around the Morazán [north of San José], and Cartago [another province], and...

Karen: Uy un detalle muy importante. Es cierto. Yo recuerdo cuando pasaban en programas como *En La Mira* [un popular programa de televisión nacional conducido por un pastor evangélico], a las chicas corriendo con los tacones cuando venían las redadas. Imagínese, corriendo como si fueran las Olimpiadas¹⁵⁴

As if it were a crime drama tv series, the media expose the images of these bodies as trophies that represent the triumph of order and hygiene. It is a situation that has not ended, and although perhaps today some trans women can walk a little more freely through the city, San José remains a deeply hostile space for impoverished trans women, for sex workers, for migrants, for informal vendors and for unhoused residents.

With sensationalist narratives, the media report on the persistence of Araya's municipal hygienism:

Image 56

Streets of San Jose will be clean of feces from homeless people



Source: La Prensa Libre, (<http://www.laprensa libre.cr/Noticias/detalle/88956>)

Caption: Streets of San José will be cleaned of homeless people's feces

This 2016 article describes a municipal campaign promoted by the Department of Environmental Services. The campaign, municipal authorities claim, seeks to avoid bad odors and concentration of insects that are harmful to health. The campaign is touted as a wellness policy that seeks to ensure a cleaner, tidier and healthier city for passersby: “Con esta campaña esperamos devolver la limpieza y

¹⁵⁴ Free translation: **Alexa:** Before, yes, I remember that people who engaged in prostitution were mistreated, even in the newspaper. That is, the guards would lift up one's ponytail, so that they would take a photograph and the photograph would appear in the newspapers. In other words, that was a violation of everything.

Karen: Oh, a very important detail. It is true. I remember when shows like *En La Mira* [a popular national television program hosted by an evangelical pastor] would show the girls running in heels when the raids came. Imagine that, running as if it were the Olympics.

el ornato a la ciudad, para crear un ambiente más limpio y saludable para las personas que transitan diariamente por San José¹⁵⁵ (S. Jiménez 2016).

The campaign consisted, in their words, of cleaning up "the physiological needs¹⁵⁶ of the homeless". Interestingly, the municipality does not care about the other "physiological needs" of the unhoused residents, such as food, access to health care, a roof or shelter. The city is not made for them, even if this is their home. The city is designed for citizens who put it to good use, such as the workers who traverse it daily to get from home to work. As can be seen in the photograph that illustrates this note, the bodies of these unhoused residents are arranged as obstacles for those who transit the city. As they could not (until that moment) clean those bodies from the space, they settle for cleaning the smelly trace of their precariousness.

Imagen 57

There will be no truce or negotiation



Caption: Municipality to street vendors: "There will be no truce or negotiation"

Source: La Prensa Libre

This article from 2017 describes the tensions between municipal authorities and informal vendors who are criminalized in the city. They were demanding a stop to the police violence they face on a daily basis in the hands of municipal officers.

From its headline, the article reproduces a warlike language: "There will be no truce or negotiation". This is actually the tone of the municipal police authorities. Its director at the time, Marcelo Solano,

¹⁵⁵ Free translation: With this campaign we hope to return cleanliness and ornateness to the city, to create a cleaner and healthier environment for people who transit daily through San José.

¹⁵⁶ In Spanish, "necesidades fisiológicas" (physiological needs) a polite way of referring to urine and excrement.

warns that there will be no negotiation, and, consistent with his hygienist vision, assures that the municipal police will continue its repressive actions until "cleaning the capital of this problem". And if there is any doubt about the benefits of sanitation for society, Solano appeals to good citizens to assume their civic duty to join the cleanup efforts: "We are working for San José, help your capital, don't buy from street vendors".

As an example of good Costa Ricans, some citizens heed the call in the comments:

"Ya es hora de que la limpieza sea permanente y no flor de un día."

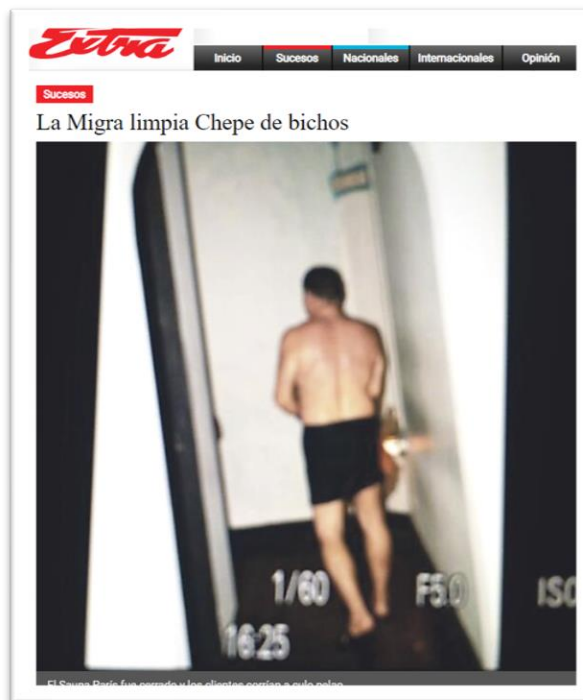
"Son un fastidio para la libre circulación de los peatones y ellos no pagan impuesto así que FUera !!!"

"Muni de San José, no a_ojen, nada tienen que negociar con nicas. Fuera Nicas."

"vuelenles garrote como hacen alla en nicaragua los gasean los garrotean el ejercito y hasta les vuelan bala solo a si entienden"¹⁵⁷

Xenophobia and racism mix well with hygienism:

Image 58
Cleaning the vermin of San José



Caption: Migration police cleans Chepe of vermin

Source: <https://www.diarioextra.com/Noticia/detalle/194111/la-migra-limpia-chepe-de-bichos>

¹⁵⁷ Free translation: "It's about time that the cleanup is permanent and not a one-day flower."

"They are a hassle for the free circulation of pedestrians and they don't pay tax so OUT !!!"

"Muni of San Jose, don't cut them a slack, you have nothing to negotiate with nicas. Nicas get out!"

"blow them up with clubs like they do there in Nicaragua, they gas them, the army beats them and even shoots them with bullets, it is the only way they understand".

The article describes in detail a raid conducted in 2013 by the immigration police in several hotels and saunas in downtown San José, in which 56 people with irregular immigration status were detained. The article describes the nationalities of the people detained, who underwent deportation proceedings. It also adds, as a great achievement, that two marijuana joints were seized in the raid.

The tone of the article is deeply derogatory, racist and homophobic. It uses metaphors such as "cleaning out the vermin". It emphasizes that one of the places raided was a space for sexual encounters between men. It uses humiliating descriptions to portray the situation in which several gay men had to run naked through the streets of San José because of the raid. Finally, the article closes by reproducing the promise of the immigration authorities to continue with the "operations to clean the city".

These stories are just a few examples of what happens on a daily basis in the city. During my fieldwork observations, I noticed a very strong police presence. I saw them repressing street vendors, asking for documents from people with brown bodies, waking up unhoused residents to clear the sidewalk, and arresting a trans woman who disturbed the moral order of the city by angrily complaining about being robbed.

4.1.7. Hygienist necropolitics and the war on trans*

The consequences of these hygienist policies are not only displacement and humiliation. For these people who live below the line of humanity, the violence deployed by the authorities in the name of hygiene and good manners is often lethal. Foucauldian scholars often repeat that letting die is not the same as making die. However, I believe that sometimes letting die is quite an active power of death. As Susan Stryker suggests, "biopower constitutes transgender as a category that it surveils, splits, and sorts in order to move some trans bodies toward emergent possibilities for transgender normativity and citizenship while consigning others to decreased chances for life" (Stryker 2014, 41). Dispossessed, displaced, stigmatized, excluded, pushed into precariousness and exposed to the worst forms of violence I have seen in the city, these people, rather than being left to die, are thrown to their death.

Mar: ¡Qué guapas en esta foto!

Gata: Todas están muertas, solo yo estoy viva, Perro.

Lupe: ¿Esta otra quién es, Gata?

Gata: Mi hermana. Y todas están muertas, solo yo estoy viva¹⁵⁸.

¹⁵⁸ Free translation: **Mar:** You are all gorgeous in this picture!

Gata: They're all dead, I am the only one left alive, Perro.

Image 59
I'm the only one left alive



Source: Gata's personal collection

In 2021, Jacques Allain Miller, a powerful psychoanalyst and heir to the legacy of Jacques Lacan, published a text on what he considers to be the crisis of the trans revolts. In his article, entitled in French *Docile au trans*, Miller engages in a dialogue with his "imaginary trans". His imaginary trans at times seems more like a phantom. Everyone knows, actually, that the object of his fantasies is Paul B. Preciado, and perhaps that is part of the problem. Miller may have as well approach some of the very active trans organizations in France to learn firsthand about the anxieties, desires and concerns of trans* people. Instead, he prefers to lock himself in his preconceptions, to cling to that absence in his knowledge, and to fantasize that he is arguing with Preciado. Preciado got in the game too, engaging in a discussion with Miller mediated by publications. In sum, two privileged intellectuals discussing about trans* people (and getting paid for it), without actually dialoguing with trans* people.

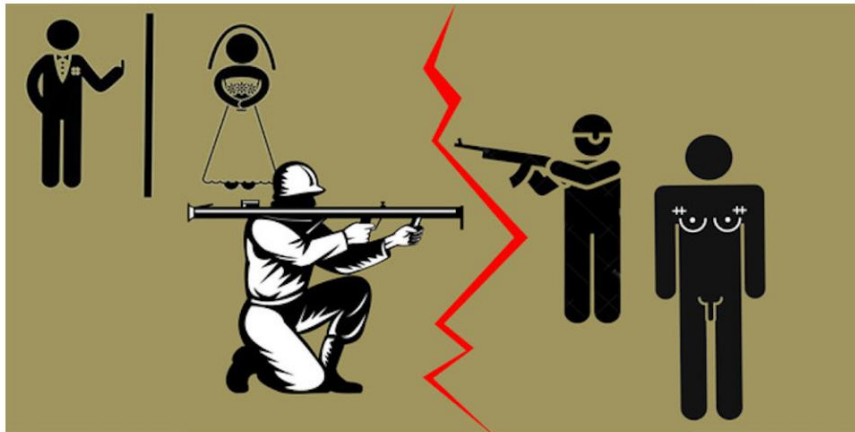
Comfortably anchored in his privilege and his colonial epistemology, Miller (and in a way Preciado also) closes himself off from the possibility of the plural dialogues he could have with trans* people, from which, I have no doubt, he could learn much more than what he learns in the books and articles written about trans* people without trans* people.

In the meanwhile, trans women who are sex workers (several of them migrants from Abya Yala) are murdered in Paris just as in Costa Rica and all over the world. But Lacan's heir seems not to take notice, since he dares to affirm that this issues constitute a "war of ideas". The edition published in *La Regle du Jeu* accompanies the article with this image:

Lupe: Who is this other one, Gata?

Gata: My sister. And they're all dead, only I am alive.

Image 60
War of ideas



Source: La Regle du Jeu (<https://laregledujeu.org/2021/04/22/37014/transsexuel-docile-au-trans/>)

« Guerre des idées », Miller repeats jokingly, recognizing that perhaps this is one of those topics about which it is not appropriate to joke. Even though we can recognize the ideological and cultural component that could be termed as *war of ideas*, the trans women who participated in this research are clear in affirming that what they have survived was a war, a real war, with all its power of death deployed on the materiality of their existence.

While I was studying in France, 3 of my trans friends died in Costa Rica. A similar number of Latin American trans* migrants were killed in Paris during the same period of time. In this context, I do not think we can speak of this a war of ideas, or at least not only so. It is not a question of blaming the violence suffered by trans* people on individuals harboring exceptional hatreds or resentments. What I have tried to demonstrate throughout this section, is that this is a long, structural, lethal process that for centuries has claimed the lives of countless trans* people.

« Le Pouvoir psychiatrique, Surveiller et punir et Il faut défendre la société, à savoir le mode disciplinaire (« la société disciplinaire ») et le management des populations (qualifié de « biopolitique »), nous fait rompre avec cette vision tronquée du pouvoir – celui juridico-légal – pour aborder les véritables causes des inégalités et des violences contre les minorités sexuelles et de genre dans le cadre d’une économie politique. On ne le répétera jamais assez : le pouvoir ne s’exerce pas uniquement et majoritairement sur le mode de la soustraction ou de la déduction opérées par des agent·e·s, par des individu·e·s mal intentionné·e·s ou violent·e·s à l’égard des autres, ce que cherchent à faire accroire le modèle individualisant du coupable responsable et les scènes d’interpellation (Bourcier 2017, 53)

The trans women who participated in this study claim that they survived a war. A street guerrilla war. Their enemy was the State. First it deployed against them the forces of the repressive and judicial apparatus, then it implemented the technologies of social medicine as well. Many *compañeras* fell along the way. They remember them with affection and gratitude, because they assure that without them, they would not be telling the story today. Probably neither would I, because I have no doubt

that if today trans* people like me have been able to infiltrate the academy, it is because of all of our ancestors that paved the way.

When Cassandra states that she and her *compañeras* are war survivors, when she self-identifies as such, she is referring to some of the bloodiest forms of violence I have known in this country. She names it war and insists on the importance of naming it that way. Trans women lived through a war, a biopolitical war. Some survived, most of them died (murdered or left to die), all of them resisted. These are the wars that are waged here, in the country without an army, in the country of peace.

If biopolitics is understood as the art of managing people's lives, capitalist demands have made it so that living and all of the processes associated with it are converted into commodities, which includes what we understand as necropower, since this represents the management of the final and most radical processes of living: death itself (Valencia 2018, chap. Necropolitics [2010, 142-3])

The lethal technology that European colonialism developed on racialized bodies degenerated into a holocaust a few centuries later. Under a similar logic, the abject bodies of gender dissidents continue today to be singled out as a biological menace to be eradicated. Incurable, undisciplined, there was nothing left to do but kill them and throw them to their death.

Mbembe says:

I have demonstrated that the notion of biopower is insufficient to account for contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death. Moreover I have put forward the notion of necropolitics and necropower to account for the various ways in which, in our contemporary world, weapons are deployed in the interest of maximum destruction of persons and the creation of death-worlds, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead (Mbembe 2013, 186).

When Montserrat Sagot (2013) analyzes the conditions in necropolitics take place in Central America, she points out that violence, and especially violence against women and vulnerable populations, is not only an end, but a means, a tool of social fascism.

La violencia no es entonces es el resultado de mecanismos de control social e institucional fallidos, sino el producto lógico del fascismo social en su proceso de afianzamiento. En este contexto, los grupos empoderados ganan poder de facto sobre la población, particularmente los y las más vulnerables, por medio del uso de diferentes formas de violencia. Es decir, esta es una violencia estructural, cuya constitución está directamente relacionada con la desigualdad, la exclusión, las rupturas en el tejido social, los vacíos y los poderes creados por los modos de vida producidos en el contexto del fascismo social¹⁵⁹ (Sagot 2013, 10).

¹⁵⁹ Free translation: Violence is thus not the result of failed social and institutional control mechanisms, but the logical product of social fascism in its process of entrenchment. In this context, empowered groups gain de facto power over the population, particularly the most vulnerable, through the use of different forms of violence. In

War, for the participants in this study, is not a metaphor. It is not fought in the realm of ideas, nor is it restricted to a symbolic level. The war has marked their bodies, has torn their sisters away from them, has displaced them from their homes, has pushed them into poverty, has tortured and violated them, has tried again and again to annihilate them:

Karen: Si hubieran tenido la oportunidad como fue las cámaras de gas, lo hubieran hecho.

Karina: Ah sí.

Estéfany: ¡Ah sí! Nos vieramos ido más de una.

Karen: Si hubieran tenido la oportunidad...¹⁶⁰

If they had had the opportunity, they would have massively killed them, they firmly assert. This is what Miller fails to understand. “La muerte es una tecnología específica, de origen colonial, de gestión de determinadas poblaciones en el mundo¹⁶¹” (Farneda 2012, 13). This is what Karen and Estéfany denounce with horror: if they had had the opportunity to exterminate them, they would have done it, because in this war, whenever they had the opportunity to kill them, they did not hesitate.

4.1.8. Resisting, living and building community

Survivors say that the 70s were the glory days, the times when they were queens in autonomous pageants, they had clients, dresses, parties and safe spaces to work and to live in community. They also say that they were the times of terror. Their daily life in the 70's did not fit into dichotomies. They lived in the city they called home, they had clients and lovers, and many friends with whom they affirmed their gender and identity. Their days oscillated between the joy of living and the persecution that the State exercised when it observed them affirming their lives. They recall with smiles and pride the activities they performed, the streets they squatted, the bonds they cultivated, the make-up and the lovers. Also with smiles, perhaps softening the pain with humor, they remember the troubles they went through trying to escape the police.

other words, this is a structural violence, whose constitution is directly related to inequality, exclusion, ruptures in the social fabric, gaps and powers created by the lifestyles produced in the context of social fascism.

¹⁶⁰ Free translation: **Karen:** If they had had the opportunity like occurred with the gas chambers, they would have done it.

Karina: Oh yes.

Estéfany: Oh yes, we would be gone, many of us.

Karen: If they would have had the opportunity....

¹⁶¹ Free translation: Death is a specific technology, of colonial origin, for the management of certain populations in the world.

In spite of everything, this community of trans women made life the flag of their revolt. To live, intensely, rabidly, insolently, undisciplined, to live their lives, to enjoy their bodies, to care for their sisters and to persist together is what the participants cherish the most.

au siècle 21, il devient une population, une force productive, un multiplicité inerte. Les queers, les freaks, les transféministes, non. Iels sont une multiplicité réactive. Iels ne sont pas la somme d'individus qui composent la population au sens biopolitique du terme. Iels sont des collectifs engagés dans la résistance au biopouvoir en fabriquant (entre autres) des formes de production de reproduction sociales différents (Bourcier 2017, 69).

The narratives of horror and pain contrast with their irreverence, humor and rebelliousness. They speak of repression and arrests, but they also recount how they developed new forms of resistance. They learned how to open the door of the police truck with a safety pin. They would wait for the vehicle to stop at a traffic light and open the doors to run off in different directions. Some got caught again, others managed to escape punishment that night. All of them celebrated the battle they had just won against the cops.

Seduction also became a strategy of resistance. The "paqueras¹⁶²", who were mocked by their friends for having affairs with police officers, used these connections, not only to save themselves, but also to rescue their friends:

Mujer 5: ¿Ustedes se acuerdan cómo me decían a mí? La paquera. Me encantaban los pacos. Entoes, a ellas, a todo el resto las detenían, y a mí me dejaban suelta. Entoes yo aprovechaba el momento en ellos se iban por allá a detener a alguna, y abría el cajón. ¡Todas salían escapadas!¹⁶³

When they grew tired of arbitrary arrests, they also exploded in irreverence and self-defense:

Kassandra: Un paco un día me dijo a mí: "está detenida". Le digo yo: "¿por qué?" Y me dice: "Porque me hizo esto". Y se reventó la camisa. Entonces yo agarré una botella y le dije: póngale eso al parte. [hace gesto de quebrarle la botella en la cabeza]. Porque llegó un momento que nosotras nos volvíamos agresivas con los mismos pacos. Y cuando los veíamos ya nos les cagábamos en la madre, pa que nos cargaran por algo, ya, legalmente¹⁶⁴.

¹⁶² "Paco" is slang word used in some countries of Abya Yala to refer contemptuously to a cop. "Paquera" is a neologism, meaning a woman is attracted to cops.

¹⁶³ Free translation: **Woman 5:** Do you remember what you used to call me? La paquera. I was into cops. So, they would arrest them, all the rest of them, and they would let me free. Then I would take advantage of the moment when they were going to arrest someone else, and I would open the police truck. Then everyone escaped.

¹⁶⁴ Free translation: **Kassandra:** One day a cop said to me: "You are under arrest". I said to him: "Why?" And he said to me: "Because you did this to me". And he tore his shirt. So I grabbed a bottle and told him: "Put that on the report". [makes a gesture of breaking the bottle over his head]. There came a time when we became aggressive with the cops. And when we saw them we would trash them, so that they would charge us for something, legally.

They resisted the imprisonment in creative ways, organizing beauty contests, making clandestine liquors, organizing dances with handmade percussion, like tireless warriors, resisting discipline, surviving, smiling. They supported each other, took care of each other, shared joints and food, helped each other pay bail. They also shared knowledge that helped them survive the streets and jail. Paradoxically, their bodies, which in the city faced restricted circulation, within the dynamics of criminalization, had a greater margin of circulation in and out of prison. They made this their trench. Circulation in prison was so intense that it became a subsistence mechanism. A number of them began to take advantage of the daily arrests to smuggle inside their bodies drugs, weapons and other items that fetched a good price in prison. They also rebelled against the guards/pimps and began to autonomously engage in sex work. Thus, a circular, informal economy developed, which they called “picar¹⁶⁵”, which went from the street to jail, from the jail to the street, and back again. In the midst of such cruelty and killing power, these women managed to develop strategies to sustain their lives.

Outside the walls of the prison, they also cultivated love and solidarity. In the 1980s, the permanence of trans women in the pensions and brothels had already been affected by the hygienist raids that persecuted clients and criminalized sex workers. Even so, many of them continued to work or live in pensions around the Red-light district, where they lived alongside cisgender women with whom they established alliances and friendships. In the pensions they ate, met, shared knowledge and accompanied each other. They found sorority from other women, and they say that they also supported them. They remember with tenderness and smiles the babies that they carried in their arms, children of the owners of the pensions or the cisgender sex workers. It was a safe space where networks of sisterhood were woven.

In spite of the punishments, they invented places where they could gather, trying to build community in this restricted space. « Il est urgent de pratiquer une riposte juridique biopolitique différente de la politique libérale de l'égalité puisque cette dernière sert le biopouvoir et non la biopolitique. » (Bourcier 2017, 59). Building community was their way out, their undisciplined resistance, their way of cultivating life. In the midst of so much repression, the joy of recognizing each other, of gathering together and sharing, helped them to survive.

4.2. *Chepe se baña*: washing the filth of precarity

I first heard of *Chepe se baña* in 2017. At the time, I was intensely involved with the work of Transvida, and I had been participating in their nocturnal rallies to approach trans* sex workers in the streets of San José for some years. Over that time, we had encountered various collectives in the streets, mainly Christian youth groups doing charity and evangelization for sex workers and unhoused residents of

¹⁶⁵ Picar refers to intentionally provoking capture in order to visit the prison.

the city. Our interactions were always respectful but distant. We recognized that we had something in common, a feeling, a story, a handful of affections that led us to cross paths in the dark streets of San José. And yet, we also recognized the differences that separated us. They sought to rescue those lost souls. We, on the other side, were driven by the desire to build a community in the streets. Our interactions were scarce and short. Dayana, one of Transvida’s activists, and I would wait for the Christian groups to finish their prayers, and when they left, we would talk with girls. We insisted that it was all right to take the coffee and the sandwich if they were hungry. At that time, Dayana and I could not offer them anything but condoms and our attentive listening. But we insisted that no one should make them feel bad, guilty, or shameful for being who they are and doing what they do.

During those years, I remember coming across maybe 6 or 7 collectives, all Christian, most of them abolitionist of sex work. However, I never came across the volunteers of *Chepe se baña*. I learned about *Chepe se baña* in the news, due to the intense media coverage this project constantly receives. I remember the first news piece that caught my attention. An article, published in the Sunday magazine of the newspaper La Nación (one of the most important newspapers in the country), entitled: “Limpiando la inmundicia a cielo abierto”, in English: "Cleaning the filth out in the open".

Image 61
Cleaning the filth out in the open



Photo by Susana Soto. Source: Ojo a las noticias
(<https://www.facebook.com/ojoalasnoticias/photos/a.178924932589676/246731475809021/>)

Caption: Cleaning the filth out in the open. The project ‘Chepe se baña’ installed during the a Saturday’s morning and afternoon in Barrio México’s Park, where street dwellers showered, dried their blankets and took a break from the soot and stench.

“Inmundicia” (filth) is a strong, derogatory word. In Spanish, and in the Costa Rican context, it refers to a disgusting and despicable filth, to something unhealthy that cannot be tolerated. It is a word that is rarely used to refer to human beings. Perhaps this is the reason for this choice of words, not at all

coincidental, to describe the bodies of unhoused residents of the city. Cleaning the filth out in the open immediately reminded me of hygienist discourses about the city, and resonated with headlines that in the past had compared undesirable city dwellers (gay sauna users, transgender sex workers, drug users and unhoused residents) to cockroaches and other pests to be eradicated.

The article contained several photographs portraying users and volunteers of the project. The first thing that caught my attention is that all the volunteers were wearing latex gloves. Not only the ones cutting hair or dealing directly with the bodies, but all volunteers wore gloves. This article is from 2017, in a pre-pandemic context in the city of San José, where latex gloves were practically reserved for the medical cabinet.

Image 62
Volunteers in beauty station



Source: La Nación (https://www.nacion.com/nacional/salud-publica/Limpiar-inmundicia-cielo-abierto_0_1635036481.htm)

While today I understand the sanitary reasons for using protective equipment, it inevitably marks a difference between volunteers and users, between a good-hearted “us” who need to protection from the filth of “others”. The gloves become a marker that accounts for a subjective position, for the construction of a charitable subject that seeks to rescue the unhoused people by means of hygiene.

Image 63
Chepe se baña user



Source: La Nación (https://www.nacion.com/nacional/salud-publica/Limpiar-inmundicia-cielo-abierto_0_1635036481.htm)

It would never have occurred to me to wear gloves during a night rally, even though we often shared a greeting or a hug. Nor did the Christian volunteers delivering food and the holy word ever wear gloves. The only latex that accompanied us every night were the strips of condoms we would bring to the girls. Even in the pandemic context, when I met Fabiola we implemented the use of masks and the distancing of our bodies, but always under the horizontal premise of taking care of each other. I do not assume that Fabiola is a greater risk to me than I am to her. Our principle is collective care, not hygienist prevention so closely coupled to the apparatus of security.

The overall tone of the article is gloomy. The author, Priscilla Gómez, reproduces stories laden with remorse and pain. She describes sad scenes that, quoting her words, “según el nivel de sensibilidad de cada quien, rompen el espíritu y el corazón¹⁶⁶”. The article refers to one of the first public activities of the project Chepe se baña, promoted by the Promundo Christian Foundation¹⁶⁷. It was the dawn of Chepe se baña. They already had a bus, but it was not yet equipped with mobile showers. Therefore, on this occasion they set up improvised showers with awnings in the center of the park in Barrio México, a working-class neighborhood north of San José where I spent a good part of my childhood. Gómez describes how the activity worked: “una vez que el agua y el jabón pasaban por el cuerpo,

¹⁶⁶ Free translation: depending on one's level of sensitivity, they can break one's spirit and heart.

¹⁶⁷ As described in the Christian newspaper El Camino, Promundo Foundation is an organization that takes the gospel to the most dangerous and vulnerable areas of Costa Rica, with the support of volunteers, NGOs and the media (El Camino 2018).

continuaban a una estación de belleza, donde les cortaban el cabello, les hacían la barba, les limpiaban las uñas y manos, y luego pasaban a un comedor improvisado donde servían el almuerzo¹⁶⁸”.

According to the project’s director, Mauricio Villalobos, the activity sought to attract donations for the campaign called "Donating drops of life" (Donando gotas de vida), with the goal of adapting the bus with mobile showers and acquiring three more buses. His plan, carefully quantified, promised biopolitical efficiency based on statistical projections: four buses with mobile showers circulating around San José would allow, according to his calculations, to bathe one person every 7 minutes, between 100 and 120 people a day, working 4 to 6 days a week. In reality, the organization has not been able to achieve this plan, but it has grown exponentially anyway, following a quantified and precise model.

The campaign slogan deserves analysis: Donating drops of life. A popular saying goes: “el agua es vida” (water is life). This is clear to those of us who live in countries where the tourism industry and agricultural corporations monopolize and contaminate the drinking water of the communities. However, this metaphor is misleading. Shower water is not exactly “drops of life”, and, although a shower is important and clearly generates well-being for the users of this project, there are other needs, perhaps more urgent, such as water for drinking, for example, or enough food to survive.

In the body of the article other things jump out. Villalobos states: “This event is to measure the mobilization capacity that San José has for a shower”¹⁶⁹. This sentence is confusing. At first glance I thought that "San José" was a synecdoche to refer to the community of San José or to the administrative authorities that govern the city. However, the next sentence clarifies that San José in this case is not a synecdoche (taking a part for the whole), but part of a series of objectification processes (figure of speech that consists of treating a person as an object): “‘We ask,’ says Villalobos, ‘how long are they willing to walk for a shower?’ And the street dwellers answer ‘whatever it takes’”¹⁷⁰. This question reproduces a logic of merit, in which the unhoused residents of the city have to walk "whatever it takes" to earn a shower. Merit is compatible with the theology of Christian prosperity, and with the idea that we are on Earth to earn, by our actions, eternal life.

¹⁶⁸ Free translation: Once the soap and water had run over their bodies, they continued to a grooming station, where their hair was cut, their beards were trimmed, their nails and hands were cleaned, and then they went to an improvised dining table where lunch was served.

¹⁶⁹ Free translation from the Spanish: Este evento es para medir la capacidad de movilización que tiene San José por una ducha

¹⁷⁰ Free translation from the Spanish: Nosotros preguntamos ¿cuánto está dispuesto a caminar por una ducha? Y los habitantes de la calle nos responden que “lo que sea”.

Beyond this, the statement reproduces ableism in its logic. Another part of the article stated: "Chepe se baña es un proyecto de accesibilidad. The street dwellers have many difficulties with mobility....¹⁷¹". The results of my ethnographic observation coincide with this statement: an important part of the unhoused residents of San José are people with disabilities, chronic illness or situations that cause them difficulties in mobility. In a society organized around compulsory able-bodiedness, bodies that do not meet the standards of normality are devalued insofar as their performance does not comply with the mandate of capitalist production. They are thus pushed into exclusion and precariousness. In some cases, it is precisely this capitalist ableism that throws them into the street. In this sense, putting people to the test to see how far they can walk to access a shower is a violent act of ableism, which excludes those who do not make it to the showers, and uses the bodies of those who do make it as indicators of the project's success.

The article also makes clear the abolitionist position of sex work by Fundación Promundo, which seeks to "help those people who are on the streets with problems of drug addiction, prostitution and extreme poverty¹⁷²". This phrase places sex work (prostitution) as a problem, next to extreme poverty, disregarding what sex workers' organizations, such as Asociación La Sala, have been trying to position for years in San José: that the problem is not sex work, but the conditions of precariousness, insecurity, and persecution in which they are forced to work.

In any case, the project, as described in the article, does not propose concrete solutions to these "problems", but focuses more on transforming the aesthetics of the unhoused resident of San José. This, Villalobos affirms, results in an immediate benefit for the users, but also, and they are emphatic about this, a benefit for the city. "It is not only about 'dignifying the homeless', but also about 'improving our urban landscape'¹⁷³". Although it attempts a humanizing effect by speaking of "dignifying the homeless", the subordinate phrase cancels the operation with a clear objectification. This phrase establishes a division between an "Self" and "others" in the logic of us/them: us, the owners of the city; them, part of the urban landscape that belongs to us. Bathing the unhoused residents then fulfills an aesthetic function, so that we do not have to see what disgusts us, or what, in the best of cases, makes us uncomfortable because it highlights the inequalities caused by this system of which we are accomplices and beneficiaries.

¹⁷¹ Free translation from the Spanish: Chepe se baña es un proyecto de accesibilidad. Los habitantes de la calle tienen muchos problemas de movilidad...

¹⁷² Free translation from the Spanish: Ayudar a aquellas personas que se encuentran en las calles con problemas de drogadicción, prostitución y pobreza extrema

¹⁷³ Free translation from the Spanish: No se trata solamente de 'dignificar al habitante de calle', sino también es para 'mejorar nuestro paisaje urbano'.

Raul, one of the users interviewed in the article, explains: “la cara que hace la gente cuando me acerco, para ellos me veo como una bolsa de basura. Y le pregunto, ¿quién quiere sentirse como un desecho?”¹⁷⁴ No one wants to feel like a bag of waste, and yet this project harbors a complex contradiction. On the one hand, it seeks to help and dignify the unhoused residents of the city, but, at the same time, it constantly objectifies them in its discourse.

Martha Nussbaum defines objectification as the process of seeing or treating of someone as an object (1995, 251). Nussbaum proposes seven notions that are involved in the idea of treating a person as an object. The subject is annulled in this operation of objectification, the person is transformed, managed and crystallized as an object through one or several of the following operations:

1. *Instrumentality*: The objectifier treats the object [person] as a tool of his or her purposes.
2. *Denial of autonomy*: The objectifier treats the object [person] as lacking in autonomy and self-determination.
3. *Inertness*: The objectifier treats the object [person] as lacking in agency, and perhaps also in activity.
4. *Fungibility*: The objectifier treats the object [person] as interchangeable (a) with other objects of the same type, and/or (b) with objects of other types.
5. *Violability*: The objectifier treats the object [person] as lacking in boundary-integrity, as something that it is permissible to break up, smash, break into.
6. *Ownership*: The objectifier treats the object [person] as something that is owned by another, can be bought or sold, etc.
7. *Denial of subjectivity*: The objectifier treats the object [person] as something whose experience and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account (Nussbaum 1995, 257).

When the project director states that Chepe se baña improves the urban landscape, he is talking about these people as if they were objects. It is an operation of the inertness type: the bodies of these others litter our urban landscape, just as inert objects, such as garbage in the streets, litter it.

The objectification continues when the medical discourse is introduced in the article. A paramedic in charge of treating minor conditions in the project's "medical cabinet", talks about the bodies and affections of the unhoused residents of the city through objectification and infantilization. He states, "Once we sit them down on the stretcher" (note the use of the transitive verb, they do not sit by themselves, the professionals sit them - denial of autonomy) "we have to treat them with a lot of

¹⁷⁴ Free translation: The face people make when I approach them, to them I look like a trash bag. And I ask you, who wants to feel like garbage?

attention because they get very upset. These people generally do not get attention, so when someone shows interest, they return to a state of childhood¹⁷⁵.

From my experience working and doing research in the city, I can agree with the first part: The unhoused residents generally do not get attention from the other people who inhabit the city. However, I disagree with the second part. It is true that when they are given attention, they are very appreciative. Throughout the fieldwork of this study, informal interviews often ended with the gratitude of my interlocutors, who appreciated my "humility" in a dialogue with them. This situation never ceased to make me uncomfortable, because it is clear to me that I am the one who should thank and cherish the time and words they shared with me. An ethical and epistemic discomfort that makes me reflect on the forms that violence takes (silencing, exclusion, rejection, loathing...) and on the immeasurable absences that our dismissive and contemptuous attitudes provoke in the city. These tokens of gratitude make me uncomfortable because I think that there is nothing to be grateful for. I just gave them a respectful treatment, which shakes off the disdain. I try to listen attentively and respectfully, because it is clear to me that I am dealing with people, not with objects that are part of the urban landscape. Thus, rather than a conversation with people in infantile regression (a conversation with children, in any case, can be highly enriching and stimulating), what I find are profound epistemic dialogues, history lessons, empirical accounts of struggle and oppression, highly valuable words.

Back to the article, it is also revealing to analyze the causes that are attributed to rejection and exclusion. "Based on appearance, the homeless person is completely rejected¹⁷⁶", affirms Sandra Peralta, one of the volunteers interviewed for the article. This perspective is overly simplistic. It reduces unhoused people to their appearance and overlooks the structural causes of rejection and exclusion (like racism, capitalism, ableism, patriarchy, etc.). In many cases, it is these systems of oppression that led them to the street, not the other way around. However, structural oppressions are produced as an absence in the rhetoric of this article. This absence leads to an oversimplified reading of the problematic and its possible solutions, as illustrated by Peralta's statements. She continues to explain that because of their appearance, "the indigent ceases to belong to others, and when they bathe, their attitude changes. They feel renewed, it is almost like a kind of therapy where

¹⁷⁵ Free translation from the Spanish: Una vez que los sentamos en la camilla, hay que tratarlos con mucho cariño porque se ponen muy chineados. A estas personas generalmente no les prestan atención, así que cuando alguien muestra interés regresan como a un estado de niñez

¹⁷⁶ Free translation from the Spanish: A partir de la apariencia, el indigente es completamente rechazado.

they feel, at least for a few hours or days, that they are part of the others¹⁷⁷." As if exclusion were a matter of attitude and aesthetics, as if the materiality of precarious life did not exist, her description speaks of the power of a shower with almost magical qualities, a shower capable of washing away social exclusion and mending, for a moment, the frayed social bond between them (the subpopulation of unhoused residents) and us (the "good Costa Rican" subjects). From her statements we infer that the problem is the appearance of the unhoused residents that makes others uncomfortable, and not the classist, racist, ableist and colonial gaze with which we look at them. The solution, then, is to transform their appearance, our gaze can remain intact. This project seeks to make them feel part of society for a few hours, to pretend, to perform for normal citizens, a normative performativity imposed on these bodies to make them suitable for the eyes of the owners of the city. "What is it that we don't understand about these people, that with just a shower, they become accepted by others?¹⁷⁸", asks the author of the article, denying once again the structural oppressions, while I am tempted to answer her: what you fail to understand is they are human.

Finally, the author ends with a long fragment in which she misgenders a trans* user of the project, Omara Quirós, who is interviewed for the article. The journalist uses the story of Omara, a trans* migrant sex worker who sleeps in a parking lot near a park in Barrio Mexico, employing a re-victimizing narrative to increase the emotionality towards the end of the article. She describes in detail the hardships Omara suffers on a daily basis, but does not even pay the care to respect her gender self-determination. She repeatedly describes Omara and her trans* friends with masculine articles and adjectives. Furthermore, she exposes her dead name (which I will not reproduce here) and emphasizes: "Omara is actually called ...¹⁷⁹". One more sign of objectification, the denial of subjectivity, where the experiences, feelings, expressions, and affirmations of trans* people are not taken into account.

The unfortunate headline of this article generated a cascade of complaints and allegations in social media, on the part of those of us who considered that the title and approach of the article was humiliating, devaluing and violent towards the unhoused residents of the city (Ojo a las noticias 2017).

¹⁷⁷ Free translation from the Spanish: El indigente deja de pertenecer a los demás, y al bañarse, se actitud cambia. Se sienten renovados, es casi como un tipo de terapia en donde sienten, al menos por unas horas o días, que son parte de los demás

¹⁷⁸ Free translation from the Spanish: ¿Qué es eso que no comprendemos sobre estas personas, que con tan solo una ducha, pasan a ser aceptados por los demás?

¹⁷⁹ Free translation from the Spanish: Omara en realidad se llama...

Inquired by Ojo a las noticias¹⁸⁰, Priscilla Gómez, author of the article, recognized that the wording of the title was wrong:

Ella dice que quiso buscar una [palabra] poco común, una fuerte, para llamar la atención a la lectura. Afirma que su intención no era implicar que las personas fueran inmundicia. Más bien quería hacer referencia a que cotidianamente (no en la actividad reportada) a las personas sin hogar les falta intimidad para poder asearse, y que por ello deben hacerlo cuando puedan, a medias y a vista de la ciudad. "Mi intención nunca fue insultar", dice Gómez¹⁸¹ (Ojo a las noticias 2017).

However, the headline implied exactly what Gómez describes: the unhoused residents of the city portrayed as garbage. As she herself affirms, the choice of the word was not accidental, but a deliberate choice that sought to have an effect on readers. Moreover, it is well known that articles' headlines are reviewed by the editors of each section (Fournier 2009), so it was not only Gómez who failed to see the violence contained in the headline.

In fact, the article provoked so much criticism that the newspaper ended up changing the headline in the online version to one with a totally different meaning: "Limpiar el rechazo a cielo abierto" (Cleaning up rejection out in the open). Some time later, the article disappeared from the newspaper's website, leaving only the printed record of the unfortunate publication.

4.2.1. The art of conducting beasts that smell of humanity

After all this effervescence, Chepe se baña appeared on my radar as one of those projects that intervene in the city under a discourse of inclusion. I wanted to investigate further. I wanted to give it the benefit of the doubt, considering comments and reactions I read on social media, which claimed that the Gomez's article did not do justice to the project, which was actually a laudable initiative to help people in need.

Some months later I saw an interview with its director, Mauricio Villalobos, on the popular national television station Teletica. This interview was the defining factor that convinced me to include this project in the analysis of this study. The interview was broadcasted on the program "Las paredes oyen" (The walls are listening), hosted by a well-known television personality, Edgar Silva. Las paredes oyen

¹⁸⁰ Ojo a las noticias was a media observatory project that existed in Costa Rica for a short period of time. Funded by the transnational NGO Hivos, and managed in collaboration with the newspapers Semanario Universidad and La Voz de Guanacaste, the project sought a critical reading of what the media published in the country.

¹⁸¹ Free translation: She says she wanted to find an uncommon [word], a strong one, to draw attention to the reading of the article. She states that her intention was not to imply that those people were filthy. Rather, she wanted to reference that on a daily basis (not in the reported activity) homeless people lack privacy to groom themselves, and therefore they must do it when they can, scarcely and in front of everyone in the city. "My intention was never to insult," says Gomez.

was a talk show that, according to Teletica television, aimed “to elevate the emotions of the viewer and interviewee to a point never seen before” (Jiménez 2014).

The interview was broadcast on October 2, 2018 and was available in the web archive for several months. The tone of the interview was melodramatic. When asking the questions, Silva made a notorious effort to load the interview with emotivity, using a dramatic tone and lexicon, such as the metaphor "life crusade", which he used to describe Mauricio Villalobos' engagement in the Chepe se baña project. The crusades were bloody warlike enterprises promoted by the Catholic Church. A life crusade appears then as an oxymoron that combines the power of death with the struggle for life, a warfare metaphor that places Villalobos as a crusader, a soldier who obtains the indulgence of his sins in exchange for his dedication to a holy war.

Continuing with the religious discourse, in the interview Villalobos affirms that heaven spoke to him and gave him a message: someone must conduct the people. "Conducting" the people appears in the interview as a reiteration, almost an isotopy in which Villalobos and the Chepe se baña project are portrayed as agents of salvation for those beings who, stripped of their possibility of agency, are objectified in the city. Villalobos is described in the interview as an "ordinary man doing something extraordinary". Not surprisingly, the Foundation's volunteer program is called Heroes:

Image 64
Chepe se baña's Heroes



Source: Heroes grup chat

Some of the interview's fragments are worth analyzing. Villalobos claims to believe in "a city for everyone". This phrase places us in the realm of the discourse of inclusion: a city for all peoples. But what exactly does this mean? Villalobos describes Chepe se baña's work as a humanitarian activity. At the time of this interview, the project already had two buses adapted with mobile showers. During their activities and their "life fairs", the project volunteers set up in a certain sector of the city and invite the unhoused people to take a shower, get a haircut, change clothes and eat a hot meal. As we

shall see, they also manage a "listening space" and other activities from a harm reduction approach. In the words of Villalobos, the project seeks to "get them to stop consumption" for a few hours, which, for him, results in a benefit for the city and for them. The problem is that after those hours, the project returns them to the starting point, with the same hunger, with the same dispossession, facing the same violence and the same cravings, the same miserable conditions, but perfumed and well dressed.

Regarding the financing of the project, Villalobos explains that they obtain most of their funds from private donations, corporate social responsibility programs, and also from the show business. For example, national artist Tapón, a well-known reggae and popular music singer, who converted to Christianity a few years ago, supported Chepe se baña's cause in 2016 in the impersonation contest "Tu cara me suena", also produced by Teletica. Tapón won about \$6500 for the project doing a cross-dressing and blackface performance of iconic Cuban artist Celia Cruz.

Image 65:
Tapón



Source: Randall Sandova, in Diario Extra (<https://www.diarioextra.com/Noticia/detalle/224725/vivo-de-la-gracia-de-dios>)

Image 66:
Tapón's blackface



Source: Jorge Navarro, La Teja (<https://www.lateja.cr/farandula/tapon-confeso-que-iglesias-le-cerraron-las-puertas/POLRC6PQVFA6PO2YB6RXLBI6NQ/story/>)

As one might expect in Costa Rica, the blackface passed almost free of criticism on national television. However, the singer claims that he did suffer the consequences of dressing as a woman, as most Christian churches with whom he had contracts closed their doors to him (La Teja 2018). In light of the imaginaries about being Costa Rican discussed in the previous chapter, we can understand why in Costa Rica a crossdressing performance generates more outrage than a blackface performance.

Another significant metaphor in the interview is the repeated use of the expression "urban tribes" to refer to the unhoused residents of San José. In his descriptions, Villalobos asserts that there are tribes that are clearly zoned, which do not mingle with each other. These descriptions remind me of the field journals of the conquistadors, who described the native peoples with the propriety and arrogance of an expert who observes the savages from the comfort of his privileges.

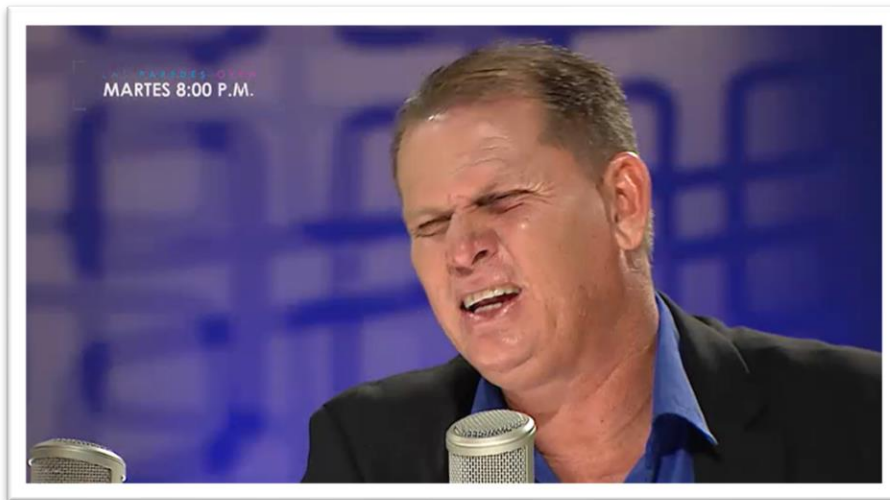
"The people you see on the street, no matter what they say, are living in hell¹⁸²", Villalobos affirms, once again revealing the way in which he conceives of this population. The religious metaphor adds drama and frames us once again within the Costa Rican imaginary. In a country blessed by the Virgin, the unhoused people unquestionably live in hell, they live in improper conditions that seem to be incompatible with the imaginary of Central American Switzerland.

Moreover, the opinion of these people must always be questioned for, as Villalobos states, regardless of what they say, the truth is that they are denizens of hell. Recalling Gayatri Spivak's (2010) contributions, it seems that for Villalobos, an unhoused person cannot speak. It is a clear process of objectification, which combines silencing with the denial of their subjectivity.

In the interview, with a tone that borders on misery pornography, Silva asks Villalobos: "What do they [the unhoused residents of the city] smell like?" Villalobos answers with words and with his face:

¹⁸² Free translation from the Spanish: "La gente que uno ve en la calle, indistintamente de lo que digan, vive un infierno"

Image 67:
What do they smell like?



Source: Screenshot from *Las paredes oyen*, Teletica (October 2, 2018)

With a face of disgust, Villalobos responds by saying that the physical odor passes, it is temporary, the real problem is in the exclusion that these people face by not being able to enter a supermarket, a hospital or a toilet. In fact, in Costa Rica, unhoused people can enter the hospital, thanks to the existence (for now) of a universal and solidary social security system which has some options for insurance covered by the State. However, this does not mean that they will be well received. Certainly, things would get more complicated in a supermarket, where they would probably be refused entry. In all these scenarios, private security guards would most likely stop them at the entrance, with the same expression of repulsion that Villalobos shows in the image above. In any case, why would they enter a supermarket where they do not have the means to buy any of the products? Silva asks what the unhoused residents of the city smell like, and I would like to answer: they smell of humanity, of the human animal deprived of privileges, of *homo sacer*, of that humanity of which they are being stripped.

Their behavior, according to Villalobos, is also somewhat despicable. "Street dwellers are behavioral, they are driven by behaviors. They are addicted to manipulation. They are professional manipulators and liars¹⁸³". Once again, Villalobos puts these people's capacity for thought and reflection into question. For this reason, this sub-population needs conduction: "We have to conduct the street dwellers to a better quality of life¹⁸⁴". Villalobos positions himself as a redeemer, as a leader who possesses a truth capable of leading them to a better place. His statements implicitly and explicitly

¹⁸³ Free translation from the Spanish: Los habitantes de la calle son conductuales, se mueven por conductas. Son adictos a la manipulación. Son profesionales manipulando y mintiendo.

¹⁸⁴ Free translation from the Spanish: Tenemos que conducir a los habitantes de la calle a una mejor calidad de vida.

suggest that there is something to fix in the lives of the unhoused people, something that escapes their own autonomy and agency, and therefore requires the intervention of heroes who can somehow restore quality of life to these bodies.

Once again, we find the amalgam of biopolitical and colonial discourses. Anchored in a hygienist discourse and inspired by the rhetoric of the Christian epic, Villalobos asserts his knowledge/power over that anonymous mass of subhuman bodies that provoke disgust, fear or indifference in the population. He knows their needs better than they do, he can translate their inaudible voices into spectacular words and images, he knows how to discern "the good" where their vision is blurred, and therefore, he exercises biopower (sponsored by churches, corporations, and the state) by conducting their actions.

As if he had read Foucault, when he states in *Security, Territory and Population*, that it is possible to act effectively on the population through the interplay of factors that at first glance seem remote or indirect (Foucault 2009, 72), Villalobos' biopolitical project could be synthesized in this sentence: "That's why I love Chepe se baña, because the guys on the street don't even notice we're conducting them¹⁸⁵".

4.2.2. The socio-sanitary apparatus

If when I read the first report in *La Nación* I still doubted that the objectification could be the journalist's or the media's approach, this interview in *Teletica* made me think that it was in fact the project's approach. Thus, I decided to follow up on the project. Therefore, as soon as I arrived in Costa Rica in 2019, I contacted Mauricio Villalobos to request an interview in the context of the fieldwork of this thesis. Villalobos answered me briefly, gave me his phone number, and told me that in fact everything there was to say about the project was already circulating in media interviews (he provided me with a couple of links, including the interview on *Las paredes oyen*), so instead of interviewing him, he invited me to come to an activity on October 6, 2019 to observe the project in action.

This is how I arrived at a diurnal session of *Chepe se baña*. Based on my previous research experience in the city, I preferred to attend accompanied, both to support the ethnographic observation process and for emotional support, as sometimes these experiences can be overwhelming. I was accompanied by my friend and colleague Luis Gómez Ordoñez, who at the time was director of the School of Psychology at the National University. We met in downtown San José and took a bus north to get to the activity. What follows is an account of what we observed at the event.

¹⁸⁵ Free translation from the Spanish: Me encanta por eso Chepe se baña, porque los muchachos de la calle ni se dan cuenta que los estamos conduciendo.

Upon arrival, Villalobos greeted us amidst calls and directions to the volunteers. He welcomed us without much warmth and immediately ordered one of the volunteers to give us a tour of the facilities. Everything happened very quickly, in accordance with the pace at which the project works. A volunteer, that I will call Freddy, led us to the bus with showers designated for men. Volunteers shouted back and forth:

Voluntaria 2: Vaya que le va a echar perfume don Freddy.

Freddy: ¡Venga, papá! Eso, levante. ¡Bueno!

Voluntaria 2: Ahí hay otro, don Walter, sí quiere [bañarse].

Freddy: Listo. Ese es el sistema. ¡El siguiente! ¡Metan a otro hombre ahí!¹⁸⁶

Image 68
Chepe se baña's shower bus



"Turn on the camera," our tour manager told me upon seeing my recording equipment, "so you can film how the apparatus [dispositivo¹⁸⁷] works," he said as we walked up the steps of the bus. A little nervous, I actually paused the camera as we entered the narrow enclosure where two showers are located.

¹⁸⁶ Free translation: **Volunteer 2:** Go on, Mr. Freddy is going to put some perfume on you.

Freddy: Come on, boy! That's it, lift it up. Good!

Volunteer 2: There's another one, Mr. Freddy, he does want to [take a shower].

Freddy: Done! This is the system. Next! Get another man in there!

¹⁸⁷ He uses the noun "dispositivo", which in Spanish is the same for "device" as for "apparatus" or "dispositif" in Foucault's terms. I use the term "apparatus" in the translation following the analytical line of this project as part of a biopolitical apparatus of security.

Image 69
Inside de buses of Chepe se baña



We were barely separated by a plastic curtain. I could see the feet of a user as he showered. "Keep filming, you can do it in this area, no problem," the volunteer insisted when he saw that I lowered the camera. I told him that I preferred to ask the user person if he gave consent before filming. The volunteer shrugged his shoulders and made a gesture as if to say, "As you wish". He then pulled back the shower curtain to reveal a man in his underwear, who he told to hurry up and finish dressing outside to make room for the next man. "So... he's coming out in his boxer shorts and this gentleman is coming in," he explained. He then showed me the materials, bottles of shampoo, deodorant, talcum powder, perfume, and explained that everything is measured and timed. Statistics and figures guarantee the project's efficiency.

Freddy: Cuando ellos entran a las duchas se les dice... Nosotros visualmente no tenemos ningún contacto, muy poco. Nada más les vemos la mano. Porque cuando están adentro se les dice que saquen la mano. Sacan la mano, echamos jabón líquido, ellos se bañan... Pa, pa, bien, bien. Si quieren más, pues más. Hay un rango ahí de duración de entre 3 y 4 minutos, aproximadamente¹⁸⁸.

He stated that they are very careful to ensure that the volunteers do not have eye contact with the users once they undress. He said they cannot give them the whole bottle of shampoo because they would make an unreasonable use of the resources. Then, he showed me how it worked: he asked the user who was in the shower to stick out his hand and poured him a ration of shampoo. He told him

¹⁸⁸ Free translation from the Spanish: When they enter the showers, we tell them.... We have no visual contact, very little. We only see their hand. Because when they are inside we tell them to put their hand out. They put out their hand, we pour liquid soap, they take a shower.... Pah, pah, good, good, good. If they want more, then more. There is a range of duration between 3 and 4 minutes approximately.

to wash and to hurry, because he had already been there for 4 minutes. He asked me one more time if I wanted to film that scene, without showing the face of the users. I told him there was no need. We went outside.

By this time I was already feeling overwhelmed by that operation that reminded me of the mass production of factories. In the midst of that hygienist chain of production, the objectification of the unhoused residents of the city began to take my breath away. From outside I could hear the volunteers shouting things like: "Let me know when they are done!" "How many are left there? 2? 3?" "We need more shoes!" "Let me know when to pour the soap." "Soap up first!"

Our guide took us to the other bus where the women's showers were located. They were unoccupied. He explained to me that they serve more men than women, so sometimes they put men in the women's showers to maximize the resources. He also told me that the women's showers have hot water, unlike the men's showers, because the project has a special interest in taking care of women.

We went out again and our guide led us to another volunteer, whom we will call Sebastian. He turned out to be one of the key informants for this study. Sebastian is a young volunteer with a great heart and a strong will to help others. He took an interest in my research and shared valuable information with me that I could hardly have gotten otherwise. Sebastian is probably one of the people with the greatest clarity on the broad panorama of the various Christian projects intervening in the city. His knowledge is empirical. He devotes his free time to Catholic and Christian charity programs. That day I learned about the existence of several initiatives: Lloverá comida, Grítalo, Watts... It was Sebastián who led me to the project Los juegos de la calle, which I will discuss in Chapter 5.

For him, the most valuable thing about *Chepe se baña* is that this project has managed to bring together in the same activity the Catholic Church and evangelical (neo-Pentecostal) churches, something that, in his words, "no politician has been able to achieve". In this sense, he considers *Chepe se baña* to be an inclusive project, inviting others to join in, fostering collaborative relationships rather than competition.

Sebastián comments that they usually work in coordination with Catholic or Christian churches. The Foundation is only in charge of providing the service of the buses and volunteers; clothing, food and other materials are provided by the churches, or financed through donations from corporate social responsibility programs. I ask him about the involvement of the State, to which he replies: "The State does not help much, actually. Little does it help".

I inquire about the strategies they use to attract the target population. *Chepe se baña's* posts are widely reposted and replicated in the media and social networks (*Chepe se baña* even started a

professional audiovisual production that year, which is broadcasted on its youtube channel). But, knowing the living conditions of the unhoused residents of the city, I know that these are not channels to reach them, because most of them do not have access to television or telephones, much less smartphones. Sebastian told me that for small activities, such as the one we were at, the church is in charge of organizing the event. However, for the big activities, such as the "Life fairs", the volunteers go out the nights before the event to invite people in the streets using flyers. He calls this "brigades", a word that caught my attention because of its military connotation.

In the field of activism in response to HIV, such activities are often referred to as "abordajes" (literally "approaches", referring to the act of approaching people in their everyday spaces and activities). In "abordajes" the emphasis is on the actions, which seek an approach to the population that lives or works on the street. "Brigada", on the other hand, puts the emphasis on the volunteer, a soldier of a good army that comes to recruit this sub-population. The use of flyers for the call is also noteworthy. Choosing this channel of communication is strange, and reflects the lack of knowledge, or else, the classist and ableist position regarding the people to be recruited, since it assumes, on the one hand, that everyone can read, and on the other, that everyone knows how to read. In any case, even when the people who inhabit the streets of San José can and know how to read, this is not necessarily an activity that is familiar to them. In my experience of work on memory and historicization with a group of trans women who were sex workers in San José during the 1970s and 1980s, I was able to observe a predominance of orality as a form of communication, bonding and reflection. Written resources proved to be much less fruitful than plural dialogues among them. In this sense, it was of utmost importance for the process to adapt both the research techniques and the calls for activism and mobilization actions to the oral form. This leads me to wonder if the use of a flyer is a strategy conceived according to the characteristics of the target population, or if it is a decision biased by the privileges of the volunteers of this organization.

As we talked, there was a lot of activity around us. The accelerated movement of the volunteers contrasted with the lethargy of some users who walk and eat at their usual pace. One woman seems angry. She seems to be very anxious, walking agitated from one side to the other, shouting at other users and volunteers, pushing us with her shoulder as she passes by. I failed to understand exactly what the reason for her anger was, but my observation partner and I realized that our presence was worsening her discomfort, so we decided to walk away to avoid adding more pressure to the situation. Sebastian, the volunteer we were talking to, struggled to ignore the situation. When we suggested to him to move away to avoid disturbing her, he told us that she has a quarrel with a man who is also there. I instantly remember the multiple stories of abuse and misogynist violence that several cis and trans women have recounted to me in the streets. My body becomes alert and gives me away.

Sebastián minimizes the situation and affirms that they [the unhoused residents of the city] always have fights, but there is no need to get involved, they will soon get over it.

"Have they already shown you the whole apparatus (dispositivo)?" asked Sebastian. In my head that word bounces scandalously referring me to Foucault. I answered that we saw the showers. Sebastian points out the other "stations": a beauty/grooming tent where they get their haircuts, their nails and their beards trimmed, and a few tables where those who have agreed to complete the various hygiene and beauty stations have their lunch.

The food, another volunteer explained, is arranged by the churches or provided by private companies or NGOs that help with donations:

De ahí pasan a un desayuno, lo que la comunidad les pueda dar, porque tampoco es que vamos a decir, vamos a darle todo el almuerzo, porque no tenemos muchos recursos. Entonces, lo primordial es que ellos salgan bañaditos. Que salgan dignos para la sociedad. Que ellos vean que son valiosos para la sociedad¹⁸⁹.

This prioritization of showers over meals reflects the hygienist approach of the project. The problem of access to food, as we will see in Chapter 5, is not a minor issue. For many of the project's users this will be the only hot dish they have in days. Hunger presses hard on their bellies and often leads them to approach such activities in the hope of receiving a plate of food. However, as this volunteer states, the priority in this project is the shower. In fact, the food station is one of the last steps in the socio-sanitary apparatus, which can be accessed only after washing the street from their bodies. The shower, says this volunteer, endows these people with dignity, a dignity that their dirty bodies do not have. As if by magic, the water and soap confer on them a value for society, a value that they did not have or that was not visible before showering, as if the scabs of precariousness covered the dignity of these bodies, making it invisible to society and to themselves.

Following this rhetoric of in/visibility we can stretch other reflections. A full belly is invisible in the eyes of society, versus a freshly washed body, dressed in clean clothes, with well-groomed hair and a nice make-up or groomed beard, as appropriate. In this sense, the showered body becomes a visible sign of the organization's work, which, when captured in a photograph, becomes a tangible indicator of its results. The spectacularization is one of the marketing strategies of this organization, which mobilizes an economy of likes, hearts, reposts, news, TV and radio appearances, donations and advertisement.

¹⁸⁹ Free translation: From there they go to breakfast, whatever the community can give them, because, I mean, we are not going to give them a full lunch either, because we do not have a lot of resources. So, the most important thing is that they leave well showered. That they leave worthy for society. That they see that they are valuable to society.

Sebastián explained it to me clearly, while showing me the "before and after" collage he likes to make of those users whose "makeover" is shocking:

La vez pasada en Coronado, él llegó en esa condición. Ahí está todo el proceso, verdad. Y ya le están cortando, ahí está. Vea, él llegó con las uñas, las uñas de los dedos de los pies... Ahí se las tuvieron que cortar con tijera...¹⁹⁰

He showed me the pictures as if the user were an animal enslaved in a circus for amusement. I felt sick, not because of the images he showed me, but because of the humiliating situation. I found it hard to hide my discomfort. What would that man think, I wonder, if he knew that a complete stranger like me would become a voyeur of this intervention on his body? I wanted the moment to pass quickly but I did not want my discomfort to give me away, so I held my eyes on his phone.

As Sebastián swiped through the photographs of that urban monster, in my head I could not stop thinking about medical exhibits and human zoos, about the centuries of violence that abject bodies have had to endure. I think of the European entrepreneurs who in a not-so-distant past enslaved people in Africa, Asia and Abya Yala and displayed their racialized bodies for the amusement of white Europeans. I think of the doctor's fingers separating the labia and penis on the body of an intersex child, of the professor's fingers showing his students the centimeters of dilation of the cervix of a woman who is going to give birth for the first time, of the policeman's hand that in the middle of a inspection, pulls the panties of a trans woman, and takes out her penis, to leave it in the air as evidence of the weight of normativity. I think of the spectacularization of precariousness, of difference, of dehumanization and bestialization, and of the thin fiber that connects those colonial stories of violence with that moment in which I silently looked at Sebastián's smartphone while he excitedly showed me the visual records of those urban critters and the process of metamorphosis in which Chepe se baña temporarily turns them into human citizens and grants them dignity. "Y él terminó todo el proceso. ¡Irreconocible! Es de esas personas que llevan todo el proceso. Y esto es para que las personas vean que sí, realmente hay un cambio¹⁹¹", affirms Sebastián.

¹⁹⁰ Free translation: Come look, last time in Coronado, he arrived in that condition. The whole process is there, right? There they are already trimming him, there he is. You see, he arrived with his nails, his toenails... They had to cut them with scissors there...

¹⁹¹ Free translation: And he completed the whole process. Unrecognizable! He's one of those that undergo the whole process. And these [the pictures] is for people to see that yes, there really is a change.

Image 70
Before and after



Source: Edited photo from Chepe se baña Facebook Page¹⁹²

The transformation acquires a value in the eyes of third parties. These before-and-after photos are the proof that Chepe se baña does produce real changes, that their work is efficient and produces impressive results. That is why, says Sebastián, sometimes tensions arise when some of the users are reluctant to get their hair and beard cut, or when they do not want to be photographed. The project still provides them with the services, he explains, but it is not as effective for the project, because it does not produce a visible and publishable result.

So far, we have seen the sanitary aspect, but the socio-sanitary apparatus does not end there. Sebastián led us to another tent and introduces us to the coordinator, whom we will call Fabián. I immediately recognized Fabián, he is a colleague who has been a professor at the University of Costa Rica. I do not think he recognized me, at least not at first glance. Fabián explained to us that he coordinates a "listening apparatus", in which professionals and students of psychology, social work, occupational therapy, nursing, among others intervene. "El dispositivo de escucha es precisamente esto, un circuito sociosanitario. Entonces empezamos con baño, comida, corte de pelo, y luego escucha¹⁹³".

¹⁹² I intentionally blurred the face in this picture to protect the user's identity. In Chepe se baña's Facebook Page, the picture shows his face.

¹⁹³ Free translation: The listening apparatus is precisely this, a socio-sanitary circuit. So we start with a shower, food, haircut, and then listening.

I took a look at the “socio-sanitary *apparatus*” and there, I also recognized several faces, who this time do recognize back. They are psychology students, who had been my students a few years ago. I took a couple of steps back to hide from their range of vision. I did not want to reveal too much about who I am, about my militant activities, or about the kind of research I do. Fabián took no notice of my avoidance strategy and continued to explain about their “model of care”, which is based on an eclectic cocktail of psychology authors.:

...lo que busca el dispositivo de escucha es hacer: orientación, desde reducción de daños, verdad? Entonces, se les da toda una capacitación... Entrevista motivacional, prevención de recaídas, ciclos de reducción de daños, Sistémica familiar, y para que estén claros, verdad, de Rogers, en todo lo que es la intervención directa desde reducción de daños. Y desde psicoterapia de Reducción de daños de Katarsky, también. Yo estoy haciendo una adaptación de Tatarsky, a Latinoamérica desde Martín Baró. Desde la desideologización del sentido común, digamos. Pero estamos en proceso¹⁹⁴.

Finally, Fabián led us to a table that is the last step of the socio-sanitary apparatus, where users are given a series of supplies to survive on the streets:

Volunteer #4: Esto es aceite de coco, eso se aplica con un aplicador, para los que vienen con los labios muy despedazados, del tubo [usado para fumar crack], les quema la boca. Y damos pasta de dientes, damos condones. Los que también así nos piden a veces, porque como amanecen en las calles y todo toes les damos bloqueador solar, para que se protejan. Y cuando ya es un evento más masivo, hacemos un registro. Para nosotros, una encuesta, de cuánta gente atendemos¹⁹⁵.

Fabián showed me the database they use in the large activities. They include variables such as age, gender, nationality, place of dwelling, type of substances consumed, among others. This registry, if systematically compiled, would possibly constitute the largest mapping of the conditions of the unhoused in the city of San José. The statistics currently produced by the State are scarce and have great limitations, since their methodologies are not adapted to the nomadic context of this "sub-population". There are very few no systematic approaches by the State, nor are there State programs for the attention of the unhoused residents. It could be said that the unhoused residents of the city constitute one of the most profound sociological absences produced by official statistics in Costa Rica.

¹⁹⁴ Free translation: What the listening apparatus seeks to do is to provide orientation, from the harm reduction model, right? So, they are given a whole training... A motivational interview, relapse prevention, harm reduction cycles, systemic family, so that they have things clear, right? Following Rogers, in what is the direct intervention from harm reduction. And from Tatarsky's Harm Reduction psychotherapy, too. I am making an adaptation of Tatarsky, to Latin America with Martin Baró. From the de-ideologization of common sense, let's say. But we are in process.

¹⁹⁵ Free translation: This is coconut oil, that is applied with a Q-tip, for those who come with their lips very broken, because of the tube [used to smoke crack], it burns their mouth. And we distribute toothpaste, we give them condoms. Sometimes they also ask for, because they wake up in the streets and all that, we give them sunscreen, so they can protect themselves. And when it is a larger event, we keep a record. For us, a survey of how many people we serve.

An absence that becomes scandalous, since this produced void contrasts with the very visible and growing number of people that can be observed sleeping on cardboard in the streets of San José. In this panorama, it is the Christian projects that generate most of the data on the unhoused residents of San José, data that are produced not by means of studies but through records that are intended for evaluation. The objective is to present indicators of results in the language of competitive funds and cooperation.

In this context, I took the opportunity to ask Fabián a question that had been running in my head since I arrived at the socio-sanitary device:

Mar: Por cierto, ahora que veo esto. Por ejemplo, las mujeres trans, en el tema de duchas, en cuál ducha las meten?

Fabián: No, no, aquí eso no, aquí eso está totalmente claro. Y después, se anota la zona de deambulación y tiempo en calle. Porque hay gente que pasa 3 años sin bañarse. Hace mes y medio hicimos este registro de Alajuela [otra ciudad] y había 3 personas con 3 años sin bañarse. ¿Se imagina lo que es eso?¹⁹⁶

He does not really answer my question. "Totally clear" in Costa Rica could mean anything, from: "we are clear that trans women are women", to "we are clear that a trans woman in a women's restroom is a danger to others". In the following weeks I inquired with trans women who have used services at Chepe se baña, and they indicated that their gender identity had been respected both in the sexual division of the showers and at the beauty station. I was positively surprised by this, since respect for the self-determination of trans* people in church-related spaces is something difficult to find. I was left with the open interrogant of how they arrived at that. I hypothesized that Fabián might have played an important role, since he has done work with Transvida in harm reduction programs. This contact with trans* activists has possibly allowed him to break with prejudices held by Christian churches. However, Fabián did not want to go deeper into the subject, he gave me this ambiguous answer and changed the subject.

Back with Sebastián, I inquired about what he and the project identify as the causes of the problem they are addressing. I asked him: what, in your experience, is the root of the problem? What is it that drives people to the streets? His answer combined the imaginaries of Costa Rican exceptionalism and equality. He told me that Costa Rica is a particular case, very different from the United States or other countries in Latin America, where people end up on the streets because of poverty. In Costa Rica, he

¹⁹⁶ Free translation: Mar: By the way, now that I see this. For example, trans women, when it comes to showers, which shower do you put them in?

Fabián: No, no, here that is totally clear. And then, we note down the area in which they wander and the time they have lived in the street. Because there are people who go 3 years without taking a shower. A month and a half ago we made this register in Alajuela [another city] and there were 3 people with 3 years without showering. Can you imagine what that is like?

assured me, the problem is not poverty, nor unemployment, nor inequality, the problem is drug consumption. Poverty is unthinkable in the imaginary Costa Rica, even though we see it displayed on every corner of the city:

Es que si usted va... Digamos, yo haciendo un estudio, de la gente de Lloverá comida, de la Fundación Grítalo, el estudio que hicimos, por ejemplo en el centro-dormitorio, el 85% de las personas que están en la calle son profesionales. Y el 90%... No, el 95% consumen. Y solo el 5% que llega al centro dormitorio no tienen vicios. El desempleo. Sabemos que el desempleo es grande, pero la mayor causa es la droga¹⁹⁷.

This explanation reproduces a psychologism that is problematic in several ways. On the one hand, it presents substance use as an individual and ahistorical situation, a phenomenon detached from material conditions and social relations. Thus, drug use is seen as a focused and impermeable problem, a situation that emerges as if by spontaneous generation, or in the best of cases, as a result of genetic determinants that are activated by magical misfortune. This fragmentary conception of the causes of the situation leads, of course, to a fragmentary and equally psychologizing approach, which pursues to "rescue" the substance users from problematic consumption, without transforming the material conditions in which this form of consumption takes place.

The answer to the problem suggested by Sebastián is also loaded with coloniality:

Latinoamérica está muy atrasado. Está muy atrasado. Queremos ver a Europa. De hecho, el campamento que vamos a hacer, ir a dormir a la calle y al parque, es un sistema que está usando Europa. Entonces la primera fecha se va a hacer aquí el 7 de diciembre. Están invitados para que lleguen, verdad. Van a llegar personalidades y vamos a recaudar, va a haber música, va a haber comida. No es lo mismo, la intención es hacer consciencia pero sabemos que mentiras que va a llegar una pareja y va a ir a aguantar frío, van a llegar con... Pero vamos a recaudar fondos, esa es nuestra intención¹⁹⁸.

Latin America is neither a mirror nor a path. The focus is on Europe. The experiences of other cities in the region are dismissed as inferior, backward, underdeveloped. In this scenario it is unthinkable to find answers or paths in the dialogues with the cosmogonies of the native peoples, with their proposals for alternative ways of healing, of being in the world and living in the community. For Costa Rica, the answers are to be found in Europe, in modernity, in the globalized and spectacularized replica

¹⁹⁷ Free translation: If you go... Let's say, I did a study, of the users of Lloverá comida, of the Fundación Grítalo, the study we did, for example, in the dormitory-center, 85% of the people who are on the street are professionals. And 90%... No, 95% consume. And only 5% who come to the dormitory-center do not have vices. Unemployment... We know that unemployment is high, but the major cause is drugs.

¹⁹⁸ Free translation: Latin America is way behind. It is way behind. We want to look at Europe. In fact, the campsite that we are going to organize, going to sleep in the street and in the park, is a system that Europe is using. Here, the first date is going to be on December 7. You are invited to come, of course. Personalities are going to arrive, and we are going to raise funds, there will be music, there will be food. It is not the same, the intention is to raise awareness, but we know people are going to arrive with their spouses, and they are going to be cold, and they are going to arrive with... But we are going to raise funds, that is our intention.

that produces and sustains this economy of charity. From this fragmentary and colonial perspective, the intention of the harm reduction approach to break with the perspective that dehumanizes and stigmatizes substance users is weakened. This depoliticized reading of the causes that overlooks the structural conditions of dispossession and denies the deep inequality that exists in this country, ends up reproducing a discourse that blames people for the precarious conditions in which they live. In the whitewashed Costa Rica, with its broad middle class and its exceptionality, the situations that lead a person to the streets can only come from the individual disorder of an abnormal subject, because the social peace that characterizes us only produces good citizens, who love work, progress and the path of the Lord. The abnormal are those who, having all the opportunities that this blessed land gives us, surrender, for no apparent reason, to an excessive consumption of substances that leaves them in the street without the possibility of agency, without subjectivity, with a broken and unrecognizable condition of humanity, masked under the scabs of the city.

As we left the activity, my ethnography partner and I walked through the neighborhood park. There, we observed a discordant scene: multiple bodies laid on the dirt and grass of the park. At first glance, they would appear to be almost young people having an urban picnic (something that happens very rarely in the capital's parks, due to insecurity, police harassment and complaints from neighbors). As we drew closer, we noticed that they were actually the users of the project, lying on the same ground where they sleep every night, but now looking fresh and clean. For the neighbors, this image is possibly more potable than that of the daily misery that inhabits the community park. Their bodies, dressed in clean clothes, visually disguise the precarious conditions in which they live. But clothes cannot mask the hunger, the cold, the violence, the dispossession, and the inequality.

4.2.3. The management of an open-air psychiatric hospital

*los sistemas de verdad aprendidos previamente hará que los propios
ciudadanos se conviertan en los celosos guardianes
del orden que les ha sido impuesto¹⁹⁹*
(Sevilla 2010, 45–46)

Mauricio Villalobos affirms that San José is like an open-air psychiatric hospital (E. Silva 2018). Although I strongly disagree with his approach and ethical principles, I find this metaphor very interesting. The city as a psychiatric hospital takes us to the terrain of normality and dissidence. It speaks of a space inhabited by beings who step out of the normal curve, or who are located inside another curve. A psychiatric hospital is supposed to be, in theory, a space dedicated to alleviating

¹⁹⁹ Free translation: the previously learned systems of truth will cause the citizens themselves to become the zealous guardians of the order that has been imposed on them.

discomfort. The long history of violence that has characterized the asylum around the world has shown us that in practice this is often not the case, and that the psychiatric hospital reproduces various violent practices based on vigilance, confinement, discipline, experimentation and forced treatments applied to people whose capacity for agency has been declared invalid by the medical authorities.

In this sense, the city as an open-air psychiatric hospital is a cite for wall-less discipline. However, if we think of it from another perspective, if we think of the city as a space in which some of its inhabitants, the so-called mad, the abnormal, seek to heal themselves with others, the metaphor presents us with other possibilities. The question I am pursuing in these sections is whether it is possible to think of the city as a space of potential healing, without this implying pathologizing, violating, imposing, disciplining or commanding.

In the interview, Fabián, Chepe se baña's psychologist, explains that the project's objective is harm reduction. The time spent by users participating in the activities of the socio-sanitary apparatus is measured, and this becomes a criterion of success. Some people, said Fabián, criticize the project because they do not understand it, but in his opinion, these activities produce successful, quantifiable results.

O sea, la gente llega a veces y nos dice: es que ustedes los alcahuetean y de todo. No, eso se llama reducción de daños. Es reducción de daños. Si la persona está aquí 5 o 6 horas, son 6 horas que no van a consumir. 6 horas por... Hoy se atendieron 80 personas... Es bastante la reducción de daños. Pero a veces es complicado, verdad²⁰⁰.

From this perspective, avoiding drug use is the main objective. But this is just the first stage in a well-defined step-by-step route. Fabián continues:

El dispositivo lo que hace es orientar, dar información, influir... El objetivo principal es influir en las pautas de consumo. Esto no es alcahuetería, que eso es lo que se dice, verdad. Es influir en las pautas de consumo, mejorar la calidad de vida, dar orientación según las decisiones de la persona y conectarlos al sistema nacional de tratamiento... Si la persona dice: no quiero dormir en la calle, entonces tenemos conexiones con los centros-dormitorios ahí en San José. Hay uno, Anny William, y el Centro de la Municipalidad. Entonces pueden dormir, hacemos una referencia para que duerman ahí. Empiezan en la Red, con Fundación Lloverá. La Fundación Lloverá es importante porque entonces, después del proceso de dormitorio, entran a entrevista con trabajadora social, para ver la posibilidad de que pasen a un albergue de reducción de daños. Este... y si la persona tiene la decisión, entonces pasa a un centro de

²⁰⁰ Free translation: I mean, sometimes people come and tell us: you spoil them, and all sorts of things. No, this is called harm reduction. It is harm reduction. If the person is here for 5 or 6 hours, that's 6 hours they are not going to consume. 6 hours per... Today attended we 80 people... It is quite a lot of harm reduction. But sometimes it is complicated, isn't it?

abstinencia, pero eso depende de las decisiones que la persona vaya tomando en el camino, verdad. Y, por supuesto, intervenirlos en todos los procesos de recaída²⁰¹.

This explanation Fabián gave me is different from what other volunteers told me about the process. In Fabián's description, the users' agency is recognized. If the person is willing to enter an institutionalization pilgrimage, Chepe se baña activates its contacts to support them. At first glance, it would seem that what is being offered to users is the freedom to choose: to decide whether or not to sleep on the street, to decide whether or not to check into a harm reduction shelter, to decide whether or not to enter an abstinence center. To decide if they want to take the path that the foundation offers them in exchange for stopping, at least for a while, their substance use.

A first problematic aspect of this formulation is the assumption that all unhoused residents of the city do not have a house as a result of their substance use. Sebastian claims that 95% of the people they work with are substance users. Even if this were true, what would happen to the other 5%? Are these people destined to live on the street, as they do not meet the criteria for inclusion in the "exit" route from consumption to abstinence? It seems paradoxical that unhoused residents who are not substance users are thrown into the bare life without the possibility of taking another course, and yet this does not contradict the discourse and practices of Chepe se baña, where substance use is pointed out as the only cause of urban precarious life.

A second problematic aspect lies in the discourse of this route as a free choice. From all that has been discussed in the previous sections, and in the light of Foucault's (2009) contributions, one might ask if this is truly a free choice. How free is the choice on an empty belly? How free is a decision when it comes to food and shelter? In the security apparatus, the renunciation of freedoms is presented as a freedom of choice. The conditions that push us to that choice are blurred or deliberately hidden. Biopower does not resort to coercion as disciplinary power would do, but conducts us (apropos of that word Villalobos likes so much), acting on things that appear to be unrelated.

The dispossession and precarization produced by the modern/colonial, capitalist/patriarchal Christian-centric/western-centric world system (Grosfoguel 2016a), the experiences of violence lived in the city, the fear of cold, hunger, ostracism and oblivion make this choice a deeply emotional

²⁰¹ Free translation: What the apparatus does is to guide, to provide information, to influence.... The main objective is to influence patterns of drug consumption. This is not spoiling them, which is what is often claimed, right? It is to influence consumption patterns, to improve the quality of life, to give guidance according to the person's decisions and connect them to the national treatment system... If the person says: I don't want to sleep on the street, then we have connections with the dormitory centers in San José. There is one, Anny William, and the Municipal Center. Then they can sleep, we make a referral for them to sleep there. They start in the network, with Fundación Lloverá. The Fundación Lloverá is important because then, after the dormitory process, they are interviewed by a social worker to see if they can move on to a harm reduction shelter. Then, if the person makes the decision, they go to an abstinence center, but that depends on the decisions that the person makes along the way, right? And, of course, we intervene them in all the relapse processes.

decision. Emotional, not in the *sentipensante* sense of the term, but in the sense of bare desperation. Entering this route of institutionalization, the surrender of one's own body to a series of norms and control, is presented as the only way out for the unhoused people who want to get off the street. This route, it should be noted, is framed within an idea of cure that is sustained by medical and religious discourses. Although they speak of a harm reduction approach, Fabián presents us with a linear and progressive route, from the street to institutionalization, from consumption to abstinence. This route is guarded by religious organizations, which undoubtedly impregnate their ideology in this process of "cure". In this sense, the decision to embark on this route implies at least two conditions for users: (progressively) renouncing substance use and submitting to the rules dictated by Christian doctrine.

In contrast with the idea of free choice, conversations with other volunteers revealed a complex system of management of the lives and bodies of the unhoused residents of the city, where the criteria for inclusion are determined under profiling logics, calculating the profitability of an investment.

In a similar logic, Sebastián explains how *Lloverá comida* actually works:

Aquí están las personas, ellos [*Lloverá comida*] les hacen un estudio a ver... Entonces, hacen brigadas con gente como mínimo así como 25 personas, pero saben que esas personas quieren internarse. Entonces, *Lloverá comida*, los recursos que empleaba en un megaevento, ahora más bien, por ejemplo dice: ¿quieres internarte? ¿sí? Ah, sí, sí. Entonces ya lo ven, lo ven psicólogos y todo²⁰².

A team of psychologists, social workers and other professionals study this person to determine if they meet the conditions for internment. When I asked him what those conditions are, he answered that they look at everything from personal to family factors. The team of experts evaluates this person to determine if they truly want to be committed, if they are willing to renounce consumption, if they have true potential to adhere to treatment, if they are susceptible to reaching a state of abstinence. Sebastián states that this study is important in terms of cost-effectiveness.

To this verdict on the present, they add a projection on the future. Organizations such as Watts have incorporated social networks as part of their research and deliberation tools. They use data management to predict behavior and enhance control:

En Watts llevamos a las personas, les tomamos los datos, buscamos en facebook y buscamos a la familia de ellos, para que cuando los traigamos del campamento, la familia diga: bueno, nos vamos a arriesgar de nuevo a llevarlo, pero cambia o

²⁰² Free translation: The people are there, so they [*Lloverá comida*] do a study on them to see. So, they make brigades with at least 25 people, but they know that these people want to get admitted into a rehab center. So, *Lloverá comida*, the resources they used to invest in a mega-event, now, for example, they say: do you want to go check into a center? Yes? Ah, yes, yes. So, then psychologists examine that person and everything.

definitivamente ya no. La última vez llevamos a 25 personas, 10 salieron de las calles²⁰³.

If the family is not willing to take the person back or if the person has no family members who can support them, that person does not meet the desirable criteria. Sebastián argues in favor of this inquiry, stating that it is difficult for a person to sustain their rehabilitation by themselves. They would probably return to the streets, and everything that was invested in their process would be lost. This practice of inquiry has several implications. On the one hand, it upholds the traditional family as the support network par excellence. This is coherent with Christian ideology, which places the heteropatriarchal family as the only normal form of bonding. It is also articulated with the national imaginaries that derive from it, where the traditional family is the pillar for the proper functioning of the Costa Rican society. What would happen, then, to all the trans women I have met on the street, the gay boys, the lesbian girls, the queer folks who have been kicked out of their homes by their blood families. I think of the stories of abuse and violence that sex workers who fled their families in their teens shared with me. These people would be excluded from this program from the start, or in any case, in order to enter, they would have to add to the list of renunciations the denial of their identity and/or their sexuality and the submission to violence in the house from which they once escaped, feeling that it was more dangerous than the street.

Equally excluded would be unhoused migrants, who arrived with a backpack on their backs, and who have no blood nucleus to offer them a roof over their heads. As Jacob points out, family for queer migrants means something very different from the traditional family:

Jacob: ACNUR se ha burlado de nosotros. ACNUR ha arrebatado, eh, historias, de toda la lamentación y a mí no me gusta la revictimización. ¡No me gusta! Y todo, y aun en una jornada, yo no he visto a una comunidad LGTB beneficiaria. ¿Porque qué dicen? Familia. El mismo modelo que usaba Daniel Ortega.

Mar: Sí, entiendo. ¿Y qué significa familia?

Jacob: Entonces, la familia heteronormativa, porque aquí yo soy solo. Yo solo solo, yo no tengo nada. Pero aquí yo me he hallado con mi misma comunidad LGTB exhiliada, y ahí yo he tenido como hermanos terrenales, hermanas terrenales, y nos hemos unido. Y unido para ver o cubrir nuestras necesidades de uno, de una u otra manera porque ninguna institución, más que CENDEROS, hay que aclararlo...²⁰⁴

²⁰³ Free translation: In Watts we take people, we take their data, we look on Facebook and we look for their family, so that when we bring them back from the camp, the family says: well, we are going to take the risk of taking you back, but you must change or else, there's definitely not anymore. Last time we took 25 people, 10 of them came off the streets.

²⁰⁴ Free translation: Jacob: UNHCR Ha mocked us. UNHCR has snatched stories from all the lamentation and I don't like the revictimization. I don't like it! And everything, and even in one day, I have not seen a beneficiary from the LGBT community. Because, what do they say? Family. The same model that Daniel Ortega used.

Mar: I hear you! And what does family mean?

Perhaps the most intriguing implication lies in the contradiction that this discourse reveals. By asserting that a person cannot sustain their abstinence without a support network (which in their view is the family), this discourse brings back to the table the issue of bonds, community and materiality. If someone, even if they have the will and the individual profile (certified by psychology and social work professionals) to follow this route, runs high risk of returning to the street if left alone, can we continue to argue that the causes that led them to the street are of an individual and personal nature? If support networks are a necessary condition for getting off the street, perhaps they also play a role in the complex entanglement that pushes these people onto the streets. Materiality also becomes undeniable. Individual will is not enough, material resources are needed to sustain existence. Without these material conditions, the spiral returns that person to the street. We accept, then, that structural conditions affect a person's future. These contradictions shake the assumption that places all responsibility on the individual and attributes all causes to drug use. And yet, the response is still an individual route. Returning to the metaphor of the psychiatric hospital, this model seeks to cure, repair or restore something that is wrong with the person who has no home to live in. The person must desire to be cured, but the will is not enough. This is where a team of psy professionals grasp in their hands the life of another being, and actively assume a role in the exercise of biopower.

Sebastián: Ven el caso, verdad. No es que van a llevar a cualquier persona. Tiene que tener una... la voluntad, verdad, la persona. Porque no es que puede llegar una persona y decir: Ay, yo me quiero internar. Internar no es tan fácil y no es tan barato. Y cuando te das cuenta, se fue. O se internó y no duró 3 días²⁰⁵.

When someone meets the conditions for their case to be valued as a good investment, these organizations conduct them on the road to cure. We might think that their humanity, their capacity for agency and self-determination are recognized to some degree. They also recognize that they have family capital that can respond to the investment that charitable organizations will make on their bodies. Conversely, if experts consider the investment too risky, it is not worth it. To be considered successful, the process must be completed in its entirety. Otherwise, it is considered a failed attempt. For a person to rehearse a transformation of their relationship with the substance for three days does not constitute any criterion of value. That they have shelter, a bathroom and food for three days is of little importance if the process is not completed. The goal is not about improving their material

Jacob: Well, heteronormative family, because I am alone here. I am alone, I have nothing. But here I have found myself with my same community of LGBT people in exile, and there I have had like earthly brothers, earthly sisters, and we have united. And united to solve or cover our needs, in one way or another because no institution has supported us, except for CENDEROS, it is necessary to say it.

²⁰⁵ Free translation: They look at the case, right? It's not like they're going to take just anybody. They have to have a... the will, you know, the person. Because a person cannot just come and say: "Oh, I want to be admitted". It's not that easy and it's not that cheap. And when you realize it, they're gone. Or they got admitted and they didn't last 3 days.

conditions of existence, but about conducting these people to stop using, because again, the problem is drugs and not racist and patriarchal capitalism. The cost of a failed attempt is too high, and as Sebastián stated, ultimately this is an investment.

For that person to go back to sleeping on the streets is a loss that is measured in figures. This endeavor that seeks to cure individuals who are suffering functions as a trade market in which inmates are exchanged for supplies.

Sebastián: Ok, entonces [Fundación Lloverá] dicen: le vamos a dar acompañamiento, buscan una fundación, una organización, Hogares Crea²⁰⁶, lo que sea. Lo internan y le dan la comida a Hogares Crea.

Mar: ¿Y cómo canalizan eso?

Sebastián: Cambian comida por espacios. Para 5 personas, para que les den dos espacios²⁰⁷.

Fundación Lloverá gets two beds for its candidates in exchange for financing food for them and three other strangers. It is a very big investment, says Sebastián, and that is why you have to select your candidates very well.

The logic underpinning this route resonates with the statements of another volunteer from the organization: "Acuérdese siempre de esa frase: 'En la vida no hay gente mala. En la vida no hay gente buena. El problema es que no ha llegado la gente que les diga qué tan útiles son'"²⁰⁸. The value of a life resides in its usefulness. In an attempt to break with Manichaeism, a utilitarian logic is reproduced, in which it seems that what makes a person human is their usefulness to society. This utilitarian vision is coupled with the discursive practices of objectification that run through this project, where the function of the volunteers is to heroically conduct these people along a route that returns them to a place where they are once again useful.

Chepe se baña promises innovative approaches that break with the logic of welfare and the stale models of punishment and repression. In this sense, we could say that the project seeks to move away from disciplinary power. However, this does not mean that it breaks with the dynamics of domination. Power in this project is undoubtedly exercised in a different way, which does not mean that it is an exercise of resistance or action against systems of oppression. Chepe se baña is a biopolitical project,

²⁰⁶ Hogares Crea is an international non-profit, long-term residential, drug-free intervention model.

²⁰⁷ Free translation: Sebastián: Ok, so they [Fundación Lloverá] say: we are going to give him assistance. They find a foundation, an organization, Hogares Crea, whatever. They check him in, and they supply the food to Hogares Crea.

Mar: And how do they channel that?

Sebastián: They exchange food for beds in the center. Food for 5 people, so that they get two beds.

²⁰⁸ Free translation: Always remember this phrase: "In life there are no bad people. There are no good people in life. The problem is that no one has come along to tell them how useful they are".

where hygienism, the fight against drugs, Christian values, market logics, spectacularization of misery and psy knowledge/power discourses converge.

Without wishing to discredit the good will and great sensitivity that I could observe in the volunteers, it must be recognized that this project leaves a significant trace of violence in its wake. In no way do I wish to imply that this is a volitional act of the volunteers, who genuinely dedicate their spare hours to the project, mobilized by the desire to help others. However, the project, in its discourse and practices, responds to a neoliberal logic, which, when condensed with Costa Rican imaginaries, ends up reproducing dynamics of domination and coloniality.

Both in the media interviews and in my observations, I identified different forms of objectification. In their descriptions, which are quite technical, users always appear in a passive position. Even in the listening apparatus, which attempts to create a space for users to speak, listening is often reduced to banking education practices applied to the prevention and reduction of psychoactive substance use. From this logic, it is assumed that users passively receive all the training and information that psy experts and psy-in-training deposit on their heads. While it is called a "listening" apparatus, it would seem that listening is pre-determined to a series of categories that are to be listened. The users are infantilized, their criteria are silenced, their discomforts are psychologized and their bodies are commodified.

Today Chepe se baña has grown enormously. I do not know if there have been any changes in their model or logics, but they have a physical space, they have diversified their activities. They are, for example, implementing art classes (painting, dance, music and sewing lessons) for people living on the streets. The operation seems to be similar. They approach people on the streets, take them to have a shower and a haircut, and once they are well dressed they offer them art and cultural activities, which involve quantifiable hours of non-consumption. At least today unhoused residents are offered more than just soap and water.

However, it seems that this diversification of services does not touch the logic of objectification that is at the core of this project. The dynamics of spectacularization seem to continue moving its machinery:

Image 71
Don Walter's transformation



Source: Chepe se baña's Facebook Page

This is the case of don Walter. After the publication of this photo on Chepe se baña's social networks, several major media replicated the image and pitifully told his story. He has been living on the streets for more than 30 years, and today is looking for support to get out of there. Chepe se baña, in turn, has reposted all media articles and videos about don Walter, creating an intense loop of likes, reposts and reach.

Image 72
Don Walter in journal La Nación



Source: Chepe se baña's Facebook Page

Hygienism does not seem to have changed either. Rather, it seems to have intensified with the pandemic. If at the beginning the volunteers wore gloves, now they wear protective suits whose whiteness contrasts with the colors of the city.

Image 73



Heroes in protective suit
Source: Chepe se baña's Facebook Page

The resources that this foundation moves do not point towards structural transformations for the eradication of dispossession and systems of oppression, but perhaps in the opposite direction. In 2021 interview in the newspaper La República, Mauricio Villalobos talks about his dreams for the city:

Veo a San José poco a poco convirtiéndose en una ciudad socialmente inteligente.

Con esto me refiero a utilizar tecnología para atender a la comunidad en condición de calle a través de la geolocalización para dar una mejor atención.

De esta manera se podría hacer un mapeo de dónde están las personas vulnerables y poder proveerles ayuda más rápidamente.

Nos diría dónde están las personas con problemas de movilidad, cuáles son sus rutas, los corredores urbanos... por medio de una aplicación en la que la sociedad civil que alerte respecto a personas en condición de calle y nosotros podamos dar el acompañamiento 24/7 para atender a esta población.

Creemos que debe haber móviles de primera intervención que vayan de la mano con esta aplicación, que levanten a personas en condición de calle con problemas de salud y darles la atención que merecen... que la persona en condición de calle reciba servicios a cambio de horas de no consumo.

Si esto se aplicara, veo cómo se mejoraría la reputación de San José como ciudad ya que reflejaría su compromiso con sus ciudadanos, indiscriminadamente de su condición²⁰⁹ (Núñez 2021)

²⁰⁹²⁰⁹ Free translation: I see San José slowly becoming a socially intelligent city. By this I mean using technology to serve the homeless community through geolocation to provide better care. This way we could map where vulnerable people are and be able to provide them with help more quickly. It would tell us where the people

This rambling about the future reflects the line that Villalobos wants for his project and for San José. In his dreamed scenario, the protagonists are the same: the heroes and the underprivileged. Civil society, “good Costa Rican” citizens is the new addition to the cast. Their function would be something like a street watcher, who, as if it were a video game, maps in real time the abnormal bodies found in the city. The unhoused people, once again, appear as inert objects arranged in the public space. Their bodies can be mapped, geolocated, approached, lifted and moved away. The logic remains the same: access to services is paid for with abstinence, and the revenues, Villalobos promises us, will benefit us all because it will enhance San José’s reputation.

What might sound to some like a dystopian TV series, actually already exists in San José. As we will see in Chapter 8, the inhabitants of Amón neighborhood in San Jose are currently implementing a prototype project that seeks to connect citizens with the police via a real-time chat, so that citizens can alert on any undesirable beings they find in their neighborhood, triggering a rapid and effective response from the police. The project proposed by Villalobos is not inscribed in the repressive logic but in that of humanitarian aid. However, after having delved into the project, I find it hard to think that a technology of this type could sustain a perspective that dignifies those beings who live in the *zone of non-being*.

The city, for Chepe se baña, is an open-air psychiatric hospital that resembles an asylum. The insane, the abnormal, have no capacity for agency, because it is not them who manage this hospital. In this socio-sanitary apparatus, the place of the managers of the cure is clearly defined. They dispose of the bodies, herd them around, tell them what to do and where to go, they study their capacities, quantify their potential, and translate it into profiles for a barter that sustains an active business of charity.

Nonetheless, after having ventured into this project, and having analyzed its ways of functioning, it is difficult for me to take a position of complete opposition to it. It is not easy to fit this project into binary categories, because the project itself harbors important internal contradictions. This project is certainly working for some people. It meets a specific need that the State and the neighboring communities of San José are failing to supply. Anything that can alleviate the oppressions and generate better material conditions of existence for people who have been deprived of decent housing is somewhat valuable. What is problematic is that this is still a capitalist inclusion (A. S. Silva

with mobility problems are, what their routes are, the urban corridors... by means of an App in which civil society would alert about people in homeless conditions and we could provide 24/7 support to attend to this population. We believe that there should be vehicles for primary intervention that go hand in hand with this App, to pick up the homeless people, who have health problems and give them the attention they deserve... that the person in homeless conditions receives services in exchange for hours of non-consumption. If this were to be implemented, I can see how it would enhance San José’s reputation as a city, as it would reflect its commitment to its citizens, regardless of their status.

2020; Netto 2012; Melo and Siva Perdigão 2013). The good intentions of its volunteers, then, generate a bittersweet sensation. We cannot lose sight of the fact that at the macro level, this project not only does not contribute to attacking the structural causes of inequality and impoverishment, but actually reinforces and nurtures the conditions in which capitalist violence is produced, generating cycles of dependency and an economy of charity that moves jobs, salaries and donations that are sustained on the bodies that inhabit the streets.

Despite all the criticisms and the profound ethical differences that separate me from this initiative, I must recognize that the "listening apparatus", however small and insufficient it may be, with all its biases and limitations, is one of the few spaces for dialogue that unhoused residents have to talk about what is happening to them and how they feel, and this, it must be said, is not a minor thing.

In spite of this aesthetics that impacts and intimidates when passing through the city, it is necessary to acknowledge that during the pandemic Chepe se baña has played a key role in channeling resources to support the survival of people on the streets of the San José. The organization mobilized donations of food, channeled support so that some unhoused residents had a temporary shelter to confine themselves and installed mobile washbasins in the city. Chepe se baña was one of the very few organizations that looked after the health (with a hygienic approach, of course) of the unhoused people during the worst moments of the pandemic.

Moreover, beyond the direction of the project, it is important to recognize the work of the volunteers, mobilized by the desire to help. One of the questions that arose when I listened to them is how is the charitable subjectivity configured? Several of them told me that they once lived on the streets, and that motivated them to they dedicate time, love and energy to support others who are in that place. In their narratives I heard a sense of community. Perhaps it gets lost in the operation of the project, which is focused on producing results that can be quantified. However, there is a strong affectivity that overflows in the midst of the hustle and bustle of the project. As Sebastián says:

Esto a veces es emocional. Aquí llegan voluntarios: uy mae, qué chiva, y no sé qué... Y yo le digo a las personas: démosle 3 o 4 días, 3 o 4 eventos, para ver qué tan chiva es para ellos. Porque yo siempre le digo a las personas, esto puede ser que no sea lo suyo. Pero lo suyo tal vez es ir a cuidar perros de la calle, o puede ser personas adultas mayores, o niños. Yo voy a niños también. Entonces busque lo que a usted le guste, lo que le apasione y deje su tiempo en ese... Porque todos necesitan, las personas de la calle, los adultos mayores, los niños, todos necesitan, en realidad. Los animalitos también. Emplee su tiempo en lo que a usted le guste. Y hágalo con pasión²¹⁰.

²¹⁰ Free translation: This is sometimes emotional. Volunteers come here like: "oh man, that's so cool..." and whatever. And I tell people: let's give them 3 or 4 days, 3 or 4 events, to see how cool it is for them. Because I always tell people this may not be their thing. But maybe their thing is to take care of street dogs, or maybe it's

We all need one another. The words of Sebastián and other volunteers are dissonant with the individualistic and psychologizing vision that the project reproduces. What is perhaps difficult is to think of it and criticize it as a homogeneous whole, because the bittersweet conversations with the volunteers showed me some fissures. And maybe it is through these fissures that solidarity and dignity seep through.

In the midst of a sea of questions, one especially echoes in my head: Can the city be a space for healing? I would not like to replicate the metaphor of a psychiatric hospital, because it is overloaded with violence and is all too vertical. I distance myself from that position of knowledge/power, which designs and imposes a route as the only way out. A route that implies the renunciation of freedom and autonomy, and segregates those who "have potential" from those whose destiny is none other than the *bare life*. However, if the city that harbors so many discomforts, I wonder if it can also be a space for healing. I think of it then in a decolonial key. In a tense and complex dialogue with unhoused residents of San José, and in the light of the contributions of the cosmovisions of the native peoples of Abya Yala, I explored if it is possible to trace alternative routes (not one, but a plurality), where the city is not only that problematic knot that suffocates their bodies, but a garden that opens possibilities to approach that sense of community that according to *Sumak Kawsay* is necessary for life.

4.2.4. "My rehabilitation is in the street": the city as a healing space.

There is an important difference between a cure and healing. The fact that several of our languages, including Spanish, have two words to name these actions shows that we are talking about different processes. *Curar* [to cure] refers to the actions that someone dispenses to another person for the purpose of remedying an illness (Papalini 2017, 18). *Curar* is the process by which an injury, illness, wound or disease is treated so that it remits or disappears (Real Academia Española 2021). *Sanar* [to heal] is a process of restoring or finding balance, of health understood in a broad sense. We could say that in cure the emphasis is on the result, while in healing the emphasis is on the process. However, rather than definitions of colonial authorities of the language, I am interested in taking up the notion of healing [*sanación*] that social movements and communities, especially autonomous and decolonial feminists, have constructed based on personal and collective experiences.

For Lorena Cabnal (2019), healing is a process that goes beyond the cure of an illness. Healing ourselves, says Cabnal, is a conscious act that dismantles oppressions and victimizations, and unveils

elderly people, or children. I work with children as well. So, find what you like, what you are passionate about and spend your time in that.... Because everyone is in need, the street people, the older people, the children, everyone is in need, really. The little animals too. Spend your time on what you like. And do it with passion.

those who exercise violence against us and against nature (2019, 122). Healing is personal, but also collective. It is personal, but also political. It aims to alleviate pain, heal wounds, recover vital strength, but it goes hand in hand with memory and emancipation: memory that allows us to understand the causes of oppressions, and emancipation that seeks not only personal liberation but the dismantling of the systems that restrict life and freedom for all people.

Ese camino lo nombramos “la sanación como camino cósmico-político” y de ahí nace toda una propuesta que convoca, en los territorios, cada vez con más fuerza, la sanación de los cuerpos para la liberación y la emancipación. Cada vez más recurrimos a la interpelación amorosa para reunir distintas energías, desde la ternura, para sanarnos²¹¹. (Cabnal 2019, 123)

Violence is lodged in the body, it holds the memory of the peoples. Therefore, with the body and from the body, it is also possible to heal these wounds.

Compartir el relato personal de cómo he vivido y cómo vivo las múltiples formas de violencia me lleva a dialogarlo en primera persona, no para individualizar mi palabra, sino para enunciar desde la responsabilidad personal y política mis dolores, enfermedades, sentimientos, desencuentros, pero también mis sanaciones emancipatorias. Mi cuerpo se vuelve el referente inmediato de la vida oprimida o liberada, sea en comunidades rurales o urbanas. Es en este cuerpo donde se constatan los efectos cotidianos de las violencias, pero también las emancipaciones²¹² (Cabnal 2019, 114).

In the context of Chepe se baña, the idea of cure seems to prevail. Although they are careful not to use pathologizing language, the solution is a standard prescription, which examines the subjects not to adapt the route to their needs, but to determine whether this person harbors the capacity for cure proposed by the experts.

In this section, I try to think of alternative routes, where the city can function as a space with healing potential. A healing process by and for the people who inhabit the city. In the middle of the observation in Chepe se baña, I engaged in a dialogue that was brief but loaded with important reflections in this sense. While Sebastián was showing me the different stations of the apparatus, he saw a woman pass by and said to me:

²¹¹ Free translation: We call this path "healing as a cosmic-political path" and from there arises a great proposal that calls, in the territories, more and more strongly, for the healing of bodies for liberation and emancipation. We increasingly appeal to the loving interpellation and tenderness in order to gather different energies to heal ourselves.

²¹² Free translation: Sharing the personal account of how I have experienced and how I experience multiple forms of violence leads me to dialogue in the first person, not to individualize my words, but to enunciate them from my personal and political responsibility, my pains, illnesses, feelings, misunderstandings, but also my emancipatory healings. My body becomes the immediate referent of oppressed or liberated life, whether in rural or urban communities. It is in this body that the daily effects of violence, but also the emancipations, can be seen.

Te a mostrar algo... Suave, porque aquí está la persona. Mmm... Yo creo que ya se fue. A ver... Dejame ver... Bueno, aquí hubo una muchacha que era usuaria, de Chepe se baña. Hoy vino y yo la iba a anotar y me dijo: "No, yo no vengo a que me atiendan. Vengo a hacer voluntariado."²¹³

The language he uses needs to be analyzed. While he is enthusiastic about this person who evolved from user to volunteer, he uses an objectifying language. He does not say: "let me introduce you to someone", he says: "Let me show you something". In any case, he explained that he was very excited because this woman's case is an example that motivates the volunteers, in that it shows them that their efforts are working, and motivates the users, in that it shows them that it is possible to progress. He continues in this sense:

Sebastián: Si usted quiere puede también hacerle una entrevista a ella.

Mar: Si ella quiere... Preguntémosle a ver si ella quiere²¹⁴.

Sebastian offers me to interview her without even consulting her will. She is now a volunteer, but she is clearly not in the same ranks as he is. In that hierarchical arrangement in which Chepe se baña functions, he can dispose of this woman's time, body and knowledge, and offer her to me as if she were a book of his own that he can lend me. I shake off this objectification in which he tries to implicate me, and I reiterate: let's ask her if she wants to grant me an interview.

The girl accepted, and despite the brevity, this turned out to be possibly the most powerful interview I carried out in Chepe se baña. Her perception about the street, about rehabilitation, her position in relation to her peers and her concern for the community speak of the alternative routes through which one can heal in the city.

She, whom we will call Elena, explained to me that she had wanted to be a volunteer for a long time, but the project director would not allow her to, because he considered that she was not ready: "Sí, porque es que Mauricio tenía que estar un poquito más seguro de que yo estuviera estabilizada, me entiende?"²¹⁵. At this point this no longer surprises me. Chepe se baña is a vertical structure where the boss makes decisions as if he were the manager of a factory. Nevertheless, she persisted in her desire to support others and that day, for the first time, she was allowed to share the knowledge she had acquired in a nail and esthetics course with her friends from the streets.

²¹³ Free translation: Let me show you something... Wait, because here's the person. Mmm... She may have already left. Let's see... Let me see... Well, there was a girl around somewhere, who was a user of Chepe se baña. Today she came and I was going to sign her up and she told me: "No, I don't come here to be treated. I am here to volunteer".

²¹⁴ **Sebastián:** If you want you can also interview her.

Mar: If she wants... Let's ask her to see if she is willing.

²¹⁵ Free translation: "Yes, because Mauricio had to be a little more certain that I was stabilized, you understand?"

I recognize the street in her slang and her accent. She explains to me that she does not wish to leave the streets. She spends most of her time in downtown San José, her home for many years. Like the howling monkey of Argüello's painting described in Chapter 3, Elena sells Claro prepaid sims in the Morazán Park. She tells me that her mother sometimes worries, because she thinks that being on the street could make her relapse into drug use. But Elena cannot imagine herself anywhere else. In the street she has her friends and her work, and we could say that in the street she also found her healing. She smilingly confided to me that she has had some relapses, because she is human, but she has learned to deal with them:

Elena: Ya me los he puesto [los límites]. Si yo sé que tal vez estoy sentada a la par de alguien que está fumando piedra y me llega ese olorsito, y ya que me agarra un dolorcito en la panza, mejor patitas pa qué te quiero.

Yo veo a ellos [sus amigos de calle] y me dicen: 'qué macha, todo bien? Vamos a fumarnos un puro!' Y le digo yo: 'no, por qué no vamos nos comemos un popi? O una galleta? No, no, no, no. Bueno tranquilos'. Todos se van, me voy yo por mi lado²¹⁶.

Elena now has a better understanding of her own limits, of what situations to avoid. But in her case, avoiding the street would not bring her any benefit but rather an emptiness in her heart. She does not want to leave the streets, and has accomplished, against all normative discourses and sentences, to find in the street her own form of healing.

Even the psychologist at Chepe se baña is challenged to recognize the path that Elena opens:

Fabián: Evidentemente la visión tradicional en el consumo de sustancias ha estado centrado en la diferenciación moral, en el juzgamiento, en que la única vía de tratamiento es internamiento, verdad. La chica que ustedes estaban conversando ahora, una chica que se está recuperando en calle. No es cierto, no es cierto que la recuperación tiene que ser, este, lo que desde Pinel se llama "institucionalizada"²¹⁷.

And yet, the route proposed by Chepe se baña is a single track that involves institutionalization. Elena, swimming against the current, shows us that her healing process nests in the street, a process that is personal but it is also woven collectively:

Elena: Tal vez la chusma [sus amistades] llega y se enojan, porque dicen: sí, porque está arriba, ya se olvida de nosotros. Acuértese cuando usted estaba en la calle. Pero es que yo les digo: Acuértese cuando estábamos en la calle, éramos una sola familia.

²¹⁶ Free translation: **Elena:** I have already set them [her limits]. If I know that maybe I am sitting next to someone who is smoking crack and I get that little smell, and then I feel that little tickle in my belly, I'd better start moving. I look at them [her friends in the street] and they say to me: what's up blondie, how you doing? Let's go smoke a joint! And I say: no, why don't we go and get a candy bar? Or a cookie? No, no, no, no, no. Well, it doesn't matter'. Everybody leaves, I go my way.

²¹⁷ Free translation: **Fabián:** Evidently the traditional view on substance use has been centered on moral differentiation, on judgment, on the fact that the only way of treatment is institutionalization, right. That girl you were talking to just now, a girl who is recovering in the street. It is not true, it is not true that recovery has to be, what since Pinel has been called "institutionalized".

Ya porque yo tenga trabajo no significa que no somos la misma familia. Nada más que una diferencia, que ya no fumamos, ahora comemos²¹⁸.

In contrast to a rhetoric of competition and envy, she counterposes a rhetoric of bonding. She speaks of a family, the street family, which is very different from the family that Christian volunteers look for when they search for the profile of a candidate for the rehab internment. This family is something else, it is neither heteropatriarchal nor vertical, perhaps it even subverts this order. It is, possibly, closer to what indigenous cosmogonies call community (which is far from the liberal sense given to it in the jargon of international cooperation, where 'community' is used to group individuals by their conditions or identities and not by their bonds and affections). Plural life, for Cabnal (2019), is a cosmogonic and political principle of respect for life (123). This is precisely what street families do.

Mar: Y ellos son sus compas, así?

Elena: Siguen siendo mis amigos. Ya porque yo no esté en calle, esté en mi casa, tenga un trabajo, no me voy a olvidar de ellos.

Mar: Sí es que se vuelven también como la familia de uno, también, verdad?

Elena: Ellos son mi familia de calle. Yo he visto como se pelean entre ellos, se agarran, se insultan, se apuñalean, se tratan, se dicen... Yo trato de meterme, agarrarme a separarlos, arriesgando que me hagan algo... Pero ellos como que me guardan un respeto. O sea, ellos me dicen: no, si usted es un gran ejemplo para nosotros²¹⁹.

Her words remind me of the narratives of trans* sex workers' about what they call family and street mother:

Déhora: ¿Adónde las conocí? Ah... Las conocí en la calle. A Antonella la conocí llegando de Panamá, y ahí nos hicimos super amiguísimas. Fue cuando me adoptó como hija de ella.

Mar: Eso me interesa. Cuando ustedes dicen: tal es la hija de tal, o tal es la mamá de tal... ¿Cómo me explica usted eso?

Déhora: Es que nosotras nos identificamos, digamos, como con la otra persona, nos llevamos tan bien que ella no sé... Es como un carisma y ya, quedó como hija. Como si fuera hija mía.

Mar: Y es alguien como que la ayuda?

²¹⁸ Free translation: **Elena:** Maybe the rabble [meaning her friends] come and they might get angry, because they say: 'yes, because she is on top now, she forgets about us. Remember when you were in the street'. But I tell them: 'Remember when we were on the street, we were one family. Just because I have a job does not mean that we are not the same family. The only difference is that we no longer smoke together, now we eat.

²¹⁹ Free translation: **Mar:** And they are your friends, right?

Elena: They are still my friends. Just because I'm not on the street, because I'm at home, because I have a job, I'm not going to forget them.

Mar: Yes, they become like one's family too, don't they?

Elena: They are my street family. I've seen how they fight among themselves, they grab each other, they insult each other, they stab each other, they treat each other, they say... I try to get in the middle, to grab them, to separate them, risking that I might get hurt... But they kind of respect me. I mean, they tell me: no, you are a great example for us.

Dévora: Ajá, sí, exactamente²²⁰.

In San José, as in the streets of many other cities around the world, trans women have at least two mothers: the one by blood and the one on the street. Some maintain close and loving relationships with their blood relatives, while others have had to distance themselves from them due to family rejection. But there are also street families, an informal system of bonds and organization of affection that is woven out of care and support.

Mar: Cuando ustedes dicen que es la hija de tal, es la mamá de tal... ¿Cómo es eso?

Karen: todas y cada una de nosotras tiene una madre.

Mar: aja...

Gloria: Pero no es una madre de verdad.

Karen: Como un adiestramiento.

Fabiola: Es como un parentesco de... por el tema de...

Karen: Es como una educación.

Mar: Pero es como alguien que las acuerpa, que les ayuda?

Varias: Ajá, ajá²²¹.

The role of street mothers is literally a nurturing one. When they adopt a new daughter, they dedicate themselves to teaching her the rules of the street. Sometimes with affection, sometimes by force, they teach them to take care of themselves, they give them tips for seduction, and they teach them how to charge the clients. Sometimes they also teach them survival strategies, such as the art of stealing from cheap clients in order to manage their own Christmas bonus and insurance payments that the State will not recognize for them. It is a transmission of knowledge for life. But street mothers also teach them how to shape their bodies and their gender expression as women. They give them

²²⁰ Free translation: **Dévor**a: Where did I meet them [the girls]? Ah... I met them on the street. I met Antonella when she arrived from Panama, and that's when we became super friends. That's when she adopted me as her daughter.

Mar: That interests me. When you say: she is the daughter of that one, or she is the mother of that one? Could you explain that to me?

Dévora: It is that we identify ourselves, let's say, with the other person, we get along so well that she, I don't know.... It's like a charisma and that's it, she becomes like a daughter. As if she were my daughter.

Mar: And she is like someone who helps you?

Dévora: Aha, yes, exactly.

²²¹ Free translation: **Mar**: When you say that she is the daughter of her, and she is the mother of her.... What is that like?

Karen: Each and every one of us has a mother.

Mar: aha...

Gloria: But she is not a real mother.

Karen: It's like a training.

Fabiola: It's like a kinship of... for the topic of...

Karen: It's like an education.

Mar: So it is like someone who takes care of you, who helps you?

Several of them: Yes! Yes!

advice, teach them how to put on make-up and how to walk, how to moderate their voices so that they sound more feminine. These forms of accompaniment are not only affective, they have a political dimension that rebels against the hegemonic ways in which politics is understood in our society. It is a politics of bonding, a transgression of that logic that decrees the political as an exclusive domain of rationality, while depoliticizing the relational sphere (Segato 2016). This politics of bonding affirms them as individuals and as a collectivity.

The girls in the sex work areas often say that one cannot survive on the street without drugs. I would argue that it is not possible to survive without these families either. These families of outcasts recognize each other, they support each other, their bonds are solidary, despite the tensions, and they celebrate the well-being of their peers, because in a way it is also their own wellbeing.

Elena recognizes the knowledge she has built on the street and puts it at the service of others:

Elena: Ahora llegó una muchacha y me dice: Oiga, yo me acuerdo que usted estaba en la zona roja, fumando marihuana. Le digo yo: sí, ¿se acuerda de mí? Me dice: sí, qué bien la veo! ¿Y cómo hizo? Le digo yo: agarrándome de la mano de Dios. Me dice: Oiga, cómo hago yo cuando yo tengo ansias? Le digo yo: yo trabajo siempre por el [Parque] Morazán. Llegue a buscarme. Si usted tiene hambre, quiere con quién hablar, dígame. Yo siempre estoy para escucharla. No ve que por lo que usted pasa yo lo pasé un montón de veces. ¡No ve que yo llegué a la calle a los 15 años! Me decían la niña del parque. ¡Yo tengo 28, imagínese! ¡Semerenda escuela! ¡La calle es una escuela!²²²

The street is a school where she has learned to live and heal. The act of listening helps the woman with her discomfort, but it also helps Elena, who smiles when she explains that "child from the park" is now able to support others. Along the same lines, Fabiola speaks of the importance of social bonds with her streets friends in her day-to-day life:

Fabiola: Vieras que en la noche yo veo muchos compañeros que ahí se ponen, en la Avenida Central, ahí, Segunda, de los a almacenes, a recoger el cartoncito. A recoger el cartón, y a mí me alegra, me motiva. ¡Ellos me motivan y yo los motivo a ellos! Y en la medida de lo posible, si yo estoy en condiciones de solidarizarme con ellos lo hago, porque yo sé que ellos también tienen más necesidades que yo, porque yo soy una gata, una leoparda, una pantera, todo el día. Yo sé cómo matarme todos los días²²³.

²²² Free translation: **Elena:** Just before a girl came in and said to me: Hey, I remember you smoking marijuana in the Red-light district. I said to her: Yes, do you remember me? She said: Yes, I see you are doing good! How did you manage to do it? I told her: holding on to God's hand. She said to me: Hey, what can I do when I am feeling cravings? I said: I always work by the Morazán [Park]. Come find me. If you are hungry, if you want someone to talk to, just look for me. I am always there to listen. You see, I went through what you're going through a lot of times. I came to the street when I was 15 years old! They used to call me the child of the park. I'm 28 now, imagine! What a school! The street is a school!

²²³ Free translation: **Fabiola:** I see a lot of colleagues at night there, on Central Avenue, there, on the Second Avenue, going the warehouses, collecting cardboard, and it makes me happy. They motivate me and I motivate them! And as far as possible, if I am in a position to show solidarity with them, I do it, because I know that they

Despite her dispossession, despite the economy of immediacy that sustains her existence, Fabiola does not assume an individualistic position with respect to resources. She takes only what she needs and shares what she has left over with her friends who are also in need. These resources can sometimes be coins, sometimes it is food, and sometimes it is a cry of enthusiasm and solidarity. "Con fuerza, papá! Con fuerza, mamá!²²⁴", Fabiola suddenly shouts, drawing the attention of passersby as she walks in San José with a huge load of cartons on her head. She explains:

A veces, este, me gusta como impactar a la gente y digo yo: Con fuerza, papá! Con fuerza, papá! -les digo yo. Y la gente se caga, como dicen, ya les bajé el menudo. Les moví el piso, ya? Han habido casos de compañeros que yo los he visto así pernoctando en los parques, de un parque van así, y van a otro. Y de repente yo los veo con el cartón, yo digo, entonces yo veo que el mundo no está echado a perder, como que sí funciona. Porque yo les digo: sigan adelante compañeros! Fuerza, papá, les digo yo! Y ahí van porque, di sí²²⁵.

Image 74

Fabiola at the end of a working day



Fabiola is clear that her recycling work is a form of survival and personal healing. But her daily work is also a performance that she puts on in the street. What might seem like a spontaneous cry of madness is actually an expression of Fabiola's incarnated reflections on the street, on life and community. A performance that helps her own process of healing, while helping other in the way. Healing is both a

also have more needs than me, because I am a cat, a leopard, a panther, all day long. I know how to kill every day.

²²⁴ Free translation: Be strong, boy! Be strong, girl!

²²⁵ Free translation: Sometimes I like to shock people and I say to them: "Be strong, boy! Be strong!", I tell them. And people get shocked, like they say: you scared the shit out of them. I rocked the floor for them. There have been cases of colleagues that I have seen staying overnight in the parks, from one park they go to another. And all of a sudden I see them carrying cardboard, and I say, then I see that the world is not completely ruined, that it kind of works. Because I tell them: keep going, comrades! Be strong, boy, I tell them! And there they go ahead.

personal and a collective process. For centuries, people have developed collective and empirical knowledge about healing and accompaniment processes, in which some substances may be used for healing, but also other things, such as music, dance and other forms of art, rituals, interaction with other human and non-human beings, among others. Healing, in this sense, is understood not as a remedy for an illness of the body, but as a process of affirmation of life and well-being.

In 2022, Chepe se baña began to include artistic activities as part of the services offered to users. This undoubtedly opens an important vein in terms of mental health, as an alternative to models focused on curing substance use as a disease. However, this proposal is far from the healing power of a street performance such as Fabiola's in the city. In Chepe se baña, the place for art is inevitably inscribed in its vertical functioning, and is offered, like the rest of the activities, in exchange for hours of non-consumption. The art activities take place on closed and controlled environments, that ensure the management of the bodies that gather there. The results are quantified in hours of non-consumption, and the process is marketed in social networks as proof of the charity's success.

Image 75

Marketing of Chepe se baña's Art School



Source: Chepe se baña Facebook Page

But in addition, the Art School comes in combo with an ideological formation, sweetened as "soft skills".

Image 76

Soft Skills Workshop at Chepe se baña



Source: Chepe se baña, Facebook page

In addition to the painting lessons, the unhoused residents can take workshops on leadership and values for change, based on the training model designed by coach John C. Maxwell. Known as the guru of leadership worldwide, with more than 25 million books sold in 50 different languages, in 2014 Maxwell was awarded as the #1 Business Leader by the American Management Association. In Costa Rica, its brand operates through two foundations: *Transformación Costa Rica* and *Mejoremos Costa Rica*, which offer training services in values and leadership, enabling comprehensive transformations for a more productive and efficient society with better performance standards. This initiative, which was declared of national interest during the administration of former president Luis Guillermo Solís, states in its vision that its supreme goal is to make Costa Rica and its inhabitants better (<https://www.mejoremoscostarica.com/>).

Making Costa Rica better sounds very similar to the Trumpist slogan "Make America Great Again", and the idea of bettering the people of Costa Rica is dangerously close to the eugenic ideas of species improvement. What does this "improvement" consist of? How does one improve a country and its population? John C. Maxwell calls for rescuing family values:

Image 77

It is time to give value to the family



Caption: It is time to... 01. Give value to the family. 02. Serve the family. 03. Lead with hope

Source: <https://www.mejoremoscostarica.com/>

The family for Maxwell, of course, is not the street family that Elena, Fabiola and the collectivity of trans women fondly portray. It is the heteropatriarchal family. As with *Chepe se baña*, the Christian basis of this program are not apparent at first glance. They are presented as altruistic initiatives that strive to help the population. However, inquiring about their principles, their links and the values they promote, we can see that the Christian ideology is at the core of their projects. It is not surprising, then, that in 2016 evangelical congressman Gonzalo Ramirez (a lawyer and pastor who came to Congress for the Christian party *Renovación Costarricense*), channeled public resources to develop a cycle of trainings for leadership and strengthening of values for the staff of the Congress, based on Maxwell's proposal. The training program was called "*Mejoremos Costa Rica: La transformación está en mí*" (Let's Improve Costa Rica: The transformation is in me), and it is still available on the official website of the Congress²²⁶. The democratization of art that *Chepe se baña* intends to achieve by providing free art classes for the unhoused residents of San José actually comes at a cost. Impregnated by Christian values and neoliberal principles of success and leadership, *Chepe se baña's* "humanitarian" aid not only gives away "drops of life" but also indoctrinates, in an operation that resembles the Catholic missions to save the souls of the savages during the colony.

From this perspective, the street performance that Fabiola has been developing and weaving into her work would probably be read more as an expression of "eccentricity" or "madness" than as an action that intends to generate an explosion of energy and support for her and her colleagues, while breaking into the passive transit of pedestrians who dodge the debris and human garbage in the city.

²²⁶ *Mejoremos Costa Rica: La transformación está en mí* :

[http://www.asamblea.go.cr/ci/ciev/La%20transformacion%20esta%20en%20mi/La%20Transformaci%C3%B3n%20est%C3%A1%20en%20M%C3%AD%20\(manual%20de%20formaci%C3%B3n\).pdf](http://www.asamblea.go.cr/ci/ciev/La%20transformacion%20esta%20en%20mi/La%20Transformaci%C3%B3n%20est%C3%A1%20en%20M%C3%AD%20(manual%20de%20formaci%C3%B3n).pdf)

In an alternative line, I find echo in some reflections of the trans-feminist, cross-border, guerrilla and Andean performance collective, PachaQueer²²⁷. In a dialogue with the researcher Julio César Díaz Calderón, CoCa and MoTa²²⁸ reflect on the possibility of healing outside the medical scope. For the PachaQueer, performance has a healing potential, both for the performers, as well as for the public and the space with which they interact. In a performance, something powerful happens when bodies come together, something that would make no sense from the medical perspective, or that would be explained through forced rationalizations. For the PachaQueer we must understand it differently, as MoTa explains it:

Eso es magia, pura magia. Ahí ya no hay ciencia ni prueba, ni lógica, ni academia. Creemos que ahí sucede la magia. Nosotras nos enunciamos mucho desde las brujas-abuelas. Creemos que somos parte de lo que otras *cuerpas* que nos antecedieron ya vivieron y conocieron, y ese conocimiento está también dentro de nosotras. Independientemente de que se haya explorado o no, pero el conocimiento está. Para nosotras ahí sucede la magia, la brujería... También siento que esa es la magia de la *performance*, que difiere de otras prácticas. Es el momento, aprovechar el momento...La energía del momento, el tiempo del momento, las personas que en este mismo instante estén mirando. Todo es mágico. Todo sucede de una forma que creemos que sostiene esa ritualidad y que luego se evidencia²²⁹ (J. C. Díaz 2021, 19–20).

From a rationality very different from the one that sustains the harm reduction model, a *sentipensante* philosophy, we could say, the effect of well-being that a performance can provoke is far from the logic of cure, but it harbors the possibility of healing. This healing is individual and collective at the same time. It is done in relation to others and heals the body as much as the collective and the space. It operates in an alternative logic of time, in which the knowledge of the past and of the ancestors is activated in the body that keeps it as an archive. MoTa continues:

²²⁷ PachaQueer is a dissident, rebellious, autonomous and self-festive trench of performance and politics. The PachaQueer, self-identified as monsters, create provocative guerrilla performances to conspire for the liberation of thoughts and the emancipation of bodies through artistic (re)action, counterculture, informal education, and the subversive autonomy of collective rage (Díaz 2021, 1)

²²⁸ CoCa and MoTa is a play on words in Spanish. *Coca* refers to cocaine, while *mota* is a slang word for marijuana, used in much of Abya Yala. La MoTa (Eduardx Fajardo) and La CoCa (Fernandx Rodríguez), identify themselves as terrorists of gender, rebels of pleasure, transfeminist witches, and cross-border monsters.

²²⁹ Free translation: That is magic, pure magic. There is no science, no proof, no logic, no academia. We believe that magic happens there. We enunciate ourselves a lot from our witch-grandmothers. We believe that we are part of what other bodies that preceded us, that already lived and knew, and that knowledge is also within us. Regardless of whether it has been explored or not, but the knowledge is there. For us, magic happens there, witchcraft... I also feel that this is the magic of performance, which differs from other practices. It is the moment, taking advantage of the moment... The energy of the moment, the time of the moment, the people who at this very moment are watching. Everything is magical. Everything happens in a way that we believe sustains that rituality and then it becomes evident.

Cada vez que hablábamos de Samuel Chambers²³⁰, nos rompíamos en mil pedazos, nos parecía tan injusto, nos daba ira, coraje, pero en el momento en que nosotras decimos su nombre, hablamos por todas las *cuerpas* que han sido asesinadas por violencia machista, patriarcal y capitalista. Llamar a estas muertas ha sido una forma de darnos esa fuerza para poder seguir subidas en los tacones... Nosotras somos *cuerpas* que desde nosotras mismas estamos castradas, desconectadas de esa posibilidad del sentir, de sentirnos, de sentir a la otra. A la *performance* le vemos esta posibilidad de conectarse con una misma y también de desromanticizar todos esos sentimientos²³¹ (J. C. Díaz 2021, 20).

Image 78
PachaQueer, Nos están matando



Performance as part of the Muestra de Arte y Memoria, Museo Universitario, Quito 2018.
Source: Díaz 2021

In this sense, Lorena Cabnal reflects on healing as a process that interpellates not only health in the body, but also the violence exercised on our bodies and on the land. In her cosmogony, healing is a process in which the memory of the ancestors is ignited to conjugate life, the vital energy that also opposes structural violence.

Ha sido la recuperación de la memoria de mis ancestras y el amor de las mujeres, mis abuelas, mi madre y mi hija, lo que me llevó a los caminos de sanación desde sus sabidurías y maneras de revitalizarme con una cosmogonía que interpela cualquier

²³⁰ Samuel Chambers was a queer person who was brutally assassinated in Quito, Ecuador. Recognized by their big heart, their love for the pacha mama and their freedom capable of dissolving structures of oppression, Samuel was a very loved person by their community. Their body bore clear signs of torture. The crime has not yet been solved.

²³¹ Free translation: Every time we talked about Samuel Chambers, we broke into a thousand pieces, it seemed so unfair, it made us angry, furious, but the moment we pronounce their name, we speak for all the bodies that have been killed by male chauvinist, patriarchal and capitalist violence. Calling our dead ones has been a way to give us the strength to continue climbing on our heels.... We are bodies that are castrated from within, disconnected from the possibility of feeling, of feeling ourselves, of feeling the other. We see in the performance this possibility of connecting with ourselves and also of de-romanticizing all those feelings....

acto de violencia contra la vida, contra los cuerpos y contra la tierra²³² (Cabnal 2019, 122).

I read this quote and remember the energy that vibrated between our trans* bodies as Gata and Cassandra showed their collection of photographs with the group of war survivors. A hubbub of laughter, shouts, anecdotes and laments took over the place. In my head a cartography of facts and affections was forming, drawing the trans* history of San José. While looking at the pictures, the phrase they repeated the most was: “all of them are already dead, I’m the only one left”. They spoke these words with pain but also with pride, with a facial rainbow that condensed the grief for their fallen *compañeras*, with a triumphant smile. It is the pride of being alive. This triumph is not only personal, but collective. With absolute clarity they affirm that their street families were fundamental for survival. Surviving is a victory against the power of death, a victory for those who are alive and for those who did not make it also. Those who left their blood on the streets, who died fighting for their lives and the lives of their sisters, are part of this continuum of artisanal biopolitics.

Ce n’est pas la politique des droits qui a permis de se retourner contre les discriminations qui en découlent, mais bien des stratégies originales et collectives déployées par les minorités concernées comme les politiques de la représentation, les actions dans les médias, les contre-discours, le travail sur le corps et la santé, les techniques de *raising consciousness* et la création des subjectivités, de formes d’intimité et de sociabilité différentes et indisciplinées, justement (Bourcier 2017, 53)

Memory is part of healing, it allows us to better understand the causes of violence and organize our emotions to combat it. Hence the importance of being able to weave it autonomously and collectively in the communities, without the vertical intervention induced by the colonial centers of production of knowledge.

While Sebastián complained about the backwardness in Latin America and insisted that Costa Rica has to look towards Europe, the PachaQueer rather work on recovering the communitarian codes of Pachamama. Why look at Europe, whose imperialist enterprise has caused so much pain and death, instead of looking at ourselves, ourselves in our context, which is Abya Yala. CoCa reflects:

Yo creo que nosotras siempre intentamos no ejercer lo que estamos cuestionando. Porque muchas veces lo que pasa en estas prácticas transdisciplinarias del arte *mainstream* es simplemente ejercer otro sistema de opresión o de colonialismo... Nosotras siempre intentamos generar un lazo, una sinergia con los espacios a los que vamos... Siempre intentamos “abrir la *cula*”, como decimos. Abrir esos vórtex, esas posibilidades de sentimientos, de conexiones con el contorno. Finalmente, dentro de la *performance*, uno de los detonantes para poder accionar es el espacio en el que estamos. Por más que nosotras tengamos una línea o una idea de lo que vayamos a

²³² Free translation: It has been the recovery of the memory of my ancestors and the love of women, my grandmothers, my mother and my daughter, which led me to the paths of healing from their wisdom and ways of revitalizing me with a cosmogony that challenges any act of violence against life, against the bodies and against the earth.

hacer, siempre es importante ver cuál es el ambiente, la energía del lugar²³³ (J. C. Díaz 2021, 20).

I highlight three elements from their reflection, whose force I could observe in the city: the bonds, the synergy and the space. The bonds, as I have been discussing, sustain existence on the street. But space is also important, not as a dry and arbitrary stage, but as part of that bond that is created in the process of healing. Healing in the city also implies connecting with those streets, with those parks, with that urban space that people like Elena and Fabiola who make of the street a school and a home.

Throughout the writing of this chapter, an ethical and epistemic concern has raised questions about my position on life in the streets. My position is, of course, crossed by the epistemic dialogues that I maintain with people who inhabit the city, and by my own experience as a researcher, but also as a person whose body and subjectivity are transformed in the city. From this place, I wish to avoid falling into a perspective that romanticizes the street. The street, I am aware of it, is full of violence, loneliness, misery, need, cold and hunger. However, just as I cannot take a binary position in relation to a project like *Chepe se baña*, I cannot take it in relation to the street either. Thus, I would like to state that this section does not seek to romanticize the street experience, much less to deny the subjective suffering and material needs of the unhoused people. What I intend is to show another side of the street, one among many that exist simultaneously, *abigarrados*.

Fabiola describes herself as “una persona trans de condición, digamos, en libertad. Porque no se le puede llamar mi condición de indigencia, ni de calle, ni sin techo. ¡No! ¡Una persona que vive en condición de libertad!²³⁴”. It is not that Fabiola does not want a house, she just does not want to give up her freedom and her vital energy in exchange for it. This may seem incomprehensible to us, but I do not dare to contradict her, nor do I want, as some of my colleagues propose, to look for psychologizing explanations that suggest that her decision is the product of alienation, of a negative identity, of the internalization of submission (Sawaia 1999), of substance abuse or of some mental condition. I prefer to listen to what she says and try to establish a dialog around our differences. Fabiola is fully aware of the exclusion she faces. She does not normalize it, she does not naturalize it, she does not justify it, yet, without romanticizing the street, she chooses it over the path of normality that is imposed on her in order to be "included". Fabiola does not want to betray her principles, and

²³³ Free translation: I think that we always try not to exercise what we are questioning. Because many times what happens in these transdisciplinary practices of mainstream art are simply exercising another system of oppression or colonialism... We always try to generate a bond, a synergy with the spaces we go to... We always try to "open the ass", as we like say. Open those vortexes, those possibilities of feelings, of connections with the surroundings. Finally, within the performance, one of the thing that enables us to act is the space in which we are. Even if we have a line or an idea of what we are going to do, it is always important to see what the atmosphere is, the energy of the place

²³⁴ Free translation: a trans person in condition of, let's name it, freedom. Because you can't say that I'm in condition of indigency, or street, or homeless. No! A person who lives in condition of freedom!

that, from my perspective, more than submission is an act of rebellion and re-existence. She defends her will to live in condition of freedom, to heal in the street and to heal the streets of San José. What she is pointing out from her position is the violence of a system that imposes a single way of being and being in the world. She claims her right to be and live differently, and she tries to be a living example that other forms of existence are possible. Her life is a commitment to what we call pluriversality. She does not seek, in any way, that other people come to live in the streets, but she vehemently claims that a normative way of existing and living in the city should not be imposed on her.

Image 78
Fabiola, la madre tierra



Talking with Fabiola about the Red-light district, she explained to me how she feels hurt and offended by all the social stigmatization that exists around the life in the street and the area of the city where she and her friends live.

Fabiola: Y esta zona, pues, es una zona de alta complejidad. Es un lugar de vivencia, de vida y muerte, porque aquí mucha gente en el día se gana sustento también. Se gana su sustento, ¿me explico? Aquí la gente vende verduritas, pasa la gente que anda reciclando cartoncito, aluminio. Pasa la gente que tiene su sodita, sus tienditas de ropa y de toda. Es un lugar de vida también. Como también es un lugar de muerte. Pero eso está en cada uno de nosotrxs, a partir de cómo agarremos la complejidad en el diario vivir cotidiano. ¿Ya? ¿Me explico?

En la continuidad de nuestra existencia. Es un lugar que fluye. ¡Hay vida! me explico? Y en la medida de lo posible, es un lugar de mucha productividad. Aquí se mueve

mucha economía. Mucha economía que bien que mal, se ven beneficiadas todas las personas, sin distingo de credo, raza, color o religión. Aquí es una zona de mucha colectividad, de muchos dispositivos, digamos, ya? Que es lo que llaman la zona roja... Pero es un nombre muy peyorativo y muy estigmatizado porque la gente, diay, lo toma por otro lado, pero la verdad es un lugar en el que hay vida. Hay vida. Vida.

Mar: ¿Cómo la llamaría usted?

Fabiola: ¿La zona?

Mar: Sí. Para nombrarla, en lugar de zona roja, cómo la llamaría usted?

Fabiola: Una zona de tolerancia. Lo más. Sí, es una zona de tolerancia. Donde se conjuga lo positivo y lo negativo y eso tiene su propia característica, verdad²³⁵.

For Fabiola, the street is a zone of complexity, where life and death coexist, not in a binary conflict, but in a variegated and permanent contradiction.

As shown in the video we produced in the framework of this thesis (<https://youtu.be/Hty9Onb67IY>), Fabiola dedicates long hours of her days to cleaning the streets where she lives. She collects solid waste, cleans the sidewalks thinking of people with disabilities, recuperates recyclable material and in the midst of all this she takes breaks to contemplate and celebrate the beauty of life that filters through the city. The trees, the birds, the sky, the insects that inhabit a square meter of lawn, she celebrates them all and affirms that her struggle is also for them. Her life, she says to me, becomes meaningful in that act of cleaning the streets, because that act is a defense of life itself, hers and that of all of us, human and non-human city critters.

Fabiola: Entonces esto me ayuda como una terapia, también. Porque el trabajo es salud y es tratamiento y es rehabilitante, también. Y para mí esto a veces, este, por eso cuando yo veo a ciertas personas que yo trato de, de formarnos. La poca formación que yo he llevado a través de muchos grupos de autoayuda, yo trato de replicarlo²³⁶.

²³⁵ Free translation: **Fabiola:** And this area is a highly complex area. It is a place of experience, of life and death, because here many people also earn their living during the day. They earn their sustenance, you know what I mean? Here people sell vegetables, people recycle cardboard and aluminum. People come by who have their own little snack bars, their little clothing shops and such. It is a place of life as well. Just as it is also a place of death. But that is inside every one of us, from the way we grasp the complexity in our daily life. You know? You understand? In the continuity of our existence. It is a place that flows. There is life! And as far as possible, it is a place of great productivity. A great economy moves here. A great economy that benefits all people, regardless of creed, race, color or religion. This is a zone of great collectivity, of many apparatuses, so to speak. That is what they call the Red-light district... But it is a very pejorative name and very stigmatized because people take it in a different way, but the truth is that it is a place where there is life. There is life. Life.

Mar: What would you call it?

Fabiola: The zone?

Mar: Yes. To name it, instead of Red-light district, what would you call it?

Fabiola: A tolerance zone. Mostly. Yes, it is a zone of tolerance. Where the positive and the negative are combined and that has its own characteristic, right?

²³⁶ Free translation: **Fabiola:** So this helps me as a therapy, too. Because work is also health and treatment and it also rehabilitates. And for me sometimes, that's why when I see certain people that I try to, to train ourselves. The little training that I have received through many self-help groups, I try to replicate it.

Díaz (2021) wonders whether healing resides in doing or in receiving. For Fabiola it is in both. Her work is a form of care for the Pachamama, which dignifies her and connects her with a vital energy. It is a coming and going between the individual and the collective, between the body and the Earth, between the self and the community, not as a road between two opposing points, but as a spiral path, which runs through, connects and revolves them.

Fabiola: Porque todos tenemos que estar conectados. Entonces yo desde que me levanto este es mi rol, este es mi trabajo, y yo lo hago de una manera tan... con tanto entusiasmo, con tanta euforia, con tanta adrenalina, que me la creo, y esa creencia se realiza, porque diay, me da, y veo que a mí en lo personal me ha dado. Porque es también, yo creo que, me ha dado éxitos bastante beneficiosos, bastante, este, beneficioso, en lo que es mejorar mi calidad de vida como persona, verdad. ¿Me explico? Porque me está ayudando en manejar, digamos, este, mi situación, digamos, este, situaciones extremas que actualmente nuestra sociedad padece. La sociedad del hombre, verdad, el consumismo, el materialismo, ser una persona que viaja en una equidad, y una, en un equilibrio, pues, armonioso²³⁷.

Fabiola is convinced that for her, the healing is on the street:

Fabiola: Esta es una manera de rehabilitarme. Y es una manera, mejor que estar metido en unas cuatro paredes, o que le den esa, esa filosofía, esa metodología de ir a pedir con un tarro a una esquina [se refiere al programa de Hogares Crea]. Porque eso no es rehabilitación. Rehabilitación, como yo le digo a los compañeros, rehabilitación está aquí mismo en este programa. En la calle. Usted sabe estar en el equilibrio. Usted aquí está en la vida y en la muerte. Este es el mejor centro de rehabilitación. No el de 4 paredes, el que la gente lucra con uno²³⁸.

In dialogue with their friend Corintia, who arrived in Costa Rica several decades ago fleeing police repression towards trans women in her country of origin, Panama, they question the reach of welfare and charity projects. They criticize the profit that charity programs make at the expense of the misery of the unhoused residents of the city, pointing out that these programs generate relationships of dependency. In some cases, Corintia and Fabiola denounce, impoverished trans women are even forced to give up their gender and self-determination in exchange for a plate of food. Fabiola reacts angrily:

²³⁷ Free translation: **Fabiola:** Because we all have to be connected. So, from the moment I get up, this is my role, this is my job, and I do it with so much enthusiasm, with so much euphoria, with so much adrenaline, that I believe in it, and that belief is realized, because it rewards me, and I see what it has done for me personally. Because it is also, I believe that it has given me quite beneficial achievements, very beneficial, in terms of improving my quality of life as a person, right? Do you know what I mean? Because it is helping me to handle, let's say, my situation, let's say, extreme situations that our society currently suffers. Man's society, right, consumerism, materialism, being a person that travels in an equity, and a, in a harmonious balance.

²³⁸ Free translation: **Fabiola:** This is a way to rehabilitate myself. And it is a better way than being confined in four walls, or that they give you that, that philosophy, that methodology of going to beg with a jar to a corner [she is referring to Hogares Crea program]. Because that is not rehabilitation. Rehabilitation, as I tell my folks, rehabilitation is right here in this program. On the street. You learn to be in balance. Here you are in life and in death. This is the best rehab center. Not the one with four walls, the one where people make money off of you.

Fabiola: Ah, no! A mí me llega una persona a hablar y yo inmediatamente lo ubico. A mí no me venga con esa política, verdad? Ah, porque saben con quién lo hacen. Porque yo todos los días me levanto con la frente en alto, como soy.

Corintia: ¡Dígale eso a Luisa! ¡Dígale eso a Luisa! A Luisa el pastor le dice: usted...

Fabiola: ¡Ah, yo me lo levanto y lo dejo como nuevo a ese pastor! Soy más pastora yo que usted, porque un pastor no debería hablar en esa forma y en ese lenguaje. Estar señalando. Porque usted es un ser humano como yo. Con sus errores también²³⁹.

Fabiola raises her voice calling the attention of several strangers in the National Park around us. "I want people to listen too," she tells me emphatically. In her angry words Fabiola defends her identity and autonomy, her agency, her philosophy, while at the same time pointing out the central node that discussions about these types of projects often overlook. When Fabiola says: "you are a human being like me" she is questioning centuries of coloniality, and is clearly and boldly asserting her life, not against others, not over others, but with others.

Fabiola: Porque al menos yo siempre que me topo un compañero, el mismo ride en el cual yo me desenvuelvo, yo les digo: mire, y les doy la explicación, y a veces yo siento que sí funciona! Sí funciona hacer un cambio entre nosotros, en la sociedad²⁴⁰.

As Bourcier rightly points out "l'on ne peut pas lutter contre le biopouvoir seul*, être féministe ou queer et « superféminise » comme iel s'autoqualifiait seul*" (Bourcier 2017, 71). While greeting colleagues and strangers, Fabiola says to me, smiling: "a mí me gusta ese mundo. Y aquí y así quiero morir yo, en esto, yo sé que voy a morir en esto..."²⁴¹. Like Elena, Fabiola claims her right to inhabit the street, and more than this, she defends that there is life in the street. With her body and her work, she affirms the will to exist, for her and her friends.

When Villalobos forcefully affirms that in the street everyone lives in hell, he is denying the words of these women, and with this, he is depriving himself of understanding the vital potential that the city can have for some people. In his obsession with the cure, marked by a colonial gaze, Villalobos pretends to have the only answer and the only truth. What prevents him from seeing other routes to

²³⁹ Free translation: **Fabiola:** No, no! Someone comes to me to talk to me and I immediately make things clear for them. Don't come to me with that policy, right? Oh, because they know with whom they can do it. Because every day I get up with my head held high, as I am.

Corintia: Tell that to Luisa! Tell that to Luisa! The pastor says to Luisa: "You..."

Fabiola: Oh, I would get up and make that pastor understand! I am more of a pastor than you, because a pastor should not speak in that way and in that language. To be pointing fingers. Because you are a human being like me. With your mistakes too.

²⁴⁰ Free translation: **Fabiola:** Because at least I always tell them whenever I come across a colleague, living in the same environment as I do, I tell them: look, and I give them the explanation, and sometimes I feel that it does work! It does work to make a change among us, in society.

²⁴¹ Free translation: **Fabiola:** I like this world. And I want to die here, this is how I want to die, doing this, I know I am going to die doing this...

healing is the obstinate coloniality with which he denies the conditions of humanity and the agency of those bodies that are the object of his corporate charity.

I wonder how a listening device like *Chepe se baña* works and what is heard in it. It seems that it is not an open and horizontal dialogue with unhoused residents of the city, to listen to their anxieties, their ideas and their experiences. Listening appears inverted. The unhoused residents talk about their anguish, but what is heard is the exit route that a group of experts has already determined for their malaise. An alternative philosophy of life, such as *Fabiola's*, is not heard by *Villalobos*, because from his perspective, what these people need is to listen to the voices of authority.

Under this colonial logic, the bodies of the unhoused people, the voices, the speech, the thoughts and the will of those who live in the zone of non-being are just noise, urban bustle, the cries of city bugs indistinguishable from the howl of a monkey, to use *Argüello's* expression. "Si la biopolítica es la entrada del cuerpo y de la vida en la gestión de la política moderna, entonces la potencia de la vida es para la biopolítica siempre monstruosa²⁴²" (*Farneda 2012, 121*).

Image 79
Fabiola cleaning up the streets



Fabiola: Vieras cómo me regocijo yo y me alienta, como te dijera, no dejo de perder la esperanza que... esa es mi mayor anhelo, que mucha, que sea más la gente de nuestra población, que andamos como queremos andar, pero que, o sea, que nos insertemos socialmente en un campo laboral como el de andar reciclando. Porque nos ayuda terapéuticamente y es una manera de ir manejando nuestra reducción del

²⁴² Free translation: If biopolitics is the entry of the body and of life into the management of modern politics, then the power of life is for biopolitics always monstrous...

daño. Digamos, es una manera de enfocar la sostenibilidad, y buscando la luz, digamos, de una manera, paulatinamente, digamos. Porque, yo soy del pensar que en la calle está la rehabilitación. No está en 4 paredes. La rehabilitación está en la calle. No está en la tinta ni en el papel, sino está en actitudes y acciones, ya? Que vayan enfocadas con una objetividad de dejar una buena enseñanza, una buena semilla, ya, para las futuras generaciones. por los niños. Porque el planeta es de ellos. Ya es menos mío, sino más de los niños, ya?²⁴³

In the interview in *Las paredes oyen*, Villalobos affirms that when working on these projects, the heart stands in the way. Emotions stand in the way. I believe quite the opposite. From my militant research experience, the heart is rather what keeps me going, and emotions are my navigational tool. The city as an alternative to institutionalization, as a plural school and as a laboratory for the ecology of knowledge, the city as an open-air healing project, is only possible by breaking the Western dichotomy between reason and emotion. Rather than devices that precondition and regulate listening, we need open dialogues. Rather than washing away the scabs, we need to wash away the vertical pretension of knowledge, the individualistic desire to be heroes and the colonial gaze that makes us think that our privileges entitle us to know more about needs and solutions than the very people who embody those needs. What I have learned in the street dialogues with unhoused residents of the city and other dwellers of the *zone of non-being*, is to *sentipensar* San José, to *sentipensar* the city with the subjects that inhabit it. It is these plural dialogues that allow us to put knowledge (even academic knowledge) at the service of resistance and emancipation, at the service of another biopolitics, one might say. A biopolitics that moves not for the revenues of charity, not for social capital, not for the economy that drives the commodification of misery, but for the collective interest of creating a city that enhances life for everyone and with everyone.

²⁴³ Free translation: **Fabiola**: You see, I rejoice, and it encourages me, as I told you, I never lose hope that... this is my greatest wish, that many, that more people from our population, those of us who walk the way we want to walk, that we insert ourselves socially in a labor field such as recycling. Because it helps us therapeutically and it is a way of managing our harm reduction. Let's say, this is a way of focusing on sustainability, and looking for the light, let's say, in a gradual way, we could say. Because I think that rehabilitation is in the street. It is not in four walls. Rehabilitation is in the street. It is not in ink or on paper, it is in attitudes and actions, get it? Actions that are focused with an objectivity to leave a good teaching, a good seed for the future generations. Because the planet is theirs. It is less mine now, and more of the children already.

Chapter 5. Hunger

*Difícil es caminar,
en un extraño lugar
en donde el hambre se ve
como un circo en acción.
En las calles no hay telón
así que puedes mirar
como rico espectador.
Te invito a nuestra ciudad²⁴⁴.*

Un gran circo, Maldita vecindad y los hijos del 5to patio

Tristeza que hace nudo detrás de la nariz. Tanta hambre me roba mis ganas de comer.

¿Cómo escribir sobre el hambre con la panza llena? ¿Cómo escribir con mis brazos flácidos, con las uñas limpias y mis ojos secos? ¿Cómo escribir sobre el hambre cuando no habita mis tripas? La sufro, pero no la encarno. Me duele, pero no me va a matar. No a mí, pero a lxs míos. ¿Cómo escribir sobre el hambre con esta náusea incontrolable que no me deja respirar?²⁴⁵

(Field diary, November 22, 2019)

Hunger was a major emergent in the fieldwork of this study. I returned to Costa Rica in September 2019, after a year and a half studying in the Global North. In Paris I came to know the misery of Europe, I saw hunger on street corners and in the subway, in the neighborhoods made of fabric at the edge of the canals, in the colorful faces that wandered the streets of the district where I lived. I came to know misery in Europe, although I have always known the misery of the Global North, in the plundered and starving Central America where I am from, whose plates of food continue to be stolen every day by decades of neoliberal policies.

I returned to Costa Rica in 2019 to do field work. I stayed for a few months in the neighborhood where I was born. An urban neighborhood on the outskirts of central San José, separated by Central Avenue from the trendy neighborhood Escalante, and by a few blocks from the messy hustle and bustle of

²⁴⁴ Free translation: It is hard to walk / in a strange place / where hunger is seen / as a circus in action. / In the streets there's no curtain / so you can watch / like a rich spectator / Welcome to my city. *Un gran circo* by Maldita Vecindad y los hijos del 5to patio

²⁴⁵ Free translation: Sadness that makes a knot behind my nose. So much hunger robs me of my appetite. How to write about hunger with a full belly? How to write with my flabby arms, with clean nails and dry eyes? How to write about hunger when it does not dwell in my guts? I suffer it, but I don't embody it. It hurts me, but it won't kill me. How to write about hunger with this uncontrollable nausea that doesn't let me breathe?

downtown San José. For as long as I can remember, one can find impoverished people wandering in the streets, rummaging through the garbage for edible leftovers. But what I found in 2019 was truly shocking. Walking from my family's house to the city center I saw a multiplicity of bodies covered with dirty fabrics, plastic bags and cardboard. The lobbies of buildings left vacant by the crisis of the last few years were now converted into fragile cardboard chambers. Sometimes, when I walked back home, the police had already demolished those desperate armatures, which the next morning reappeared as human anthills reclaiming the city.

Closed stores, rental signs everywhere, empty buildings and homeless people setting up humble dwellings to resist the torrential rains that flood our city with crap. From the moment I arrived I was overwhelmed by the amount of people sleeping in the streets. In the parks, on the sidewalks, under the bridges, on the train line, around the bus stations, outside the hospitals, in parking lots that, when emptied of cars, become rooms where bodies park awaiting the sunrise. There are just too many people living on the streets. This was my first impression upon returning to the city.

I was aware that my perception was subjective, influenced by my intermittent experience of living in the center of the city, and by the inevitable vertigo I felt upon returning after a some time living abroad. And yet, what I observed was so overwhelming that it pierced the research questions with which I had crossed the Atlantic.

Es la segunda vez que me pasa. Camino por la avenida 5 en San José. Una persona en situación de calle se me acerca, y cuando le digo que no ando nada de efectivo para apoyarle, porque de verás ando los bolsillos vacíos, me responde: “No, no, mae. No quiero plata. Quiero comida”. Patada en mi estómago y mis privilegios. “Bueno, qué quiere comer? Vamos y lo invito a algo”, le digo con tristeza en la garganta. “No, vea, es que aquí todo es muy caro. Y la verdad me sirve más si me puede comprar comida para cocinar ahí abajo adonde me estoy quedando”. Me explica adonde queda el albergue adonde está parando estos días, por el Museo de los Niños, entrando en la Zona Roja. Me dice que si quiere lo acompaño para que vea que no me está mintiendo. Yo le digo que no es necesario. Me dice: “Vea, hay un chino [una tienda de alimentos], es lo más barato que hay por acá”. Nos fuimos caminando juntos, como 500 metros, hasta el chino. Me explica que tiene familia, pero no puede estar con ellos porque están en un albergue segregado por sexo. Me dice que no encuentra trabajo. Habla aceleradamente. No consigo distinguir si es el hambre o el síndrome de abstinencia. Quizás es el coctel de ambas. Llegamos a la tienda. Le compré una bolsa grande de arroz, frijoles, unos huevos, un atún y un aceite. El mae estaba todo agradecido. Me agarró fuerte las manos y me dijo adiós. Yo me quedé con el ánimo arrugado. De verdad me rompe el corazón. Es demasiado. Ahora, la gente de entrada ya no pide plata, pide comida. Y no es como: “cómprame una empanada”. Es como: “ayúdeme a sobrevivir una semana”²⁴⁶ (Field diary, September 22, 2019).

²⁴⁶ Free translation: This is the second time this happens to me. I was walking down 5th Avenue in San José. A man approaches me, and when I tell him that I don't have any cash to spare him, (my pockets are truly empty),

I talk to people on the street, I talk to migrants, to women, to young people from the countryside who have come to the city, I talk to older people, to kids who have been pushed out of the school, I talk to drug users, stoned and in abstinence, I talk to dealers, I talk to guys who are drunk, I talk to street vendors, to sex workers, to cab drivers, to uber drivers, to trans women, to grandmothers and their grandchildren... everyone is hungry in this city.

Well, I am hyperbolizing, and using a synecdoche that is actually unfair to those populations that are lacking food on a daily basis. The truth is that right there, in those same streets or just a few blocks away, the buildings house businessmen and tenants who look at the urban landscape with their tummies full of haute cuisine and status. San José is a city of contrasts, contrasts that are sometimes difficult to observe because they hardly meet on a horizontal plane.

Some of those who inhabit the upper strata of San José look at poverty and hunger with very different eyes than I do. In 2014, an exhibition of paintings by artist Juan Manuel Delgado entitled "*La Pobreza Extrema*" (Extreme Poverty) was held in downtown San José. The exhibition was organized at the Club Unión, a prestigious social and business club founded in 1923 by a powerful group of coffee producers who were looking for a meeting place for people of high economic and cultural level (Montero 2013). In order to become a member of Club Unión, it is necessary to provide two letters of reference from members to support the admission. In addition, it is necessary to purchase a share, pay an admission fee and a monthly fee. For several decades, membership was restricted only to cis men, although their wives and companions could enter the Club under their guardianship.

he answers me: "No, no, man. I don't want money. I want food". A kick in my stomach and my privileges. "All right, what do you want to eat? Let's go and I'll buy you something," I said to him with sadness in my throat. "No, you see, it's just that everything here is very expensive. And the truth is that it would be better for me if you could buy me some food to cook down there where I am staying". He explains to me the location of the shelter where he is staying these days, by the Children's Museum, entering the Red-light district. He tells me that, if I want, I can go with him so I can see that he is not lying to me. I tell him that it is not necessary. He tells me: "Look, there is a chino [a food store], it is the cheapest place around here". We walked together, about 500 meters to the shop. He explains to me that he has a family, but he can't be with them because they are in a sex-segregated shelter. He tells me he can't find work. He speaks rapidly. I can't tell if it is hunger or withdrawal. Perhaps it is the cocktail of both. We arrived at the store. I bought him a big bag of rice, beans, some eggs, a can of tuna and a bottle of oil. The man was all grateful. He grabbed my hands tightly and said goodbye. My heart shriveled up. It breaks me apart. It's too much. Now people don't ask for money, they ask for food. And it's not like: "buy me an *empanada*". It's like: "help me survive for a week".

Image 80
The best social club in the city



Source: Screenshot from Club Union website, <https://www.clubunion.com/>

The halls of this neoclassical building in the heart of the city, where it is said that the elites elected the presidents of this country (Montero 2013), received Delgado's exhibition that sought to give the prestigious members of the club a glimpse of that other Costa Rica that they see from the height of their windows. The hungry Costa Rica that feeds their wealth.

Image 81
Poverty tourism



Source: Colectivo Costarricense de Psicología de la Liberación, 2011

This collage published in the bulletin of the Colectivo Costarricense de Psicología de la Liberación (Costa Rican Liberation Psychology Collective) presents with irony what was happening in that place.

San José is a flat and horizontally spread city, but it is compartmentalized. The deficient public transportation is not, as in other cities, a meeting point between social classes. The private residential complexes where members of the Club Unión live often have a specific entrance for domestic workers and service personnel, whose bodies are not worthy of entering through the main gate for residents and guests. Poverty, stylized by the artist's brush, was put on display so that the attendees could get to know this phenomenon with which they are hardly confronted. On the right we see a photo of the artist posing with his work. In the background, we can see a working-class neighborhood in San José. In the picture, clothes are hanging in the sun, a practice used by the people who do not have an electric dryer at home, and which is apparently exotic for the select public of the Club Unión, to whom the invitation on the left indicates that the dress code for men is a jacket and for women a cocktail dress. The poster clarifies that tennis shoes, jeans and caps are not allowed. Below is Banksy's famous work, in which a couple of white tourists take a ride, pushed by an impoverished child in the Third World.

The selection of the image that represents extreme poverty, in which we do not observe people but clothes, is noteworthy. It offers us the representation of a poverty without a face, without a body, without a history, without life, a poverty that never feels hunger, without pending accounts, without insomnia and tiredness. A pacified and stylized poverty for the consumption of the elites who visit the prestigious club.

Journalist Sergio Zúñiga described the scene with a powerful metaphor:

Como agujeros negros que llevan a otra dimensión de la realidad nacional, catorce obras se enmarcan en paredes de finas maderas, pomposos arreglos florales y exquisitos pisos de mármol, todo iluminado por candelabros de cristal²⁴⁷ (Zúñiga 2014, para. 5).

However, those black holes do not trap the particles around them. They are not really portals, and their viewers do not run the risk of being absorbed and disintegrated by the ravenous images that speak to them of parallel dimensions that their imagination is unable to think of. Some of the attendees, perhaps, consciously sustain exploitative practices that impoverish the population. Many others may not even realize that the lives they live are sustained by the bodies that inhabit the houses in these paintings. They will believe, like Smith (1982), that their wealth has nothing to do with impoverishment, and that the market distributes capital in the fairest and most natural way.

When Providence divided the earth among a few lordly masters, it neither forgot nor abandoned those who seem to be left out in the partition. These last too enjoy their share of all that it produces. In what constitutes the real happiness of human life, they

²⁴⁷ Free translation: Like black holes that lead to another dimension of the national reality, fourteen works are framed on fine wooden walls, pompous floral arrangements and exquisite marble floors, all illuminated by crystal chandeliers.

are in no respect inferior to those who would seem so much above them. In ease of body and peace of mind all the different ranks of life are nearly upon a level, and the beggar, who suns himself by the side of a highway, possess that security which kings are fighting for (Smith 1982, 10).

A few blocks away from the Club Union, we find multiple parallel dimensions of the national reality. For instance, near the Central Park, on any given day the municipal police carry out the usual seizures of the products of street vendors who probably inhabit the neighborhoods that Delgado wanted to portray. In image 82, we can see how the police celebrate the seizure of a cart of oranges, which some impoverished person was pushing around the streets of San José trying to earn some money to eat and pay the rent. What was confiscated by the police is itself food, food that neither the vendor nor his people will be able to recover.

Image 82
Police seizing street vendors



Source: Policía Municipal de San José Facebook Page,
<https://www.facebook.com/201661679852669/photos/a.610784842273682/2619149208103892>

Caption : This morning before the traditional downpours of the season, we conducted seizures of street vendors in the Central Park of SJO. We defend the right of people to walk freely!

In the name of the citizens' right to walk freely through the city, the police destroy the means by which a vendor tries to assert his basic right to food and housing. People are hungry, and the police do not ease up. San José is a city of contrasts that do not mingle but intertwine.

In this scenario, my overwhelming subjective perception became a research question. This chapter seeks to walk a path around that great emergent: hunger. The first section of this chapter intends to

draw the context of hunger and extreme poverty in San José. For this purpose, I analyze some figures and indicators on poverty in Costa Rica, and I contrast them with data from my fieldwork and the perceptions of people who inhabit the city of San José. The second section addresses the contrasts surrounding hunger and the food market in the city. It gathers a series of situations observed during the ethnographic process, in which food and hunger become a business, an offer of alternative consumption and entertainment for the middle and upper classes. In addition, this section analyzes the tense reactions of middle-class professionals when confronted with people whose bodies render impoverishment visible.

The third section approaches the problem of hunger from a different perspective, that of the charitable interventions that address this issue in the city. It analyzes a Christian project that organizes competitions around food in the Red Light District of San José, and the entertainment products that are generated from the spectacularization of their activities. Finally, in order to outline possible alternatives, I discuss the experience of feminist solidarity economy that a group of people in exile have promoted in the city of San José.

5.1. Figures of Impoverishment and dispossession in the Central American Switzerland.

The issue of hunger and poverty is not only a collateral effect of capitalism. The precariousness of the working classes is part of the mechanisms that theorists such as Adam Smith (1976) consider to be self-regulating mechanisms of the market. Smith considers that the market contains an infallible rationality that allows it to self-regulate and restore its immanent equilibrium. Smith argues that market imbalances are always the product of improper regulations and injudicious restraints that governments impose to trade. For example, the market uses scarcity (dearth), understood as shortages of food as a result of decline in production, as a self-regulatory mechanism. When governments intervene to try to remedy the inconveniences of dearth, they force artificial conditions on the market, which, according to Smith, push the situation into its most extreme form: famine. "...famine has never arisen from any other cause but the violence of government attempting, by improper means, to remedy the inconveniences of dearth" (Smith 1976, 690).

Faced with disequilibrium, the market seeks to adjust the number of workers to the amount of wage fund available in a country. One of the ways in which the market adjusts the proportion of laborers is by means of liberally distributing malnutrition to the social classes whose numbers exceed their ability to obtain subsistence. The market stretches the limits of bodies of these surplus populations, pushing further and further the levels of precariousness that people are willing and capable of enduring

(Montag 2013). In other words, this restoration of equilibrium operates through mortality, and leads us into the realm of necro-economics and necropolitics. In order for some to live, others have to die.

Condemning millions of human beings to death because their existence is more of a cost than a benefit would certainly be controversial. War facilitates a state of exception in which it is permissible to kill others in the name of the common good. However, outside the state of exception, in the so-called "normality" of the human rights era, annihilating hungry people in the name of the common good could be scandalous. Not that it does not happen, but it entails a number of complications in terms of governmentality. With the power of the invisible hand of the market, it is no longer necessary to murder them. Through necro-economy, entire populations are handed over or pushed to death, without it being possible to establish who is directly accountable. The populations that must die to sustain the species are left to die a slow and diffuse death in which responsibilities are blurred. Populations are not people, they are anonymous masses, numbers that are added and subtracted.

My approach to hunger in this study comes from a radically different perspective. My concern about hunger did not begin with data about an anonymous mass. It was not a deductive work based on numbers and statistics. It actually emerged as a category in the field. Hunger exploded in my eyes and heart when I returned to San José. Rather than analyzing official figures and statistics, I am interested in the stories, the embodied reflections and experiences of those who are suffering from hunger in San José.

Fearing that, perhaps, my perception of the increase in poverty in the city might be distorted by the time I lived outside the country, I sought to contrast it with other sources. I consulted official figures, but also, keeping in mind Foucault's remarks about the link between statistics and biopower, I looked for unofficial sources to contrast. Thus, I began to include questions about hunger, the cost of living and the visible expressions of poverty in the dialogues with people who had been living or working in the city for several years.

On the afternoon of October 14, 2019, walking along the northeast side of central San Jose on my way to an interview with staff of TEOR/ÉTICA Foundation, I noticed several people sleeping in the park. A few days earlier, Fabiola had driven me through that same area in a *parcour*/interview. We walked down to a lonely street taken over by the weeds that escaped from the Metropolitan Zoo, where she had shown one of her favorite spots to sleep in the city.

The TEOR/ÉTICA foundation is a space that pursues to bridge art and culture with the history and life of the community. Located in Barrio Amón, a neighborhood I will return to in Chapter 8, the TEOR/ÉTICA foundation has a strategic position in a community with complex dynamics, where

poverty and opulence coexist. This is actually quite rare in the city, since gated neighborhoods and residential complexes segregate social classes around San José.

For several years, this art foundation has been trying to occupy its geographical position in a socially responsible way. For example, they opened their doors to trans sex workers in the neighborhood. I came to TEOR/ÉTICA with the interest to inquire about the neighborhood and about their relationship with trans* people who inhabit that space. However, moved by the scenes observed on my way there, I took the opportunity to ask about their perception of the cost of living (especially food), and the expressions of poverty that become visible in everyday life.

Performing a memory exercise, TEOR/ÉTICA's staff members, Paula and Miguel, calculated that a plate of food in a local restaurant increased by approximately 25% from 2015 to 2019 (Paula and Miguel, in discussion with the author, October 14, 2019). Next, I inquired about their perception of the number of people living on the streets and in the parks of San José. Their answer was emphatic:

Mar: Yo me fui hace año y medio. Ahora que vuelvo, yo siento un aumento en la población...

Paula: ¿Indigente?

Mar: En situación de calle, sí.

Paula: ¡Diez veces más!

Mar: O sea... ¿Ustedes perciben que son más?

Paula: Aquí, en Barrio Amón, o sea, amanece alguien aquí en Teor/Ética o ahí a la vuelta, cosa que hace, no sé, año y medio no pasaba. Un año y medio para acá eso viene así.

Mar: Yo lo siento. Yo viví mucho tiempo en Los Yoses, y ahora me estoy quedando ahí otra vez. Ahí por el IMAS, en realidad, es Francisco Peralta. Y camino mucho a San José y sí siento que hay un aumento muy grande. Pero no sé. Le ando preguntando a todo el mundo para ver si es solo mi percepción.

Paula: No, no. Estás en lo correcto. Sí, yo diría que unas 5 a 10 veces más. No sé. De gente, sí²⁴⁸. (Paula, in discussion with the author, October 14, 2019)

²⁴⁸ Free translation: **Mar:** I left about a year and a half ago. Now that I came back, I sense an increase in the population...

Paula: Indigents?

Mar: Unhoused people, yes.

Paula: Ten times more!

Mar: I mean... Do you perceive that they are more?

Paula: Here, in Barrio Amon, I mean, someone sleeps here outside Teor/ÉTICA or just around the corner, something that didn't happen a year and a half ago. From a year and a half ago it has been like that.

Mar: I feel it. I lived in Los Yoses for a long time, and now I am staying there again. Near the IMAS, actually, the neighborhood is Francisco Peralta. And I often walk to San José and I do believe that there is a very big growth. But I don't know. I'm asking everyone to see if it's just my perception.

Paula: No, no. You are correct. Yes, I would say about 5 to 10 times more. I don't know. Of people, yes.

Paula's perception coincides with the perception of volunteers working in organizations that assist the unhoused population. Sebastián, for example, mentioned to me that data from Chepe se baña estimated around 5000 unhoused people living in the city. He projected that by 2019 it could have increased to 5500 or 6000 (Sebastián, in discussion with the author, October 6, 2019). In a similar vein, a volunteer from Watts collective assessed that, in a matter of 5 years, the homeless population would have grown from 1500 to 6000 people. Unlike Sebastian, who believes that most of the people they assist are Costa Ricans, volunteers from Watts observed a significant increase in the number of migrants living on the streets. This could be related to the socio-political situation in countries such as Nicaragua, Honduras and El Salvador, which is causing displacement and forced migration in very precarious conditions.

Unhoused residents of the city constitute one of the most visible expressions of poverty. Perhaps that is why their presence in the public space is so disturbing. The authorities rush to clean the streets of these bodies deployed on the sidewalk to mask the inequalities that many people do not want to see. My perception about the increase of this visible expression of poverty seems to be shared by the interviewees. But, what do the official statistics say? Contrasting these perceptions with official statistics is difficult, since in Costa Rica there are still no official data on the number of people living on the streets. The mayor's office estimates that some 3000 people live on the streets of San José (A. Mora 2019), while the Instituto Mixto de Ayuda Social²⁴⁹ (IMAS) claims to have assisted a total of 4146 homeless people in 2021 (Instituto Mixto de Ayuda Social, Costa Rica 2021). This is the number of people who received support from the institution, and we can imagine that there is a considerable number who have not benefited from the welfare programs.

Next to these uncertain numbers, of the absence that is scandalous and visible in the streets of San José, we find some statistics that speak concretely about hunger in the country. Hunger may be less visible, but it seems to be quite extended in the population of the country, according to the Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2021 for Latin America and the Caribbean, elaborated by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the UN,

The report presents the average of statistics collected between 2018 and 2020. It indicates that, in Costa Rica, 800,000 people live in a condition of moderate or severe food insecurity, meaning that they suffer to some extent from hunger (FAO et al. 2021). This represents almost 16% of the population, and an increase of nearly 4 points compared to the statistics for the 2014-2016 period.

²⁴⁹ IMAS is an institution that serves "the population in poverty of Costa Rica through the provision of subsidies and the realization of programs which provide financing and training to productive enterprises" (Instituto Mixto de Ayuda Social, Costa Rica n.d.)

One in six people fail to meet three meals a day, and 100,000 people report having gone an entire day without eating a meal (Molina 2021).

Hunger is perhaps less visible than homelessness, but it seems to be more widespread. "Government of hunger", shouted a graffiti on the walls of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Costa Rica in late 2019.

Image 83
Government of hunger



Caption: Government of hunger. CAQ [president] and Rocío Aguilar [Minister of Finance] out!

The truth is that, beyond the economic policies of former President Carlos Alvarado, hunger in Costa Rica is the result of decades of neoliberalism and centuries of colonialism. Coinciding with my perception, the figures indicate that hunger in Costa Rica, as in Abya Yala, has been increasing. It seems that despite the Structural Adjustment Programs, or perhaps we should say as a product of them, the neoliberal project never managed to adjust the reality to the promises of fighting poverty.

Las estadísticas indican que estamos retrocediendo en la lucha contra el hambre. Hemos vuelto a los niveles de hace 15 años, y estamos perdiendo la batalla contra todas las formas de malnutrición. Queda mucho por hacer para garantizar una alimentación saludable a toda la población a lo largo de su vida²⁵⁰ (Molina 2021, para. 23)

The Covid-19 pandemic undoubtedly worsened the situation. In Costa Rica, the State implemented an emergency fund, Bono Proteger, to support people whose income had been affected by the sanitary

²⁵⁰ Free translation: Statistics indicate that we are going backwards in the fight against hunger. We are back to the levels of 15 years ago, and we are losing the battle against all forms of malnutrition. Much remains to be done to ensure healthy diets for all people throughout their lives.

crisis. Although insufficient to cover all needs, this fund helped mitigate a bit the impact on the daily economy of the population. The Ministry of Labor and Social Security received more than one million applications from freelance workers, people with informal or temporary jobs, and people who became unemployed because of the pandemic. One million people represent about a quarter of the total working-age population (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos 2021b).

Image 84
Surviving the pandemic in the streets



Source: Óscar Jiménez Fernández,
<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10157729143373019&set=a.10154406924343019>

The COVID-19 pandemic struck especially hard in regions with less food sovereignty (including urban areas). But Costa Rica had been dragging on the problem of hunger in for some time. An article published in 2021 in *Semanario Universidad* analyzes national statistics indicating that between July 2019 and June 2020, 47.6% of households (about 763 thousand households), experienced some degree of food insecurity. For thousands of families, their income was not enough to ensure the three basic meals a day for all its members. As usual, dispossession does not strike everyone in the same way. The report notes that factors such as a low level of education increase the incidence of food insecurity. In addition, the incidence is higher in female-headed households, and is further aggravated in the case of migrant women (Molina 2021).

Eddy Madrigal, coordinator of the 2020 National Household Survey (ENAH0), indicates:

hay familias sobre la línea de pobreza extrema e incluso quienes oficialmente “no son pobres” que por distintas circunstancias pasan hambre. Endeudamiento, gastos

médicos, desigualdad en el consumo familiar y otras causas podrían llevar a que más costarricenses se acuesten con el estómago vacío²⁵¹ (Madrigal in Muñoz 2020, par.6).

The 2020 National Household Survey (ENAH0, for its acronym in Spanish) yields more indicators. By mid-2020, about 420,000 families were living below the poverty line (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos 2020b, 46). This is equivalent to 30% of the national population (47). The ENAH0 2020 also registered 112,987 households in extreme poverty (46). The ENAH0 defines "extreme poverty" as the situation of families whose income per capita is less than the cost of the Basic Food Basket, an amount that is barely enough to cover the food a person needs to stay alive. For that year, the Basic Food Basket for the urban area was calculated at ₡50,245, which was equivalent to approximately \$86 at the exchange rate at the time (20).

How much hunger can a body endure? How much hunger can the people bear? How much hunger can the market manage, in that invidious equilibrium that Smith considered perfect and natural? The limit, says Montag, is exactly *bare life*:

The limit Smith does in fact set on the lowering of wages is the limit of the market itself: it is none other than the bare life of the workman, whose 'wages must at least be sufficient to maintain him... at a rate consistent with common humanity' and even 'somewhat more; otherwise it would be impossible for him to bring up a family and the race of such workmen could not last beyond the first generation' (Montag 2013, 205).

Thus, it is not a matter of eradicating hunger, but of administering it in adequate quantities to enable the accumulation of capital. Perhaps these hunger figures may seem like distant realities to some people, parallel worlds like the ones Delgado exhibited on the walls of Club Unión. Perhaps they cannot hear the rumble of those empty stomachs, nor can they imagine that in this city there are people who manage to survive on less than \$86 a month. However, anyone who crosses San José on foot, by bus or in their private car will not be able to avoid the tired, hungry and often desperate looks of that anonymous crowd that cannot afford to eat.

The rapacious homeostasis of the market requires poverty, since it creates the conditions of desperation that enable the exploitation of the working classes, the labor that sustains the luxuries and privileges enjoyed by the rich. In the security apparatus, says Foucault, the key is not in the absolute control of bodies, but in the administration of different variables that affect the life of the population. Sometimes, this administration consists of letting things happen:

The apparatus of security, by contrast, as you have seen, "lets things happen." Not that everything is left alone, but *laissez-faire* is indispensable at a certain level:

²⁵¹ Free translation: There are families living above the extreme poverty line and even families who are officially "not poor" that for various reasons suffer from hunger. Indebtedness, medical expenses, inequality in family consumption and other causes could lead to more people in Costa Rica going to bed on an empty stomach.

allowing prices to rise, allowing scarcity to develop, and letting people go hungry so as to prevent something else happening, namely the introduction of the general scourge of scarcity (Foucault 2009, 45).

The issue of hunger and poverty is not just a side effect of capitalism. In biopolitical terms, we would say that hunger is a mechanism of control, a tool to administer life and death in the population. But this administration does not affect everyone equally. Hunger does not mean the same thing for all bodies, nor can it be satiated equally by everyone.

Merchants who raise prices in the face of rising demand are not only right to do so from the point of view of their self-interest... but the unintended effect of their profit is the disciplining of the hungry by the market itself, which distributes to them only the meagre portion that their falling wages will procure (Montag 2013, 209).

5.2. You are what you eat: the alternative lives of the hipsters

“You are what you eat” says a popular slogan encouraging conscious eating. Considering the figures discussed above, this slogan that promotes healthy lifestyles and self-care, loses its meaning or acquires a perverse one. If we are what we eat, what would the thousands of people who have nothing to eat be? An empty gut, an ache in the belly, a bundle of anguish, a sociological absence, a failure of the alternative lifestyle that promised a better world and a better life.

Image 85
We are what we eat



Source: Paseo de las Flores Facebook Page,
(<https://www.facebook.com/Paseodelasflores/photos/somos-lo-que-comemos-gnc-costarica/703230386382728/>)

Description: Advertising for the GNC company, a powerful distributor in the nutritional supplement industry.

I do not intend to underestimate the importance of a balanced and conscious diet for physical and mental health. However, when 800,000 people do not have enough money to guarantee three meals a day, what possibility will they have to choose what they eat?

Image 86
Mindfuleating workshop



Source: <https://www.ucr.ac.cr/actividades/2018/05/09/mindful-eating-o-aprender-a-comer-con-consciencia.html>

Description: Mindfuleating workshop: learning to eat consciously, organized by the University of Costa Rica

Mindful eating, for someone who loses their focus to the sound of their squirming guts, seems like a cruel joke of capitalism. In the neoliberal era, the market has absorbed the notion of wellbeing. It is no longer a community project or a collective demand to the State but has become a product sold for individual consumption. For those who do not have consumption power, the route is that of necropolitics. For those of us who have the means, the route is that of consumption. It is a round business. Capitalism produces living conditions that provoke generalized suffering. At the same time, it sells us commodities, products, lifestyles that promise to bring us health and wellbeing. Trapped in this circle, we adopt the neoliberal mandate to invest in ourselves, in a cycle of subtle management that never seems to end.

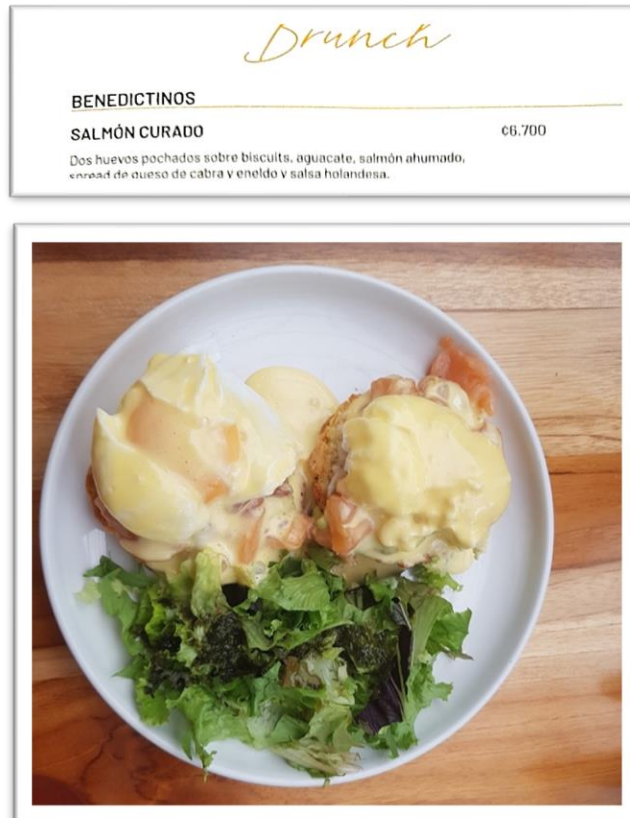
we see the *biomarket* create an epistemological displacement that is incorporated into bodies themselves; it no longer originates in an external, authoritarian structure, but rather it has been incorporated into our corporal systems through our obedience to consumption (Valencia 2018, chap. Necropolitics [2010, 150])

Costa Rica advances at an accelerated pace along the path of neoliberalism. Thus, while thousands of hungry bellies wander the streets of the San José, others turn food into an entrepreneurial project that sells wellness and alternative consumption. This conscious eating trend has spread to the hip neighborhoods of the city, where today we find restaurants whose menus (often in English) offer gluten free, raw, organic, vegan options and so on. Yet another contrast in the Costa Rica of

inequalities, where some of us can invest in ourselves and buy edible wellbeing, while others wait outside the hipster restaurants for charity, leftovers or a garbage bag to rummage through.

If the figures on extreme poverty discussed in the previous section are not in themselves staggering, we can compare them to the cost of a plate of food in an inclusive restaurant in Barrio Escalante, the trendy neighborhood that I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 8.

Images 87
Brunch in Barrio Escalante



In 2019, the price of this dish was \$11.5 in 2019. \$14.5 if accompanied with coffee. Figures that may not say much in Europe but compared to the prices of food in Central America are extremely high. Costa Rica also resembles Switzerland in prices. Leaving aside international comparisons, it is worth contrasting these prices with the hunger figures for Costa Rica: a customer in this restaurant spends in a single meal 1/6 of the budget of the Basic Food Basket, which hundreds of thousands of people cannot afford in a month. It should be noted that this restaurant is inaccessible to a large part of the population, and yet its prices are not particularly high compared to gourmet restaurants in the same neighborhood or in other areas of the capital.

Image 88

Meme: Costa Rica is expensive!



Source: Michael Palma on Twitter,

<https://twitter.com/PalmaMichael/status/1196597187175763969/photo/1>

Caption: So expensive! What a bummer!

5.2.1. Sikwa: cultural appropriation for alternative consumption

Well-being has proven to be a big business within the neoliberal project, yet capitalism certainly did not invent food as a form of healing, balance or wellness. In fact, the living knowledge of native peoples reminds us all the time of the reciprocal relationship between our bodies and nature. Still, capitalism has an impressive absorptive capacity. “Market logics can transform any kind of resistance into an exploitable market niche; everything can become an object of consumption” (Valencia 2018, chap. Necropolitics [2010, 151]). For example, in Costa Rica, a group of entrepreneurs have recovered the culinary knowledge of the native peoples, transforming them into a stylized project of ancestral cuisine located (until 2020) in the gastronomic capital, Barrio Escalante.

Images 89

Sikwa, Barrio Escalante, 2019



Sikwa claims to be a project that pursues the conservation of Costa Rican gastronomic culture. Although its cuisine is not 100% purist, it is inspired by traditional recipes of indigenous peoples, that are offered to its customers in the colorful dishes that compose their ancestral gourmet menu (<https://en.sikwacostarica.com/menu>).

On its website, this project is presented as:

center for Costa Rican gastronomy education and research and a space that protects the tradition of the native culture. We strive to create awareness for an honest and equitable production chain and we dream to help shape a country that prides itself on its tradition (Sikwa n.d.)

Images 90
Sikwa's aesthetics



Source: Sikwa Facebook Page,

The rescue of ancestral tradition produced with the elegance of Western aesthetics has turned out to be a veritable commercial success, recognized in business magazines as one of the top 5 restaurants redefining gastronomy in Central America.

Image 91
Sikwa in Forbes Magazine



Source: Sikwa Facebook Page,
(<https://www.facebook.com/sikwarestaurante.cr/posts/pfbid08HhUhHrg4WrZvVEW6ABvV2EGZaPQsJWLV3aRkSjxkqj4z2pfgsTu6gFugFwL13QwI>)

Caption: Forbes considers us as one of the 5 Central American restaurants that redefine gastronomy. Eternally grateful for the article. Excellent news on the verge of reopening. We leave the link in the bio so you can read it. @forbes_centroamerica

Sikwa is even sponsored by national brands such as Bavaria and multinational corporations such as American Express:

Image 92
Sikwa – American Express



Source: Sikwa Facebook Page
(<https://www.facebook.com/sikwarestaurante.cr/photos/a.223777994644347/836731940015613/>)

Chef and founder Pablo Bonilla is a true enthusiast of the ancestral gastronomic culture. He takes his time in interviews to raise awareness of our roots and to appeal to stop imitating European canons and turn our gaze to the cultural richness of this country (Zamora 2019). Sometimes he mentions that indigenous peoples are still facing violence and looting in our country. It is striking, however, that the website and social media of this project do not repost the numerous statements, reports and urgent calls for solidarity that indigenous organizations from different territories constantly publish in light of the constant siege, harassment, looting, forced displacement, and multiple forms of violence they face.

Image 93
Report of attack on Cabécar woman

COMUNICADO PÚBLICO

MUJER CABÉCAR RECUPERADORA ES ATACADA.

- Katherine Ríos, recuperadora cabécar de Kono Jú desde 2019, fue atacada con piedras y patadas por integrantes de la familia Rivera.

Lunes 21 de febrero 2022. El día de ayer 20 de febrero al ser 5:30 p.m. Katherine Ríos se dirigía a Kono Jú a dejar unos viveres en una motocicleta con su cuñado, William Hernández. En el camino se encontró a Evelyn y Mariela Rivera quienes la increparon con insultos: "zorra", "hijueputa", etc. Luego cuando pasaron frente a la casa de la familia Rivera (que queda a unos pocos metros de la entrada de Kono Jú) le tiraron una piedra que por suerte no la impactó.

Minutos después, al terminar los pendientes en Kono Jú, Katherine y su cuñado se dirigían en motocicleta al centro del Territorio Cabécar de China Kichá. Justo en el momento de pasar frente a la casa de la familia Rivera, Katherine recibió el golpe de una piedra por lo que cayó de la motocicleta; cuando Katherine cayó al suelo, Karol, Jeylin y Daryn Rivera le tiraron más piedras y la agredieron con patadas. William intentó detener el ataque pero fue golpeado con un piedra y fue mordido por Karol cuando éste intentó detener los golpes contra Katherine.

Katherine pudo huir con su cuñado, luego de recibir los golpes. En este momento se encuentra estable pero sí cuenta con varios moretones en su cuerpo. Katherine es una de las recuperadoras cabécares que recuperó Kono Jú, el primer terreno recuperado tras el asesinato del Uniwák Sergio Rojas Ortiz del Territorio Bribri de Salitre.

[Más información en comunicado adjunto]

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COORDINADORA LUCHA SUR-SUR

Source: Recuperadoras y recuperadores cabécares de China Kichá. Coordinadora de Lucha Sur Sur, <https://www.facebook.com/CoordinadoraLuchaSurSur/posts/466429041639166>

Image 94
Alert for the arbitrary detention of a Cabécar man

ALERTA NACIONAL E INTERNACIONAL

NUEVA DETENCIÓN ARBITRARIA CONTRA RECUPERADOR CABÉCAR DEL TERRITORIO DE CHINA KICHÁ, COSTA RICA

- Jesús Emiliano Villanueva Fernández, recuperador de Yuwi Senaglö, fue detenido arbitrariamente por tres oficiales de la Fuerza Pública el pasado domingo 01 de mayo por el supuesto delito de desobediencia a la autoridad.
- La detención se da un día después de que Darío Ríos Ríos sufra un intento de homicidio el sábado 30 de abril.

Martes 03 de mayo del 2022. El domingo 30 de mayo del 2022, Jesús Emiliano Villanueva Fernández se encontraba junto a Dennis Ríos Ríos en las cercanías de la plaza del Territorio Cabécar de China Kichá. Alrededor de las 10 p.m. cuando se dispusieron a regresar a sus casas de habitación y pasaron frente al puesto policial instalado por la Fuerza Pública desde septiembre del 2020, ambos recuperadores (Jesús y Dennis) manifestaron a los oficiales presentes su disconformidad con el hecho de que Leandro Rivera Venegas continúe en libertad a pesar de cometer un intento de homicidio contra Darío Ríos Ríos el sábado anterior (30 de abril 2022).

La reacción de la Fuerza Pública fue violenta, los tres oficiales presentes ametrallaron contra los dos jóvenes y amenazaron con privarles de libertad. Amenaza a la que Dennis Ríos Ríos pudo escapar pero Jesús Villanueva Fernández no. Villanueva fue detenido y golpeado por la Fuerza Pública cuando se encontraba dentro de la patrulla y también en la celda. Los golpes fueron en su cara, orejas, espalda e incluso intentaron asfixiarlo (fotografías adjuntas).

Según Jesús, estos golpes fueron en medio de provocaciones de la Fuerza Pública con el único objetivo de poder atribuirle más delitos en su contra. Provocaciones a las que Jesús no respondió de ninguna forma.

Jesús Villanueva Fernández fue detenido arbitrariamente durante 18 horas por la Fuerza Pública, donde se le violaron una serie de derechos: 1) proceso de arresto acorde a lo establecido en la Ley; 2) conocimiento de todos sus derechos como persona privada de libertad; 3) agresión física por parte de oficiales de la Fuerza Pública; 4) violencia psicológica por parte de los oficiales que le insultaban e increpaban por ser un recuperador de tierra-territorio; y 5) el derecho particular de los Pueblos Originarios que establece a la privación de libertad como el último recurso en su contra, dada su particular pertenencia y arraigo territorial. Además, la Fuerza Pública comete abuso de autoridad y agresión física.

Jesús Villanueva no contó con una defensa pública adecuada. La defensora pública Sonia Huelzo Herrera no explicó a Jesús los delitos que le fueron imputados, tampoco le explicó el proceso a seguir y al día de hoy 3 de mayo, no ha enviado a Jesús el expediente de su proceso judicial.

Como recuperadoras y recuperadores cabécares de China Kichá denunciaremos la escalada de violencia en nuestra contra desde febrero del presente año. En esta escalada, nuestros principales agresores pertenecen a la familia Rivera Venegas; siendo Leandro Rivera el responsable en escalar el conflicto hasta el intento de homicidio de nuestro compañero Darío Ríos Ríos. Denunciamos al Estado costarricense que pretende pasar por alto las agresiones en nuestra contra, resulta evidente el respaldo de la Fuerza Pública en el Territorio a favor de la familia Rivera Venegas (en repetidas ocasiones vemos como los oficiales trasladan a distintas partes del Territorio a estas/os agresores/as).

1/2

- Sitio web: www.coordinadoradeluchasursur.com
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COORDINADORA LUCHA SUR-SUR

Source: Recuperadoras y recuperadores cabécares de Kelpego, Recuperadoras y recuperadores cabécares de Kono Jú, Recuperadoras y recuperadoras de Sa Ka Keirö Kaska, - Recuperadoras cabécares de Sa Ka Duwé Senaglö, Recuperadoras y recuperadores cabécares de Yuwi Senaglö; and Coordinadora de Lucha Sur Sur, <https://www.facebook.com/111882987093775/posts/510556640559739/>

Image 95
Report of arson in Cabécar territory

COMUNICADO PÚBLICO

CONTINUA TENSION Y AGRESIONES EN EL TERRITORIO CABÉCAR DE CHINA KICHÁ

- El día de ayer, 15 de febrero, alrededor de 200 hectáreas de las recuperaciones de Kono Jú, Yuwi Senaglö y Sa Ka Duwé Senaglö fueron incendiadas por integrantes de la familia Rivera. Familia ampliamente reconocida y denunciada por agresiones en contra de las personas recuperadoras cabécares de China Kichá.
- El día de hoy, al ser las 2:45 p.m. se dividió un nuevo incendio en las inmediaciones del río Peñabaye, en la recuperación de Kono Jú.

Miércoles 16 de febrero 2022. El contexto de tensión y agresión en el Territorio Cabécar de China Kichá no disminuye. El día de ayer, alrededor del medio día fue divisado un nuevo incendio en Kono Jú.

Poco después del medio día, cuando los recuperadores Juan de Dios y Efraín Fernández se encontraban inspeccionando el lugar de los daños fueron interceptados por Harold, Jeylin y Leonardo Rivera en la entrada de la recuperación de Kono Jú. Harold Rivera dijo a los dos recuperadores que él fue el responsable de iniciar el incendio y que lo volvería a hacer cuando le diera la gana. Posteriormente, Jeylin agredió con un palo a Juan de Dios en una de sus manos y Harold golpeó a Efraín. En medio de la agresión el teléfono celular de Efraín fue robado, dejando a los recuperadores incomunicados durante varias horas.

También en medio de la agresión, Harold, Jeylin y Leonardo Rivera gritaron a los dos recuperadores amenazas de muerte, mientras portaban un machete en sus manos. La familia Rivera es ampliamente reconocida como uno de los actores más hostiles contra las personas recuperadoras cabécares de China Kichá. El hostigamiento, acoso y agresión de parte de la familia Rivera es constante.

Al paso de las horas el incendio se fue extendiendo a otras recuperaciones: Yuwi Senaglö y Sa Ka Duwé Senaglö. En total, las personas recuperadoras estiman que al menos 200 hectáreas fueron incendiadas el día de ayer. En la recuperación de Sa Ka Duwé Senaglö, dirigida por mujeres cabécares, se reportó la quema de árboles frutales, palmas, bejuco y animales. Además, fueron incendiadas intencionalmente, flora y fauna que ha sido protegida por las personas recuperadoras desde que ingresaron a esos terrenos que se encontraban ilegítimamente en manos de personas no indígenas.

La Fuerza Pública se dirigió brevemente al lugar y únicamente indicó a los recuperadores que no hicieran caso de la familia Rivera. Por otra parte, los bomberos no se han hecho cargo de su trabajo y han ignorado los llamados de las personas recuperadoras.

1/2

- Sitio web: www.coordinadoradeluchasursur.com
- Contacto: coordinadoraluchass@gmail.com

COORDINADORA LUCHA SUR-SUR

Source: Recuperadoras(es) Cabécares de Kono Jú, Recuperadoras(es) de Yuwi Senaglö, Recuperadoras de Sá Ka Duwé Senaglö y Coordinadora de Lucha Sur Sur, <https://www.facebook.com/CoordinadoraLuchaSurSur/posts/463589661923104>

Bonilla affirms that his project goes beyond a nice discourse, and he is committed to promoting productive chains that will allow producers in indigenous territories to sell their products to restaurants in the capital city. He assures that 85% of their raw ingredients come from "indigenous areas" and proudly states that they have one Bribri employee, whom they are training so that in the

future he can train other indigenous employees. Bonilla speaks of compensation and respect for the ancestral knowledge of indigenous peoples (Zamora 2019). However, Sikwa is still a business project (a very successful one), and as such, it is immersed in the dynamics of oppression that are inherent to capitalism.

Prices at Sikwa are similar to those of its neighbor restaurants in Barrio Escalante, such as the one mentioned above. At the beginning of 2020, a starter could cost around \$10 and a main course between \$13 and \$16. For \$8 you could buy a dessert and for another \$8 a mixed beverage inspired by Latin American ancestry. Moreover, Lonely Planet promoted that for \$50 at Sikwa it was possible to immerse oneself in a gastronomic experience of an 'ancestral tasting menu' of six courses (Lonely Planet n.d.). \$50 is a little more than half of the amount that the State has set as an average for the Basic Food Basket in urban areas, and it is almost what the State considers that a person needs per month to cover their basic food needs in rural areas (\$62.3) (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos 2020b). A striking contrast between what a white tourist or a Costa Rican mestizo can pay in one night for a sample of indigenous cuisine, and what the State indicates that indigenous people require to survive for a month.

Alternative consumption is still capitalist, with all the inequalities and injustices it provokes. It may assuage our white and bourgeois guilt, but it does not remove us from the logic of the market. As Valencia points out:

Both *gore consumption* and *the aesthetics of violence* or *decorative violence* expose that in the general consumerist imaginary, the sole way to demonstrate recognizable, praiseworthy, acceptable, and viable solidarity, empathy, critique, or resistance within *gore capitalism* is through consumption (Valencia 2018, chap. Necropolitics [2010, 156])

The origin of this project is perhaps as controversial as its name. Bonilla admits that he has no indigenous family, and that his first contact with the cuisine of the native peoples was through “una señora Boruca que cocinaba en la casa de un amigo vecino²⁵²”. In other words, an indigenous domestic worker who worked in the home of an urban family²⁵³. Bonilla studied gastronomy abroad, and when he returned to Costa Rica, he says he felt frustrated and stagnant when he saw the lack of culture in our country. Then, he met the Jirondai Project, a group that documents the indigenous oral tradition,

²⁵² Free translation: a Boruca lady who used to cook at a neighboring friend's home.

²⁵³ I cannot delve into this issue in this thesis, but it is important to note that in Costa Rica, women who work as domestic workers in private homes suffer all kinds of abuses and labor exploitation, which in many cases resembles slavery (Esquivel 2022). In the case of racialized people, the situation is often worse. For a detailed analysis of this situation, see the book: Hidalgo Xirinachs, Roxana. *Mujeres de Las Fronteras: Subjetividad, Migración y Trabajo Doméstico*. Ciudad Universitaria Rodrigo Facio, Costa Rica: Editorial UCR : Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales, 2016.

through chants with elder women who hold important positions in the Bribri peoples. That was his gateway. From there, he began traveling around indigenous territories, recovering recipes and learning with the communities the ancestral knowledge of their cuisine (Zamora 2019).

It is undeniable that Bonilla has great admiration, respect and affection for the people who have been his teachers. However, in his restaurant he is the chef. Reviewing their website and their social media, there is no mention of the names of the people who inspired the fancy plates that adorn Sikwa's menu. They claim that their menu seeks to preserve the ancestral Costa Rican cuisine, but none of the dishes indicate which territory it comes from or which indigenous people developed that traditional recipe.

In this sense, Sikwa reproduces what activists and authors from various indigenous peoples of Abya Yala denounce as one of the risks of using the category "indigenous"²⁵⁴. When used as a denominator without context, uprooted from a territory and without making explicit from which people it comes, "indigenous" becomes an umbrella term to name the members of a very diverse group of peoples who inhabited Abya Yala before the arrival of the European colonizers, and who did not become organized under the model of the Nation-state. Says Mixe researcher Yasnaya Aguilar Gil:

La trampa ha consistido en esencializar el rasgo indígena y asignarlo como rasgo cultural. Resulta bastante común leer estudios titulados "Cosmovisión indígena", "Música indígena" o "Danza indígena", como si los pueblos que no conformamos Estados debiéramos tener, por esa mera razón, una misma cosmovisión, una misma música o un mismo tipo de danza²⁵⁵ (Aguilar 2018, para. 31).

In this sense, Aguilar stresses the importance of designating peoples by their names, and of avoiding generalizations that erase their history and cultural differences. Moreover, she warns that the word "indigenous" comes from a Western narrative that anchors these subjects to a past, denies them their present and imposes assimilation as the only possible future.

Como apunta el historiador Sebastián van Doesburg, las categorías "mixe", "mapuche" o "mixteco", por ejemplo, permiten vislumbrar un futuro —y de hecho un presente— diferente en que la identidad no se construya exclusivamente en relación al Estado-nación como sucede con la etiqueta "indígena". El término "indígena", no

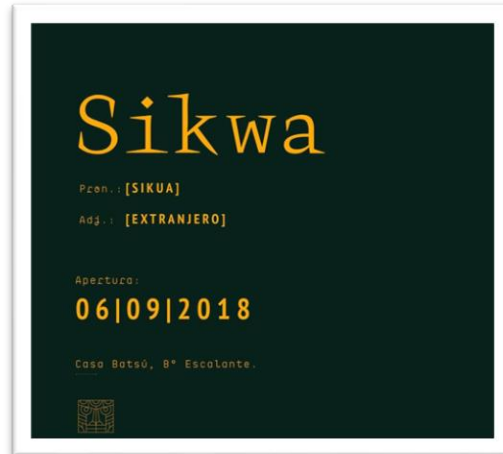
²⁵⁴ There are different positions regarding the term to name the people and peoples who resisted and survived the European conquest and coloniality. Some authors are critical of the term "original peoples" (Rivera Cusicanqui 2010), others, as described below, criticize the term "indigenous" (Aguilar 2018). In this thesis I use the term "indigenous" because it is the term most commonly used in Costa Rica. However, as far as possible I try to name the people and the territory, in response to the call made by several indigenous organizations not to homogenize their cultures, their histories and their struggles.

²⁵⁵ Free translation: The trap has consisted in essentializing the indigenous trait and assigning it as a cultural trait. It is quite common to read studies entitled "Indigenous Cosmopolitanism", "Indigenous Music" or "Indigenous Dance", as if the peoples that do not constitute States should have, for that reason alone, the same cosmopolitanism, the same music or the same type of dance.

hay que olvidarlo, sólo cubre doscientos años de los nueve mil años de historia mixe o mesoamericana (tomando la domesticación del maíz como su génesis)²⁵⁶.

Beside the absence of the names of the concerned persons and peoples, we have the name of the restaurant: Sikwa. In their instagram profile, they state that Sikwa means "foreigner":

Image 96
Sikwa



Source: Sikwa Instagram, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BnZ9kt7HWoZ/>

Following the same Western logic of homogenization, the publication does not indicate from which indigenous language this word comes from. In Costa Rica, there are various peoples and various indigenous language. Within the territory defined by the Costa Rican Nation-state, several indigenous languages are spoken today: Cabécar, Bribri, Ngäbére, Buglére and Malecu. In addition, Teribe and Boruca are considered recently extinct, although there are still some semi-speakers of the latter (Sánchez, n.d.).

The word Sikwa is taken from the Bribri language, and although one of its meanings is "foreigner", this definition needs more context. In fact, more than a foreigner, Sikwa is used to designate people who are not indigenous, white and mestizo people who are not part of the Bribri culture and community (Krohn 2022; Jara and García 2013; Constenla et al. 1998; Margery 1996; Jara and García 2003).

²⁵⁶ Free translation: As historian Sebastian van Doesburg points out, the categories "Mixe", "Mapuche" or "Mixteco", for example, allow us to glimpse a different future -and in fact a different present- in which identity is not constructed exclusively in relation to the Nation-state as is the case with the label "indigenous". The term "indigenous", we must not forget, only covers two hundred years of the nine thousand years of Mixe or Mesoamerican history (taking the domestication of corn as its genesis).

The Sikwa team makes it clear on their website that they do not intend to pass themselves off as locals in the community, and that is the reason for the choice of their name, which is an acknowledgement of their condition as outsiders:

We will never pretend to be local, hence our name, which means “foreigner”, but to be a celebration, a production chain project for the commercialization of products, a mean for social aid and for the conservation and propagation of their knowledge, the most important culture, the most ours of all, our native culture (Sikwa n.d.).

However, the fragmented definition they disseminate erases the racialized component of this signifier, which bears the historical imprint of centuries of anti-colonial resistance. As in the Census questionnaires, the question of race is evaded. As if the differences between us were only geographical and not political. This approach, inadvertently perhaps, erases the abysmal distances that coloniality has imposed on our bodies, and that today still continue to claim the lives of indigenous leaders and push these populations to death as part of neoliberal necropolitics.

The photos of the staff of the Sikwa project show us in a team of blond, white and mestizo bodies, taking inspiration from cultures that are not even referred to by their name:

Images 97
Sikwa's Staff



Source: Collage of photos from Sikwa's Facebook Page
(<https://www.facebook.com/sikwarestaurante.cr/photos/>)

The audacity of naming Sikwa (white, not indigenous) a restaurant that sells processed and stylized knowledge of indigenous people (undifferentiated under that ambiguous signifier that erases their diversity) to white and mestizo customers, tramples on the intention of celebrating the culture of the peoples it fails to name. By omitting their names, those of their peoples and their territories, the discourse of respect is fissured, and their practices come dangerously close to epistemic extractivism and cultural appropriation. In this sense, the team at Sikwa fails in its intention to sustain a respectful approach to these anonymous people to whom they owe their commercial success.

Image 98
Meme: Cultural appropriation



Source: Facebook Page Ken y Ken Mariquitas de bien

Perhaps the comparison of Sikwa's project with the racism and cultural appropriation practices that the Ken & Ken meme seeks to criticize is unfair. The Sikwa team makes explicit its respect for ancestral knowledge. However, in the end, they share the same problematic root: coloniality. The Sikwa team tries to compensate the communities, but their project does not question or challenge the source of the oppressions that indigenous peoples in Costa Rica and Abya Yala face on a daily basis.

They promote productive chains, but indigenous people will always be the last link: farmers, employees, suppliers and even unpaid informants whose knowledge is extracted as raw material and stylized to match the Western market. Their celebration of "indigenous culture" promotes a romanticized version for alternative consumption for hipster crowds, where race and racism are not named.

As Valencia observes, the market offers products for all audiences, including those of us who seek to construct alternative ways of living and being in the world. We are offered an alternative life that can be bought, and then again, the question arises: who has the purchasing power to buy these products of resistance?

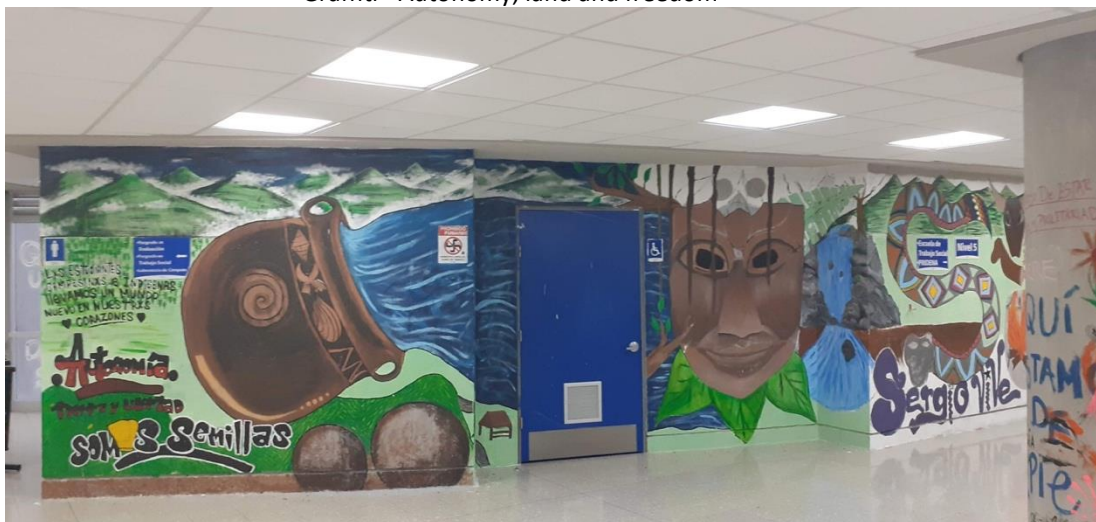
Our apparently voluntary consumerist behaviors contribute to the creation of products that enlarge market niches. For example, there are products considered *alternative* or *resistant*, which are promoted and sold in parallel ways to products that do not attempt to conceal their own origins in vulgar, conservative, capitalist consumerism. These *resistance* products are labeled in multiple ways in order to satisfy, reinforce, or even create tastes that are antithetical to the consumerist system. It might seem that these products are challenges to the market, but their credibility as antagonistic practices is neutralized by the power of a trendy and profitable cannibalization orchestrated by the contemporary market. (Valencia 2018, chap. Necropolitics [2010, 151])

Resistance, as Valencia states clearly, cannot be bought in a store or served on the plate of an alternative restaurant. The consumption of these products, in one way or another, always feeds the

market. The market is that voracious force that devours peoples, bodies, knowledge and cultures. It also devours resistances, digests and degrades them. These alternative products are a trap, a seductive trap that neutralizes our capacity to respond and to organize.

Erasing the racial issue is not just any absence in a country that struggles to whiten itself while denying the lethal practices of racism discussed in chapters 2 and 3. Thus, while the Sikwa team celebrates ancestral soirées and positions itself in the region's business magazines, in Costa Rica racist violence is the daily bread for the people who developed the knowledge with which the *sikwas* make their living in San José.

Image 99
Graffiti - Autonomy, land and freedom



Description: This graffiti was a collective intervention involving indigenous people and university students in resistance. It was painted during the occupation of the building of the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Costa Rica in 2019. With the phrases like: "We, students, peasants and indigenous people carry a new world in our hearts. Autonomy, land and freedom! We are seeds! Sergio lives!", this graffiti commemorates the resistance of indigenous peoples in Costa Rica, and rescues the memory of Sergio Rojas, Bribri activist of the Salitre territory, murdered for defending the autonomy of his people.

5.2.2. Chepequetas: touring the Costa Rican way of life

As part of my observations on hunger and food in the city, I approached Chepequetas, an NGO that promotes the appropriation of public spaces through picnics, bicycle tours and walking tours in San José. One of the organization's main focus is food tourism. As they explain on their website: "Food is Culture and Culture explains how people live, think, enjoy, interact and dream. In our experiences we try to include part of costa rican treats, drinks and coffee to help explain costa rican way of life" (Chepequetas, n.d.). I was particularly interested in understanding what they mean by "Costa Rican

way of life". I contacted the organization explaining my research interest and they kindly invited me to join a walking tour focused on coffee culture. They exempted me from paying the tour's fee, which was not cheap, and throughout the tour they kindly answered my questions about their organization and the work they do in the city.

We started our tour in Parque Morazán, a tiny urban lung located on the edge of Amón neighborhood, which is a meeting point for hundreds of San José's inhabitants. The first thing that caught my attention was the presence of the police. As I will develop in chapter 8, it is usual to see police officers at any time of the day in Parque Morazán. However, these officers were not patrolling the park, they were there to escort the walking tour.

Image 100
Policeman escorting Chepequetas' tour



One of the tour guides was an old friend whom I had met in gay & lesbian activist circles and at the university. She had been working for some years on gender issues in the city, so her reflections showed a critical perspective on urban dynamics and even some contradictions regarding the actions of her organization. I asked her why we had a police escort. She told me that she was not happy with the situation, but it was a measure they had been implementing for some time now, to ensure the safety of tourists. She told me that some time ago they faced tense situations related to sexual harassment on the streets. The organization's solution was to establish an alliance with the municipal police, to guarantee their support. Since then, "policletos" (officers on bicycles) accompany the tours and even participate in the coffee tastings.

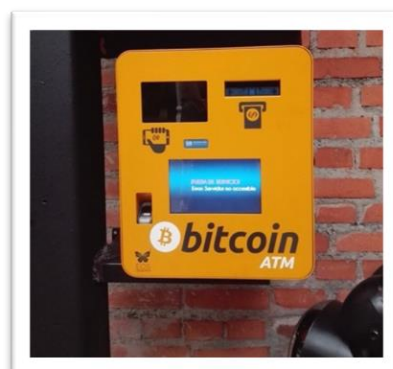
Image 101
Policemen tasting coffee



The tour moved through the streets of the central area, amidst facts of spatial history, architecture and anecdotal information about the elites who erected the buildings in that part of the city. At no time did I perceive any situation that would justify a police escort. Nevertheless, the presence of the officers was clearing the way for us among the passersby. In the distance I could see the street vendors, mostly migrant women, running through the pedestrian streets to avoid a police seizure. The officers' escort also managed to prevent people from approaching us to beg for money or food.

We hopped from café to café, observing the contrasts between the bustle of the central market and the sobriety of buildings such as the Steinworth, built in 1907 by an Italian architect commissioned by a family of German merchants based in San José. The modernist building is a historical heritage site, but it has kept up with the times. Nowadays, for example, it is home to one of the busiest gay bars in the city, as well as the first bitcoin ATM in the country:

Image 102
Bitcoin ATM



After tasting a gourmet cup of coffee in the tranquility of the courtyard of this architectural gem, the tour continued to another café. Located on a pedestrian street, the Granier Café & Bakery offers

products at moderate prices for passersby in San José. Granier operates in Costa Rica as a franchise. It is a Spanish-owned company, with more than 350 branches in different countries. This tour, that offers a glimpse at Costa Rican coffee culture, stops at gourmet cafés in buildings with names in foreign languages and at transnational companies owned by European capital. At the same time, there is no mention of the indigenous peoples and coffee production. More than a contradiction, I would say is a reflection of Costa Rican history, and especially the history of the whitewashed elites that forged the city of San José.

Unlike the quietness with which we tourists tasted coffee in Steinvorth's private space, at Granier the tasting took place in the middle of the street, as their lounge was too small to accommodate the group. The street was a busy pedestrian area. We stood in a circle around the guides who spoke of the quality and innovation of the products of that shop. All around us people were walking in a hurry, trying to avoid the group of tourists or approaching with curiosity to see what was summoning us to the place. I stayed behind, observing the interactions of the passersby. It was at this point that hunger burst forth again.

The guides had promised us a surprise at Granier. From the kitchen, a smiling waitress came out with a large aluminum tray filled with sugar-coated pastries. The guide explained that it was an innovative recipe, inspired by an Italian traditional sweet. The group packed around the smiling waitress, almost pushing each other to get to the front. "How many per person?" the waitress asked. "Two, three maximum," replied the tour coordinator.

From behind, I watched the group grow larger and larger as passersby approached, attracted by the sweet smell of the treats we were about to receive. My tour companions ran to take out their cell phones to record the moment, while all around people wondered what was going on in that place. I overheard the strangers' conversations: "- What's going on over there? - They're giving away something! - Let's see what they are giving away over there. - Go ahead and ask, go, go!"

Image 103
Chepequetas tour stops at Granier



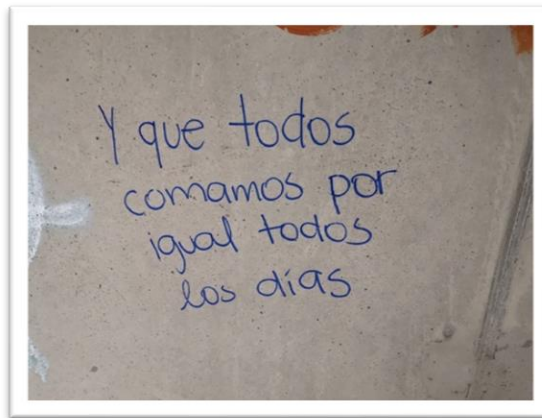
In the context of the food insecurity that the country was undergoing, a gift like this was received with euphoria by those who were lucky enough to be passing by that place at the right time. Behind me, I heard the conversation of an adult woman with a young boy: "Look, they are giving something away. Let's go and see!" They rushed over with excitement. The boy jumped up to try to see what they were offering, and the woman stretched out her hand in expectation. Like her, there were already a dozen people surrounding the waitress, who was looking around not knowing what to do. At that point, the tour coordinator climbed up on a stair and asked the crowd for their attention. "Excuse me. Excuse me. This is for tour people only. Only for those with the red bracelet." A chorus of huffs responded with disappointment. The tour coordinator smiled nervously, perhaps a little embarrassed by the awkward situation, as he instructed the waitress to check the VIP bracelet before handing out the pastries. The waitress's smile soon turned to distress. Some people left quite annoyed at the false joy. I put my hand deep inside my pocket with shame, trying to hide the bracelet that designated me as meritorious of that treat.

Behind me, the boy asked what was going on. The lady's face melted. She told him that it was only for people who had bracelets. The boy does not understand a thing. The lady exclaimed, "How unfair! They shouldn't do it in the middle of the street, then" I turned around and said to her, "You're right, ma'am. It is not fair." I took out the arm I had hidden and showed it her: "Look, I have a bracelet. If you want, I can get one and we can share it". The little boy grinned, the lady stared at me, nodding, but with disbelief. I got the pastry, tore off a small piece and gave them the rest. They thank me

sincerely and left. The boy walked away bouncing up and down with joy. I stood there in the middle of the street, feeling like crying.

I decided to abandon the tour at that point. I had seen enough, and now I was feeling sick to my stomach. In the end, the tour did get the Costa Rican way of life, with all its contrasts: the bustling streets, the quiet courtyards, the pretty buildings next to the cement boxes, the gourmet cups of coffee in gentrified shops, next to fast food joints offering coffee at a quarter of the gourmet price; the cops clearing a path for tourists, the locals mending a piece of bread, the false illusions, the hierarchies, the bracelets that distinguish us, the doors that open for some and those that close in the face of others.

Image 104
Graffiti – May we all eat equally



Caption: May we all eat equally every day.

5.2.1. Hunger makes them sick

Hunger sickens those who suffer from it and cannot satisfy it. Malnutrition is a problem that causes illness, affects cognitive development, mood and eventually leads to death. But hunger does not only bother those who suffer from it. I am not referring to the somatization of pain and anguish that the sight of dispossession and poverty can cause us. Indeed, my body felt the scars of all the affects that this research triggered in me. Along this chapter I discuss some of those of affections (indignation, anger, pain, commiseration) that I observed in the ethnographic process in San José. But also, in this section, I will address something of a different sort. It is a matter of visceral reactions, yes, but with a different substratum. This section gathers and analyzes situations that reflect the discomfort that hunger provokes for some people, a discomfort that resides not in the causes that provoke hunger, but with the expressions that make it visible in the bodies and in the public space.

I walk through the streets observing the interactions in the public space. Near the clock in the Plaza de la Cultura, a man begs for alms. He moves untidily in all directions; he doesn't know to whom to address his plea. He holds a dirty and crumpled cup from

McDonalds, with some coins clinking inside. He takes small steps, turns on his own axis, returns to the initial place. He does not finish the sentences: "a coin for...", "give me something for...", "pa, help me with some...". People turn their faces away from him. Occasionally, someone commiserates, throws a coin in his cup and moves quickly forward as if to mark the limit of their interaction. But most people don't even come close. They quicken their pace and curve their course to avoid him. He looks for their gaze with desperation. But he can't reach them. They have eyes that do not see. What the eyes don't see, the heart doesn't grieve over, says an old proverb. It seems to apply to society as well. People can't stand the sight of hunger. I can understand their discomfort. It tears me up inside too, though certainly not in the same way. I too would like to abolish that scene of misery, but not just to clean up the landscape, but to end inequality. The man keeps spinning in an endless loop. I approach him, give him a few coins and a half-smile. He gives me a fist bump in gratitude. His knuckles are dirty with street and humanity. Our gazes intertwine and embrace. I wish him a good evening and leave, feeling tearful. (Field diary, October 10, 2020).

Scenes like this one plague the pages of my field diary. Sometimes they are interspersed with some solidarity exchanges: people donating or sharing food, people offering to listen, people sharing a cigarette, a song or a laugh in a city park. But the tone is primarily that of this entry: between indifference and evasion, passersby try to avoid the bodies that hinder their transit through the city.

On the afternoon of November 23 indignation abounds at Transvida. Walking down the dark hallway leading to the terrace, I could see them talking agitatedly and shaking their heads reproachfully. I took a cup of coffee and sat in silence, for I sensed that something serious had happened and I did not want to disturb their discussion. One of them interrupted the hubbub to explain to me what was going on. Transvida had been planning for several weeks a series of activities to celebrate a Christmas for the trans* family. Their main concern was to be able to provide a Christmas dinner for all the people who do not have the material resources and family support networks. Since their donors' budgets did not allow them to use the funds to pay for such an activity, the activists of Transvida organized a raffle to raise funds. They collected food and put together a basket that would serve as the main prize. They sold the numbers among their contacts in state institutions, NGOs and cooperation agencies. The lottery had taken place the previous Sunday:

Anonymous participant 1: Diay, no ve que la canasta de víveres se la pegó una funcionaria de [redacted] [una ONG que trabaja derechos humanos en el país]. Y diay, la verdad es que nosotras esperábamos que la donara, porque ella tiene recursos. ¿Me explico? Ella sabe la situación de las compañeras. Aquí hay muchas chicas que pasan hambre y que les caería bien ese diario. Ella no lo necesita.

Anonymous participant 2: No, y está bien, es lo justo, ella se la ganó. Es de ella. Pero a mí sí me parece feo que no lo comparta, porque como dice la compañera, ella tiene recursos, y la verdad es que los productos que iban en esa canasta son humildes. O sea, no son cosas que ella consume.

Anonymous participant 3: Nombres, esa vieja lo que va a hacer es donársela a la empleada doméstica, de hijo. ¡Si ella ni come esas cosas!

Anonymous participant 1: Sí, o sea, como mínimo que le hubiera donado el arroz y el aceite a la compañera. Ella sabe la condición en la que vive, que una bolsita de arroz a ella le serviría mucho²⁵⁷ (Group discussion with the author in Transvida, November 23, 2019).

Transvida activists complain about the lack of solidarity of a person who accepts a basket of food that she does not need, knowing that there are trans women in the collective who have difficulties to ensure their basic diet. They debate about justice. Some of them believe that she has the legal right to take the food basket home. Others refute by saying that beyond the legal, there should be a moral responsibility, and they believe that what is legal is not always what is just. They all agree that her attitude was selfish, and that it denotes a lack of sensitivity and solidarity with the populations that justify her salary paid by international cooperation. In the middle of this interesting discussion, they ask me: "Perro, what would you have done in her place? To which I reply, "Girls... do you really have to ask?"

Hunger and dispossession have opened important ethical discussions in this community of trans women. The contrast between the situation of a large part of the population and the lives of those who are hired to provide assistance to them causes a short circuit that sparks a critique of inequalities. In San José, the prices of food do not stop rising. It is something that affects us all. But Transvida's *compañeras* are clear that while some of us are grumbling when we pay the bill, others are not eating lunch.

A few days after this discussion in Transvida, another situation arose that fueled their reflections on inequality. The context was an activity that gathered trans* people from all the provinces of the country. The activity was organized in conjunction with a professor from a public university and her students, and an international human rights organization. Transvida's members also contributed to the logistics, although they did not receive remuneration or grades in exchange. They carried out the arduous task of contacting trans* people from all over the country to ensure their presence in the

²⁵⁷ Free translation: **Anonymous participant 1:** Well, turns that an official from [redacted] [an NGO that works on human rights in the country] won the food basket. And well, the truth is that we were hoping that she would donate it, because she has resources. Do you know what I mean? She knows the situation of our *compañeras*. There are many girls here who go starving and who could use that food basket. She does not need it. / **Anonymous participant 2:** No, and it's fine, it's only fair, she won it. It is hers. But I do think it's nasty that she didn't share it, because as my compañera was saying, she has resources, and the truth is that the products that were in that basket are humble. I mean, they are not things that she would consume. / **Anonymous participant 3:** No way! She is going to donate it to the maid, for sure. She doesn't even eat that stuff! / **Anonymous participant 1:** Yes, I mean, at least she would have donated the rice and oil to the *compañera*. She knows the condition in which she lives, and a bag of rice would come in handy for her.

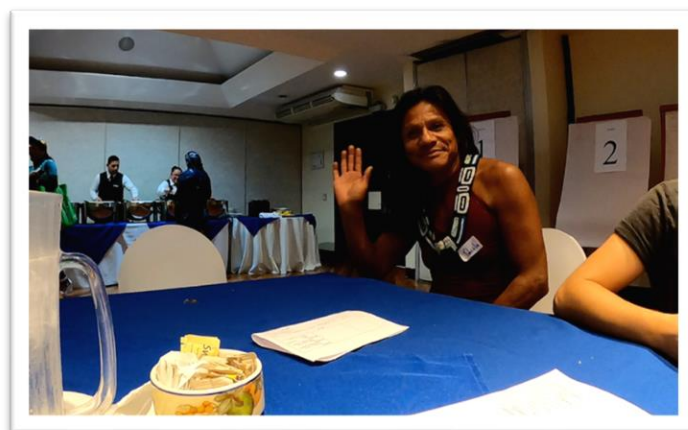
activity. They invited me to participate and asked for my support in gathering trans* men. I asked if I could do a participant observation exercise in the activity and they accepted.

That activity sought to bring together 100 trans* people from all over the country. In the end there were about 75 of us, as some people were unable to attend. In any case, it was a very large gathering. We greeted each other with affection and enthusiasm. There were people from all the provinces of the country.

Many of the trans* people who attended the event, especially the trans women, live in conditions of extreme poverty. Some of them are homeless. Therefore, they were very excited to participate in this activity at a nice hotel in the capital. In the hallways, one could notice trans* people taking selfies in front of the astonished faces of tourists and businessmen who did not understand what was going on in that place.

The activity began with a breakfast, which was crucial for the participants who had traveled very early in order to arrive on time, and for those who came from nearby as well, since many of them had nothing to eat for breakfast. This was the case of Fabiola, with whom I shared a table that morning. Euphoric, she spoke to me with her mouth full. She told me, among other things, that the food was very good, and as soon as she finished her plate, she got up to see if there was anything left to have seconds.

Image
Fabiola at the Radisson Hotel



I had to leave before the activity was over. On the way out, I ran into Dayana, activist in Transvida, who had to go to the other side of the city. I offered her to share a taxi. When we got in the car, Dayana said:

Dayana: ¡Viera esa profe! Esa, la que estaba ahí. ¿Usted la conoce?

Mar: La conozco, sí. Es de la universidad.

Dayana: Pues ahora le di un “ubicatex” [expresión popular que se usa para designar el acto de poner a alguien en su lugar].

Mar: ¿Cómo? Cuénteme.²⁵⁸ (Dayana, in discussion with the author, November 21, 2019).

Dayana explained to me that she had not confirmed her participation in the activity because she had been experiencing health problems for several months and she was working a very strict schedule in a call center. However, excited to be reunited with so many friends from all over the country, she made the effort to attend the event. She arrived a little late and unannounced. She wanted to surprise her colleagues whom she had not seen for a while. The people in charge of the activity, therefore, were not expecting her.

She told me that when she arrived in the morning, she was signing the register list and she overheard a conversation of the professor with her students. Dayana was wearing a cap that day and her hair covered her face. Neither the professor nor her students recognize her. The professor, says Dayana, sounded upset. She was giving complaints to her students: "No, this can't be! They can't eat breakfast as if they were at home".

The professor's judgment denotes a classist bias that demonstrates not only her lack of knowledge of the population on which they claim to be experts, but also her ethical position on research and the relationship between the university and the communities. As if the trans* women who were present there had the resources to eat a breakfast like this in their homes. Some of them do not even have homes, they survive on one meal a day, and sometimes they have nothing to eat at all. But it seems that this is something that this group of scholars cannot grasp.

Dayana explained to me that what made the professor uncomfortable was that, seeing that there was food left, some of the girls were having a second serving. Dayana heard how she complained because they ran out of fruit, and the hotel staff had to go down to the kitchen to bring another platter of fruit. At that moment, someone walked in and greeted Dayana, calling her by name. Dayana is one of the most renowned and respected trans* activists in the country today. The professor, then, instantly recognized her when she heard her name. Dayana recalls that the professor looked back at her with panic and guilt. Guilt, Dayana says, because she was caught red-handed in her classist comment. Panic, because she knows that Dayana is an activist never remains silent in the face of injustice.

²⁵⁸ Free translation: **Dayana:** You wouldn't believe that professor! That one, the one who was there, do you know her? / **Mar:** I know her, yes. She's from the university. / **Dayana:** Well, earlier I gave her an "ubicatex" [popular expression used to designate the act of putting someone in their place]. / **Mar:** What do you mean? Tell me about it.

Dayana says that the professor made this comment in front of other trans women who were helping with the logistics of the event. She was not worried about them listening to her, and yet, when she saw Dayana, she seemed frightened. In other words, the professor recognizes in Dayana the agency that she denied in the bulk of the trans population, who she and her students had approached to extract information that was being presented to them that day, processed with academic language. The fear that Dayana saw in the professor's eyes was that Dayana could expose in front of other audiences the classist violence she had just heard.

Dayana says that the professor walked up to her and greeted her warmly with a smile on her face. Dayana did not let the situation pass and questioned her:

Entonces le digo: "¿Cómo está? Dígame una cosa, ¿hay algún problema? ¿Con la comida, me pareció escuchar?". Y me responde: "No. Lo que pasa es que están comiendo dos o hasta tres veces, entonces tuvieron que ir a traer más comida, y no puede ser". Me vuelvo yo y le digo: "¿Y qué importa? Todo esto está pagado, ¿no es cierto? De por sí, faltaron 30 personas. ¿Qué importa que coman dos, tres veces? Para eso vinieron las chicas. Hacen el esfuerzo de venir desde Limón, desde Puntarenas para la actividad de ustedes, lo mínimo es que puedan comer bien"²⁵⁹ (Dayana, in discussion with the author, November 21, 2019).

The professor was unable to respond. She stuttered a few syllables and finally told Dayana that she was right. She left, visibly annoyed. Inside, trans* people filled their stomachs with smiles. For some of them, this was the only hot meal they would have for days, and they received it with great enthusiasm and gratitude.

Dayana was giving the professor a lesson in biology, nutrition and ethics. For those who do not suffer from hunger, the importance of guaranteeing food in activities with a population living in extreme poverty may not be so clear. However, for the community of trans women that were invited to the event, this is something basic:

Corintia: Y otra cosa, muchas veces critican que mucha transgénero no van... ¡A veces no tienen para los pasajes! ¡A veces no tienen para comer! ¿Y van a sentarse a ver una charla? Muy lindo, derechos humanos y todo, pero tienes que comer, tienes que vivir.

²⁵⁹ Free translation: So I said to her, "How are you? Tell me something, is there a problem, with the food, I thought I heard something like that?" And she replied: "No. The thing is that they are eating two or even three times, so they had to go and bring more food, and that can't be". I turned to her and said: "So what is the matter? This is all paid for, isn't it? In fact, there were 30 people absent. What does it matter if they eat two, three times? That's what the girls came for. They make the effort to come all the way from Limón, from Puntarenas for your activity, at least they should be able to eat well".

Fabiola: Sí, porque así no llega el mensaje...²⁶⁰ (Corintia and Fabiola, in discussion with the author, October 10, 2019).

The aforementioned event presented the results of research on the anguish and needs of trans* people in Costa Rica. It is therefore shocking that, knowing the precariousness and violence faced by this population, the scholars seemed more concerned about the buffet running out than about the fact that the trans* participants gathered there suffer from hunger on a daily basis. The desperation that hunger mobilizes seems to be unbearable for some professionals who, paradoxically, work with this population. Hunger makes them sick, in a very different way that it does for those who suffer from it.

I describe one last situation that illustrates the violent forms in which some professionals treat impoverished trans* people. On the afternoon of November 19, 2019, I developed a participant observation at a workshop organized by the Defensoría de los Habitantes de la República to present the protocol for accessing hormonal treatment in public hospitals in the country. The activity was full of tensions. From a place of knowledge/power, some of the health professionals showed disrespectful and defensive attitudes towards the concerns and questions raised by the trans* people. They belittled the interventions of trans* people, denied the situations they were posing and repeated several times that they were the experts in the field who came to explain to us how things work. The personnel of the Defensoría de Habitantes tried to mediate to calm the discussion. They called for respect and asked the professionals to listen to what trans* participants were saying.

In the midst of the tensions, a group of trans* people entered the hall. They were late because they had traveled from Puntarenas (a coastal province), and the bus had been delayed. They entered quietly through the back door and took the chairs in the rear to avoid interrupting the discussion. Their faces seemed visibly agitated, as if they had come running from the bus station. One of them got up, sweating, and approached a table at the back of the room, where there was a jug with water, 4 drinking-glasses made of glass and a closed package of plastic cups. Next to that table, there was an official from the Defensoria de Habitantes seated. Standing near the door was an epidemiologist from the Social Security. The trans woman takes the jug in her hand and grabs a drinking-glass to pour herself some water. The epidemiologist rushes over and whispers something to her. She wrinkles her face and shakes her head, puts down the glass, opens the package of plastic cups, takes one, pours

²⁶⁰ Free translation: **Corintia:** And another thing, they often criticize that many transgender women don't attend... Well, sometimes they don't have enough money for bus tickets! Sometimes they don't have enough to eat! And they expect them to go sit down and listen to a lecture? Very nice, human rights and all that, but you need to eat, you need to live. / **Fabiola:** Yes, because then the message won't get through...

herself some water and drinks it down. She pours herself another cup and drinks it all down, and finally, returns to her seat with two more cups to share with her colleagues.

I observed the situation from the other side of the room but could not hear what had happened. During the break, the official from the Defensoría de Habitantes who had witnessed the interaction comes up to me enraged and explained what had happened: “The girl picked up a glass to pour herself some water, but the doctor saw her. He stared at her as if in revulsion, as with contempt. Then he approached her and said, 'No, do not take that glass. The drinking-glasses made of glass are for doctors. You take a disposable one” (Anonymous official from Defensoría de Habitantes, in discussion with the author, November 19, 2019).

Perhaps for the elites who gather at the Club Unión, poverty may appear to be something exotic, something they see only through paintings and screens. For people like the professionals involved in the episodes analyzed in this section, the sight of poverty is more difficult to evade. It is true that they do not share the same spaces, but there are situations that force them to meet face to face with the bodies whose impoverished condition becomes evident. Perhaps it is this proximity that provokes their virulent reactions. Poverty bursts into their daily lives as a constant reminder of the cruelty of the capitalism.

The disgust that doctor felt at the possibility that the mouth of a trans sex worker could touch the same glass that he and his social class might use one day is revealing. This health professional is one of the authorities in charge of the care of trans* people in the country's public health services. The disgust and contempt for the body of a trans woman is a sample of the discrimination and violence that trans* people face on a daily basis in the health services. The repulsion, surely, is provoked in part by this abject body that steps out of the standards of normality. But again, not all trans* bodies evoke the same repulsion. That afternoon, after a heated discussion about violence and rights in health services, the epidemiologist in question looked at me with angry eyes. I felt a bit intimidated by his aggressive tone and the threatening way in which he approached me with his body, which was much bigger and stronger than mine. There was definitely contempt for me in his gaze. However, I could not identify repulsion, nor did I see in his eyes the disgust with which he looked at some of my trans* colleagues in the room. His repulsion was linked to poverty, and to those who embodied it inside that room.

5.3. The coloniality of Christian charity and the use of hunger for social control

In contrast to the reactions of disgust and contempt that structural hunger provoked in the professionals I observed along the ethnographic process, for Christians, hunger and misery are supposed to generate compassion. Following the mythical example of Jesus, Christian ideology promotes charity as a fundamental value. "God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy" Matthew 5:7.

For instance, in 2016, Leonel Chacon, priest of La Merced church in San Jose, called on his parishioners to recover the charitable practices with the impoverished people living in the surroundings of that church. In resonance with the teachings promoted by Opus Dei, Chacón and the representatives of the Diocese of San José appealed:

Redescubramos las obras de misericordia corporales: dar de comer al hambriento, dar de beber al sediento, vestir al desnudo, acoger al forastero, asistir a los enfermos, visitar a los presos, enterrar a los muertos. Y no olvidemos las obras de misericordia espirituales: dar consejo al que lo necesita, enseñar al que no sabe, corregir al que yerra, consolar al triste, perdonar las ofensas, soportar con paciencia a las personas molestas, rogar a Dios por los vivos y por los difuntos²⁶¹ (Chinchilla 2016, para. 5).

Their discourse speaks of corporal and spiritual works of mercy. The corporal ones are directed to feed the bodies of the poor, to supply the basic needs for survival. Spiritual works are aimed at nourishing the soul, to feed the population with Christian values. In both cases it is a vertical action, where a charitable subject takes pity on those who live in need, and extends a hand, a word and a moment to listen and accompany them.

In a spontaneous meeting that took place in the middle of a *parcour*/interview at the National Park in San Jose, Fabiola and Corintia, two trans migrant women who have lived for decades in San Jose, reflected on poverty, politicians' promises and Christian charity programs that aim to address the problem of hunger and impoverishment in the city.

Corintia: Con esas promesas vienen, que no haiga pobres... ¡Mentira!

Fabiola: ¿Cómo no van a haber pobres? Lo que hay, lo que existen son personas acaparadoras, acumuladoras de cadenas de esclavitud, y personas como yo que viven en el diario vivir, con lo único necesario que es la comida y la vestimenta²⁶² (Fabiola and Corintia, in discussion with the author, October 10, 2019).

²⁶¹ Free translation: Let us rediscover the corporal works of mercy: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, welcoming the stranger, assisting the sick, visiting prisoners, burying the dead. And let us not forget the spiritual works of mercy: to give advice to those who need it, to teach those who do not know, to correct those who err, to console the sad, to forgive offenses, to bear with patience those who are annoying, to pray to God for the living and for the dead.

²⁶² Free translation: **Corintia:** They come with such promises, that there will no longer be any poor people... That is a lie! / **Fabiola:** How can there be no poor people? What there are, what exist are hoarders, accumulators of chains of slavery, and people like me who live in the daily life, with only the necessary, that is food and clothing.

With a striking clarity, Fabiola and Corintia unveil the logic of charity in times of neoliberal capitalism. For the charitable subject to be able to fulfill this merciful mandate that will open the gates of heaven, it is necessary that there be impoverished populations in need of help. That is to say, in order to earn the entrance to heaven with mercy and charity, it is necessary for exclusion and inequality to exist.

The trans* participants in this study expressed an ambiguous and tense position towards Christian charity programs. On the one hand, they recognize that in some cases it is the only option many of them have to resolve the materiality of existence. However, the food offered in charity services is not free. It does not have a monetary cost, but is paid for anyway, with the biopolitical currency of normativity.

An afternoon at Transvida Dayana recalls the bitter experience that a group of trans women faced a few years ago in an activity of the Rahab Foundation. Rahab is a non-profit NGO that has been working in Costa Rica since 1997, with the mission of facilitating dignifying changes in the quality of life of individuals and families who are victims of human trafficking and the sex trade (Fundación Rahab, n.d.). Their website indicates that they work with the person as a whole, addressing body, soul and spirit. One of their core values is spirituality: “Honramos a Dios en todo lo que somos y hacemos. Promover un ambiente de búsqueda de Jesucristo²⁶³” (Fundación Rahab, n.d.). They have a Christian approach, and they promote abolitionism of sex work. I have often crossed their staff members in sex work areas of the city, offering coffee and cookies to trans* sex workers, in combo with the divine word.

Dayana recalls that after evading dozens of invitations from the Rahab Foundation that insisted on approaching the population of trans women who were sex workers, one day she finally gave in and accepted an invitation to a lunch that the Foundation was offering to a group of the girls. The girls came to the meeting hungry but suspicious. Upon arrival, the girls were seated at a long table. They were served a bowl of "olla de carne", a traditional soup of tubers, vegetables and beef with high nutritional value. In front of the table, Rahab's managers said a few words and prayers while the girls ate and announced that they had two very special guests for them that afternoon. Dayana recounts that the first one was a cis woman who defined herself as an ex-lesbian. The woman gave testimony of her days in the Red-light district. She spoke of a miserable life, tormented by drugs, alcohol and unbridled sex. She said that this life led her to lose everything she had and pushed her to prostitute herself in order to survive. Dayana says that she began to feel sick to her stomach listening to these

²⁶³ Free translation: We honor God in all that we are and do. Promote an environment of seeking Jesus Christ.

stories while she was eating. Her colleagues looked at her in confusion. What followed, Dayana says, was worse.

¡Luego trajeron a un 'ex-gay'! Ex-gay dicen ellas, en realidad era una chica trans, a la que habían vuelto a masculinizar. ¡Viera usted! Nos enseñaban fotos y salía con aquellos shortsitos, claramente era una chica trans. Pero ahora dizque se había recuperado y era un hombre hecho y derecho, se había casado y hasta chamacos tenía. Y entonces el mensaje que nos daban era como que nosotras estábamos confundidas, y nos traían a ese mae de ejemplo para que viéramos que sí se puede cambiar con la ayuda de Dios²⁶⁴ (Dayana, in discussion with the author, November 1, 2019).

Dayana says that she felt the blood boiling in her head. She felt nauseous, she thought she was going to vomit the hot soup running down her esophagus right there on the table. She stood up abruptly and said to her friends: "That's it! We're getting out of this place right now!" She told Rahab's staff that she had had enough, that her dignity was worth more than a plate of beef stew, that food in these conditions will make them sick, and she warned them never to come near Transvida again.

Corintia shared a similar situation with Fabiola. She asked her to talk to one of their friends, Luisa, who also lives on the street, because she was concerned about the ideas that a pastor was putting into her head in his charity programs. Fabiola, who says that she herself occasionally uses this type of charitable food service, reacted angrily to what Corintia was telling.

Fabiola: No, ¡por favor! ¿Que le estén dando por la cara y después te den de comer? ¡Como que no!

Corintia: Sí, pero ella... ella va por una necesidad. Y lo que yo digo es, por favor, ¿para oír ese sermón por un plato de comida?

Fabiola: No, y te va afectando. Y no todos tienen la madurez como la tengo yo, de que yo, eso, eso me resbala y más bien se la puedo devolver con doble filo. Y así lo digo yo. Yo, por ejemplo. Yo eso sí no lo pongo en duda. Yo soy una, yo soy una mujer, femenina²⁶⁵ (Fabiola and Corintia, in discussion with the author, October 6, 2019).

Fabiola's tense relationship with the charitable services that provide food in San José is not only a matter of need, but also of her ethical stance and her profound reflections on inequality. As she explains, she takes a plate of food when she needs it, but she will not give up her dignity or her identity.

²⁶⁴ Free translation: Then they brought in an "ex-gay"! Ex-gay they said, in reality she was a trans girl, who had been masculinized again. You wouldn't believe it! They showed us pictures and she was wearing those little shorts, she was clearly a trans girl. But now he had supposedly recovered and was a full-fledged man, he was married, and he even had kids. So the message they gave us was that we were confused, and they brought us that guy as an example so that we could see that it was possible to change with God's help.

²⁶⁵ Free translation: **Fabiola:** No, please! They hit you in the face and then they feed you? No way! / **Corintia:** Yes, but she... she goes there because she is in need. And what I am saying is, please, to hear that sermon for a plate of food? / **Fabiola:** No, and it gets to you. And not everybody has the maturity like I have, that I, I don't really care, and on the contrary, I can get back at them with a double edge. I say it like that, I, for example, I do not doubt that I am a woman, feminine.

She resents being used to fill out numbers, and does not accept that those who feed her think they can have an opinion about her life and her body. In addition, Fabiola always tries to take only what is necessary. “Yo lo utilizo cuando necesito, Corintia, porque tampoco le voy a ir a quitar el bocado a otro compañero de la calle. Cuando necesito, ¿ya?²⁶⁶”.

Fabiola's life ethic is one of reciprocity, solidarity, and justice. She promotes a way of consumption based on what is fair and necessary. She takes what she requires and leaves what she does not need for those who are in greater necessity. As the next section discusses, this is a very different logic from that promoted by some Christian charity projects, such as *Los Juegos de la Calle*, where the value of competition amalgamates with charity.

5.3.1. Street games, hunger games

What I observed in San Jose was a bit different from the merciful mandate of the Catholic Church. Prosperity theology and the influence of market logic have permeated Christian youth organizations that today seek to innovate the ways to gain entrance to heaven by means of charity. Watts is an organization that takes merciful work to another level. Watts is a collective of Christian volunteers that operates in the metropolitan area of the country. In their own words, they are about love, art, creativity, accompaniment and the word of God combined in the form of service, to reach out to the most vulnerable in our society (Watts, n.d.).

With Watts, charity has reached the 21st century. It is no longer a replication of the traditional ways in which Jesus fed the poor, but a modernization of these mechanisms so that charity results in an immediate benefit for those who exercise it, a dose of strong emotions that help them endure the craving until the true reward of eternal life arrives. Incorporating market logic and television narratives, Watts has created a model that combines charity, competition, indoctrination and evangelization in a format that is exciting and appealing to young audiences.

[S]omos un movimiento de voluntariado que busca llevar luz y transformación a los rincones más oscuros y vulnerables de nuestro país, a través de diferentes actividades disruptivas, que promueven la interacción de nuestros voluntarios con personas en situación de calle, quienes en algunos casos logran emprender un proceso de renovación integral, que culmina con su salida de este tipo de condición²⁶⁷ (Watts, n.d.).

²⁶⁶ Free translation: I use it when I need it, Corintia, because I'm not going to go take the food out of another fellow on the street either. I use it when I need to, right?

²⁶⁷ Free translation: We are a volunteer movement that seeks to bring light and transformation to the darkest and most vulnerable corners of our country, through different disruptive activities that promote the interaction of our volunteers with homeless people, who in some cases are able to undertake a process of integral renewal, culminating in their departure from this type of condition.

If it is possible to speak of something like a Charity Industrial Complex, Watts would be a good illustration of it. Spade proposes that:

When movement organizers, activists, and intellectuals use various terms that end with “industrial complex”, like “military industrial complex” or “prison industrial complex”, they are pointing to this kind of multivector analysis of law, power, knowledge and norms (Spade 2015, 3).

Watts works in partnership with public institutions and private donations. They have links with other national and transnational religious collectives. Their work in the Red-light district of San José fills needs that the State is not meeting, and this allows them to weave relationships of power. Their approach devoutly adheres to Christian morality, therefore, that is the normativity that their discourse and practices proclaim.

I came to *Los Juegos de la Calle* through Sebastián, the volunteer I met at Chepe se baña who enthusiastically explained to me the configuration of the Charity Industrial Complex in the city of San José. “Vamos a tener en la otra organización, los Juegos de la Calle²⁶⁸”, said Sebastian to us during the observation at Chepe se baña. We look at him with bewilderment. He repeats enthusiastically, “Ajá, los Juegos de la Calle²⁶⁹”.

The name of the activity immediately brought me back to *The Hunger Games*, a series of dystopian novels written by Suzanne Collins and later brought to the big screen. I had not read the books nor watched the movies at the time, but I had a vague idea of what it was about. After the observation exercise, I had to watch the movies, to understand if there was some analogy, if it was a coincidence, a projection of the unconscious or a cynical adaptation in which life imitates art.

The plot of *The Hunger Games* goes something like this: capitalism has continued to advance with its inherent voracity. The inequalities between the center (Capitol of Panem) and the peripheries (the districts) are perpetuated. In the collective memory remains the narrative of a popular rebellion, in which the starving inhabitants of an impoverished district rose up against the system that pushed them to death and produced them as *bare life*. The rebellion was put down, but to make sure that the story of this people did not inspire others to fight, the government implemented an entertainment/indoctrination program that sought to both amuse the masses and neutralize any incipient germ of insubordination. Thus, in a sort of postmodern tribute, every year, each district had to send 2 of its inhabitants (a boy and a girl, like in Noah's ark), to compete to the death with the representatives of other districts, until the law of the strongest is imposed. The pedagogy of cruelty theorized by Rita

²⁶⁸ Free translation: We are going to hold at the other organization, the Street Games.

²⁶⁹ Free translation: Yes, the Street Games.

Laura Segato (2016) meets the decorative violence and gore consumption that Sayak Valencia (2018) warns about in our society.

Before our puzzled faces, Sebastián continued explaining the activity:

Vamos a empezar este fin de semana que viene. Todos los sábados, cuatro sábados, del mes de octubre al mes de noviembre, y vamos a premiarlos y todo. De hecho un bufete de abogados nos donó la premiación, que va a ser un día en el Parque de Diversiones, el 1er lugar. Entonces para que ellos se motiven, verdad, y salgan. Sabemos que diay, lo que vamos a hacer es que diay, la persona que llega no consume, y el equipo que va a ganar puntos. Entonces vamos a hacer una reducción de daños. Y que ellos jueguen, verdad. Vamos a hacer cuatro equipos, con puntuaciones y todo, tabla de puntuaciones, va a haber casa y visita, en la Zona Roja. Ya tenemos todos armado. Y empezamos este sábado, Dios primero²⁷⁰ (Sebastián, in discussion with the author, October 6, 2019).

Sebastian's words resembled the language of national football championship. It is worth noting that football in this country is almost as sacred as La Negrita, as depicted by trans painter Alina Gonzalez (J.M.R) in her work entitled The Coronation of the Virgin:

Image 106
La coronación de la Virgen, 1991



Image 107
La coronación de la Virgen, 2014



Source: (<https://www.facebook.com/josemiguel.rojasgonzalez.5/photos>)

²⁷⁰ Free translation: We are going to start this coming weekend. Every Saturday, four Saturdays, from the month of October to the month of November, and we are going to give them awards and everything. In fact, a law firm donated us the prize, which is going to be a day at the National Amusement Park, for the first place. So that they get motivated, right, and get out of there. We know that, well, what we are going to do is that the people who come will not consume, and that team will win points. So we're going to do harm reduction. And let them play, you know. We are going to form four teams, with scores and everything, score table, there is going to be home and away, in the Red-light district. We've already got them all set up. And we start this Saturday, God willing

Beyond the sports lexicon, Sebastian's description sounded a bit nicer than the Hunger Games analogy. I wanted to give them the benefit of the doubt. Sebastian invited me to observe the activity, so on October 19, 2019, I conducted an observation exercise at to the second date of their street tournament.

The expectation of this activity kept me anxious for several days. The experience in Chepe se baña had shaken my affections, and I felt a little uncertain about what I could find in "The Street Games". The activity was held at night, on a 5-a-side soccer field in the heart of San Jose's Red-light district. I got a ride to the central park, from where I walked northwest with a knot in my stomach. Night was just beginning to fall.

Block by block I walked dodging garbage, broken sidewalks and excrement of different species. I tried not to dodge the gazes, though. My presence was clearly foreign in that place, but I tried at least not to make it seem threatening. I arrived at the soccer field and asked for Sebastian. I was told that he was not there. He was doing "brigades", meaning that he was recruiting participants who were dwelling in the streets of San José. There were about twenty uniformed volunteers with their Watts t-shirts. There were also some hungry people already there. Inside, I could also observe a few people who were not wearing Watts' uniforms (who I later found out, were the jury of the competition), and many cameras and microphones in the hands of the volunteers scattered all over the place.

The volunteers looked at me with suspicion. I told them that Sebastian had invited me to come. Still, I sensed their mistrust lingered. They invited me to wait for him at the entrance. A short while later, I saw Sebastian appear at the top of the cemented hill, followed by a crowd of unhoused people who formed a column waiting for the volunteers to take their information before entering the activity. The scene triggered in me a horrible metaphor, that of the Pied Piper of Hamelin, leading the rats to the edge of the city.

I was carrying equipment to record audio, video and photographs, but at that moment, seeing the long line of weary bodies, I decided not to take it out. Several considerations led me to make this decision at the time. First, observing the dynamics of the activity, it seemed that requesting consent to record was going to be quite complicated. Many of the people were visibly under the influence of alcohol and drugs, and although they were there "voluntarily", their will was driven by necessity. I am not sure if we can speak of voluntary participation when the payment is a meal that for many will be the first hot dish they will have for the day. The second consideration was that the atmosphere felt tense. Perhaps because night had fallen and we were in that part of town, perhaps because of the aesthetics and tone of the activity that made me feel like I was outside a football stadium, or perhaps because competition generates psychosomatic reactions that put us in a state of alert. Finally, when I

looked at the arena where the activity was taking place, it was full of cameras. There were professional video and photo cameras, there were dozens of phones capturing moments, taking selfies with participants, broadcasting live from the activity. I thought, then, that my presence would be less disruptive if I did not film, and that in any case I could draw on the multiple recordings and photographs that the volunteers were taking, to reconstruct the memory of this observation. So, I took out only a notebook and pen, where I wrote down notes of the informal interviews and what I observed in the activity.

This section is based on those inputs. I complemented my notes with Watts' publications on their Facebook page, where, in addition to hundreds of photos, the live transmission of the entire activity can be found. As I will explain in the next section, the way in which the images of this competition are captured and spectacularized raised a series of ethical questions for me. For this reason, although the images are public on their Facebook page, I decided to apply filters to try to protect the identity of the contestants, and in that way try to escape the practices of spectacularization.

Sebastian greeted me upon arrival and told me that he was glad I could make it. He then introduced me to several volunteers. This eased some of the tension of our initial encounter, although I still felt an uncomfortable look from some of them. Given that this was a Christian event, I wondered if their hostile regards had anything to do with my gender expression or what they could assume about my sexuality from my looks. In any case, Sebastian asked a senior volunteer to give me an interview to explain the details of the competition. He agreed, without much enthusiasm. He explained to me that this is just one of many actions that Watts carries out to help the homeless population and people with addiction problems in the city. For example, in conjunction with the Grítalo Foundation (another Christian organization), Watts runs a canteen for children and provides clothing, medical and dental services in the Red-light district. In other words, they play a role in sustaining life there where the State is failing.

The volunteer explained to me that Watts initially supported Chepe se baña's work. However, they considered that Chepe se baña's approach was too assistance-oriented, and therefore did not inculcate the values of self-improvement and the importance of making an effort to achieve things, which are fundamental for people with addiction problems to overcome their situation. Therefore, Watts came up with an innovative modality to work with the unhoused population, in which the food, rather than a donation, was the reward for a great effort.

He then described to me how the activity worked: volunteers go around the streets of the Red-light district inviting people who are sleeping or drinking on the street to participate in a tournament. Volunteers like Sebastian are not new to the Red-light district, they already have trusting relationships

with some of the people who live in those streets, which makes it easier for them to convince the people to participate. In any case, they are promised that if they do participate in the competition, they will receive a plate of hot food and a glass of soft drink.

Before entering the activity, they collect data from each participant to keep a record that allows them to map the population. This initial record also allows them to determine who is sober and who arrives under the influence of substances. This information is fundamental, as it establishes a first hierarchical category. Those who arrive sober start the day with extra points, and those who manage to arrive sober on all four dates of the tournament will receive special recognition.

Once inside, the volunteers organize the participants into four teams. Some volunteers also join the teams. The teams, he explains to me, are also called "tribes", because they respond to the form of social organization of this population in the Red-light district, which he describes as a lax form of collective organization for survival. He says that "urban tribes" have territorial dynamics in the area, and that there are disputes and tensions between the tribes, which are sometimes dragged into The Street Games.

In this tournament, the teams were named: *Cualquier vara*, *Tigres*, *Bendecidos* and *Rescatados*. The religious language in the last two is noteworthy: Blessed and Rescued. "Everyone wins something here," the volunteer tells me, referring to the fact that everyone will receive a prayer and a plate of food. However, when he explains how the activity works, it becomes clear that not everyone wins equally, or at the same time. The volunteers organize a series of competitions, animated by a professional entertainer and an innate comedian who has also lived on the streets.

"First to win, first to eat," the volunteer told me with eloquent pragmatism. "What do you mean?" I asked. He explains further: "Everyone who participates will receive a plate of food. Of course, they have to participate. They can't just come and lie down to sleep on the floor, nor can they watch the games from the stand. The food is the prize for all the people who sign up to play". It is exactly that: a prize. Teams then compete in games that involve physical and mental skills, coordination, speed and teamwork. The first team to win a competition will be the first one to eat. While the winners enjoy a hot meal, the losing teams compete for second place. The winners of the second match then are allowed to eat, and so on, until the losers finally receive the longed-for food that kept their bellies roaring for two hours since they arrived on the arena. "So, the food is really the prize? Prize for the winners and consolation prize?", I asked the volunteer. "Well yes, but it's not the only prize. The winning team at the end of the whole tournament will also receive a surprise prize. I can't tell you what it is, but it's something really cool, they're going to be thrilled. It's only fair that they get a prize, right? They earn it with hard work and commitment."

The volunteer tells me that there are also other prizes. Beyond teamwork, the aim is to reward individual perseverance. The initial registration works for this purpose. Volunteers evaluate the profile of the participants and compare it with their sobriety record. For those who show a promising future, Watts will reward them by providing them with a sponsorship to participate in a Christian camp that takes place over a weekend in the mountains. Then, says the volunteer, they will have shelter, blankets and food for a couple of days with, away from the temptations of the streets, and they will learn through experience that a better life is possible. Once again, the volunteers will evaluate the profiles of the interns, and those who prove to be a good investment will be sent to a private detoxification center.

An example of the outcome of this arduous testing trail was posted on the Watts facebook page in December 2019. The photo on the left was taken on October 19, the same day I conducted my observational exercise. The photo on the right was posted two months later, showing prompt and effective results in a before and after format.

Image 108
 "Grillo", The Street Games



Source: Adaptation from Watts' Facebook Page

Caption: The work that the Lord began in our friend "Grillo" he will be perfect!! From the first day we started #LosJuegosDeLaCalle in #ZonaRoja "El Grillo" was fully involved in the activities... he was the first to arrive and the last one to leave the competitions... He quickly bonded with all the Watts volunteers and was jovial and creative at every competition... he attended all 5 Saturdays of the games and he earned a place on the #WattsRide to the amusement park... he enjoyed like a child and remembered what it felt like to be free... Imprisoned by alcohol addiction, he lived a violent detoxification process... fighting with himself and with the damned substance that had enslaved him for years, helped by Watts volunteers and the Casa Libertad Association, he took off from the Red Light District and where he wishes never to return... Today he is in a long-distance rehab facility... "El Grillo" is one more project of God.... Thank you so much #Volunteers

and #Sponsors for being a light of #Hope in the midst of darkness for these people who in the course of our interventions like that prodigal son narrated in the Scriptures have come to their senses to leave behind the mistakes of their lives... #KnowThePowerOfLight #Volunteering #WattsLuzParaMiCiudad – in Santa elena Reserva Bosque Nuboso costa rica.

This publication uses a narrative of liberation, a liberation that comes from surrendering oneself fully to the Lord, with images that evoke the clash between good and evil, light that vanquishes darkness, and "God's plan" prevails over human "errors". It combines religious discourse with metaphors related to systems of oppression: "imprisoned by alcohol", "enslaved" by a "damned substance", this "prodigal son" flies away from the Red-light district, thanks to volunteers and sponsors who redirect his steps towards the path of God. Beyond religious metaphors, this discourse reveals this organization's perception of the socio-geographical zone in which they intervene. They consider it a dark, gloomy, place from which people must be removed so that they will never return. It seems that their objective is not even the regeneration of the area, but to rescue the souls willing to leave that hellish place.

While speaking with the senior volunteer, we were interrupted by a passerby. He asked if they were giving away food. The volunteer told him that it is not exactly free. To receive the food, it is necessary to participate in some activities, games, but if you play, you get a plate of food. The man asked if it was only for nationals. The volunteer replied that no, it is for everyone, the only requirement is to play. The man seemed happy. Someone called the volunteer and he left, leaving me alone to talk with the stranger. He told me he is a migrant from Nicaragua. He came recently with his wife and baby. They are unable to find work and they are starving. He asked me when the next date would be and if he could bring the baby. I felt an anguish that swelled my tongue. I told him that I am not part the organization, but that he could ask the people in uniforms at the entrance. I wished him luck and strength. He went to talk to the volunteers at the entrance.

The competition was about to begin. I was a nervous wreck. I did not want to enter. It is not even a rational reflection; I felt a malaise in my body screaming at me to run away from that place. Sebastian came back with a girl. He introduced her to me and told me that she was going to be my guide that night. The girl was friendly and smiling. She told me to ask her any questions I had and invited me to follow her to the playing arena. We went in, there was a lot of light and a lot of noise. There were users chatting with the volunteers, there were others sitting on the floor, and there were a number of people lying on the stands. I wondered if those who did not manage to get up would get a plate of food as well. My guide told me that they were about to start and took me to take a picture of the activity's banner. It is the only picture I took of the place, deliberately without people:

Image 109
The Street Games



A red ribbon divided the play area from the area where the volunteers and the teams that were not competing were watching. The volunteer explained to me again how the tournament works. I took the opportunity to ask what I had did not have the chance to ask the first volunteer. I asked her what they would serve them for dinner and how they finance the food. She told me that they usually work with donations from private companies with corporate social responsibility programs, or other groups with which they have alliances, such as Grítalo, or sometimes even the municipality itself. Local churches also collaborate. In fact, she said, they play an important role in the activity. She pointed out to me a woman dressed in white who was sitting at the only table in the court. She is an influential pastor of a church in San Jose that does significant social work with this population. That night she was invited as part of the jury, and she was in charge of the spiritual conduction of the event.

While the first volunteer wanted to keep the prize a mystery, this girl told me about the final prize: a trip to the National Amusement Park. She asked me not to discuss it with the participants, because they wanted to keep expectations high until the end. They would have liked to take them all, she said, but there were not enough funds, so they preferred to handle it with discretion so that those who were left out would not feel bad.

As we walked next to the red ribbon, the girl told me about what this activity and the work of the organization mean to her. She said that it fills her and inspires her, that she learns a lot from the people on the street, and that it is very satisfying to be able to help others. Her words and gestures show a genuine interest in the people. She told me that she had been working with Watts for more than a year now, and that over time they develop bonds with the people. She spoke about one boy in particular, who was her favorite, a boy whom she had accompanied several times at prayer time. "You help them all, but there are always some of them with whom you get especially attached to, I don't know why". She identified her favorite participant among the collectivity of bodies and called him over

to introduce him to me. The boy approached and they gave each other a big hug. I could see the affection between the two of them. This is something that caught my attention because it is not the same kind of bond that I observed in Chepe se baña.

Chepe se baña's volunteers establish a more distant relationship with the users. Its operation resembles a production chain, thus preventing the possibility of dialogue and interaction with the population that uses its services. Their rhythm is fast, and their tasks are segmented. In Watts, on the other hand, it seems that bonds are an important part of their project. The accompaniment provided to contestants is not only a food service (mediated by the competition), but also a spiritual accompaniment, which involves knowing, listening and guiding participants through the Bible. Beneath all the contradictions that I was already observing, as I watched them hug it seemed undeniable that between that volunteer and that contestant there was an affective bond. We cannot affirm that relationships are built in horizontal terms. From my observation I would rather say that they are not. However, the logic of rescue that operates in Watts is different from that of Chepe se baña, where the subjects are objectified, canceling any possibility of an affective connection.

The embrace of the volunteer and the contestant was interrupted because the competition started. The volunteer explained to me that in each joust they would earn points. The score is determined by the jury. They earn an extra 100 points if all team members arrive sober. The night I was observing, no team made the 100 points. On the contrary, a good portion of the participants were visibly drunk or high on drugs. Despite this, they were set to play physical competitions.

The first game is a sack race. The participants had to cross the court leaping inside the sacks, until they reached the finish line. Once a participant crossed the finish line, the next member of his team could leave the starting line and try to reach the finish line before his rivals. The first team to cross the finish line, or the team with the most competitors across the finish line at the end of the time, wins. No crawling or rolling was allowed. They had to jump across the finish line and if they fell down, they had to start over.

Image 110
Sack race – The Street games



Source: Adaptation from Watts' Facebook Page

When the presenter explained the competition I was immediately concerned. I could tell that nearly half of the people present were in an altered state of consciousness. Perhaps even more. I was concerned, then, that they were being put into an activity that required coordination and physical exertion, that perhaps their bodies were in no condition to perform. What would happen if someone had an accident? Who would assume the costs of medical care for these people who clearly had no insurance? Would they have any kind of support in case they were injured? An injury could mean an even greater complication in obtaining the daily sustenance, which was already difficult for them to guarantee.

The competition began amidst my nerves and the questions exploding in my head. Their bodies fell to the floor with the weight of hunger. They would get up spitting out giggles and pain, and recommenced. The sound of their bodies hitting the floor was muffled by the laughter of the whole place. Volunteers clapped, cheered and laughed. A crowd of cameras documented every jump, every fall and every new attempt. The hostess narrated everything as if it were a horse race. Teammates from each "tribe" shouted phrases of support and motivation. Occasionally a volunteer would burst in between the cameras to help a drunken man who had fallen and was unable to get up.

My fears materialized and turned into indignation. Their bodies earn their sustenance with bruises and sweat, while the rest of us enjoy the show, as if it were a staged production. In neoliberal times, warns Bader Sawaia,

Ao mesmo tempo que se valoriza o afeto e a sensibilidade individual, assiste-se a banalização do mal do outro, a insensibilidade ao sofrimento do outro. O que ocorre

é que os sentimentos são valorizados como fonte de satisfação em si mesma, configurando uma dor e não um sofrimento²⁷¹ (Sawaia 1999, 106)

The pain that was trivialized in that scene was not only the physical distress of the bodies, but the suffering of the entire population. The desperation, the hunger, the perseverance, the efforts, the short-term hope, the pain, the humiliation, all seemed to be part of the entertainment presented to us. It was a real show, a circus in which the clowns are paid with food.

The first winning team came out of this joust. Between chants and applause, they moved to the food court. The other three teams remained in the playing arena, waiting for the next competition. The preparation for the second game took a long time.

A smell of rice with chicken was emanating from the food court. Anxiety was beginning to rise among the hungry teams who had not yet earned their right to eat. While they were preparing the game, I took the opportunity to ask the volunteer how they came up with such an event. She pointed to a couple of volunteers near the jury table. She told me that they were the masterminds. She praised their intelligence and creativity. She told me that they invented everything. They wanted to innovate, not just come to hand out food, which is what has always been done, but to do it in a way that was fun for everyone. They also wanted to use the activity to give a positive message. She explained to me that at the end of the competition they will receive the words of the preacher, who speaks very nicely. But also, the idea was that each game could give them a lesson for life. I asked her who chooses the games, she pointed to the same two people. "They have too many good ideas, it's a whole other level, they are super creative and innovative." The sack race is a traditional game, but she assured me that I would be surprised by the next one, which was devised specifically for this activity.

The second game started:

²⁷¹ Free translation: At the same time that affection and individual sensitivity are valued, we witness the trivialization of the harm of others, the insensitivity to the suffering of others. What happens is that feelings are valued as a source of satisfaction in themselves, configuring a form of pain and not a suffering

Image 112
Second game – The Street games



Source: Adaptation from Watts' Facebook Page

The second game was much more difficult, but less risky for the physical integrity of the contestants. Along the length of the court were strung two long ropes holding a series of hula hoops. Each team was organized in two rows, forming pairs facing each other along the rope. Each pair was handed a plastic bag, garbage bag. I reflected on the choice of the material. It reminded me of the words of Raúl, one of Chepe se baña's users interviewed in the note I analyzed in chapter 4. In that interview Raul said: "la cara que hace la gente cuando me acerco, para ellos me veo como una bolsa de basura. Y le pregunto, ¿quién quiere sentirse como un desecho?"²⁷².

Each participant had to hold one end of the garbage bag. The game consisted of passing a plastic ball through the hula hoops, so that the next pair could catch it with their bag, and pass it to the following pair through the next hula hoops. The team that managed to get the most balls to the finish line would win. If the ball fell to the ground, they had to start over from the beginning.

This game evoked in my head the memory of a popular video game that I used to play in my childhood. The game was called Circus Charlie, and it consisted of having a clown riding a lion jump through hoops of fire, making sure that the lion did not get burned in the attempt:

²⁷² Free translation: The face people make when I approach them, to them I look like a trash bag. And I ask you, who wants to feel like garbage?

Image 112
Screenshot from Circus Charley



The circus analogy made me feel even worse than I already did. The game started and tensions began to rise. Almost no pair was able to accomplish the task. It was an exercise that required a lot of coordination and concentration. It also required precision in the movements, which the tired, drunk and starving participants were failing to achieve. No team seemed to have a chance of winning, and by that time the contestants were getting really hungry and cranky. The hostess started to get irritated as well. She seemed annoyed by the participants' incapability to perform in the game. Thus, she called for volunteers to join the competition, to pair up with the users to help them advance. Some succeeded, others kept missing the ball again and again.

The crowd began to scatter across the arena. Frustration won that game. Several of the participants joined their peers in the audience zone. Others sat down on the synthetic grass. Amidst a great buzz, one team managed to complete the task with the help of volunteers and some concessions. The winners moved on to eat. It was already late, so they promptly rushed the losers to swallow their food and return to the court for final reflection.

As they were eating, I wondered what the final reflection would be about. I could not think what the moral of that game could be. The fuel of this activity is competition. They say that everyone will get a plate of food, but the competition determines who eats first and who eats last. It is also not true that everyone will eat. Whoever does not play does not eat. Competition is the prerequisite for receiving food. It made me think of a passage from Chilean philosopher Humberto Maturana, that Farneda comments on in relation to the effects that the logic of competition produces on social relations:

Si dos animales se encuentran frente a un alimento y uno lo come y el otro no, eso no es competencia. No lo es porque no es central para lo que le pasa al que come que el otro no coma. En cambio, en el ámbito humano, la competencia se constituye culturalmente cuando el que el otro no obtenga lo que uno obtiene se hace

fundamental como modo de relación. La victoria es un fenómeno cultural que constituye la derrota del otro²⁷³ (Maturana 2008, 21; in Farneda 2012, 128).

Farneda points out the perversity of this logic. In reality, says Farneda, nobody needs for anyone else to do fundamentally badly in order to obtain their own wellbeing. Different cosmogonies that place the common good and the community as the center that builds their relationships are living proof of this. What imposes, normalizes and naturalizes competition as an inherent condition of human beings, says Farneda, is the capitalist ontology (Farneda 2012, 129). This is the logic that governs The Street Games. They are careful to make sure that everyone who competes gets to eat, but they are also careful to point out that not everyone can have equal access to food.

The last ones to eat quickly returned to the field. With the fire in their bellies appeased, they listened to the message of the hostess, who, frustrated, asked for the attention of the contestants and tried to explain the moral of the second game. The explanation was even more complicated than the game itself. I listened to her words but could not understand the metaphors. She talked about the mirror, asked questions like "who am I in front of a mirror?", followed by chained pronouns and verbs that sounded like a song from The Beatles: "I am he as you are he as you are me and we are all together". All around me the contestants looked at her with frowning faces. It all seemed absurd and confusing. In the end, I think I understood that the metaphor of the mirror was meant to teach them that in life, to achieve certain things, one must reach an agreement with oneself. It was a call against self-sabotage in the rehabilitation process.

I thought that was the end of the activity, but there was one more surprise to come. Pastor Erika Lizano, president of Casa Libertad Association, took the microphone to give some closing remarks. She began to talk about drug rehabilitation. Christian music played in the background. I transcribed some excerpts from the live broadcast available on Watts' Facebook page:

Me pidieron hablar de la desintoxicación. Y desintoxicar es sacar algún efecto tóxico de nuestra vida. A veces ese efecto tóxico no es solamente la sustancia. No es solamente la dosis que he consumido. Es lo que traigo por dentro...²⁷⁴

²⁷³ Free translation: If two animals are in front of food and one eats it and the other does not, that is not competition. It is not because what happens to the one that does not eat is not central for the one that does eat. On the other hand, in the human sphere, competition is culturally constituted when the fact that the other does not obtain what one obtains becomes fundamental as a mode of relationship. Victory is a cultural phenomenon that constitutes the defeat of the other.

²⁷⁴ Free translation: I was asked to talk about drug detoxification. And to detoxify is to remove some toxic effect from our life. Sometimes that toxic effect is not just the substance. It's not just the dose that I have consumed. It's what I bring inside...

Her sermon intended to move away from guilt, called for pardon and self-forgiveness, and yet, it insisted that they are living on the streets because there was something toxic inside them that anchored them to drug use and the Red-light district.

Cuando hablo de cosas tóxicas, no necesariamente son drogas. Es falta de perdón, es sed de venganza, es que mami no me quiere, es que papi no me quiere, es que mis hijos no me quieren hablar. Y eso siempre va a provocar que una y otra vez yo termine consumiendo la sustancia que por un momento me va a hacer olvidar²⁷⁵ (Lizano in Watts Luz Para Mi Ciudad 2019)

The pastor evoked situations that were painful for some of the people present. I could hear people chuckling interspersed with the sound of loud breathing. I could perceive the atmosphere getting denser and denser.

As if their embodied experience was not enough, the pastor began to explain to them the reasons why life on the streets is not a good life: “A veces los veo en la calle y les digo: ¿cómo están? Y me dicen: bien²⁷⁶”. She smiled wryly, paused for a moment and continued in a louder tone: “¿Qué será estar bien? ¿En la calle? ¿Comiendo de un basurero? Recibiendo ofensas en la calle, escupas, gritos... ¡Qué cansado es el camino. Es cansado, hijo. Son años, de años de años de esto²⁷⁷”.

She walked towards a man in the audience. She placed her hand on the man's head, looked at him and exclaimed: “Yo le pregunto a Dios, ¿será que en 27 años no ha hecho nada? Años de trabajar con este chico. 15 años, 20 años...²⁷⁸”. The man, exposed in front of the whole crowd, bursts into sobs. “... ¡27 años! 27 años y uno se pregunta: ¿por qué no ha cambiado nada, por qué sigue este muchacho así?²⁷⁹”. I observed the scene in astonishment. I looked all around, as if expecting a volunteer to do something about that array of blame and revictimization, but what I found everywhere were teary eyes. If their goal was to make the participants feel bad in order to push them to change, at least the first part of that equation was fulfilled.

Yo lo quiero invitar de verdad, a que usted tome una decisión. Si usted quiere continuar en la calle, si usted quiere continuar el consumo, sepa que ese no es mi motivo para no ayudarlo. Siempre voy a estar ahí... Pero lo que quiero decirle hoy, con

²⁷⁵ Free translation: When I talk about toxic things, it's not necessarily drugs. It is unforgiveness, it is thirst for revenge, it is that mommy doesn't love me, it is that daddy doesn't love me, it is that my children won't talk to me. And that will always cause me to end up consuming again and again the substance that will make me forget for a moment.

²⁷⁶ Free translation: Sometimes I see you on the street and I ask you: how are you? And you answer: fine.

²⁷⁷ Free translation: What does It mean ‘to be fine’? On the street? Eating from a garbage can? Taking offenses in the street, getting spit on, shouted at... How tiring the road is. It's tiring, son. It's years, years of years of years of this.

²⁷⁸ Free translation: I ask God, in 27 years have you done nothing? Years of working with this boy. 15 years, 20 years...

²⁷⁹ Free translation: 27 years! 27 years and one wonders: why hasn't anything changed? Why is this boy still like this?

esto voy a terminar, es que es cansado. Es cansado seguir una y otra vez... Hemos tenido miles y miles de oportunidades de cambio, pero al final de la historia solamente una decisión me puede hacer cambiar²⁸⁰ (Lizano in Watts Luz Para Mi Ciudad 2019).

She continued to stimulate painful emotions. She pointed out that help, like that plate of food they earned with their sweat today, will not be denied to them if they decide to continue consuming. However, she made it clear to them that she is tired, tired of seeing them coming back again and again.

We can analyze her discourse from the perspective of the security apparatus. On the one hand, she stresses the horrors of the street, speaks of the dangers, suffering and risks of living in the streets. Her discourse presents a powerful argument in the logic of security apparatus. And then, after drawing this picture of anguish and risks, she also offers the sole and all-powerful solution:

Pastora: He estudiado el tema de las drogas por muchos años, y la ciencia dice que es una enfermedad que no tiene cura. Imagínesen en el lío que podemos estar metidos. Pero yo conozco a uno que cura todas las enfermedades.

Público: ¡Amén!

Pastora: ¡Amén! Y ese que cura todas las enfermedades está dispuesto a cambiar mi vida y tu vida...²⁸¹ (Lizano in Watts Luz Para Mi Ciudad 2019).

She speaks of addiction as a disease for which the only possible cure is God. She acknowledges scientific knowledge, but affirms that what science cannot do, God can fix. With a representative speech act, she then promises salvation for those who make the decision to surrender themselves to the Lord.

Yo quiero que usted cierre sus ojos. Que lo que es tóxico y no lo deja avanzar, hoy tiene que salir de su vida. Que sí, que hay una enfermedad... Estamos aquí porque hay un problema. Estamos aquí porque hubo un abandono. Estamos aquí porque alguien un día dijo: prefiero verlo muerto que seguir sufriendo²⁸² (Lizano in Watts Luz Para Mi Ciudad 2019).

She touched a sensitive issue. With this phrase several of the participants burst into tears. The pastor was explaining to these people the burden they became for those who were once their family and

²⁸⁰ Free translation: I truly want to invite you to make a decision. If you want to continue on the street, if you want to continue using, you should know that this is not a reason for me stop helping you. I will always be there... But what I want to tell you today, and I will end with this, that it is exhausting. We have had thousands and thousands of opportunities to change, but at the end of the story, only one decision can make me change.

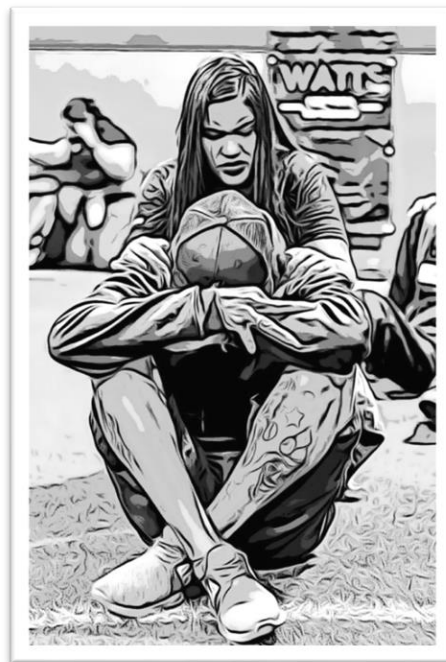
²⁸¹ Free translation: **Pastor:** I have studied the subject of drugs for many years, and science says it is a disease that has no cure. Imagine the kind of mess we are in. But I know one who cures all diseases. / **Audience:** Amen! / **Pastor:** Amen! And that One who cures all diseases is willing to change my life and yours.

²⁸² Free translation: I want you to close your eyes. The thing that is toxic and does not let you move forward, today it has to get out of your life. Yes, there is a disease... We are here because there is a problem. We are here because there was an abandonment. We are here because someone said one day: I would rather see you dead than continue suffering.

loved ones. They left them to die, they even wished them dead, because their life had become for them a burden, a hindrance, a suffering. *Bare life*, in short. The State, with its market necropolitics, had long ago left them to die. But their tears came from that wound that the pastor pressed when she pointed out that moment in which the community loosens the net that sustains their existence and pushes them towards death.

The volume of the music increased. I could hear sighs all around me. Some people choke on tears and snot. I felt my heart pounding hard in my chest. I was not prepared for this. Perhaps I should have seen it coming, but I guess I thought it would be something like Chepe se baña. It took me by surprise. I was expecting the motivational talks, but what happened there was a cult, with a preach full of blame and pain. The pastor then called the volunteers to approach the participants. The volunteers surrounded them, grabbing their heads and holding their hands. Each volunteer held one or two participants, as shown in the intervened picture:

Image 113
Praying – The Street Games



Source: Adaptation from Watts' Facebook Page

¡Gracias Dios! Gracias te damos, Señor, en este momento, Padre. Porque aunque la ciencia la respetamos, Señor, porque son años y años de estudios para determinar que hay una enfermedad de por medio, hemos conocido a aquel que por su llaga hemos sido todos curados... Permítenos hoy, Señor, echar fuera de nuestras vidas toda falta de perdón, todo odio, señor, toda venganza, padre. Permítenos sacar de nuestra vida todo aquello que no me edifica. Todo aquello que lo único que hace es

hacerme dar vueltas y vueltas y vueltas por el desierto²⁸³ (Lizano in Watts Luz Para Mi Ciudad 2019).

By comparing the Red-light district to a desert, pastor erases life and the possibility of life, erases the inhabitants of that area and erases the communities that Fabiola and Elena told us about in chapter 4. I do not remember hearing this metaphor at that moment. In fact, I remembered few details about the sermon, which I was able to analyze through the recording of the live transmission on Facebook. In the middle of that pastor's words, I lost my concentration. I had difficulty filling my lungs. I felt dizzy. All my energy was focused on trying not to break down, in performing so that it would not become evident that those scenes were overflowing my role as an investigator. I did not want to close my eyes. I looked at the floor. I heard disconsolate cries around me. I asked myself what I was doing there. I felt my own tears running down my cheeks as they escaped. Mine were tears of a different substance. Not the guilt induced by that pastor who sought to push them all the way to redemption. Mine were tears of rage, tears of disgust, tears of pain in the face of injustice, tears of indignation.

Yo sé que tú tienes una tierra prometida para nosotros, Señor. Yo lo sé porque, un día Señor, tuviste misericordia de mí. Papito, gracias. Gracias, Señor porque sabemos que sí es una enfermedad, y respetamos la ciencia, tenemos al salvador, Señor, que puede venir a tocar nuestras vidas y sanarnos. Y aquí estamos Señor, delante de ti... Entregándote, Padre, todo aquello que no queremos más en nuestras vidas y que es un proceso, Señor. Y sí, señor, hemos estado cansados. Hoy te pedimos fuerza, señor. Hoy te pido un soplo para cada uno de ellos y ellas. Ten misericordia, padre, de nosotros...²⁸⁴ (Lizano in Watts Luz Para Mi Ciudad 2019).

The service closed with a round of applause to the Lord for all that he has done and will do for their lives. One of the presenters took over. The participants were barely wiping away tears as they were instructed to stand up and group into their teams to receive the judges' verdict on that night's winner. Christian music was still playing loudly. I seized the moment of commotion to run away. I got up and left the place as soon as I could. My hands were shaking, I felt like throwing up.

I took a cab that was passing by on the corner. As I got in, the cab driver asked me what was someone like me doing in that place. He clearly read my class privileges in my clothes and on my skin. I explained to him that I was coming from an activity where they hand out food to people living on the street. He

²⁸³ Free translation: Thank you God! We thank you, Lord, at this moment, Father. Because even though we respect science, Lord, because there are years and years of studies to determine that there is a disease involved, we have met the One who by his wound we have all been healed... Allow us today, Lord, to cast out of our lives all unforgiveness, all hatred, Lord, all vengeance, Father. Let us remove from our lives everything that does not edify me. Everything that does nothing but make me go round and round and round in the desert.

²⁸⁴ Free translation: I know that you have a promised land for us, Lord. I know this because, one day, Lord, you had mercy on me. Daddy, thank you. Thank you, Lord because we know that if it is a disease, and we respect the science, we have the Savior, Lord, who can come to touch our lives and heal us. And here we are Lord, before You... Surrendering to You, Father, everything that we no longer want in our lives and that is a process, Lord. And yes, Lord, we have been weary. Today we ask you for strength, Lord. Today I ask you for a breath for each and every one of them. Have mercy, Father, have mercy on us....

congratulated me, I felt like crying. He then told me about his daughter, a 20-year-old girl who was hanging out with “the wrong crowd”, and no matter how hard he tried to help her, she ended up leaving his house.

He told me that months went by without hearing from her, lying awake every night wondering if she was all right. One day, driving through that area, he saw her on a corner and stopped. He asked her to come home, but she told him not to worry, and assured him that she was fine. Since then, he sometimes looks for her around the Red-light district and takes the opportunity to help her with whatever he can. He implied without explicitly saying it that the girl uses drugs and engages in sex work. He then asked me if the event would be repeated and asked me for the details to invite his daughter to come over. I look at him, heartbroken, and told him that I honestly would not recommend that event. They give them food, yes, but the approach is not the friendliest one. They work on the basis of generating guilt, and sometimes, I said to him, that ends up doing a lot of harm. I told him that perhaps it would be better to look for other programs. The man thanked me for my honesty and for listening to him. I told him to keep the change, ran into my house, and collapsed on the bed.

5.3.2. Spectacularization and the *jouissance* of misery

The first entry in my field journal the morning after *The Street Games* reads, “Today I woke up with my stomach still upset. No need to ask what made me sick”. That night I vomited several times. This is as bodily as this research process got for me. I felt an unbearable disgust. A disgust for the activity, a disgust for the system that allows the existence of these things, but also, a certain disgust for me, as I inevitably recognized myself as part of this chain of violence.

I cannot affirm that the name of *The Street Games* was inspired by *The Hunger Games*, but what is certain is that there is a common logic, combining competition, misery, and the spectacularization of violence for the amusement of the affluent classes. Trying to understand how people laughed (as in the circus), cried (as in the cult) and celebrated these scenes (as in an augmented reality cinema), I find resonances in Sayak Valencia's sharp analysis of the spectacularization of violence and gore capitalism.

Over the course of recent decades, these necropractices have become more permissible, as they have given rise to new cultural understandings, allowing the use of exceedingly brutal and horrifying forms of cruelty that can be converted into spectacle through their consumption as televised entertainment (Valencia 2018, chap. Necropolitics [2010, 147]).

It is true that what I observed was not the obscenity of physical violence, bodies were not torn apart and death was not spread. This needs to be said out of respect for the numerous lives that gore capitalism takes every day. The violence I witnessed in *The Street Games* was not that brutal extreme, but it is a link in that chain of violence where class, gender and race are intertwined, a chain that leads to death, where necropower is becoming increasingly permissible. Perpetuating a long history of violence, poverty is transformed into spectacle. The forms of class violence with which capitalism slowly kills the dwellers of the *zone of non-being*, is presented as a product for the entertainment that viewers can enjoy from the commodities of their home.

This is a chain that stretches back centuries, crossed by racism and colonial domination. Unlike theater, where there is a script that seeks to provoke an emotion in the spectator, *The Street Games* is closer to the format of a reality show, in which reality itself becomes comical in the eyes of those who do not embody the suffering that is presented as a show. In the same line, the tears shed by the contestants and the promising *dénouement* in the hands of the Lord provoke in the viewers a cathartic effect, a dose of intense emotions that release in their organisms a tidal wave of neurotransmitters that substitutes the damned substance that this program wishes to eradicate.

For these bodies and the pain they experience to be disposed for the amusement of others implies an exercise of hierarchization and a differentiation. Competitors and spectators are not of the same species. The existence of the former makes the latter laugh, moves them, amazes them, amuses them. From human circuses to decorative violence, passing through slavery, these forms of violence imply the objectification of those lives that will be rendered as objects for amusement.

Valencia says that the *gore* works through the

depiction of excessively cruel violence, making that violence an anecdotal and even comical action, thus provoking cognitive dissonance between the images of extreme violence and the paradoxical depiction of these actions in a cynical way, bordering on obscenity. However, at the same time, gore impedes the articulation of arguments that might confront this cognitive dissonance and its implications, thus leading to the acritical acceptance of the most recalcitrant violence applied against bodies. (Valencia 2018, chap. Necropolitics [2010, 170]).

The Street Games truly resembled being inside a television set. This was intentional, the space was arranged to provoke that effect. When the sound of a body crashing to the floor provoked a chorus of laughter, I felt as if I was watching an American TV show, where the sound of laughter in voice-over indicates us when we have to laugh. Just like that, the laughs that I heard live, were heard in voice-over by those who, from the comfort of their homes, were watching the live broadcast of *The Street Games*

The competition was being documented by not one or two, but dozens of lenses. When I arrived, I felt overwhelmed by the number of cameras everywhere. It all became clear when the volunteer guiding me explained that, parallel to the contest of impoverished people competing for food, there was another contest going on. This one was not for the dwellers of the *zone of non-being*, but for the volunteers. It was a photography contest, entitled "The Photos of the Street".

Image 114
The Photos of the Street



Source: Watts' Facebook page

The organization had aligned itself with the logic of the spectacularization of gore capitalism. Not only did they broadcast live every physical and emotional hit taken by the competitors, but they also encouraged a multiplicity of eyes to be deployed all over the place, recording everything. The panopticon replicating itself over and over again, like a clone army of electronic eyes watching and recording everything, watching the hunger, watching the competition, watching the obedience, watching the gratitude.

The rules of the contest established three categories: joy, service and communion. This explains why, whereas some volunteers ran to the pastor's call during the sermon to embrace the participants who were breaking out in tears, others did not comply and continued walking around the court, photographing the bodies and their expressions.

Image 115
Finalist in the category: Communion



Source: Adaptation from Watts' Facebook Page

The photos would be judged on creativity, composition and intention, meaning what the photo is intended to communicate. Image 116, for example, a finalist in the contest, sought to give a message about the power of prayer: "Drug use is a dungeon that you can only get out of with the help of heaven and a dose of determination":

Image 116
Finalist in the category: Service



Source: Watts' Facebook page

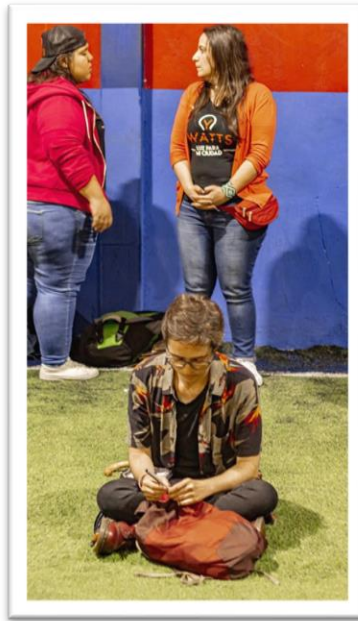
Caption: Finalist Photo of the #ThePhotosOfTheStreets Contest. Category "Moments of Service". Division professional camera. J Federico Campos Calderon captures this moment of service during one of the nights of #TheStreetGames where one of the #FriendsOfTheStreets approaches 2 of our #Volunteers at the end of the event asking them to pray for him so he can get out of his street and drug use situation. Drug use is a dungeon that you can only get out of with the help of heaven and a dose of determination. Voting is open until next Tuesday, December 3. The photo with the most likes and loves respectively will be the winner! Vote and share to help Federico! #KnowThePowerOfLight

While the unhoused residents of San José made physical efforts on the court, these young volunteers competed in an artistic-intellectual contest. In both cases, the goal was the same: to produce images that mobilize emotions in the spectators. The forms, however, are very different. The unhoused residents competed with their bodies; their bodies themselves were the instruments to earn the right to eat. The volunteers had other conditions. Their instruments were the cameras, but the objects that would allow them to win were the bodies of the unhoused residents, the bodies and their emotional reactions. Hence the dense atmosphere of that activity. The stronger a photo vibrated, the more chances it had of winning. So, the tears of those people were not only the way to divine redemption, but also the raw material for the images that would make them win.

If the food was the prize in the *zone of non-being*, what was the prize for the photo contest? For a moment I thought it might be the same prize as the winning team in The Street Games: a ticket to the National Amusement Park to have fun with the group. But the volunteer guiding me clarified that it was not. The prizes, like the contest forms, were differentiated. For the volunteers, the reward had to be adjusted to their status and consumption habits. So, while the participants who made the photos possible received a plate of rice with chicken and a glass of soda, the winning eye would receive a weekend for two in a hotel in the paradisiacal forests of Monteverde, a site of ecological tourism in the country.

The contest rules stipulated some ethical considerations. It stated that "in a moment of intimacy", no flash should be used, and the moment should not be interrupted. It warned that a safe distance should be kept when taking photos. In addition, the rules stated that the responsibility for any stolen equipment was to be borne by the volunteers, as Watts disclaimed all liability. The regulations also stipulated that permission had to be requested from anyone being photographed. In my observation, I could see that this was not followed. The cameras were recording everything from multiple angles, throughout the entire event. Proof that they did not ask for consent is that in their Facebook page, I found a photograph of myself:

Image 117
Unauthorized photo of myself – The Street Games



Source: Watts' Facebook Page

This photograph was taken in the middle of Pastor Lizano's sermon. By that time, I had stopped taking notes. In the photo I appear visibly affected. Perhaps the panoptic eye that captured this moment decided to publish it because they thought it was a moment of "communion". In reality, I was trying to hold back the tears and the discomfort that the stigmatizing and revictimizing sermon provoked in me. At no time did they ask my permission to publish my image, not even to photograph me. They did not show me the photo to see if I felt comfortable, nor did they ask if I was okay with publicly exposing that image that captured a moment of vulnerability. No one told me that the photo would be uploaded to social media, much less that it could be used by someone to compete for a weekend in a mountain hotel.

These people had no consideration whatsoever regarding the use of my image, something that throughout this research has been a fundamental concern for me. If the volunteers, who recognized agency in me, who saw me as a neighbor, perhaps from a distant district but within the *zone of being*, did not request my authorization to use my image, it is hard to imagine that they asked for consent from the unhoused residents who were being objectified for the amusement and the race to the eternal life of the volunteers. In any case, even if they had sought consent in some form, as Fabiola exemplifies, when the food to sustain life that is at stake, consent is not a free choice:

...yo a veces he ido, cuando están repartiendo comida, y yo a veces voy, ¿verdad? Pero hay veces que empiezan ellos a tomar fotos, y dice más de un compañero: "Ay, a mí no me gusta!" Pero uno tiene que ser agradecido, diay, si uno quiere tener, este, como un soporte de ayuda para que le sigan dando de comer, uno tiene que también, diay, ser recíproco también, diay devolver algo para que la gente vea de que llegan a

comer y que es funcional el programa, pues. Y necesitan documentaicones²⁸⁵ (Fabiola, in discussion with the author, November 22, 2019).

The participants in The Street Games play a more active role than in Chepe se baña. However, they are also objectified and exploited, put to work to win a meal. They have no agency, they are there following the rules and instructions of the volunteers. Sometimes they laugh, sometimes they cry, sometimes they yawn and get tired. They listen all the time, they are almost never allowed to speak. They are observed, recorded, spectacularized with the aesthetics of a TV game show. In the midst of this, an ethical question resonates in my head. Along the lines of what Valencia poses: "What is my role as a viewer in the face of the naturalization of violence perpetuated in the media? What is my responsibility in the face of my own consumption of gore images?" (Valencia 2018, chap. Necropolitics [2010, 158]).

Like many of the characters in The Hunger Games, the contestants in the Street Games have no agency. Their role is determined by the hierarchy of power and knowledge imposed by coloniality. I, on the other hand, have agency, an agency that is reinforced by my class and racial privileges, by my foreign surname and even by what it means in Costa Rica to say that I am doing a postgraduate degree in France. However, I did not know what to do with my agency that night. At times I wished to intervene, I wanted to talk to the people whose suffering was being spectacularized, and I wanted to invite them to escape, but in the end, I remained in my role as an observer, documenting that spectacle of colonial charity. How do my field notes differ from the photographic panopticon of the volunteers? We clearly have a different approach, and yet, there are points of convergence that confront me with my privileges and with my ethical/epistemic position in the face of the violence I study. I also benefit from all this.

The entries in my field diary, the analysis of violence and injustice that I construct along these pages, they are all materials that I use to obtain my PhD, which will open me the gate to job stability. I wish to think that this study takes a different position on violence, that it documents it not with the aim of exoticizing it or to produce a sort of academic gore narrative, but with the intention of understanding how power intricates in the projects that with good intentions promote inclusion in the city. My hope is that understanding these dynamics can lead us to build something different. However, this experience leaves a bitter taste in my mouth. I think we still have a long way to go to decolonize

²⁸⁵ Free translation: ...sometimes I have attended, when they are handing out food, and sometimes I go, right? But there are times when they start taking pictures, and more than one colleague says: "Oh, I don't like it!" But one has to be grateful, say, if one wants to have, this, as a support of help, so that they continue giving you food, one has to also, say, be reciprocal too, say, give something back so that people see that they come to eat and that the program is functional, well. And they need documentation.

research and the university, and to devise ways to compensate and develop safe spaces for our research participants.

This ethnographic exercise left me with a series of open questions. I do not intend to answer them in this thesis, but to take them as a path to continue exploring, through an epistemology that seeks to break with epistemic violence and to generate resources to resist and re-exist in the face of necropower.

5.4. To share a meal as a path for resistance

Food, and specially sharing food, has been one of the most vibrating interests I have had in my life. I incorporated food as a pedagogical resource and as an object of study in the courses I taught at the university, and that led me to understand that food can bond us in particular ways. In the work that I conducted for my master's degree, I incorporated the practice of ensuring a meal to compensate the people who shared their time and knowledge with me. Dayana had explained to me that many of the girls I was interviewing would go straight from there to work on the street, and that that was, perhaps, all they were going to have in their bellies that night.

Breaking with racist and patriarchal dynamics of exploitation, I am interested in cooking as a communitarian and collectivizing function that supports life. A powerful tool for transformation, a thread that weaves culture, history, pleasure and life, and ties them to the present, in a knot of affections that materializes in food. I was thinking about food as the fabric that sustains existence, but also resistance. Revolution is a word that is easy to say with a hashtag, but it is difficult to embody it for a long time with the rumble of an empty stomach.

With these considerations I planned the field work. I tried to end every parcouir/interview with a meal, as a form of compensation. However, when I returned to San Jose after two years away, what I found was a terrible upsurge in hunger. I collided with the inequalities, the contradictions, the pettiness and the spectacularization of violence. People who look the other way because looking at hunger makes them sick. People who profit from the hunger of others. Churches who live off the hunger of others and yet do more than what the State and dozens of human rights NGOs do. The contradictions exploded my head and wrinkled my heart in ways that still today I cannot process.

Amidst this, I met people who organize to try to help each other survive:

Y hablar con mi círculo de confianza que tengo, que son ellos mismos, porque nos hemos organizado como... ¿no tenés un pan? Tomá, aquí, comamos todos. ¿No tenés

esto? Y así hemos vivido. Y así hemos estado, pero no sé hasta cuándo²⁸⁶ (Jacob, in discussion with the author, November 26, 2019).

In the face of the great emergence of hunger in this research, intensified by the news of the effects of the pandemic in San Jose that I was following from afar, the practice of sharing food seemed increasingly urgent. "I don't know for how long," said Jacob to me a few months before the pandemic began. When I returned in 2021, Jacob and his friends had succeeded in organizing solidarity at different levels. They introduced me to a project that revolves around food, but seeks to resist the neoliberal normativity: the Feria Pinolera. The name of this fair comes from the word "pinolillo", a traditional Nicaraguan drink made from white corn, cocoa seeds, and spices such as cinnamon, pepper and cloves. In a direct reference to their culture, a group of Nicaraguan women and trans* people seeking asylum launched this collective project to generate resources to sustain their lives.

Image 118
7th edition of the Feria Pinolera



Source: Red de Mujeres Pinoleras' Facebook page
(<https://www.facebook.com/Red-de-Mujeres-Pinoleras-107677764424016/photos/395732382285218>)

The Feria Pinolera was born in the context of the pandemic, which aggravated the conditions of unemployment, exclusion and dispossession suffered by women and feminized bodies in exile (Jacob and Iris, in discussion with the author, November 7, 2021). Iris, a Nicaraguan lesbian feminist forced to migrate to Costa Rica, explained to me the origins of this project. Faced with the harsh situation, several feminists in exile adopted a practice of bartering, in which they exchanged objects, food and knowledge. This autonomous practice of anti-capitalist resistance was a precursor to the fair. They

²⁸⁶ Free translation: And to talk to my circle of trust that I have, which is them, because we have organized ourselves like... Don't you have a loaf of bread? Here, take this, let's all eat. Don't you have this? And that's how we have lived. And that's how we have been living, but I don't know until when...

began to think that just as they bartered things within the community (something they continue to do), they could perhaps get together to offer some products for sale (food, crafts, art) and thus generate some income in the context of the multiple crises they face (Iris, in discussion with the author, November 7, 2021).

Image 119
Alejandra and Niska at the Feria Pinolera



This is how a group of asylum seekers and refugees decided to promote this fair as a strategy of solidarity economy and support in times of the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition to the autonomous sustainability of daily life, the fair seeks to weave support networks among women in exile, to open spaces for training and to generate a safe space for the Nicaraguan community to meet. The fair also seeks to position women's and feminists' struggles and resistance to the Ortega Murillo regime (Jacob and Iris, in discussion with the author, November 7, 2021).

At the Feria Pinolera, food has a price, although two people could eat for the cost of one plate at Sikwa. Unlike Sikwa, this fair does not use the knowledge of peoples in exotic formats. It is rather a celebration of the cooks' origins, an imaginary bridge that connects each of the participants with their history and with the people they had to leave behind. This has made the Feria Pinolera a meeting point for the Nicaraguan community in exile, who come looking for those tasty links to keep their memory and their roots alive.

If the contraceptive hormone was for Preciado an edible panopticon, the food at the Feria Pinolera is an edible gateway to a logic that challenges the values of the neoliberal project. Iris and Jacob shared

the core values that the organizers of the fair have defined the process of collective systematization of this experience:

abrazar, acompañar, solidaridad, confianza, lealtad, empatía, responsabilidad, compromiso, fuerza de voluntad, responsabilidad afectiva, reconocimiento, apartidaría, transmutación, transición, mujeres diversas, inclusividad²⁸⁷ (Feria Pinolera 2022).

The Feria Pinolera resists competition and seeks to demonstrate that there are other possible paths. It is not a "market of entrepreneurs", like some projects that have begun to emerge under feminist and LGBTIQ labels.

Image 120
I LGBTI Market



Source: Transcendetes' Facebook Page

The Feria Pinolera is above all a community. The market, although it may have concrete results for survival, is inscribed in the logic of capitalism, with all its voracity. The fair is rather a community of affection, where food is sold but also shared. Solidarity overcomes competition. The organizers are working inside and outside the fair to create networks to guarantee food for refugees and asylum seekers. The Feria Pinolera is not a brand, but a craft loaded with affection and history.

²⁸⁷ Free translation: embrace, companionship, solidarity, trust, loyalty, empathy, responsibility, commitment, willpower, affective responsibility, acknowledgement, partnership, transmutation, transition, diverse women, inclusiveness

Image 121

Gallo pinto con coco, traditional Bluefields' dish

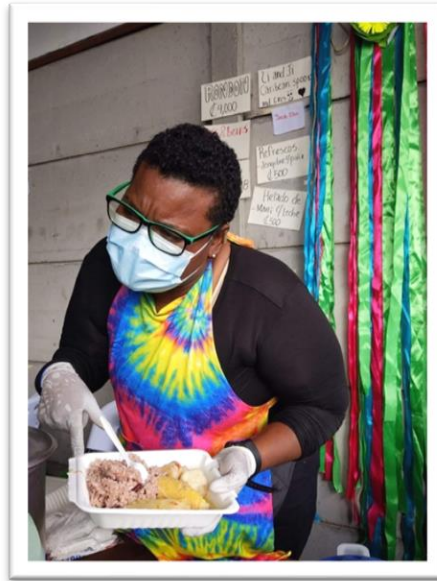


Says Sayak Valencia:

We nonetheless have to constantly reimagine the form of our resistance to the market. We should not begin with a simplistic or antagonistic position in relation to the market, but rather must keep in mind that subversion begins with a reformulation of our theories about practices of resistance and consumption so that we can reconsider the phenomenon as a whole, while distancing ourselves from a dichotomous vision. (Valencia 2018, chap. Necropolitics [2010, 152]).

Although it was originally conceived for a Nicaraguan public, a growing number of Costa Ricans are attending the fair. Walking among the stalls of the fair is a multisensory experience that shows the great cultural diversity that inhabits Nicaragua. There are Caribbean products and recipes from native peoples. There is comfort food, urban street food that cures any hangover and traditional dishes that are eaten at Christmas. There are refreshing drinks and hot beverages. There are also clothes, ornaments, hats and souvenirs of the multiple resistances that these people have given birth to. In their stalls they do not just offer a plate of food, they offer us a lesson of geography and culture, a lesson of history, politics and life.

Image 122
Jacob selling food at the Feria Pinolera



Next to the food and handcraft stands, the fair is also a space for art. People usually stay all day, and as the afternoon progresses the atmosphere warms up with traditional dances, masquerades and live music. On one occasion they screened a documentary about the popular uprising against the Ortega dictatorship, and on another occasion the fair was the finishing point for a large demonstration against Ortega's regime.

Image 123
Traditional dances



Image 124
Olguita Acuña singing



Costa Rican philosopher Alexander Jiménez says:

en tiempos de penuria solo la solidaridad entre desconocidos permite comprender la supervivencia de los seres más empobrecidos. Si algunos pobres siguen alimentando a otros pobres, aun cuando no tengan más lazo entre ellos que el hambre y la necesidad, si la mayoría de los indigentes sobreviven a sociedades excluyentes y opresivas como las latinoamericanas, eso no sucede de milagro. Hay sobrevivencias que solo se explican por las redes de solidaridad y los lazos diarios, invisibles, que

sostienen a los pobres aún frente a las embestidas de un sistema político y económico degradado y voraz²⁸⁸ (A. Jiménez 2005, 94).

The Feria Pinolera is a celebration of life. It is a project that subverts the logic that causes hunger in the city and resists the dynamics that benefit from it. The cooks offer us dishes and smiles. I observe them sharing their plates with each other, telling stories, giving each other advice, embracing each other with affection. The organizers of the fair do not have much, but what they share what they have. When there is hunger, they try to solve it collectively. Solidarity overcomes competition. Community is stronger than individualism.

Image 385
Organizers of the Feria Pinolera



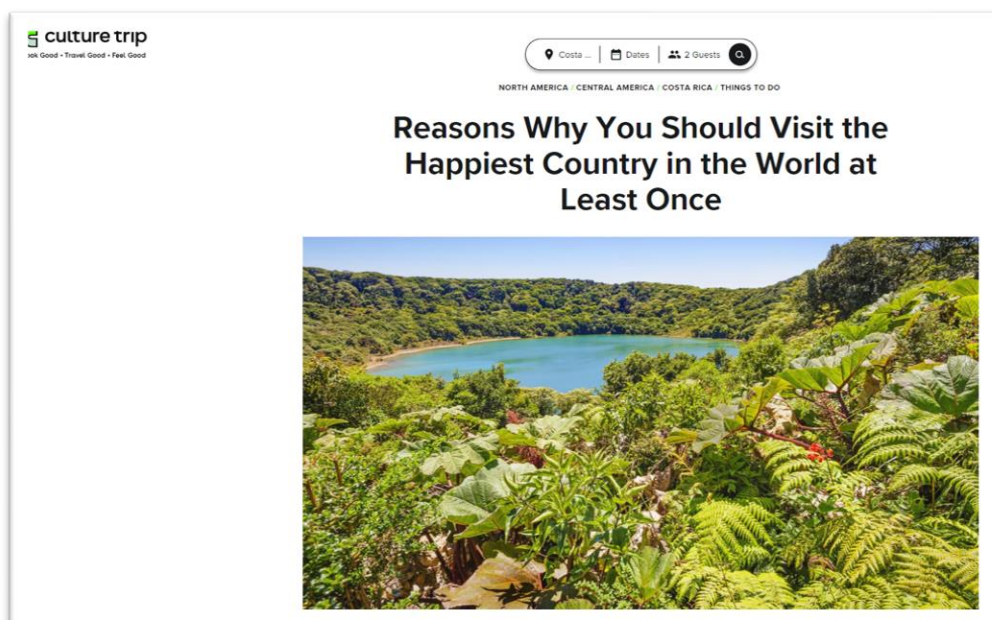
²⁸⁸ Free translation: In times of scarcity, only solidarity among strangers allows us to understand the survival of the most impoverished beings. If some poor people continue to feed other poor people, even when they have no other link between them than hunger and need, if the majority of the indigents survive in excluding and oppressive societies such as those in Latin America, it is not a miracle. There are survivals that can only be explained by the solidarity networks and the daily, invisible ties that sustain the poor even in the face of the onslaught of a degraded and voracious political and economic system.

PART III “Inclusive Costa Rica”, the happiest country in the world

Costa Rica has benefited greatly from its designation by the Wellbeing Economy Alliance (WEAll) as the happiest country in the world. With a score of 62.1 in the Happy Planet Index, Costa Rica was appointed as the happiest country among 152 countries for the 4th time in a row. According to WEAll, “strong social networks, investment in health and education, and a deep connection to nature may help explain why Costa Ricans are happier and live longer than the residents of most wealthy nations” (Wellbeing Economy Alliance 2021a, para. 1).

The result of this index has been marketed as a slogan that appears in state campaigns and commercial brands to promote tourism, as shown in image 126.

Image 126
Costa Rica on Culture Trip



Source: Culture Trip, (<https://theculturetrip.com/central-america/costa-rica/articles/15-reasons-why-you-should-visit-the-worlds-happiest-country-at-least-once/>)

This slogan has even been promoted as part of the country brand, Essential Costa Rica²⁸⁹, which projects the image of a green Costa Rica, committed to the protection of the environment.

²⁸⁹ Essential Costa Rica is the country’s nation branding strategy, aimed at positioning and capitalizing the country’s image in the international market, promoting tourism, foreign investments and the acquisition of exportation products (Essential Costa Rica, n.d.).

Image 127
Essential Costa Rica



Source: Esencial Costa Rica,
(<https://www.esencialcostarica.com/pura-vida-costa-rica-pais-mas-feliz-del-mundo/>)

The Happy Planet Index is calculated by means of a formula that combines three measures: Well-being (calculated through polls collected by Gallup World Poll, in which residents of each country rate the quality of their lives overall, using a scale from 0 to 10), multiplied by Life Expectancy (based on data formulated by the United Nations Development Program), and divided by Ecological Footprint (a measure prepared by the Global Footprint Network, using the global hectares per person -gha- unit, which is the average amount of land needed, per person, to sustain a country's typical consumption patterns) (Wellbeing Economy Alliance 2021b).

Foucault affirmed that “the two major elements of reality that government will have to handle are economy and opinion” (Foucault 2009, 353). It seems that, in the case of Costa Rica, the amalgamation of these two elements has been very fruitful. The WEAll itself cautions that this index does not take into account the human rights situation when calculating its measurement:

Human rights abuses are a problem in most of the world, including in some of the high-ranking countries in the Happy Planet Index results. While the Happy Planet Index may reflect some of the negative impacts of these abuses, it does not seek to directly measure this (Wellbeing Economy Alliance 2021a, para. 6).

This could explain why, even though the situation in Costa Rica is not as serious as in other countries in the region where necropolitics is the norm that governs daily life, people from certain groups or populations seem to live in a Costa Rica that is very different from the one that is portrayed as the happiest country in the world.

A paradigmatic example is the situation faced by the different indigenous peoples in their territories in the country. According to a report on aggressions and human rights violations against indigenous peoples in the southern zone of Costa Rica, in 2020, 86 aggressions were reported in the territories of the southern zone of Costa Rica alone (Chaves 2021, 13). The report analyzes the threats and aggressions to the psychological, physical, spiritual and life integrity suffered by the Bribri peoples of Salitre and Iriría Bribri Sá Ká, Brörán peoples from Térraba and Cabécar peoples from China Kichá territories during 2020. The aggressions include beatings and attacks with firearms, bladed weapons, and chemical substances, homicide, attempted homicide, intimidation, threats and racist insults, burning and destruction of their homes, crops and belongings, looting of archaeological sites, criminalization and police abuse (Chaves 2021, 34–36). In less than 1 year, two indigenous leaders fighting for the defense of territory were murdered in Costa Rica: Sergio Rojas Ortiz, from the Uniwák Clan of the Bribri People of Salitre, murdered in March 2019 and Jerhy Rivera Rivera, of the Brörán People, murdered in February 2020. The report also highlights that indigenous women also suffer from the intertwining of various systems of oppression, as in the case of attacks by non-indigenous mobs on the Brörán Peoples in Térraba territory and Cabécar Peoples in China Kichá, in which insults and threats of racist and sexual nature were hurled at indigenous women.

Despite formal charges have been filed, most of the aggressions remain unpunished. This should not be surprising, given that the State is recognized as the second most important agent of violence (after landowners) faced by these peoples (Chaves 2021, 41). Taking into account that indigenous peoples have sustained a long and tireless struggle against colonial and capitalist destruction of the land, these data reflect the contradiction between the discourse of a green and happy country promoted by our national brand, and the reality faced by indigenous peoples in their territories in the face of structural and naturalized racism that we rarely speak of.

“Los jóvenes costarricenses dicen ser altamente felices²⁹⁰” (Jiménez 1998, 11) philosopher Alexander Jiménez notes with suspicion in reference to a study published in the newspaper *La Nación* on August 16, 1996. This study also pointed out that these same young people affirmed that they did not want to marry “negros del África²⁹¹” or mestizos from Latin America, and they expressed antipathy for Cuba (despite never having visited that country). The study did not include the item, but surely if these happy young people had been asked, they would have answered that they were not willing to marry an indigenous person either. The happiness of these young people seems to be anchored in an imaginary of whiteness and superiority that borders on supremacism.

²⁹⁰ Free translation: Young Costa Ricans say they are exceedingly happy.

²⁹¹ I keep the original wording (literally: blacks from Africa) since it is yet another example of structural racism.

As Sayak Valencia points out, in gore capitalism,

Nationalist discourse is encouraged and inflamed in order to dismantle or immobilize nations themselves, so that all activities are directly opened to the market. This is evidenced by the fact that the majority of European countries in which the political right is in power defend a neoliberal economy while simultaneously deploying a conservative discourse that appeals to nationalism. Nonetheless, underlying the tenets of nationalism is the system of nation-market that imposes parameters of personal, cultural, social and international identity through the use of registered trademarks (™), logos (®), names (©), companies, popular iconography, theories and so on, a process that presupposes purchasing power in order to confer a *status quo* that serves as a model for identity (Valencia 2018, 28–29).

It is in this context that I formulate the question: what is inclusion? Authorities and citizens often claim that Costa Rica is the most inclusive country in the region. But what does this mean? Who is to be included and what are they being included to? Who are excluded from the practices and discourses of inclusion pretend to be all-encompassing? These questions guide the course of the chapters contained in this part, which seeks to question the uses given to the notion of inclusion in the framework of neoliberal Costa Rica, traversed by the coloniality of its national imaginaries.

This part contains 3 chapters that explore the form that discourses of inclusion have taken when put into practice by various social actors. *Chapter 6. The political economy of diversity* begins by reviewing some critical proposals on the concept of inclusion, in dialogue with the reflections embodied by the participants of this study on the subject. I then attempt to outline the context in which neoliberal policies, the ideology of the Catholic and Neo-Pentecostal churches, and the political progressivism are configured in a tense relationship that is the substratum of what we call inclusion in Costa Rica today. Subsequently, I elaborate some reflections on the effects that the process of "NGOization"²⁹² has had in the country, as these organizations have played a key role in the administration of the biopolitics of inclusion in Costa Rica and in the region. Finally, I address some alternative collective practices, which although not labeled with the concept of inclusion, seek to sustain the lives of those who are left out of the neoliberal practices of inclusion.

Chapter 7. The profitability of inclusion, addresses the growing business of inclusion, and the effects that diversity management and rainbow capitalism practices have on subjectivities. I begin by critically analyzing the notion of sexual citizenship, its limitations, and its absences. I put in tension the normativity that shapes the *homocitizen* and pushes them to assimilation. I analyze some expressions that this normativity takes in Costa Rica, in the form of politics and lifestyle. Furthermore, I analyze certain practices of gay entrepreneurship and corporativism, that have been bolstered by the rise of

²⁹² *NGOization* is a term that has been used to describe the normative and homogenizing process promoted by international cooperation, in which social collectives are invited to adapt their forms of organization to the formal structure and functioning of Non-Governmental Organizations.

discourses of rainbow inclusion. Finally, I explore some expressions of resistance to the classist, masculinist and whitewashing assimilation that drive these projects.

Finally, *chapter 8. What is a safe space?* explores the practices and projects of inclusion in the city, regarding housing, leisure, and safety. The question of safe spaces leads the analysis to habitational projects, queer regeneration entrepreneurship, inclusive bars and gay friendly restaurants, parks and streets of the city. This chapter seeks to expand the boundaries of the restrictive notion of safe space, highlighting that some bodies, even if they are queer, are not admitted into spaces that offer safety. In dialogue with the participants, we explore the artisanal mechanisms they have developed to guarantee personal and collective safety in those interstices that the discourses of inclusion fail to cover. These discussions are not intended to revictimize the people who embody these alternative security practices, but to learn with them that there are other paths beside or against neoliberal normativity.

Chapter 6. The political economy of diversity

*Croire au droit, c'est mauvais
pour la santé mentale et subjective
(Bourcier 2017, 46).*

Costa Rica claims to be the most inclusive country in the Central American region. Our rulers tour Europe boasting about their achievements in terms of inclusive policies.

Image 128
President Carlos Alvarado meets with King Felipe VI



Source: Europa Press, <https://www.europapress.es/nacional/noticia-rey-traslada-presidente-costa-rica-compromiso-espana-integracion-centroamericana-20220328152836.html>

The photograph above shows a meeting between the president of Costa Rica and the King of Spain in 2022, during his last tour of Spain and France. A few days before the second round of the 2022 presidential elections, President Alvarado seized this encounter to send a message all the way from Europe to his future successor. He asked for them not to go backwards on human rights issues such as equal marriage and therapeutic abortion (Soto 2022). It is noteworthy that the way in which President Alvarado presents his speech makes people think that the achievements in human rights are the product of his government and his party, rendering invisible the historical struggles of activists and collectives without whom the changes at the legal and cultural level would not have been possible. Beyond this, shortly after the publication of this article, more than 20 LGBTIQ organizations made a statement clarifying that the President's speech is misleading, since it is not within the authority of the President of the Republic to eliminate the figure of egalitarian marriage. The organizations called on candidates and politicians to stop using the rights of LGBTIQ people as a bargaining chip for the elections.

This is not the first time that rulers of the Partido Acción Ciudadana (PAC), have sought to boost their résumé with rainbow reports. The PAC party that has profited a lot from the discourse of inclusion and human rights. For some years now, government representatives from this political party travel around the world talking about human rights and respect for diversity, and every May 17th they raise the rainbow flag in every public institution. While it is true that today Costa Rica is the country of Central America with the most progressive legislation for trans* people and same-sex couples, government representatives do not speak of the institutional violence, the police abuse, the decades of persecution, assassination and repression that our people, especially trans women, have survived. Nor do they talk about what happens to "human rights" in indigenous territories, or what it means to be trans* or queer in a racialized body, without a stable job, or without a home.

Sometimes I have the feeling that the more we talk about inclusion, the more this signifier is emptied of content. It is a sort of anomie of meaning, as Santiago Alba Rico (2006) points out, that usually happens when pretty concepts, such as democracy, freedom and inclusion, are incorporated and eroded in politics. These concepts are so detached from the responsibility that implicates us in them, that we can use them to embellish our discourses without sustaining a coherence in our actions. Thus, what are we talking about when we talk about inclusion? Are the laws that regulate marriage or civil status an expression of inclusion? How do the practices of inclusion work in the Costa Rican context? Who do these practices include and who do they exclude?

Brazilian social psychologist Bader Sawaia proposes the notion of dialectic of inclusion/exclusion to problematize the discourses of inclusion in neoliberal times where, while promoting a notion of inclusion that is quite restrictive and functional to capitalism, the structural causes of the oppressions that provoke "exclusion" are avoided. Exclusion, says Sawaia, is a complex and multifaceted process, a configuration of the dimensions of thinking, feeling and acting, mediated by social determinations mediated by race, class, age and gender (Sawaia 1999b, 110). Social exclusion, says Sawaia, is not only a product of neoliberal capitalism, but is part of the engine that drives capital accumulation. In contrast to the fragmentary definitions, so common in Western thought, that approach the processes of exclusion by alluding only to one of its sides (discrimination, poverty, etc.), Sawaia proposes a critical reading through the notion of dialectic inclusion/exclusion, which manages to address the different forms in which social injustice is produced (Sawaia 1999a).

...optar pela expressão dialética exclusão/inclusão é para marcar que ambas não constituem categorias em si, cujo significado é dado por qualidades específicas invariantes, contidas em cada um dos termos, mas que são da mesma substância e

formam um par indissociável, que se constitui na própria relação²⁹³ (Sawaia 1999b, 108)

Inclusion/exclusion, says Sawaia, does not refer to a dichotomy or a pair of opposites. On the contrary, they are two facets of the same phenomenon, which exists and is sustained in contradiction:

“A sociedade exclui para incluir e esta transmutação é condição da ordem social desigual, o que implica o caráter ilusório da inclusão... A lógica dialética explica a reversibilidade da relação entre subjetividade e legitimação social e revela as filigranas do processo que liga o excluído ao resto da sociedade no processo de manutenção da ordem social...”²⁹⁴ (Sawaia 1999a, 8)

The excluded are not outside the system. The system "includes" them in that condition we call "exclusion", a condition that is necessary for the status quo, insofar as the oppression and exploitation of these beings sustains the commodities of others. The excluded are not the opposite of the included, the excluded is the condition that supports the lives lived by those of us who shelter under the banner of inclusion.

From her studies with people who are excluded from what we commonly call human rights (for example, unhoused people), she concludes that exclusion generates a particular form of suffering, which she calls "ethical-political suffering", whose genesis lies in the awareness of the feeling of worthlessness, a product of social delegitimization and rejection, and the desire to "be people" (Sawaia 1999b, 109). In my own research, I would rather say that more than the desire to "be people", what I found was the rabid desire to be treated as such, to have their bodies, their lives, their ideas and their feelings treated with respect, to live a life free of violence, in short, to live with dignity.

For instance, when Jacob explains to me that he has not been able to get the Immigration Office to put his name on his asylum-seeker's card, so he has to get through each day of his life in exile with a name that visibly does not fit him²⁹⁵, he speaks with anger and pain:

²⁹³ Free translation: Opting for the dialectical expression exclusion/inclusion is to point out that both are not categories in themselves, whose meaning is given by specific invariant qualities contained in each of the terms, but that they are of the same substance and form an inseparable pair, which is constituted in the relationship itself.

²⁹⁴ Free translation: Society excludes to include and this transmutation is a condition of the unequal social order, which implies the illusory character of inclusion... Dialectical logic explains the reversibility of the relationship between subjectivity and social legitimation and reveals the filigrees of the process that links the excluded to the rest of society in the process of maintaining the social order.

²⁹⁵ In Costa Rica, trans* people have been allowed to legally change our names since 2018 (the change of registered sex or the recognition of self-perceived gender is taking more time). However, for several years the right to a name has been accessible only to Costa Rican citizens of legal age. Minors and asylum seekers received as consolation the figure that we trans* citizens had to carry for many years: a field stating the "known as" on the identity card. This "known as" has legal value, insofar as it can be included in official documents, but always in a secondary place, after the legal name. Those of us who lived for some time in Costa Rica under this figure know that in practice it is an ornament, since the institutions, the law and the market continue to use the

“Cuando yo vine yo dije: Wow aquí me puedo llamar Jacob Ellis y no como me puso mi madre. Igual ni en migración han reconocido eso, porque el CC para mí no existe. Porque yo estudié, y el CC [conocido como] es como para una persona disocial y yo no soy disocial... Además de eso, me escribieron mal mi nombre, porque mi nombre, obviamente, el que me puso mi madre es un nombre inglés... Y con todo y el pasaporte, se los enseñé... En mi pasaporte sale escrito una cosa y en el gran carnet de solicitante de refugio estaba escrito mal²⁹⁶” (Jacob, in discussion with the author, October 30, 2019)

Jacob's complaint is not because he wants to "be a person". In his reflection, the awareness that he is a person vividly palpitates, a living being who deserves respect, and yet the institution that regulates the legality of his existence in this territory insists on denying his self-determination in his identity card. For Jacob, because of his history and his culture, a "known as" is a figure used to refer to people generally linked to organized crime, a sort of criminal nickname that authorities publish in the media when looking for a suspect. “Yo no soy una persona disocial, yo soy una persona muy profesional, con capacidades y habilidades, que acá en Costa Rica he aportado mucho al desarrollo dentro de mi organización...²⁹⁷”, Jacob insists with sorrow.

This kind of situations have even led him to refuse or renounce aid and subsidies from the State and humanitarian organizations such as UNHCR and HIAS. Jacob resents the treatment he has received from this so-called humanitarian system: “Porque todos miran a la persona como número. Y mientras vos mirés a alguien como número, no, no vas a tener esa empatía de saber, en realidad, por qué están²⁹⁸” (Jacob, in discussion with the author, October 30, 2019).

He is even troubled about his application for refugee status at times. It is a complex and painful position. Jacob is aware that obtaining refugee status is not going to resolve his life, but he also knows that it is the best he can hope for in this country. It is clear to him that the refugee card is just a crumb of safety against all the violence he faces in the street, and at times he wonders if it is worth submitting

registered name. We can imagine the complications this can bring for an asylum seeker, who already faces daily rejection and the obstacles in an inhospitable city. In general, most of them end up using the legal name that does not identify them, just to avoid the violence of institutions and capital. This is why trans* Costa Rican and migrant activists have fought to ensure that migrants can have that minimum gesture of respect that is to be called by their name. As a result of these struggles, the Immigration office has recently enabled a procedure for the change of name on the asylum seeker's card (without any mention or recognition of the struggles that opened this path, of course).

²⁹⁶ Free translation: When I came here, I said: Wow, here people will call me Jacob Ellis and not what my mother named me. But the immigration authorities haven't even recognized that, because a CC [know as] doesn't exist for me. Because I studied, and the CC is used for like a dissocial person and I am not dissocial... Besides that, they spelled my name wrong, because my name, obviously, the one my mother gave me is an English name... And even though I showed them my passport and everything... I have one thing written on my passport and in the famous asylum seeker card it was written wrong.

²⁹⁷ Free translation: I am not a dissocial person, I am a very professional person, with abilities and skills, and here in Costa Rica I have contributed a lot to development within my organization...

²⁹⁸ Free translation: Because everybody looks at the person as a number. And as long as you look at someone as a number, no, you're not going to have that empathy of knowing, in reality, why they're there.

to this other violence, that of the institutional norm: “Mis principios, eso no lo es. Porque eso es encajarse en otra condición y yo no estoy para encajarme en condiciones que dicen los roles del Estado y del sistema²⁹⁹” (Jacob, in discussion with the author, October 30, 2019).

For Jacob, inclusion is precisely that, renunciation, submission, dropping part of his being and his identity in order to fit into the rigid molds of the State. But this renunciation is presented as a right, as a benefit, as a choice. No one is forcing Jacob to submit to the rules of international law, and yet I wonder what choice does a person who fled his village to protect his life really has. As Spade says: “...the emotional or affective registers of neoliberalism are attuned to notions of ‘freedom’ and ‘choice’ that obscure systemic inequalities and turn social movements toward goals of inclusion and incorporation and away...” (Spade 2015, 22).

Jacob does not want to “be people,” as Sawaia suggests. Jacob knows he is a person, and what he wants is to be treated as such:

¿Cuando yo me doy cuenta que yo era una mierda? En un momento, cuando yo vine a Costa Rica. Porque mis derechos aquí fueron pa, pa, pa. Entonces a veces yo me pregunto, cuáles son esos criterios de selección? Si la gente para beneficios es zona vulnerable, pueblos indígenas, afrodescendientes o ven a la gente como número, como eso, y nosotros no tenemos los números. Entonces está bien, yo entiendo, pero que el trato sea justo, igualitario para la comunidad LGTB. Muchos de nosotros, de la comunidad hemos hecho grupos de autoapoyo porque, porque la depresión, la ansiedad, han entrado en un cuadro de suicidio, y yo no quiero que la gente de la comunidad se siga muriendo. Yo sé que estamos acá, y lo estamos pasando duro, y que todo es por el sistema mierda de Daniel Ortega Murillo con la Chayo, pero espero que esto termine pronto, porque Costa Rica no tiene políticas para personas emigrantes, y mucho menos para personas de la comunidad LGTB. Y me duele³⁰⁰ (Jacob, in discussion with the author, October 30, 2019).

As we shall see, in today's Costa Rica, the notion of inclusion is becoming increasingly narrow, reflecting the fragmented vision that Sawaia (1999a) criticizes, a synecdoche in which a part (the exclusion experienced by gay and lesbian couples because of their sex/affective relations) is taken for the whole (the exclusion, exploitation and violence suffered by queer and trans people, impoverished sectors, racialized populations, among others). In the last decade the discourse of inclusion in Costa

²⁹⁹ Free translation: Those are not my principles. Because that is to adjust to another condition, and I am not here to adjust to the conditions that the roles of the State and the system dictate.

³⁰⁰ Free translation: When did I realize that I was a piece of shit? In an instant, when I came to Costa Rica. Because my rights here went boom, boom, boom. So sometimes I ask myself, what are those selection criteria? If the people eligible for benefits are vulnerable zones, indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, or if they see people as numbers, like that, and we don't have the numbers. So fine, I understand, but the treatment should be fair, equal for the LGTB community. Many of us from the community have formed self-support groups because, because of depression, anxiety, people have become suicidal, and I don't want people from the community to keep dying. I know that we are here, and we are having a hard time, and that everything is because of the shitty system of Daniel Ortega Murillo with Chayo, but I hope this ends soon, because Costa Rica does not have policies for migrants, much less for people of the LGBT community. And it hurts me.

Rica has taken a dizzying turn towards the rainbow, becoming a topic of debate and social polarization among those who support a progressive agenda in terms of rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual and to some extent queer, trans and non-binary people (intersex people continue to be produced as an absence in most inclusion discourses and projects). This rainbow inclusion has followed the line drawn in the United States, with an agenda focused on obtaining civil and property rights, with great weight on the legalization of same-sex unions. Critical activists such as the Against Equality collective have called this the Holly trinity of mainstream gay and lesbian politics: gay marriage, gays in the military, and hate crime legislation (Conrad et al. 2014, 6). In Costa Rica we do not have an army, so inclusion has been aimed at other types of industrial complexes typical of the third world that aspires to be Global North. Otherwise, the agenda in recent years has been focused on the approval of "inclusive" laws and policies that reproduce assimilation and homonormativity.

Several researchers, activists and thinkers have pointed out the dangers of framing struggles for justice and resistances against violence exclusively in the field of law³⁰¹. Although laws in the field of human rights seek to safeguard access to a series of rights, the truth is that they are also part of this machinery of the modern state, they are inescapably part of the normative system of the Nation-state, and therefore, however progressive they may seem, they are usually based on (or even aggravate) the conditions of oppression of populations historically affected by necropolitics. The inclusive policies of the Nation-state are inscribed in the dialectic of inclusion/exclusion, and while they attempt to combat the visible manifestations of discrimination, violence and exclusion, they hardly touch the roots that feed oppressions.

In an interview/parcour with José Zambrano, a gay activist from Honduras who was sheltered in Costa Rica in a program for the protection of human rights defenders threatened in their countries of origin, we talked about "inclusion". He explained how he sees the situation in Costa Rica:

Bueno creo que se ve, se ve el adelanto, se ve la Costa Rica democrática, se ve. Pero también hay otra Costa Rica, verdad, que es aquella Costa Rica también que no está realmente respaldando estas exigencias, por decir así. Como te decía, hay personas en situación de calle, hay personas en situación de extrema pobreza, hay personas también en situación de desempleo. Están aquí personas en situación de exilio. O hay personas necesitadas de un tratamiento, ¿verdad? Entonces creo que debería de valorarse más el valor que tiene el ser humano o la vida, ¿verdad?. Que no importa si es nacional o es un extranjero, ¡es una persona! Creo que se contradice con el tema de una nación democrática y con avances educativos. Ves... un país con participación, con adelanto en leyes y todo, pero si dejamos a otros atrás, o vemos unos de menos, digamos, porque no tienen eso o no tienen lo otro, con estas carencias creo que no

³⁰¹ Further discussions of the subject can be read in Spade 2015; Bourcier 2017; Nair 2014; Spade and Willse 2014; Bornstein 2014; or the various interesting and urgent reflections available at: <http://www.againstequality.org/>

es realmente una democracia, por decirlo así. ¿Verdad?³⁰² (José, in discussion with the author, October 21, 2019).

José puts into question the imaginary of the idealized democracy, and brings to the table some of those sub-populations that inclusion does not seem to reach: impoverished people, people without shelter, migrants, people with HIV. We could name many more. Those sub-populations that receive the onslaught of necropolitics, for whom administrative advances that carry the banner of their identities (such as equal marriage or regulations prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity), do not seem to translate into material transformations that alleviate or improve their living conditions.

Administrative systems, warns Spade (2015), present themselves as neutral when in fact they are part of this system that produces daily injustice. Inclusion is part of this biopolitical and necropolitical system of life and death administration.

The existence and operation of such administrative norms is therefore less visible than those moments when people are fired or killed or excluded explicitly because of their race or body type or gender, yet they sometimes produce more significant harm because they structure the entire context of life (Spade 2015, 5)

Violence has deeper roots than the expressions of discrimination that we white and mestizo queer people may face in our jobs, universities or in our middle-class neighborhoods. This is not to say that discrimination in our workspace should not be fought, but it raises a warning against these traps of racist and patriarchal capitalism, which restricts inclusion to those who assimilate to a neoliberal normativity, while sustaining and intensifying the structural oppressions that underpin modern normality (Spade 2015).

José points to the contradiction that this chapter aims to address, that dialectic of inclusion/exclusion, in which one does not exist without the other, and where inclusion often implies at the same time exclusion and oppression. When inclusion is presented as a monothematic agenda, when it is detached from class struggles, when the rainbow does not admit black and brown, it combats only the most visible expressions of violence against the bodies that inhabit the *zone of being*, while in the *zone of non-being* violence and death continue to threaten existence. It is yet another example, as

³⁰² Free translation: Well, I think you can see, you can see the progress, you can see the democratic Costa Rica, you can see it. But there is also another Costa Rica, right, which is that Costa Rica that is not really supporting these demands, so to speak. As I was saying, there are people living on the streets, there are people living in extreme poverty, there are people who are unemployed. There are people in exile. Or there are people in need of treatment [for HIV], you know. So I think we should appreciate more the value of the human being or life, shouldn't we? It doesn't matter if they are nationals or foreigners, they are people! I think it contradicts the theme of a democratic nation with educational advances. You see... a country with participation, with progress in laws and everything, but if we leave others behind, or we see some of them as less, let's say, because they do not have these or do not have the that, with these deficiencies, I think it is not really a democracy, to put it that way. Right?

Spade points out, of how “how life chances are distributed through racialized-gendered systems of meaning and control, often in the form of programs that attest to be race-and gender-neutral and merely administrative” (Spade 2015, 5).

Following this critical line, I want to analyze some contemporary discourses and practices of inclusion in Costa Rica, and especially in the city of San José. For this, it is necessary to understand the context in which they emerge and develop. In the previous chapters I have developed a reading of the way in which coloniality shapes national imaginaries, public policies and inequalities in this country. In the following I will briefly address the way in which neoliberal policies, the ideology of the Catholic and Christian churches, and the political progressivism discourses are configured in a tense relationship that which holds together what we call inclusion in Costa Rica today.

6.1. A rainbow styled bargaining chip

“Se supone que Costa Rica es el lugar, es el país donde se defienden los derechos humanos, obviamente desde la comunidad [LGTBIQ+]. Pero también entender que existe el clasismo, y no todo el mundo es garante de tus derechos...”³⁰³ (Jacob, discusión with the author, November 26, 2019). Jacob points out two problematic knots that are key to this study. On the one hand: the image of Costa Rica as the country of human rights and inclusion for people who are grouped under the acronym LGBTIQ+. On the other hand, the fragility of this discourse when dissidents from the heteronormativity also embody other conditions of oppression. It seems as if sex/gender dissidence is not enough to enter the internationally recognized LGBTIQ+ umbrella, because when it intersects with conditions such as racialization or impoverishment, rights remain merely a pretty discourse on paper:

Entonces es como ese discurso que venden, de los derechos humanos... es como el doble discurso de la gran Costa Rica defensora de los derechos humanos, que no tiene nada que ver con la realidad. Porque la realidad es otra cosa, y sí he visto, pues, que acá lo que dan es estadía, pero la promoción de derechos humanos de las personas, ellos se lo pasan por donde más les conviene. Y todo es en papel, porque el papel aguanta...³⁰⁴ (Jacob, discusión with the author, October 30, 2019).

In previous chapters we explored some of the historical processes that have propelled Costa Rica to position itself as an emblem of peace, democracy and human rights. But how and at what point concepts such as human rights and inclusion became synonymous with the civil and economic rights agenda of the gay and lesbian citizens is something worth exploring. It is clear that to a large extent

³⁰³ Free translation: Costa Rica is supposed to be the place, the country where human rights are defended, obviously from the [LGTBIQ+] community. But we must also understand that classism exists, and not everyone is a guarantor of your rights...

³⁰⁴ Free translation: So it is like that discourse they sell, of human rights... it is like the double standard of the great Costa Rica, defender of human rights, which has nothing to do with reality. Because the reality is something else, and I have seen, well, that here what they give is a place to stay, but the promotion of human rights of the people, they shove it wherever it suits them best. And everything is on paper, because paper holds up anything.

this symbolic anchoring of inclusion with the rainbow flag is influenced by what happens in these matters in the Global North, especially in the United States, which always marks a horizon for Costa Rica. However, there are particularities for a country like Costa Rica, located in the third world, tied by its feet by relations of dependency with international financial organizations, with other nations and with international cooperation, and by the hands by the churches, which are undoubtedly another transnational economic and political power.

6.1.1. The establishment of the neoliberal reign

Costa Rica, like so many other countries of the Global South, has been a testing ground for the most rapacious neoliberal policies of contemporary capitalism. The policies, always dictated from outside, but welcomed with devotion by the national elites, have not passed without resistance, but as we shall see, in the history of neoliberalism in Costa Rica, one way or the other, capital always wins.

Neoliberalism dominates our economy and penetrates our subjectivity, it produces it, configures our identity, in a line that links contemporary dependency with the submission to the Spanish Crown. The line is called coloniality. It is not surprising, then, that the currency in this country is called “colón”. Colón which in Spanish is the name of Christopher Columbus, whose effigy appeared in 1897 on the 20 colones coins.

Image 129
20 colones coin



Source: Historia de Costa Rica,
(https://www.instagram.com/p/CVbr2kUrw7U/?utm_medium=share_sheet)

Although the law that established the colón as currency dates back to 1896, today it continues to be the currency used on a daily basis, without major questioning of its symbolic weight. In touristic areas

and in stores for consumers with high purchasing power, the dollar is usually the dominant currency, without this implying, in any way, a break with the imperialist and colonial heritage, of course. Not even when, in 2021 a commemorative coin was designed on the occasion of the bicentennial of independence, was the name of our currency questioned, nor was the weight of carrying the name of the conqueror debated. The coin was designed by graphic designer José María Castro Madriz, descendant of a former president who was one of the founders of the Republic of Costa Rica. He donated the rights to the design to the Central Bank of Costa Rica, in what was catalogued by this entity as "an act of patriotism".

Image 130
Bicentennial commemorative coin



Source: Historia de Costa Rica, (<https://www.instagram.com/p/CWvyP5Up3jE/>)

On the back, the words "freedom, peace and democracy" are written. The coin shows a map of an "open and global Costa Rica, which assumes its place in the world, represented by the globe". (Ministerio de Cultura y Juventud de Costa Rica 2021). Globalization in this Costa Rica "open to the world" did not come without taking its toll. As in the rest of Central America, the Costa Rican people have paid with hunger for the implementation of neoliberalism.

I take on David Harvey definition of neoliberalism as a political project (2005; 2016) carried out by the corporate capitalists class, either to restore class position to ruling elites, or to create conditions for capitalists class formation on former socialist countries (Harvey 2007). Harvey sustains that neoliberalism has proven to be rather unsuccessful at revitalizing global capital, but on the redistributive side, it has managed to restore class power (2007, 29), channeling wealth and income from the mass of the population to the upper classes, and from vulnerable countries to richer ones

(2007, 34), by the means of what he calls *accumulation by dispossession*, “a continuation and proliferation of accretion practices that Marx had designated as ‘primitive’ or ‘original’ during the rise of capitalism” (2007, 34). In simple terms, Dean Spade says, with neoliberalism “the rich have gotten richer and the poor have gotten poorer” (Spade 2015, 22).

But in order for this political project to become dominant, says Harvey (2007), it requires a process of “naturalization”, in which its fundamental concepts become “deeply embedded in commonsense understandings that are taken for granted and beyond question” (24). The effects of this process extend not only to political economy practices, but to the way we think, interpret and understand the world (Harvey 2007, 22). Some authors suggest neoliberalism even configures the way we feel and desire (Sawaia 1999b; Alba Rico 2006), playing a key role in the production of subjectivity.

Neoliberalism is a massive project of exploitation and class violence that Third World countries like Costa Rica know quite well, a form of violence that takes deep roots in colonization and is imbricated with other systems of domination. As Sayak Valencia affirms “it is primarily in the Third World and along its borders where the effects of gore capitalism are most obvious and brutal” (Valencia 2018, 22).

Neoliberalism actually penetrated and settled in Costa Rica in the midst of one of the most complex moments in Central American history, where the blood of the people boiled and ran through the streets and fields, between dictatorships, civil wars, guerrillas and revolutions. It was the debut of the 1980s. The decade of the 1970s had left the United States with a bruised imperial ego, and with the fear of “otros mundos posibles” (other possible worlds) brewing in its backyard. At the time of the wars in Central America and the Sandinista revolution, Costa Rica positioned itself internationally as neutral. However, the supposed neutrality was limited to the armed conflict, because in terms of political economy, Costa Rica aligned itself with the United States and strengthened its relations with the government of Ronald Reagan. The relations were not only symbolic. Between 1982 and 1990, Costa Rica received 1.3 billion dollars from the International Development Agency (IDA) in exchange for becoming the Central American model of capitalist and neoliberal democracy (Valverde 2017, 90). The dream of Costa Rican exceptionalism found another way to differentiate itself from Central America in this neoliberal neutrality. It was a form of combat alongside the armed conflict (in which, it is worth noting, the rulers and people of Costa Rica were also involved, but on different sides).

It is in this context that the radical project of globalization arrived in a Costa Rica already aligned with the United States. Under the argument that the private sector manages resources more efficiently, a series of measures and reforms were promoted that sought to remove the State from the tasks of production and intervention, pushing labor and financial flexibilization (Esquivel 2013, 83). It was not

a question of dismantling the state, but of transforming its role in order to put it at the service of the needs of the market. The State was not to restrict its expansion, but to safeguard its interests. As Harvey points out: “the state, with its monopoly of violence and definitions of legality, plays a crucial role in backing and promoting these processes”(Harvey 2016, 35).

In addition to IDA, international financial organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank played a decisive role in the shift of Latin American economies towards neoliberalism. It is a continuation of dependency relations, in which debt becomes an instrument that enables these organizations to control the economic policy and social investment of indebted countries, “forcing them to focus on producing cash crops in order to make payments on debts instead of investing money in basic necessities and infrastructure within the country, or growing sustenance crops to feed their people” (Spade 2015, 23).

In Costa Rica, these processes took the form of Structural Adjustment Program (SAPs) and Structural Adjustment Loans (SALs), which brought about all that Spade describes as neoliberalism: “policy changes like privatization, trade liberalization, labor and environmental deregulation, the elimination of health and welfare programs, increased immigration enforcement, and the expansion of imprisonment” (Spade 2015, 13). Costa Rica agreed with the World Bank on a first Structural Adjustment Program (SAP I) in 1985, a second (SAP II) in 1989 and a third (SAP III) in 1995. SAP I represented a major change in Costa Rica's economic policy. The development model sustained between 1950 and 1980, with robust state institutions that pursued social justice, was replaced by a market-driven state model. In the productive sphere, the SAPs contemplated a series of measures such as the restructuring of the productive apparatus, promoting the diversification of industrial production and substituting traditional products with non-traditional products for export to markets outside Central America (coconut oil, cashew, macadamia and the devastating pineapple monoculture). Subsidies for basic grains (rice, corn, beans) that circulated in the local market were eliminated, and imports of basic grains were liberalized (Hidalgo 2000).

These export, trade and industrial policies were supported by measures such as the application of a flexible exchange rate through periodic mini-devaluations, a new duty system with a generalized reduction of duties, a new regime of fiscal incentives, which included the elimination of taxes and a system of benefits for the export of non-traditional products destined for new markets, as well as the total exemption of income tax generated in these activities and the exemption of import taxes on the inputs used in these activities (Hidalgo 2000).

In the financial sector, a strong impulse was given to private banking, accompanied by a limitation of credit managed by public banks. Other changes in the public sector included the freezing of contracts

and salaries in the public sector, reform of the pension system, restructuring of the public administration, especially the Ministries of Education and Health, the Costa Rican Social Security Fund (in charge of managing all the country's public clinics and hospitals), among other institutions and autonomous agencies in areas such as electricity generation, telecommunications, tourism and fuels. Some taxes and public service fees were raised. SAP III deepened a policy of privatization and promotion of private enterprise, which culminated in the sale of important state-owned companies and the concession of public works projects to private companies.

Finally, as if they were concerned about the welfare of the population, in the first SAP they included a last block of redistributive measures (clearly insufficient to mitigate the impact of the SAPs on the population), which involved the promotion of workers' cooperatives, housing policies and access to land ownership for peasants (Hidalgo 2000). These measures disappeared for SAP II and SAP III.

In short, in a matter of 10 years the country underwent profound transformations that affected the everyday economy of the majority of the population. In the years that followed, the neoliberal project continued to take hold, especially with the free trade agreements. Neoliberal policies did not always pass peacefully. Opposition was especially strong against SAP III, as well as against a package of measures known as the "ICE combo" that sought to privatize the Costa Rican Electricity Institute (ICE), a huge institution that has been the pride of Costa Rica for decades. In 2000, the "ICE Combo" was approved in Congress, but popular mobilizations paralyzed the country and managed to reverse the approval. Similarly, at the beginning of the 2000s there was a strong popular opposition to the signing of the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) with the United States. In addition to the impact it would have on the national productive sector vis-à-vis large U.S. producers, the CAFTA contemplated a series of parallel reforms (known as the implementation agenda) that would bring more privatization, labor precariousness and even threats to the environment, indigenous peoples, food and national sovereignty. Finally, in 2007, the decision on CAFTA was put to a referendum, and after one of the most intense processes of networked popular organization in every corner of the country, against the millionaire propaganda of the elites and the Costa Rican and U.S. government, CAFTA was approved at the polls with a small margin of 3% over the opposition and a 40% abstention rate.

Image 131
A year of CAFTA, San José, 2008



Caption: After a year of CAFTA, we are still eating shit

The approval of CAFTA was the final blow that consolidated the neoliberal project in Costa Rica, leaving the social movements worn out and fragmented. The neoliberal project has not only made the local economy precarious, but, as Harvey points out

The creation of this neoliberal system has entailed much destruction, not only of prior institutional frameworks and powers (such as the supposed prior state sovereignty over political-economic affairs) but also of divisions of labor, social relations, welfare provisions, technological mixes, ways of life, attachments to the land, habits of the heart, ways of thought, and the like (Harvey 2007, 23).

After a few decades of neoliberal reign, in Costa Rica we are skidding at great speed down the road of inequality, and despite the fact that poverty is spreading and the gap between rich and poor is widening, the general feeling seems to be one of a malaise that is uncomfortable but does not mobilize. The effects of the neoliberal project on social relations are evident. As the philosopher Alexander Jiménez warns:

Se trata de la sustitución global de los horizontes éticos de convivencia y de la colocación de la voracidad financiera y mercantil como modelo de las relaciones humanas. En efecto, no podemos esperar habitar sociedades hospitalarias, mientras las sociedades sean imaginadas y gobernadas como mercados, y los seres humanos como consumidores o pura fuerza laboral³⁰⁵ (A. Jiménez 2005, 88).

³⁰⁵ Free translation: It is about the global substitution of the ethical horizons of coexistence and the positioning of financial and mercantile voracity as the model of human relations. Indeed, we cannot expect to live in hospitable societies as long as societies are imagined and governed as markets, and human beings as consumers or pure labor force.

Under the law of the market, solidarity is increasingly difficult to conjugate. Competition dictates the form that social relations take, reducing the life chances of those populations that have suffered centuries of oppression.

The strong social polarization that divided the country around the "ICE Combo" and CAFTA has not been seen in years. The latest tax reform, promoted by President Carlos Alvarado, generated strikes and mobilizations of some sectors in 2018. This reform has come to worsen the battered economy of the middle and popular classes, while large national and transnational companies continue to evade taxes.

Image 132
Tag: Fuck the IVA



Caption: Fuck the IVA³⁰⁶. Seen in downtown San José

However, fragmentation characterized this movement, and the demonstrations did not succeed in destabilizing the accelerated pace of these policies. On the contrary, we have seen in recent years the increased polarization around issues that, at least on the surface, are of a different nature: the inclusion in the law of the rights of certain populations, such as women and LGBTIQ+ people.

In this sense, self-styled "center" political forces have recovered the struggles of women and people who embody sex/gender dissidences to supply the progressive quota to their policies, while in economic terms are completely compatible with the neoliberal project. This has implied important clashes between the government and the churches, who share ideologies and businesses, but do not

³⁰⁶ IVA is the acronym for the value added tax approved in 2018.

agree on body management politics. The churches, as we shall see, are also important business actors in the neoliberal world.

6.1.2. Faith in the State and the State in Faith: the Confessional State

To understand to weight of the Catholic Church in Costa Rica's politics it is necessary to remember that Costa Rica is the only confessional state in the Americas. The Christian doctrine plays an important role in our national identity, as discussed in chapter 2. This, of course, is a colonial heritage that has accompanied the construction of the nation-state since its beginnings.

Costa Rican feminist researcher Adriana Maroto (2013) identifies several stages in the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Costa Rican State:

1. From Colonial times to the 1880s

The first moment is marked by Spanish domination, which imposed intense evangelization processes in its colonies, justified as a way of civilizing and pacifying the native savages of Abya Yala. With the independence, the relations with the Spanish Crown were transformed, but the influence of the Catholic hierarchies on the politics and daily life of the country constituted a form of continuity of the coloniality of power. Thus, on October 7, 1852, Costa Rica signed a Concordat with the Vatican, which institutionally consolidated the relations of the State with the Catholic Church.

2. Between 1880 y 1930

During this period, the ideas of a liberal Christianity gained strength in Costa Rica. This was not an anti-religious movement, but could be read as a coquetry with secularism, as it sought the separation of the State and the Church, in order to minimize clerical power in the political life of the country. During this period, as part of the constitutional reforms of 1884, the Constitutional Congress of Costa Rica unilaterally annulled the Concordat of 1852. Subsequently, other anti-clerical laws were promoted, which, although they did not seek to break relations with the Holy See, aimed at diminishing its power.

3. 1930-1980

Throughout this period new political alliances with the Catholic Church were created, such as the alliance between Social-Christians, Communists and the Catholic Church during the Reformist State. The defeat of this alliance and the triumph of the Social Democrats in the Civil War of 1948 did not bring about a real break with the Catholic Church. The Founding Board of the Second Republic (1948-1949) even sought the signing of a new concordat with the Vatican, which was frustrated by the refusal of President Figueres to prohibit divorce. Even so, the Catholic Church continued to have great

influence over political decisions during the Benefactor State, reinforcing itself as a fundamental part of the national and cultural identity.

From the second half of the twentieth century, the hierarchy of the Catholic Church established a symbiotic relationship with the State, insofar as it has been an association in which both parties have benefited (Maroto 2013, 195). Thus, between 1949 and 1979, the State legislated in favor of the Church, enabling, for example, priests to be deputies and guaranteeing the participation and influence of the Church in the design and supervision of teaching programs.

4. 1980 to the present

This period is of particular interest since it marks the neoliberal turn. In 1979, José Román Arrieta Villalobos was appointed Archbishop of Costa Rica, inaugurating a neoconservative ecclesiastical practice in the country. During this period, different political, economic, and religious phenomena have caused a slight but progressive decline of Catholicism in Costa Rican society. This should not necessarily be read as a movement towards secularism. Although studies indicate a downward trend in the adherence to a Catholic faith, there has been a parallel increase in the number of people participating in neo-Pentecostal Christian churches (Fuentes 2015).

Despite this, the Catholic Church continues to exercise significant political power. During the past decades, the Catholic Church has played an important role in national decisions regarding the rights of women, youth, gay and lesbian couples, and trans* people. For decades, the Catholic Church has hindered sex education, and has fervently promoted the prohibition of abortion, emergency contraception, and in vitro fertilization. It has contributed with multiple obstacles to prevent the legalization of same-sex unions. In addition to this function of control over bodies, the hierarchs of the Catholic Church are frequently designated as mediators between the government and social movements in situations of social conflict. In this sense, they have directly supported the advance of the neoliberal model in the country. All this has led researchers such as Maroto (2013) to affirm that in Costa Rica, more than a pressure group, the Catholic Church should be understood as an agent of power and significant influence in the development of culture and the State. In this way, the confessional nature of the State, rather than being a historical leftover, should be understood as a process in constant renewal (189).

In Costa Rica, election day always begins with a mass, which is attended by most of the presidential candidates. The participation of the Catholic Church in the public space and in political events has been naturalized (Maroto 2013, 189). It is frequent to find references to God in presidential speeches, and it is common for candidates to commend themselves to God at the beginning of their mandate. The domains of Catholic ideology are also manifested in everyday life: from "God bless you" to the

holy cards stuck to the windows of public offices, religious celebrations in public institutions, Catholic religion lessons in all public and most private schools, catechesis, prayers and masses in public and private schools and colleges.

Image 133
Religious holy cards at the Immigration Office, San José



As Maroto (2013) points out, in Costa Rica, the Catholic Church has played a very important role in the configuration of the national identity that has resulted in the imposition of a morality with strong religious foundations (192). But this influence of the Catholic Church is not only of a subjective and cultural nature. Despite the strength that Liberation Theology³⁰⁷ had in our region, in Costa Rica the Catholic Church quickly aligned itself with the neoliberal project, reinforcing the instrumental rationality on which the market is organized (Pérez 2007).

Through several companies belonging to the Episcopal Conference, the Catholic Church has consolidated itself as an important economic group, with businesses, investments in private corporations, trusts, and offshore companies. Some of these have been investigated in the country for illegal financial intermediation, as is the case of Servicios Pastorales Latinoamericanos S. A., a company registered in Panama that appeared in the Panama Papers scandal for tax evasion (*La Nación* 2018). Servicios Pastorales Latinoamericanos S. A. was also the figure with which the Episcopal Conference participated in the SAMA Group, a powerful mutual fund company in Costa Rica's stock

³⁰⁷ A religious current that accompanied the struggles of the peoples and leftist organizations in the 60s, 70s and 80s, sometimes even by armed means

market. The Catholic Church obtained shares in this group, deposited in this financial institution the totality of its wealth, and several of its hierarchs were even on its board of directors:

Image 134:
Grupo Sama



Source: Semanario Universidad

(<https://historico.semanariouniversidad.com/pais/costa-rica-entre-los-mayores-paraisos-de-capitales-ilicitos/>)

Description: The photo shows the board of directors of the Grupo SAMA. Among them: businessman Víctor Oconitrillo Conejo, Bishop José Francisco Ulloa; Alfonso Gutiérrez Cerdas, lawyer and expert in commercial law; Guillermo Godínez Zúñiga, director of Pastoral Services of the Episcopal Conference; and Carlos Ceciliano Bermúdez.

In 2004, the General Superintendence of Financial Entities initiated an investigation of the links of the Catholic Church with the SAMA Group, for the crime of illegal financial intermediation, which in the country is punishable with imprisonment. Although it did not result in the imprisonment of any of the political or ecclesiastical leaders, these and other scandals clouded their relations and led the Episcopal Conference to decide to withdraw from the SAMA Group's Board of Directors.

In addition to its investments, the Catholic Church directly receives money from public funds, as a consequence of the confessional State. To cite some figures: a journalistic investigation developed by the television station Repretel showed that in 2008, the ministries of Foreign Affairs, Culture and Government and Police contributed with \$275,665 to the Catholic Church. In 2009 the same ministries increased the figure to \$512,216. In 2010, with the electoral triumph of the virgin's favorite daughter, Laura Chinchilla, state contributions to the church tripled.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Chinchilla played an important role in reconciling Catholic Church authorities with the government, after a brief rift in 2007, due to differences over the national discussion on the approval of CAFTA and the national polarization around the open-pit mining project

in the northern region of the country. With the symbolic act of consecrating the powers of the republic to Christ, a new honeymoon begins between the political power, the economic elites and the Catholic authorities. Chinchilla promised to maintain a fluid dialogue with the Catholic church, which in practice translated into a strong increase of state funding to the church's coffers. Thus, during the first year of Chinchilla's government, the Ministry of Education joined the list of collaborators, and that year the amount of State contributions to the Catholic Church reached \$1,977,142. The memes circulated immediately:

Image 134:
Meme: beloved daughter of the Virgin Mary



Source: Soy Bimago
(<http://soybimago.blogspot.com/2013/08/Laura-Chinchilla-hija-predilecta-de-Maria-por-2millones-colones-diarios.html>)

Caption: "beloved daughter of Mary" for 2 million colones daily. Mrs Laura tripled the amount that the government gives to the Catholic Church, now it is 2 million colones DAILY. She was declared "beloved daughter of Mary" by the bishops."

According to ecclesiastical sources, it is estimated that between 2010 and 2015 the Catholic Church would have received approximately \$6,550,000 from the State (Catholic Echo, 2019). This panorama draws the role played by the Catholic Church in the country. Beyond faith and personal beliefs, the church intervenes in public life through the control of bodies and the management life, in close connection with the State, both culturally and materially.

The rise of neopentecostal power

In spite of how intertwined Catholic doctrine is with Costa Rican identity, in recent years we have witnessed important changes and reconfigurations in the faith. Different studies show that in the last decades the affiliation to neo-Pentecostal Christian churches has grown, stealing believers from

Catholicism (Centro de Investigación y Estudios Políticos 2013; 2016; 2021; Fuentes 2013; 2015). This is part of a very strong international movement in Abya Yala, influenced, financed, and sometimes orchestrated from the United States, which has come to have such devastating consequences as the election of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, or the rejection of the Peace Accords in Colombia.

Feminist sociologist Laura Fuentes has researched religiosity and its political and social implications in the country. According to Fuentes (2015), religious affiliation tends to be configured through a nominal inheritance: the religion of the family is inherited, favoring social integration into a community of citizens who share a worldview. However, an age profile developed by Latinobarómetro 2013 for the Latin American region indicates that there are more Catholics as age increases, and in the younger sectors there are more Evangelicals (Fuentes 2015, 57). In other words, Neo-Pentecostal churches are gaining followers among the younger generations.

Unlike Catholics, for whom the saints, the virgins, and specially the Negrita occupy an important place in their faith, people who identify themselves as Christians or Evangelicals, belonging to Neo-Pentecostal churches, base their experience of faith entirely on the biblical scriptures. For them, the Bible should not be interpreted contextually, but should be taken with respect and attachment to the scripture. They consider that constant prayer is the only answer to the problems and decisions of daily life. The format and aesthetics of their cults are far from the Catholic sobriety. Worship services are usually much more animated, with live music, projections, chanting, and sometimes even glossolalia, trances and exorcisms (Fuentes 2013, 75).

Unlike Catholics, Neo-Pentecostal practitioners accept divorce, although divorced people cannot have a leadership role in the cult, nor can they preach. Nevertheless, believers of Neo-Pentecostal churches share with practicing Catholics the sexual panic, manifested in the adherence to heteronormativity, reticence with respect to the use of contraceptives (especially before marriage), fierce opposition to abortion and condemnation of sexual pleasure (Fuentes 2013, 78; 81). Likewise, they share the belief that homosexuality is a psychological disorder or confusion that can and must be corrected (Fuentes 2013, 79; 86).

Beyond these coincidences between Catholics and Neo-Pentecostal Christians in terms of moral values, they operate by means of a different approach towards class issues. Despite its successful participation in business, the Catholic Church proclaims to the believers the discourse of traditional Christian theology, a sort of providential believe in which impoverished people should accept their condition of poverty, because this will open the door to eternal life. The rich, for their part, should avoid flaunting the privileges they enjoy, and should engage in charity to support the unfortunate (Fuentes 2013, 73). Thus, the hegemonic discourse of the Catholic Church discourages the questioning

of inequalities and the causes of class oppressions. This ultimately results in conformism and obedience functional to neoliberal capitalism.

Far from the values of traditional Christian theology, and even more so from the interesting Liberation Theology developed in Abya Yala, Neo-Pentecostal churches proclaim the theology of prosperity, which holds that financial blessing and physical well-being are always God's will, and that faith, positive discourse and donations to the church can increase material wealth. In this sense, it deviates from the social value of charity and places welfare on an individual plane. It is a sort of entrepreneurial theology, where the believer must invest in the church in order to also grow in the market. In these churches' luxury is not frowned upon but on the contrary, the ostentation of overabundance is conceived as a proof of divine blessing on the religious work (Fuentes 2013, 75). In this line, the theology of prosperity is also compatible and tremendously functional to neoliberal capitalism.

Thus, although in essence resorting to very different argumentative strategies, on one side and on the other, the proposals of the Christian churches on the economy evidence the colonial imbrication of class, race and gender as systems of domination. By designating God as solely responsible for our material conditions of existence, they erase the weight of systems of oppression upon bodies and the way in which race and gender continue today to determine class conditions for countless people in the world and in this country. It is a universalist ideology in its fullest sense. "In the eyes of God we are all equal," even if on Earth bodies continue to bear the violence of coloniality.

In short, both the Catholic Church and the Neo-Pentecostals uphold values compatible with the neoliberal project. However, both have entered into strong tensions with political parties that attempt to attenuate their right-wing economic policies by embracing (or, rather, recuperating) the struggles of the feminist and LGBTI organizations. This has marked ruptures with the political class that has traditionally been their ally. The churches have felt threatened and betrayed, and have reacted very strongly. The Catholic Church, in its own way, makes use of its influence in state politics. The Neo-pentecostal churches also organized to penetrate into national politics, forming Christian parties to win congressional seats, developing social work where the State does not reach, and establishing themselves among the masses as an option "for the people". This, as we shall see, has worked out very well for them. They have grown and multiplied. They now win numerous seats in the congress in every election, and they even close to winning the presidential election in 2018. In this context, where the common denominator among the forces that dispute political, economic and cultural power seems to be coloniality and the neoliberal project, I try to understand what it is that we call inclusion in Costa Rica.

6.1.3. The emergence of inclusion in political discourses

Historian Víctor Hugo Acuña notes that in 1859, President Mora introduced for the first time in presidential discourses the idea of equality among citizens as a distinctive national attribute (1995, 68). As the materiality of inequalities made the nationalist imaginary of equality unsustainable, the discourse of social equality began to take hold. By this time, they did not speak of inclusion but equality, opportunity and integration.

Throughout the twentieth century, political parties promised in their campaigns to open possibilities for those who were being left out of the labor market. With special force since the neoliberal turn, the notion of inclusion begins to appear in the sense of social inclusion. There was talk of including peasants in the economy, of inclusion policies that would allow people with disabilities to access jobs, of including small producers in the market, and of including women in the labor force as well. Inclusion then seemed to be a door to the development of those sectors that had been left behind, and with this, to contribute in general to the development of this country that dreams of entering the first world.

Basically, inclusion was aimed at those who were most dispossessed. The excluded were the laggards, the residuals, and the solution would come from the hand of capitalist development. This notion of inclusion remained in political discourse until the early 2010s, when the polarization around the rights agenda for women and gays and lesbians achieved its peak. At the beginning of that decade, there were numerous gay and lesbian organizations in Costa Rica, which continued the work promoted by the pioneering collectives that began to lead the way against heteronormative violence in the 1970's. I, for example, participated at that time in a collective that organized street demonstrations in reaction to bars, restaurants and other establishments that expelled us for holding public demonstrations of affection or homoeroticism. This organization did not have an anti-capitalist stance, I would not even say it had an intersectional approach. We organized performative actions where kisses overflowed among the attendees. Something like a homoerotic revenge against those who wanted to censor us. Some of these actions were accompanied by legal complaints, when the affected individuals so wished, and although most of them were dismissed, a couple went to trial and culminated in heavy fines for the establishments and compensation fees for the affected people. Other organizations of the time did political lobbying for human rights, held support groups or even inclusive masses what they call the "diverse community".

The calls of these organizations were gradually growing, and although they never exceeded a few hundred, they were gathering more and more people in the streets, gay and lesbian people but also heterosexual allies. This was the scenario in 2012, with the virgin's beloved daughter in the presidency, when the conservative board of the National Congress made a decision that had an explosive boomerang effect they could not have imagined. They appointed Gerardo Justo Orozco Álvarez, an evangelical pastor who came to congress on behalf of the Christian party Renovación Costarricense, as president of the legislative commission on human rights. Bible in hand, Orozco launched violent and pathologizing arguments to oppose the bills that sought to legalize same-sex unions (J. D. Jiménez 2017), and promised that as long as the human rights commission was in his hands, he would not allow the "gay agenda" to advance, nor would he allow the restitution of the in vitro fertilization technique. The congressman also took a fervent position against education programs for sexuality and affectivity.

Spontaneously and without foreseeing the magnitude it would take, several activists gathered our indignation to organize a demonstration to repudiate Justo Orozco and the complicit congresspeople who put him there. We called this effort the *Movimiento Invisibles* (the invisibles movement), mocking the words of Orozco who said that he did not discriminate against gays and lesbians because they were so insignificant that he did not even see them. Despite the limited range of action that this kind of mobilizations have, given that they are framed within the politics of visibility, I have to say that this was the most democratic and plural articulation that I have known in the recent history of the queer movement in the country. We met in open, autonomous assemblies, self-convoked by the participants (although they always took place in San Jose, and at the university which at that time was a rather hostile place for trans people). The participants were mostly young people from urban middle classes³⁰⁸. We agreed on the content of our agenda, the mechanisms of struggle, the graphic campaign, the spokespersons, and the slogans. We took on tasks and managed to raise resources, so that on June 16 we took to the streets in a demonstration towards the Congress, whose walls we washed with soap, in a performative act intended to symbolize the cleaning of rottenness that the building harbored. It is estimated that between 3,000 and 5,000 people participated in the activity, a crowd that far surpassed any queer mass activity organized up to that moment in the country. After this event, Pride demonstrations underwent an impressive transformation, growing exponentially in

³⁰⁸ For an analysis of the implications of the self-representation of young, urban, whitened, middle-class, gays and lesbians in the campaigns of this movement see: Fournier, Mar. (2016) La autorrepresentación en las campañas del movimiento LGBTI. Aportes para la construcción de comunicaciones inclusivas. In: Martínez, Yanet. (Compiler) (2019) Desnudando identidades: Construcciones de sentido, representaciones y vivencias cotidianas de género y sexualidad. Editorial Universidad de Costa Rica.

numbers, but also in the diversity of participants and their demands (J. D. Jiménez 2017). It was, without a doubt, a catalyst that strengthened the LGBTI struggles in the country.

Image 136
Invisibles' march, 2012



Tensions and polarization were increasing. Different organizations and political parties competed to promote their projects to legalize same-sex unions (with alternative figures to the holy marriage). Trans women were strengthening their organization, demanding respect for their names and gender, and claiming their space to participate in discussions on policies and regulations that affect them.

Justo Orozco hogged the cameras spewing hate and reading biblical quotes from his seat in the national congress. Churches organized conferences in conjunction with Christian universities to bring in international experts who promised to cure homosexuality, while queer psychologists and allies organize to take over the Costa Rican Association of Psychologists (which regulates the professional activity of psychology in the country) and push for the ban of conversion. The media could not miss this juicy issue on the agenda setting. It became very visible, heated discussions were occurring everywhere. Soon, politicians from across the ideological spectrum also wanted to capitalize on this polarization.

This is the context in which the 2014 presidential elections arrived, where the word "inclusion", that had been used for years to speak of economic and educational inequalities, begins to be spoken of in

other terms. For the first time, inclusion is linked to gay and lesbian populations, and the exclusion of LGBTIQ populations begins to appear in the government plans of different parties. These plans outline in general terms the approach that each party proposes to different areas or problems, but hardly propose concrete measures. Before this moment, the word inclusion appeared from time to time in the government plans of different parties, almost always adjectivized in the sense of "social inclusion", a nice concept but broad and ambiguous enough to be used by politicians of the center, right and left. However, as Table 3 shows, as of 2014 inclusion begins to gain importance in political discourses:

Table 3
Count of "inclusion"³⁰⁹ in government plans

Political party	2014 elections		2018 elections	
	Place in the elections	Count of inclusion	Place in the elections	Count of inclusion
Partido Acción Ciudadana	#1 First round #1 Second round	29	#2 First round #1 Second round	37
Partido Liberación Nacional	#2 First round #2 Second round	15	#3	30
Frente Amplio	#3	2	#8	24
Movimiento Libertario	#4	2	#7	6
Partido Unidad Social Cristiana	#5	0	#4	24
Partido Patria Nueva	#6	0	Did not participate	-
Restauración Costarricense	#7	0	#1 First round #2 Second round	7
Renovación Costarricense	#8	0	#11	1
Partido Accesibilidad Sin Exclusión	#9	18	#12	9
Partido Nueva Generación	#10	0	#9	3
Partido de los Trabajadores	#11	0	#13	0
Avance Nacional	#12	0	Did not participate	-
Partido Integración Nacional	#13	0	#5	0
Partido Republicano Social Cristiano	Did not participate	-	#6	14
Alianza Democrática Cristiana	Did not participate	-	#10	0

As shown in the table, the discourse of inclusion begins to position itself in the 2014 elections, and by 2018 an increase can be observed for almost all parties³¹⁰.

³⁰⁹ For the purposes of this table, I counted the number of times the words "inclusion" or "inclusive" appear in government programs. I discarded those accessory uses of the word (for example, to refer to the inclusion of an article in a law), counting only those uses that refer to actions or policies to include population groups in social life, or to transform institutions, spaces or programs so that excluded groups can have access to them.

³¹⁰ A particular case is the Partido Accesibilidad sin Exclusión (PASE), a party created by people with disabilities to promote their rights. From its very name "Accessibility Without Exclusion", it positions the issue of social exclusion suffered by this population. This party uses the discursive framework of accessibility rather than inclusion, emphasizing the creation of accessible policies and spaces for all people. In this sense, rather than asking those in power and society in general to include them, what they seek is to break down the barriers that exclude them. It is an interesting twist in which people facing exclusion are seen as active in generating change, something that does not always happen in discourses of inclusion of "vulnerable populations". However, as Alex Vázquez commented in our interview, the internal contradictions of the PASE (conservative and religious

As I was saying, until a few years ago, politicians spoke of inclusion to refer to policies that sought to incorporate populations that had been left behind in the development curve of the neoliberal project. "Inclusion" was used to refer to policies that sought the [re]incorporation of certain sectors (especially women, the older people and citizens of peripheral areas) into the labor force, or to combat dropouts from the education system. But in 2014 the concept began to take a discursive turn towards the human rights agenda. In short, the notion of inclusion moved from social and economic rights to cultural/civil ones.

In general terms, the populations most often mentioned in government programs are the elderly, people with disabilities, and to a lesser extent women outside the labor market. Children and teenagers are indirectly mentioned, based on the promises of educational inclusion. Several parties, especially as of 2018, include in their programs some proposals aimed at the inclusion of LGBTIQ people, recognizing that there are obstacles that exclude these populations from education, employment, housing and health. In some plans, indigenous peoples are mentioned under a rhetoric of inclusion, although with few concrete measures, and to a much lesser extent they refer to Afro Cost Ricans and Afro descendent peoples. Very few programs talk about migrants and refugees, and when they do, some promise rather to implement anti-migration measures to keep migrants far from our white nation.

Without seeking to establish any kind of causal relationship, it is interesting to note that most of the parties that occupy the first places in both 2014 and 2018 use a discourse of inclusion in their programs. It is worth highlighting the case of the evangelical party Restauración Nacional, which in 2018 won the first electoral round. This party makes little use of the notion of "inclusion", but this does not mean that LGBTIQ issues are absent in its plan. On the contrary, Restauración Nacional positioned itself in the tense juncture of 2018 as the alternative to "gender ideology". In their discourse they affirmed that various parties (especially the ruling party) maliciously promoted the "gender ideology" disguised as inclusion. They claimed that was a "false inclusion", so that their party offered a "true inclusion", "efficient and supportive for development". Other parties, such as the Partido de los Trabajadores (Workers' Party), do not use the rhetoric of inclusion because their Trotskyist tradition distrusts reformist positions, but this does not imply that the human rights agenda is absent from their program. For example, they position themselves in favor of equal marriage, the gender identity law and even the production of official statistics on LGBTI populations.

positions against abortion, LGBTIQ+ and women's rights) have driven people with disabilities and allies away from the party's ranks.

Despite this visible incidence of inclusion discourses, this concept remains ambiguous. The Acción Ciudadana party (that governed from 2014 to 2022), presented in 2014 an outline of a definition: “la plena incorporación de todos los sectores a la vida en sociedad, el respeto a sus derechos y el efectivo reconocimiento a las peculiaridades culturales que le son propias³¹¹” (PAC 2014). For its part, the Frente Amplio (left-wing party) speaks of “un país más inclusivo, más igualitario, menos discriminador, con más oportunidades para quienes menos tienen...³¹²” (FA 2014).

However, when observing in detail the discursive construction in the plans, it seems that inclusion is used as a nice adjective that accompanies proposals in the most diverse areas, but rarely goes beyond the abstract plane. Thus, for example, we find phrases such as: “an inclusive, supportive and diverse country” (PAC 2018), or “inclusive society” (PAC 2014). In the social sphere, we find various expressions: “inclusive social policy” (PAC 2014), “inclusive education” (PAC 2014, 2018; PLN 2014; FA 2018; PUSC 2018; ML 2014, 2018; PRSC 2018) and “digital inclusion” (PLN 2014), or “inclusive housing subsidies” (PUSC 2018), meaning granting middle classes access to housing subsidies. To face unemployment, we find phrases like “inclusion in the labor world” (PLN 2018; PASE 2018; PRSC 2018), and “inclusive employment” (PLN 2014). Restauración Nacional party even speaks of “inclusive entrepreneurship” (RN 2018), to promote creative and sustainable development. Some parties speak of “inclusive cities” (FA 2018) or “inclusive public spaces” (PLN 2014), or even “inclusive tourism”³¹³ (FA 2018; PUSC 2018; PASE 2014).

It seems that, when injected by the management and entrepreneurial discourses that NGOs and international cooperation agencies were promoting in the neoliberal turn, inclusion became a neoliberal key word, a transversal term that we find across the political spectrum: from the reformist left of the Frente Amplio: “inclusion and democratization in the distribution of wealth” (FA 2018), passing through the flexible rhetoric of the right wing parties that dispute the center: “inclusive growth or development” (PAC 2018; PLN 2018; PUSC 2018; PASE 2018; PRSC 2018), “financial inclusion” (PLN 2018) and “inclusive businesses” (PLN 2018). Right-wing parties included other uses such as “inclusive human security” (PLN 2018), meaning the incorporation of the human rights approach to the work of police forces, or from the far right, or the promise made by the far right-wing party, Movimiento Libertario, of a safer and more inclusive Costa Rica (ML 2014;2018), linking inclusion with crime prevention and heavy hand repressive policies.

³¹¹ Free translation: The full incorporation of all sectors of society, respect for their rights and the effective recognition of their own cultural peculiarities.

³¹² Free translation: ...a more inclusive, more egalitarian, less discriminatory country, with more opportunities for those who have less...

³¹³ A very ambiguous concept that ranges from the incorporation of micro-enterprises and local workers into the tourism industry, to the promotion of inclusive tourism activities for people with disabilities..

Indeed, the government programs for the 2014 and 2018 elections show the growing importance of the notion of inclusion in Costa Rican public policy. All these proposals for "inclusive governments" (PLN 2014) may sound nice and even cloying, but who are these policies aimed at? Who are the subjects targeted by this kinds of inclusion?

During these years, the use of "inclusion" became popular as a synonym for the human rights agenda of mainstream LGBTI organizations. With the triumph of Luis Guillermo Solís, of the Acción Ciudadana party, in 2014, this notion of inclusion moved into the sphere of institutional politics. In 2015, the Solís administration approved the Executive Branch Policy to eradicate discrimination towards the LGBTI population from its institutions, through Executive Decree #38999, which opened the door for a series of guidelines and reforms to norms and regulations in all public institutions. The reforms are mainly part of the fight against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity within the institutions.

Multiple training and awareness-raising processes were developed, in collaboration with the work of queer activists (almost always unpaid), to try to confront the barriers of conservative sectors that wanted to hinder these initiatives. Actions along the lines of visibility policies were also implemented. Thus, for example, every May 17, in the framework of the international day for the fight against homophobia, lesbophobia and transphobia, public institutions raised the rainbow flag:

Image 137

President Solís raises the rainbow flag for the first time at the presidential palace, 2014



Source: Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/article/latinoamerica-costarica-bandera-gay-idLTASIEA4F05Z20140516>

Many anti-capitalist activists, including myself, have disagreements with the way in which president Solís' government and his party institutionalized and profited from the struggles that we have

historically waged. However, despite our differences, I can recognize that the situation for the advancement of the civil rights of these populations, and the relations with State institutions were much more favorable during the PAC governments than with the new government of Rodrigo Chaves, who since assuming the presidency in 2022, began to trim advances achieved in the last 8 years.

I can also recognize that some of these policies have alleviated the living conditions of some gay, lesbian and trans* people. For example, institutional recognition of trans women as women gave them access to training programs and subsidies coordinated by the National Institute for Women and the Institution in charge of social assistance programs. Likewise, gays and lesbians were able to extend social security to their unprotected partners, and trans* students finally gained the battle to be called by their names in their schools and were allowed to use whichever bathroom they felt most comfortable with. Acknowledging this does not mean that we are indebted to Solis' government, nor does it justify presenting these advances as the achievements of politicians, when they have been the product of the sustained struggle held with our bodies over many decades. However, it is certain that this government facilitated some transformations.

Table 4 presents a summary of the main progressive breakthroughs that have been implemented in institutional policy regarding the recognition of rights for LGBTIQ+ people. These include mainly reforms to laws or regulations, or the creation of non-discrimination and visibility policies.

Table 4
Summary of inclusive policies for LGBTIQ+ population

Name of policy or reform	Beneficiaries or responsible parties	Objectives:
2002 – Reform to Código Penal	Gay, trans, and lesbian people	Eliminates the concept of "scandalous sodomy" from the penal code.
2008 - Decreto Ejecutivo N° 34399-S, Día Nacional contra la Homofobia	Ministries, departments and institutions of the executive branch	Declares May 17 as the National Day against Homophobia. In 2012 it is extended to lesbophobia and transphobia. Public institutions are invited to carry out awareness-raising events on the subject.
2008 – Manual de Buenas Prácticas para la no discriminación	Minors inserted in the public educational system	Presents basic guidelines aimed at inhibiting discrimination in the educational system based on the Principles of Respect, Equality and Universality.
2011 - Política Respetuosa de la Diversidad Sexual del Poder Judicial, Sesión de Corte Plena 31-11	Judicial Branch and general public	Seeks to eradicate discrimination based on sexual orientation in the services provided to users and employees of the institution.
2011 - Reglamento de personas refugiadas, N°36831-G	Asylum seekers, refugees and displaced people.	It establishes that Costa Rican authorities must ensure equality and non-discriminatory treatment on the basis of ethnicity, origin, religion, gender, age,

		language and sexual orientation, among others.
2012 - Sentencia nº 16632 de Sala Constitucional	Gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans* people detained in prison centers	Lifts ban on same-sex intimate visits in correctional facilities
2013 - Reform to the Código Penal	Judiciary, general public	Eliminates the paragraphs referring to homosexuality as a mental illness for unimputability.
2013 – Reform to the Ley General de la Persona Joven No. 8261	Gay and lesbian people under the age of 35.	Introduces an article recognizing same-sex domestic partnerships for couples under 35 years of age.
2014 – Reform to the Reglamento del Seguro de Salud de la Caja Costarricense del Seguro Social, Acuerdo N° 8744	Same-sex partners of people with health insurance.	Access to social security for same-sex couples under the family benefit system
2015 - Directrices técnicas para la promoción y garantía del derecho a la salud de gays, lesbianas, bisexuales, trans e intersex	Ministry of Health. Users of public and private health services	Promote actions for the respectful treatment of gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans* and intersex persons in health services.
2015 - Decreto Ejecutivo 38999 and Directriz N-025P	Ministries, departments and institutions of the executive branch	Establishes the creation of an "Institutional Commission for Equality and Non-Discrimination towards the Sexually Diverse Population Diverse Population" in all the organs of the Executive Branch.
2015 - Decreto N° 39210-MP-S	Same-sex couples in need of reproductive assistance	Authorizes the performance of the assisted reproduction technique of In Vitro Fertilization for couples of legal age, without restrictions for same sex couples.
2018 – Declaration from the Colegio del Profesionales en Psicología	LGBTIQ+ users of public and private psychological support services.	It clarifies that homosexuality, bisexuality and trans* existence are not forms of mental illness and, therefore, cannot be diagnosed, cured or treated. In 2022, another statement reinforces this one and clarifies that conversion therapies are not authorized as part of the professional practice of psychology in the country.
2015 - Circular DM-024- 05-2015, Ministerio de Educación Pública	LGBTIQ+ students and employees of public schools.	Declares the Ministry of Public Education and all educational institutions free of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.
2015 - Manual Día Nacional contra la Homofobia, Lesbofobia y la Transfobia, Ministerio de Educación Pública	Public schools	This booklet is designed to train faculty and staff of public schools on sexual and gender diversity, how to address it, and how to deal with cases of harassment against these LGBTI students.
2015 – Directriz N° 037-S	People with HIV. *This guideline was supposed to open the door for uninsured migrants to access antiretroviral treatment. In practice, this has proved	Establishes that the clinics must continue to provide, without interruption, comprehensive care and treatment to people with HIV and STIs who have been fired from their jobs and are unable to

	extremely difficult to implement.	continue contributing to the health insurance system.
2016 – Resolution 3566-2016 and Circular DM-040-07-2018, Ministerio de Educación Pública	Trans* students of legal age. Trans* students who are minors and have the authorization of their legal guardians.	Authorizes the rectification or adaptation of the chosen name for trans* students in their documents (class lists, student cards, diplomas). In 2016 the procedure was carried out through the figure of the "known as". In 2018 the regulation is adapted since the change of name is authorized for trans* persons.
2016 - Norma de atención integral en salud para personas LGBTI y otros HSH (CCSS, MS, MJP).	LGBTIQ+ users of public and private health services	Ensures humanized attention and non-discriminatory treatment in health services. Promotes awareness-raising strategies and ongoing training for health personnel. Introduces a depathologizing approach to homosexuality and trans* people.
2016 - Reforma Procesal Laboral Ley No. 9343	Salaried LGBTIQ+ people	Article 404 of the Labor Code is amended to expand the categories of protection against discrimination for LGBTI people
2016 - Decreto Ejecutivo N° 39680-MP	Civil service employees	Establishes the duty to safeguard the gender identity in the personal file and history of the public personal file and history of the civil servant assigned to the Civil Service.
2017 - Política para contribuir a erradicar la discriminación hacia la población sexualmente diversa, Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos, Consejo Directivo 850-2017	Employees of the national institute of statistics and census	Seeks to eradicate discrimination against the sexually diverse population in the workplace.
2017 - Procedimiento institucional de consulta a la población trans privada de libertad; and 2018 - N° 40849-JP Reglamento del Sistema Penitenciario Nacional	Trans* people detained in prisons.	Allows trans* inmates to choose the module (for women or men) in which they will be incarcerated within penitentiary centers, according to their gender identity. In 2018, a new regulation of the National Penitentiary System is approved, which formalizes this right
2018 - Protocolo de Atención Integral de Personas Trans para la Hormonización en la Red de Servicios de Salud	Trans* people with health insurance.	Provides access to hormone treatment in the social security system, after having received endocrinological and psychological evaluation.
2018 - Directriz N° MTSS-DMT-DR-5-2018	Same-sex partners of people inside the pension regime.	Extends the death pension benefit to same-sex couples who have a pension plan.
2018 – Acuerdo N° 49-2018 del Tribunal Supremo de Elecciones	Costa Rican trans* people of legal age.	Allows the change of name for trans* people to their self-perceived gender identity, as a free and requirement-free procedure, applicable only once. It also eliminates sex as a category in the identity card.
2018 - Decreto Ejecutivo No. 41158-MP	This figure is a general advocate for the rights of	Creates the position of

	LGBTIQ+ people, although its actions are not binding.	Commissioner of the Presidency of the Republic for matters related to LGBTI persons.
2020 – Reforma al código de familia para permitir el matrimonio igualitario, a partir de la Resolución N° 2018012782 de la Sala Constitucional	Same-sex couples wishing to get married.	In 2018, Resolution No. 2018012782 of the Constitutional Chamber resolves that the State must remove legal barriers preventing same-sex marriage. It gives the State a period of 18 months to make the necessary reforms, or, otherwise, it would automatically reformulate the articles of the Family Code that established that marriage is the union between a man and a woman. The latter was what finally happened.
2022 - Reforma el Código Penal para tipificar los crímenes de odio	Survivors and family members of victims of prejudice-related killings.	Includes a clause in the penal code that establishes as a hate crime the qualified homicide that occurs based on nationality, race, age, sex, political opinion, migratory status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability or genetic characteristics. Increases prison sentences to between 20 and 35 years.

As the table shows, most of these reforms were approved between 2014 and 2022, coinciding with the governments of the Acción Ciudadana party (PAC). The reaction of the conservative sectors was not long in coming: street demonstrations, legal actions to prohibit inclusive policies, hours of sermons in every church, and attacks, violence and discrimination against bodies evidencing dissidence from the cisheteronormativity.

Image 138

March for life and the family, December 2, 2017



Source: Impacto Evangelístico, (<http://impacto evangelistico.net/noticia/8533-miles-familias-marchan-vida-familia-costa-rica>)

Tempers were heated, polarization was difficult to overcome, and in this context, just a few weeks before the 2018 election, still under the administration of Luis Guillermo Solís, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights resolved the advisory opinion "OC 24-17", that had been filed by the Government of Costa Rica. The OC 24-17 was a strategic maneuver promoted by the then Vice President of the Republic, Ana Helena Chacón, who has always shown a commitment to various oppressed populations in human rights matters. In discreet coordination with a few activists, Chacón presented before the Court a consultation revolving around the questions: (1) Could it be understood that Article 54 of the Costa Rican Civil Code should be interpreted, in accordance with the American Convention of Human Rights, in the sense that persons who wish to change their first name based on their gender identity are not obliged to submit to the jurisdictional process contemplated therein, but that the State must provide them with a free, fast and accessible administrative procedure to exercise that human right? (Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos 2018) And (2) is the existence of a legal figure regulating same-sex relationships necessary for the State to recognize all the property rights deriving from this relationship? (Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos 2018, 5).

In short, the Costa Rican government voluntarily submitted to the scrutiny of that international body. Chacón's strategic vision did not disappoint, and on January 9, 2018, the State of Costa Rica received the Court's response, which declared that indeed the State was incurring in violations of the human rights of those populations, and therefore, it should take the necessary steps to ensure that same-sex couples have access to a legal figure, ideally marriage, on an equal terms with heterosexual couples. It also declared that the State should guarantee the change of name for trans persons, in an administrative procedure, free of charge, and without requesting any pathologizing requirement or "transition" test. It also recommended moving towards the recognition of self-perceived gender so that trans* persons can change the sex they had assigned at birth.

This ruling has had a broad impact, as it became jurisprudence for the rest of Latin America, opening the door for legalizing same-sex marriage and allow the name change other States, and, in some cases, the change of sex or gender in national registries for trans* people. Internally, it also had a strong impact on the country, as it lit up the polarization that was already smoldering in Costa Rica.

The indignation of the conservative sectors was recovered by the Christian candidate and congressman of the Restauración Nacional Party, Fabricio Alvarado, who catapulted vertiginously to the first places in the voting intentions in the polls, wielding a discourse against the inclusive policies of the ruling party. His campaign promised to restore traditional family values and eradicate what they have come to call "gender ideology". For instance, in his government plan, F. Alvarado promised to order the decisive elimination of all vestiges of the "gender ideology" in Costa Rican education and

public institutions, for it was discriminatory and contrary to the Costa Rican Judeo-Christian idiosyncrasy, and because it proposes a fragmentary and partial approach to the problem of discrimination (Partido Restauración Nacional 2018, 128). Along with his Christian ideology, F. Alvarado also made clear his commitment to the neoliberal project: “El mercado es el mecanismo más idóneo para organizar, en la base, la vida económica de las sociedades³¹⁴” (Partido Restauración Nacional 2018, 25).

In a sprint never seen before, Fabricio Alvarado entered the final stretch and came out the winner of the first round of elections with 25.02% of the votes, followed by Carlos Alvarado, of the ruling party, with 21.60%. The candidate accused the ruling party of violating traditional Costa Rican values, and promised a fierce defense of life and the traditional family. In his government plan, he questioned the notion of inclusion that the ruling party used as a slogan, and warned that his government would bring true inclusion:

Nuestros detractores nos han acusado falsamente de ser monotemáticos en nuestra gestión legislativa, pero la verdad sea dicha: mientras nuestro proyecto político se ha orientado claramente hacia los temas país, hacia los problemas más acuciantes que sufren la mayoría de los costarricenses, son nuestros detractores los que, hasta el cansancio y la necesidad, presentan un discurso agresivamente monotemático alrededor de la agenda de la llamada ideología de género –reduccionista y radical-, el aborto y la agenda de los grupo LGTBI, Una de las primeras medidas de mi gobierno será emitir una directriz para todo el Poder Ejecutivo, con el fin de suspender la aplicación de las políticas heredadas que suscriben esta “monocronismo” ideológico, para sustituirlo por uno integral y verdaderamente inclusivo³¹⁵ (Partido Restauración Nacional 2018, 126–27).

The second round of the 2018 elections made international news. Tensions activated people and resources on both sides of the race, some moved by the fear of regressivism, others driven by the euphoric hope for the triumph of Christian values. Once again, the eyes of the United States were on Costa Rica, and both churches and corporations in the inclusion industry pressured Costa Ricans in the run-up to the election. As the president of the LGBTI Chamber of Commerce recounts:

Por supuesto que afectó negativamente la imagen del país un poco, porque la comunidad LGBT global estaba preocupada de que existieran fundamentalistas en el poder en Costa Rica. Porque tenemos el sur conquistado por Bolsonaro y el norte por

³¹⁴ Free translation: The market is the most suitable mechanism for organizing, at the base, the economic life of societies.

³¹⁵ Free translation: Our detractors have falsely accused us of being monothematic in our legislative management, but truth be told, while our political project has been clearly oriented towards the country's issues, towards the most pressing problems suffered by the majority of Costa Ricans, it is our detractors who, to the point of exhaustion and foolishness, present an aggressively monothematic discourse around the agenda of the so-called gender ideology -reductionist and radical-, abortion and the agenda of the LGBTI groups. One of the first measures of my government will be to issue a decree of the entire Executive Branch, in order to suspend the application of inherited policies that subscribe to this ideological "monochronism", to replace it with a comprehensive and truly inclusive one.

Donald Trump. Y nosotros quedamos en el centro, verdad. Entonces, qué pasó? Le ganamos nosotros. Y los gringos nos dijeron, las Cámaras, las 40 Cámaras LGBT en Estados Unidos nos dijeron, mandaron cartas: miren, felicidades porque en Costa Rica ganó, lo que nosotros no pudimos hacer en Estados Unidos lo lograron ustedes, etc, verdad. En Suramérica fue más resignación que otra cosa. Pero eso provocó también que la Casa Blanca [de los Estados Unidos] mandara pastores evangélicos a Costa Rica. En enero de este año [2019] hubo una conferencia con pastores evangélicos que son los consejeros espirituales...³¹⁶ (Julio César, in discussion with the author, October 7, 2019).

The fear of a Christian religious fundamentalist government led many people to vote for the candidate Carlos Alvarado, from the Acción Ciudadana party. Some people, though, suggest that it was not the defense of "inclusion" or the human rights agenda that defined the election, but an internal fracture between Neo-Pentecostal Christians and Catholics. A few days before the election, a video went viral in which the apostle Ronny Chaves, spiritual leader of candidate Fabricio Alvarado, rants against the figure of the Virgin of the Angels. This caused strong indignation among the devotees of La Negrita, a sacred icon of Costa Rican identity. It is said that this may have provoked a Catholic protest vote.

The map of the electoral results shows that the ruling party obtained its biggest advantage in Cartago, birthplace of La Negrita and known for being the most Catholic province in the country. In Cartago, 74.62% of the voters gave their support to the PAC candidate Carlos Alvarado, who won the national election with 60% of the votes, against 39% for the Christian candidate. Fabricio Alvarado's defeat encouraged LGBTIQ+ collectives and their allies. However, the triumph of the PAC did not end polarization, and, as I intend to show, neither did it translate into a democratization of inclusion policies in the country.

³¹⁶ Free translation: Of course, it negatively affected the country's image a little bit, because the global LGBT community was worried that fundamentalists might come to power in Costa Rica. Because the south is conquered by Bolsonaro and the north by Donald Trump. And we were left in the middle, right? So, what happened? We beat him. And the gringos told us, the Chambers, the 40 LGBT Chambers in the United States told us, they sent us letters: look, congratulations because in Costa Rica you won what we could not do in the United States, you did it, etc., right? In South America it was more resignation than anything else. But that also provoked the White House [of the US] to send evangelical pastors to Costa Rica. In January of this year there was a conference with evangelical pastors who are the spiritual advisors of politicians.

Image 139
Alvarado is appointed as President



Source: La Nación, <https://www.nacion.com/el-pais/politica/en-vivo-a-las-1020-a-m-carlos-alvarado-se/L4ZHFV2MVFKHGZLTVOHBM3ZU/story/>

6.1.4. The “Good” vs. the “Evil”: social polarization in neoliberal times

The differences surrounding the recognition of rights for LGBTIQ+ people have been taken up by parties across the political spectrum and have exacerbated a strong social polarization between conservative sectors and self-styled progressive sectors. Polarization around these issues is not new. Costa Rica's history is full of tensions between conservatives, who fiercely oppose the advancement of the agenda for women's rights and the struggles of feminists, gay, lesbian and trans* people, the persecution of lesbians around the "II Encuentro lésbico-feminista de América Latina y el Caribe", the raids in bars in the 80s and 90s, to name a few examples (J. D. Jiménez 2018; Chacón and Cascante 2015). In the last decade these tensions have reached a new peak. Not only were tensions elevated, but on both sides the differences were presented as two irreconcilable poles. As the wording of liberal feminist María Flórez-Estrada portrays it, polarization was posed as a dichotomy that divided the population into the good and the evil (with each side disputing the discursive legitimacy of the former), leaving no room for transit or intermediate positions:

Image 140
Social polarization



Source: María Flórez-Estrada Pimentel Facebook,
https://www.facebook.com/maria.florezestrada/pimentel/posts/pfbid0A4tpBLvnR8Ly4s_wLRvxGg1B8RCKP9y2r8qbEFYNpeLuehkDzmRmytXuDWyk9iwJel

Caption: This is a time to take a stand for human rights and individual freedoms, because they are at risk. What is happening is not a confrontation between right and left, but between Enlightenment and religious obscurantism. The opportunism for the municipal elections will become evident and will end up losing.

Although Fabricio Alvarado lost the second round of the elections, the massive support for the Christian candidate reflected the political/religious transformations that have been taking place in the country. After Carlos Alvarado's victory, the hashtags *#ganóelamor* and its English version *#lovewins* became popular among progressive sectors, and a curious phenomenon occurred: the historical tensions between conservative religious churches (and their congregations) and people who dissented from cisheteronormativity, were reconfigured in the form of partisan politics. Thus, rather than speaking of progressives and conservatives, people began to speak of "PAC-lovers" and "ramashekos". "PAC-lovers" was used to name anyone who had a progressive stance on gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans* and intersex rights, abortion or feminist demands. The term "ramashekos" was used to refer to people who were against the "gender ideology", and in general against the claims of feminist, queer and trans collectives.

Image 141
PAClovers



Source: Eres un PAClovercillo
Facebook page

Image 142
Ramashekos



Source: DaRu Dani Facebook profile

“PAClovers” refers directly to the Acción Ciudadana Party, while “ramashekos” is a derogatory neologism resulting from a video that went viral where Laura Moscoa, a militant of the National Restoration Party and wife of candidate Fabricio Alvarado, spoke in tongues in the middle of a prayer (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4udEaAmAHkg>). One of the most paradoxical effects of framing polarization in binary and political-partisan terms is that some of us, trans* and queer activists, when we questioned or criticized the neoliberal policies or authoritarian positions of Carlos Alvarado’s government, we were often labeled “ramashekos” by cisheterosexual people. In other words, a totalizing discourse was created in the popular imaginary based on the logic of the dichotomy of good and evil. In this sense, any criticism of the government, even if it had nothing to do with the issue, was framed as opposition to the rights agenda of women and LGBTIQ+ populations. The PAC then became a more legitimate voice to speak about our existence, our needs and our struggles, than the very people and collectives that embody sex/gender dissidence.

This polarization has been strongly influenced by religious discourses. One example is the long discussion around educational programs for sexuality in the public education. In the early 1980’s, during the government of Luis Alberto Monge (responsible for promoting SAP I, and thus a key figure in the dizzying turn towards neoliberalism), an agreement was signed between the Ministry of Public

Education and the United Nations Population Fund, which aimed to introduce education on birth control and demographic issues in the country (J. D. Jiménez 2022). The project did not necessarily have a progressive approach, nor did it seek to promote a sexuality free of prejudice and give room for pleasure, but rather followed the line of international organizations that insisted on the need to slow down the birth rate.

Thus, in 1985, a commission was created to elaborate the guidelines to be used to teach sex education lessons. The government took the precaution of including the Catholic Church in this commission. However, the Catholic authorities were not satisfied with the product, as they considered that the texts lacked moral and Christian values, and that they used subliminal messages to incite an indiscriminate use of sex. They also warned that sex education carries the threat of students becoming homosexuals or lesbians (J. D. Jiménez 2022).

The Catholic Church managed to obstruct the implementation of these programs for several years, even with the support of the Pope, until modifications were made to bring them in line with their doctrine. These modifications included: eliminating illustrations depicting the human body (as they could incite promiscuity), adopting an abstinence-promoting approach, establishing that procreation is the goal of sex, clarifying that man and woman were created in the image and likeness of God, and censoring any content that presented masturbation or abortion as an option. In addition, a Biblical quotation was placed at the beginning of each issue to be discussed. The pressure was so great that the government finally accepted the Catholic Church's conditions. Finally, in 1993, these lessons began to be taught in some schools.

This controversy was revived in the 2010s when a profound reformulation of those guidelines was proposed. The new initiative was a program of education for sexuality and affectivity, characterized by approaches on gender, human rights and diversity. The new programs incorporated content on pleasure, talked about contraceptives and presented homosexuality as one more variant of human sexuality. They also recognized the self-determination of trans* persons. The PAC governments inherited this controversy. They defended the implementation of these programs, which they embraced as part of their inclusion policies. These programs were supported by various sectors, including high school students who organized to defend their right to sexual education.

However, this discussion once again ignited the fire of conservative sectors, which claimed that these programs sought to indoctrinate children and young people with "gender ideology". Fake news abounded. It was said that the programs would put elementary school children through group masturbation exercises, for example.

The Catholic Church was joined by the increasingly strong evangelical churches, forming a powerful alliance that succeeded in blocking the implementation of these programs for a long time. Neo-Pentecostal believers consider it fundamental to oversee the sexual education received in high school and to disprove it at home (Fuentes 2013, 80). This idea has had an important impact in the country in the midst of the discussion. On February 8, 2018, more than 20 schools in the country were shut down with chains and padlocks, placed by mothers and fathers who were part of the movement "*No a la ideología de género- Unidos por la familia*" (No to gender ideology-United for the family), a movement of neo-Pentecostal Christian base, which managed to mobilize a Catholic sector as well. The protestors closed the schools to block the implementation of educational programs for affectivity and sexuality.

Image 143:
Republic of Mexico School closed by de No a la ideología de género- Unidos por la familia



Source: La Nación <https://www.nacion.com/el-pais/educacion/padres-frenan-ingreso-en-cuatro-escuelas-en/AH4REQHUEBDZ3GVJLS4XCDMLWY/story/>

Although for 2018 it was agreed not to implement the programs in primary schools, and it was clarified that parents who did not want their kids to receive the lessons on education for sexuality and affectivity at school could send a letter indicating so, for several days, schools in rural areas of the country (San Carlos, Pérez Zeledón, Limón) remained closed by parents of No to gender ideology-United for the family movement. Their banners read phrases such as " I am the one to educate my children", "No to Gender Ideology", "I love my children and I educate them with values and principles". The arguments were religious and biblical, in opposition to the approaches of diversity and pleasure

included in the programs. As expressed by a mother interviewed by the local channel Aguas Zarcas TV:

"Desde que inició el mundo fue con hombre y mujer. El Arca de Noé echó parejas no dos parejas de hombres y mujeres, echó parejas de animal y aves igual³¹⁷"

The tensions led the government to threaten to use police force to open the schools, arguing that the right to education of hundreds of children was being violated. Eventually the Ministry of Public Education managed to reopen the classrooms, although tensions surrounding these programs continue to this day.

The tensions surrounding this polarization have become part of everyday life, as shown by the tags on the walls of this parking lot in San José:

Image 144:
Polarization on the walls of San José



Source:

Caption: Tag on the left reads: Family: divorce is a myth.

Tag on the right reads: Secular State Now!

In addition to the reforms at the normative plane (table 4 in the previous section), the governments of the Acción Ciudadana Party (PAC), imitated the visibility policies of the metropolis of the Global North:

³¹⁷ Free translation: Since the beginning of the world it was with male and female. Noah's ark cast out couples, not two pairs of male and female, but couples of animal and birds.

Image 145
Buildings of San José and other cities illuminated with rainbow lights



Source: Instituto Costarricense de Electricidad Facebook page

This visibility politics do not transform the material conditions of queer people, nor do they question the neoliberal project. They are actually the continuation of marketing and commodification discourses developed decades ago around identity politics. However, they certainly have the power to infuriate conservatives, who respond in the same logic. Thus, on these same streets illuminated by rainbow lights, conservative groups circulate making their own politics of visibility:

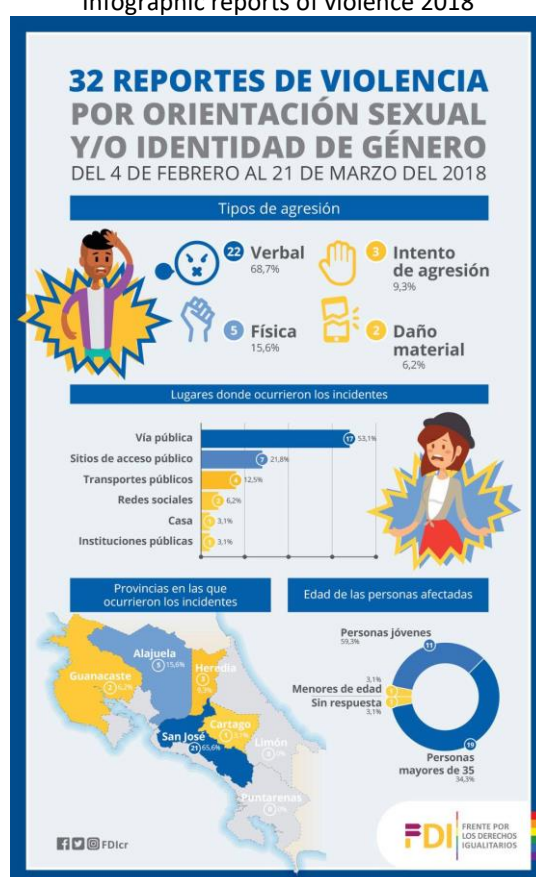
Image 146:
Pro-life bumper sticker



Caption: Under the image of a heart, the text: Yes to life! Under the image of a traditional heterofamily, the text: Yes to family! Under the image of a gun: Yes to defense!

The problem is not dissent, but the violence that provokes this polarization, a violence that does not touch all bodies in the same way. Many of us experienced fear at the times of maximum polarization, but not all of us faced that violence with the same chances of survival. Thus, while some of us celebrated the ruling of the Interamerican Court of Human Rights with drums in the streets, those same streets were the scene of attacks and violence. Various LGBTQI+ and trans* collectives denounce that there was an increase in the incidence of violence after the Court's ruling, and especially after the victory of Fabricio Alvarado in the first round of the 2018 elections (Arroyo and Jones 2020).

Image 147
Infographic reports of violence 2018



Source: FDI facebook page,
<https://www.facebook.com/FDIcr/photos/a.140455462825046/887118351492083/>

In the midst of these two groups that raise their banners against us and in our name, there are the bodies, lives and fears of several people, like the participants in this research, who, although they embody the so-called diversity that is in everyone's mouth, they do not find shelter in the policies of inclusion.

Hoy diríamos que a pesar de las evidentes distancias sociales, de la existencia de inequidad social sustentada en racismo, elitismo y clasismo —es decir basadas en el

menosprecio de las evidencias de mestizaje—, y en la persistencia de desigualdades de calidad de vida y acceso a las oportunidades en razón del estatus social y de los recursos económicos, en el país logró tomar fuerza una idea de igualdad jurídica que más temprano que tarde terminó derivando en inclusión ciudadana y democracia política³¹⁸ (Sojo 2010, 349).

Carlos Sojo's quote is an example of the contradiction contained in the discourse of inclusion, that Bader Sawaya (1999b) describes so well with the notion of dialectic of inclusion/exclusion. Sojo affirms that this country has achieved legal equality that leads to citizen inclusion, but at the same time recognizes that racism, elitism and classism provoke inequity. It seems that citizen inclusion can be built alongside the rivers of coloniality.

When the true structural causes of violence are blurred, in many cases, the violence exercised by institutions is not even recognized as such. Those who are left out of this citizen inclusion have another perspective:

Costa Rica tiene muchas cosas que tiene que deconstruir desde la institucionalidad y obviamente hacer algo como más humanista, más humanitaria. Mirá, porque a mí me contaban mis ancestros, mi gente mayor, del exilio, pero una cosa es contar y una cosa es vivirlo... Yo, siendo defensor de derechos humanos, al venir aquí me han violentado todos mis derechos. El derecho a la salud, el derecho a la educación, el derecho a... ¿Por qué? Porque muchas veces a como... como somos pobres, así nos quieren ver: pobrecito, con la ropa rota o con esto. Pero ante todo, uno tiene dignidad y... y son cosas que a mí me calan³¹⁹ (Jacob, in discussion with the autor, October 30, 2019)

Thus, in the same streets that are disputed by the visibility politics of the rainbow lights and the bumper stickers of authoritarian conservatism, historically excluded people, queer or not, are trying to survive the onslaught of the neoliberal project.

³¹⁸ Free translation: Today we would say that despite the evident social distances, the existence of social inequality based on racism, elitism and classism -that is, based on the disregard of the evidence of mestizaje-, and the persistence of inequalities in quality of life and access to opportunities based on social status and economic resources, an idea of legal equality gained strength in the country, which sooner rather than later ended up deriving in citizen inclusion and political democracy.

³¹⁹ Free translation: Costa Rica has many things that need to be deconstructed from an institutional point of view and obviously do something more humanistic, more humanitarian. See, my ancestors, my elders, told me about the exile, but it is one thing to speak about it and another to live it.... As a human rights defender, when I came here, all my rights were violated. The right to health, the right to education, the right to.... Why? Because many times since we are poor, that's how they want to see us: poor, with torn clothes and so on. But above all, one has dignity and... and these are things that really get to me

Image 147
No jobs available



Construction site of Alma de Escalante building, 2019

In the neoliberal context, social problems such as inequality, racism, sexism and other forms of violence are presented in a dehistoricized and individualized way, as if they were the product of the acts of malicious, perverse or sick individuals, and not the product of structural systems of domination (Spade 2015). In a similar way, the discourses of inclusion claim diversity but disassociate themselves from the struggles for redistribution. As Boaventura de Sousa Santos points out, in conversation with Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui:

Entonces cómo es que habiendo esta fuerza desde abajo hacia la descolonización, en los diferentes siglos que tú identificas, desde el colonial hasta el liberal, y hasta hoy, ¿cómo el Estado sigue logrando imponerse de esta manera? Parece que al Estado le gusta esta diversidad, este abigarramiento, porque de alguna manera es una diversidad linda pero no contesta el poder. Y por eso el poder sigue saqueando los recursos naturales y hay un crecimiento de la propiedad de la tierra en manos de los terratenientes...³²⁰ (Rivera Cusicanqui and Santos 2015, 86).

The problem with many of the policies of inclusion is that they propose superficial reforms that do not attack the bases from which oppression arises. They promote a form of diversity that does not challenge power. As Spade points out:

³²⁰ Free translation: So how is it that having this force from the bottom towards decolonization, in the different centuries that you identify, from the colonial to the liberal, and up to today, how does the State still manage to impose itself in this way? It seems that the State likes this diversity, this variegation, because in some way it is a nice diversity, but it does not challenge the power. And that is why the power continues plundering natural resources and there is a growth of land property in the hands of landowners...

Meaningful transformation will not occur through pronouncements of equality from various government institutions. Transformative change can only arise through mass mobilization led by populations most directly impacted by the harmful systems that distribute vulnerability and security. Law reform tactics can have a role in mobilization-focused strategies, but law reform must never constitute the sole demand of trans politics. If we seek transformation that is more than symbolic and that reaches those facing the most violent manifestations of transphobia, we must move beyond the politics of recognition and inclusion. (Spade 2015, 8)

This is the risk of institutionalizing struggles against social injustice in the form of inclusion policies. Rights reinforced privileges based on class, race and gender, and oppression continues to suffocate the same subpopulations. For them, inclusion policies seem more like necropolitics than biopolitics. Today, trans* people in this country can change their legal names, which for some of them gives them the sole guarantee that their tomb will bear their name.

6.2. Inclusive dependency: human rights, NGOs and international cooperation

It is not only politicians and churches that have found a mine in the discursive disputes over inclusion. Non-governmental organizations have also eaten from that cake. NGOs represent what is known in international human rights jargon as civil society. That is, the people. However, in Costa Rica, as in other parts of Abya Yala, NGOs often resemble corporations rather than grassroots organizations.

Even before progressive political parties in our region began to extract political capital from the struggles of the LGBTIQ+ movements, an effervescent economy was moving in the form of NGOs. This economy had already consolidated itself by appropriating and managing feminist and women's struggles (Falquet 2020). With their alleged autonomy from governments, NGOs promise, on the one hand, to professionalize and better structure the social movements struggles, and on the other, they open the door to access resources from international cooperation that give a boost to political advocacy on women's and LGBTIQ+ rights.

It all sounds quite nice. However, it is necessary to understand that this process of formalization and institutionalization of collectives following the NGO model has its particularities in our region. International cooperation, which always comes from the Global North, often brings with it the same dynamics of coloniality that we know well in international politics. The requirements for access to funds, the training and formative processes, the thematic delimitations and the temporality dictated by the fiscal year, subtly but forcefully impose a line on activism in Abya Yala. This line dictates the rhythm, form and contents that our struggles should follow, provoking a homogenization effect such as that caused by globalization on our cultures.

Au niveau national comme au niveau international, le discours des droits ne produit que des subjectivités appauvries, des sujets essentialisés, homogènes et universels :

la femme et l'homosexuel que prennent en charge le féminisme blanc occidental et ce qu'il faudra bien appeler l'homosexualisme blanc occidental (Bourcier 2017, 34)

On the other hand, the catalogue of funds, projects and transnational megaprojects that the economies of the Global North make available to the organizations of the Global South is nothing more than the continuation of an economy of dependency, which now has a "human face". It is not in vain that various authors speak of the Nonprofit Industrial Complex (NPIC) as yet another form in which the articulation between law, power, knowledge and norms in neoliberal capitalism is configured (Spade 2015; Bourcier 2017).

International cooperation fails to shake off its coloniality and constantly explains to us how we should fight our battles. They minimize our own forms of organization, belittle our capacity to define our own agendas, deny our autonomy, and all this is done under a patronizing discourse that often makes us think that we should thank them for their gesture of coloniality. Jacob reflects with disgust on these dynamics among NGOs working with asylum-seeking populations:

Yo veo mis interseccionalidades que en mí, por mi cuerpo pasan, y al ir a un lugar que yo no, no soy beneficiario... O sea, me cala mucho porque yo digo, ¿cuáles son los criterios de selección? Soy comunidad LGTB, soy esto, soy el otro, y voy contando, y no... Entonces me harté de la revictimización y yo he decidido no más. Y si me llaman bueno, y si no también. A mí, yo no estoy para: sí señor, sí señor. No, porque es un derecho... Entonces cala eso de ir a revictimizarte y que te vean como te ven, para darte una ayuda que ni es de su dinero, que son de otros donantes...³²¹ (Jacob, in discussion with the author, October 30, 2019).

6.2.1. The coloniality of "human-rightism" and the Non-profit industrial complex

It is no coincidence that the explosion of cooperation and the NGO boom in Abya Yala coincides with the consolidation of the neoliberal project in the region.

Dans un monde désormais « unipolaire » et dominé sans partage par le bloc capitaliste, les institutions internationales acquièrent un rôle croissant dans les transformations globales : en parallèle des effets délétères par les plans d'ajustement structurel imposés par le FMI, la Banque Mondiale et l'ONU se chargent de l'accompagnement « à visage humain » du processus (Falquet 2020, 226–27).

Jules Falquet (2020) has studied the historical processes surrounding the institutionalization and *NGOization* of feminism in our region. Her contributions help us to understand what happened with

³²¹ Free translation: I see my intersectionalities that pass through me, through my body, and when I go to a place where I am not, I am not a beneficiary.... I mean, it really gets to me because I say, what are the selection criteria? I am from the LGTB community, I am this, I am that, I am the other, and I go on counting, and no? So, I got fed up with the revictimization and I decided not to do it anymore. And if they call me, fine, and if they don't call me, fine too. I am not here to say: yes sir, yes sir. No, because it is a right... So, it's not enough to go to revictimize yourself and to be seen the way they look at you, in order to give you an aid that is not even from their money, but from other donors...

the LGBT movements as well, as they allow us to see the link between the human rights agenda and neoliberalism. As Sam Bourcier warns :

C'est là que se produit aussi la saturation du social et du personnel par le néolibéralisme de manière raciste. Une véritable multinationalisation du social et du sexuel. Au niveau national et supranational, les politiques des droits des LGBTQI sont en train de « subir » le même sort que les politiques féministes lorsqu'elles se sont institutionnalisées, ont été intégrées et instrumentalisées par les entreprises et les institutions supranationales comme les Nations unies, le FMI et la Banque centrale dans les années 1980. La défense des droits de l'homme, des femmes, des gais, des lesbiennes et des droits sexuels fournit une panoplie de critères pour évaluer les autres cultures et leur « gouvernance » nationale (Bourcier 2017, 34)

In her work, Falquet (2020) observes that the process of institutionalization and *NGOization* of feminism in the region served as a pilot for international organizations seeking to export this model to the countries of the global South (205). We have already seen that in the 1980s the UN showed great interest in the issue of population and birth rate, an eminently biopolitical concern. The imposition of structural adjustment programs coincides with the promotion of sex education programs to reduce the birth rate (J. D. Jiménez 2022; Falquet 2020). The Global North commands the reduction of state social investment, and at the same time prepares a private model that will fill the gaps in the weakened social policy: the Nonprofit Industrial Complex.

This model places an important part of the transformations in the realm of law. Change is seen as occurring by reforming obsolete laws or by introducing into the legal and judicial system new forms of regulation for populations that had lived in the margins of the law for many years. It is a curious twist in the politics of visibility, this desire to be visible before the law.

...the spaces, the liberties, and the rights won by individuals in their conflicts with central powers always simultaneously prepared a tacit but increasing inscription of individuals' lives within the state order, thus offering a new and more dreadful foundation for the very sovereign power from which they wanted to liberate themselves. "The 'right' to life," writes Foucault, explaining the importance assumed by sex as a political (Agamben 1998, 121).

Like the edible panopticon that Preciado (2013) warned about, the LGBTIQ+ movements ask the authorities to see them, to adjust their parameters of normality to include them and to be incorporated into their regimes of control. As a result, the disruptive potential of sex/gender dissidence is neutralized or attenuated, and dissidence is reformulated in the form of reformism compatible with the neoliberal project.

the paradox of rights: rights mediate emergent social groups, and rights claims often serve as the resistance framework of such groups, yet declarations of universal rights often actually mask and perpetuate the structured conditions of harm and disparity faced by those groups (Spade 2015, 10).

By this I do not intend to say that certain transformations in the law are not important. As the Ecuadorian alternativist lawyer and transfeminist activist Elizabeth Vázquez points out, there are a series of minimum aspirations around the biopolitics and necropolitics that govern our states on which we can probably agree:

¿Cómo no estar de acuerdo, corporativos o no, transfeministas o no, en la despenalización del homosexualismo consentido? O, ¿cómo no estar de acuerdo en el rechazo a los crímenes de odio? Pero una vez que se supera el discurso “anti-discriminación” y empiezan a formularse reflexiones más sofisticadas alrededor del cuerpo y la sexualidad, la identidad y sus dimensiones privada y pública, individual y colectiva, y alrededor de la participación política en sí misma, salen a relucir circunstancias y aspiraciones distintas...³²² (Lind and Argüello 2009, 100–101)

The reforms proposed in the field of law are made within the normative framework of the Nation-State, which carries, as we have seen, centuries of imbrication of systems of oppression. These demands for inclusion, moreover, are presented to states that are shifting to the right and reforming their structures to suit the neoliberal project.

Increasingly, neoliberalism means that social issues taken up by nonprofits are separated from a broader commitment to social justice; nonprofits take part in producing and maintaining a racialized-gendered maldistribution of life chances while pursuing their “good work” (Spade 2015, 36).

Falquet observes that, in this process of *NGOization* and institutionalization that has been gaining force since the 1990s, a part of the feminist movement in Abya Yala has turned to the right wing politics (Falquet 2020, 227). We cannot say that this is the case for all of them, but undoubtedly this has also occurred in LGBTIQ+ organizations too. Some collectives have managed to resist, using the resources of international cooperation as just another instrument, without letting it determine their forms and objectives. In other words, some collectives have managed to maintain a certain degree of autonomy, which allows them to escape those relations of dependency, in which the North knows how to manage the South so well. But in general terms, we can say that LGBTIQ+ collectives in Costa Rica, have undergone a similar process as Falquet describes that occurred in feminist organizations:

Progressivement, une partie des organisations acquièrent une personnalité juridique en bonne et due forme, ouvrent des compte de banque en dollars, puis se dotent bureaux coquets et de personnel de plus en plus numéraires, salarié et différencié – incluant des femmes de ménage, des secrétaires et des dirigeantes (Falquet 2020, 228)

³²² Free translation: How can we not agree, corporate or not, transfeminist or not, on the decriminalization of consensual homosexuality? Or how can we disagree with the rejection of hate crimes? But once the "anti-discrimination" discourse is overcome and more sophisticated reflections begin to be formulated around the body and sexuality, identity and its private and public dimensions, its individual and collective dimensions, and around political participation itself, differences in circumstances and aspirations come to light....

Access to international cooperation funds is not unconstrained. The terms of reference of most donors for human rights organizations operate with a logic similar to that of structural adjustment loans, in the sense that they imply a series of reforms that condition access to resources. This has led activists like Elizabeth Vázquez to point out that:

el derecho-humanismo³²³ se acerca al derecho comercial clásico porque es muy respetuoso de los convencionalismos, de las técnicas, del status quo de los derechos, no es tan ambicioso o tan subversivo como el alternativismo que te busca huecos, que busca humillar al sistema jurídico³²⁴ (Vásquez 2012, para. 9).

NGOs that depend on cooperation import agendas without an adequate historical and cultural contextualization. The limited scope for action dictated by international organizations, foundations and donor states of the Global North erodes autonomy, feeding dependency relations and undermining the capacity for creative resistance of social movements.

Emerging nonprofit organizations both filled the gaps left as the government abandoned key social and legal services designed to assist poor populations, and created a new elite sector of law and policy reform funded by wealthy philanthropists. This new sector differs significantly from the more grassroots and mass-based social movements of earlier eras. Its reform projects reflect the neoliberal shift toward the politics of inclusion and incorporation rather than redistribution and deep transformation (Spade 2015, 29).

To fit into the logic of the NPIC, organizations have to adapt to the requirements of donors, whose demands generally involve a package of transformations and norms. In what follows, I will explore the implications of this normative order on organizations, how these norms affect their structure, activities, resources and identities, among other dimensions.

Structure: International cooperation requires the “partners” to create formal associative structures with legal status. For many years, this was an impediment for gay, lesbian and trans* organizations in the region. As José recounted in our interview, in Honduras it was not until 2004 that the state finally allowed the legal inscription of three openly gay associations. In Costa Rica, it was in 1995 that the first openly gay organization, Triángulo Rosa, was granted legal status, after a long road full of obstacles and conservative resistance from the institutions (Jiménez 2018). In the case of trans* organizations, it was much later. For example, Transvida exists as a collective since 2009, but it was in

³²³ “Derecho-humanismo” (translated here as *human-rightism*) is a term with which Vázquez and the activists of the TRVNSGÉN3RO PROJECT name that trend in activism that adopts an agenda defined by international cooperation and the hegemonic tendencies of social movements in the Global North. It is a sort of synecdoche, in which they speak of human rights, which would represent, at least on paper, a broad repertoire of rights, to name in reality a restricted and restrictive portfolio of civil and patrimonial rights for LGBTIQ+ people, and some punitivist policies against hate crimes.

³²⁴ Free translation: *human-rightism* is close to classic commercial law because it is very respectful of conventions, techniques and the status quo of rights, it is not as ambitious or as subversive as alternativism that looks for loopholes and seeks to humiliate the legal system.

2015 that it filed its legal registration, which allowed them to participate as a sub-recipient of the HIV Prevention Country Project promoted by the Global Fund.

Certainly, the processes of *NGOization* and their incorporation within the NPIC have impacts in other areas as well. As a consequence of this process of institutionalization that Falquet (2020) calls *NGOization*, collectives begin to look more and more like corporations. Leaving aside street knowledge, organizations are progressively adopting the language, structures and norms of the business world. This model inevitably imposes vertical power structures that are difficult to combine with organic horizontality. I do not say it is impossible, but it is difficult to dismantle the hierarchies imposed by the figures of boards of directors and leadership positions (often better paid than the rest, with requirements that are discriminatory for queer and trans* people from popular sectors). As Spade affirms:

Overall, the lesbian and gay rights agenda has shifted toward preserving and promoting the class and race privilege of a small number of elite gay and lesbian professionals while marginalizing or overtly excluding the needs and experiences of people of color, immigrants, people with disabilities, indigenous people, trans people, and poor people (Spade 2015, 34)

Activities: In the field of *human-rightism*, international cooperation shapes the agenda of social movements. From the Global North, they dictate the contents, point out the priorities and shape the type of actions that are considered correct within the repertoire of donors' codes of conduct. In the field of *human-rightism*, international cooperation shapes the agenda of social movements. From the Global North, they dictate the contents, point out the priorities and shape the type of actions that are considered correct within the repertoire of struggle mechanisms. In this sense, some direct actions are downplayed as radical or disruptive, giving priority to activities that do not question the basis of the status quo, such as political lobbying or mass communication campaigns. Moreover, as Falquet rightly points out, this goes so far as to shape participation in mobilizations: "Même les manifestations doivent avoir lieux aux horaires de bureau, les jours ouvrables, pour que ces groupes y participent" (Falquet 2020, 231).

In Costa Rica, as in France and in so many other countries, the LGBTIQ+ NPIC aligned itself with the reformist demand for equal marriage. LG activists believed that the struggle should be staggered, and it was not strategic to launch the demands of trans* people at the same time as the fight for marriage. Therefore, they asked us to wait and invited us to join the equal marriage campaign. But marriage solves little for queer and trans* people who struggle every day to survive neoliberal necropolitics. Jacob explains it from his experience:

Al venir aquí, a otro país, que te vendan algo bonito y que por eso, eh... Con esa campaña del matrimonio igualitario... Bullshit! O sea, para mí eso es una mierda total.

Porque para mí, toda la vida luché allá por la comunidad LGTB y para mí, yo, Jacob, el matrimonio no es algo grande. Yo tengo 7 años con mi pareja y yo no necesito casarme para tener algo o encajar de nuevo en el sistema para control. Entonces a mí me interesaba otras cosas, como poder tener mi trabajo, en mi seguro social a mi pareja, que ella en realidad pueda gozar de esas prestaciones de seguro mío. ¿Me entendés? Y aquí veo que le están dando publicidad, todo está en eso, en vez de ver qué se puede hacer. Porque... no puedo hablar por Centroamérica pero por lo menos Nicaragua y Costa Rica que he estado, la lucha se ha vuelto como más político corrupto, de economía, como de publicidad, como con el mercado, que por derechos humanos, políticos y civiles de las personas³²⁵ (Jacob, in discussion with the author, October 30, 2019).

As Spade notes,

The quest for marriage seems to have far fewer benefits, then, for queers whose families are targets of state violence and who have no spousal access to health care or immigration status, and seems to primarily benefit those whose race, class, immigration, and ability privilege would allow them to increase their well-being by incorporation into the government's privileged relationship status (Spade 2015, 31).

In this sense, both Spade (2015) and Almeida and Vázquez (2010) agree that it is not a matter of completely dismissing the work of reforms at the legal level. For instance, in their book *Cuerpos distintos: ocho años de activismo en Ecuador*, Almeida and Vázquez (2010) describe interesting actions that have been developed in Ecuador from legal alternativism, which they describe as a "hacking" the system from within. They find loopholes to mock and move the normative system off balance. But this cannot be the central demand of our resistance, as Spade alerts (Spade 2015, 17), nor can we place our trust in a State that since its foundation has persecuted and criminalized those who dissent from the norm. We must also be cautious not to believe what the law says about itself since time and again the law has changed, been declared newly neutral or fair or protective, and then once more failed to transform the conditions of disparity and violence that people were resisting (Spade 2015, 7–8).

Resources: Ignacio Martín-Baró (1989), precursor of liberation psychology and a researcher committed to the struggles of the Central American peoples for liberation, points out that resources in an organization determine power relations, both internally and in relation to others. By resources,

³²⁵ Free translation: Coming here, to another country, they sell you something nice and that's, uh... With that equal marriage campaign... Bullshit! I mean, for me that's total bullshit. Because for me, all my life I fought there [in Nicaragua] for the LGTB community, and for me, I, Jacob, marriage is not a big thing. I have been with my partner for 7 years and I don't need to get married to have something or fit back into the system for control. So, I was interested in other things, like being able to have my job, to include my partner in my social security coverage, so that she can actually enjoy those benefits of my insurance. Do you get what I mean? And here I see that they are giving it [equal marriage] publicity, everything is about that, instead of seeing what can be done. Because... I can't speak for Central America but at least Nicaragua and Costa Rica that I have been to, the struggles have become more like corrupt politics, an economy, like advertising, like in line with the market, than about human, political and civil rights of the people.

Martín-Baró understands a wide range of elements: money, yes, but also materials, instruments, technologies, information, experiences, tools for agency, and, of course, people who put their bodies and energy into the organization. Resources, says Martín-Baró, also influence relationships, strategic alliances, solidarity pacts and the relations that are generally woven with other social actors. What happens with *NGOization* is that monetary and material resources are overvalued over other resources, such as street and embodied knowledge. Thus, we have often seen the abandonment of community practices that sustain lives in order to prioritize activities that fit the resource management model of cooperation. Likewise, the voices that wield organic and local knowledges are minorized or delegitimized in the face of the voices that replicate the institutional languages of the international professional world. As Valencia points out: “to conceive of the Third World as a geopolitically immutable space—without any possibility for action, empowerment, or the creation of its own discursive frame—is a clear indication of the disdain implicit in a colonialist position” (Valencia 2018, 7).

In short, as long as they are in line with the model of project-oriented programs with short timelines and quantifiable outcomes (Spade 2015, 29), the management model imposed by the international cooperation may open the door to some economic stability for some LGBTIQ+ activists. However, as Spade points out, “pay often correlates to educational privilege, which again means that the greatest share of resources goes to white employees from privileged backgrounds while the least goes to employees of color and people without educational privilege” (Spade 2015, 36).

Examples of the erosive impact of these dynamics on Costa Rican organizations abound. I will mention just two. One afternoon, while working with the group of trans women on recovering the oral history of their community, I brought to the discussion one of the few books that exist about trans women in Costa Rica. As I pronounced the author’s name, fury took over the room. The older ones *transplained*³²⁶ to me that this book was written and published at the expense of the exploitation of trans women in the 90’s. They recounted that the author, a gay activist and scholar, renowned for his research on gay history, was a leader in an LGBT organization that received a grant from Dutch cooperation to do research *on* trans women. This was a well-funded project, yet they denounced that those who collaborated with interviews received little or no compensation at all. They claim that he got rich out of managing this and other projects, funded by international cooperation to work with gay men and trans women. When the book was published, a fancy presentation was held with representatives of international agencies, scholars and cooperation officials in the field of human

³²⁶ *Transplaining* is a term we coined in response to the usual mansplaining and *cisplaining* voices that write trans* history.

rights. The author invited a couple of the trans women he had interviewed, and asked them to dress nicely for the occasion. They said they felt as part of the decoration, since they were not given a chance to speak at the presentation (Anonymous participant #1³²⁷). However, they could listen to his affirmations, and some of them could also read his book. They denounce that its pages are filled with lies (Anonymous participant #3). They recall feeling sick with the words he used to describe them. They resent him treating them with contempt, neglecting their requests about pronouns and names, psychologizing their oppressions, and not even recognizing them as women. Without using those words, they were speaking with great clarity about forms of epistemic violence that are common to the NPIC, such as extractivism, silencing, instrumentalization, objectifying, othering, and exoticization.

“La idea de él era sacarle toda la plata que pudiera a la Embajada Real de los Países Bajos. Y lo logró. ¿Pero qué hizo? Agarrarnos a nosotras de mampara, de gancho, para lucrarse³²⁸” (Anonymous participant #2). This discussion led us to reflect on class oppression. Recalling that outrageous episode enabled them to denaturalize the causes that produce the precarious material conditions in which they live, while others earn their living by writing books about their misery.

However, two decades have passed and the situation does not seem to change. This brings us to the second example. Despite countless hours of training and formation, despite having adjusted its structure to the model imposed by international cooperation, despite having legal status and accumulating in their bodies an enormous and powerful archive of trans* knowledge, trans women continue to occupy subordinate positions in the different NPIC projects. As activist Dayana Hernández denounces:

Image 149
Trans* critique to the NPIC



Source: Screenshot form Dayana Hernández’s facebook page³²⁹

³²⁷ We agreed with the participants to render their identity completely anonymous to avoid persecution on the part of the author they denounce.

³²⁸ Free translation: His idea was to get as much money as he could from the Royal Netherlands Embassy. And he succeeded, but what did he do? He used us as a screen, as a hook, to make a profit.

³²⁹ Dayana restricted the privacy settings of this post to her friends. For this reason, I asked for her consent to include a screenshot of this post in this study.

Caption: People who work in international organizations in this country with huge wages and they don't know a thing nor do they contribute to the populations in fact they learn from us really so shameless, those jobs belong to us enjoy while you can #someday [They have the jobs] only due to cronyism because they have zero experience.

Dayana sustains that her *compañeras* are the best qualified for NPIC-funded positions, but they will never be appointed because trans women's knowledge is seen only as raw material to be exploited.

Social justice has become a career track populated by individuals with specialized professional training who rely on business management models to run nonprofits "efficiently". The leadership and decision-making come from these disproportionately white, upper-class paid leaders and donors, which has significantly shifted priorities toward work that stabilizes structural inequality by legitimizing and advancing dominant systems of meaning and control rather than making demands for deeper transformation (Spade 2015, 29).

Even today, in Costa Rica trans women who despite multiple obstacles manage to enter in the lowest range of the NPIC's salaried world, continue to receive lower wages than cisgender people doing the same job. When they denounce that they are being underpaid, NGOs, international cooperation agencies and state institutions resort to the coloniality of knowledge. They argue that trans women cannot receive a higher salary, since they are paid what corresponds within the salary scale for people who do not have formal education (discussion with Transvida activists , April 15, 2021). Thus, even if they obtain better indicators in their work than their cisgender colleagues, they continue to be the last link in the NPIC chain, underpaid and with no possibility of promotion, in a "humanitarian" career with a limit marked by titles. In the NPIC structural systems of oppression are barely tickled. As Spade notes, "lack of community accountability, elitism, concentration of wealth and resources in the hands of white elites, and exploitative labor practices have become norms within these organizations" (Spade 2015, 36).

Identity/subjectivity: Without exhausting the domains impacted by the processes of *NGOization*, I will conclude by mentioning one that is particularly problematic in Costa Rica and in Abya Yala. International cooperation has also come to affect the processes of subjectification and the way we in Abya Yala construct our identities. Dean Spade warns us about this:

how modes of administrative governance produce what we come to think of as natural or pre-existing identities... Rather than understanding administrative systems merely as responsible for sorting and managing what "naturally" exists, I argue that administrative systems that classify people actually invent and produce meaning for the categories they administer, and that those categories manage both the population and the distribution of security and vulnerability (Spade 2015, 11).

An example of this emerged in my dialogues with the group of trans* women self-identified as war survivors. They explained to me that although today the majority of trans women in Costa Rica receive

the word "travesti" as an insult, this was not always the case. "No hablemos de chicas trans, hablemos de travestis que era lo que decíamos en ese tiempo³³⁰" (Kassandra, in discussion with the author, August 25, 2017). In Costa Rica, until relatively recently, "travesti" or "loca" were the words these participants used to name themselves. Not that they were words with positive connotations, nor were they the terms they chose to use to name themselves. These were the words by which they were called, and they began to use them to name themselves. As Dévora points out: "No, digamos, hasta ahora, después de muchos años nosotras no éramos mujeres trans. La palabra mujer trans se escucha hasta ahora. Antes diay, playo o travesti o así³³¹" (Dévora, in discussion with the author, July 21, 2017). The introduction of the term trans*, and especially trans woman, came to this community as part of an international trend that brought to Abya Yala the terminology used in the Global North. Although today most of us trans* people identify with this term, it has erased other local forms such as "playo" or "loca", which are too dirty for the sanitized politics of *human-rightism*. In short, as Falquet portrays: "Mais pour accéder aux financements, il faut offrir des garanties : professionnalisation, spécification, mais aussi discipline et obéissance" (Falquet 2020, 228).

One of the most dangerous effects of the establishment of the NPIC lies in the way it shapes relations between organizations, groups and communities. By reproducing the logic of neoliberal management, relationships are built in terms of competition. At best, strategic alliances will be established with other organizations, but solidarity does not seem to be a value that fits within these forms of governance. The Global North's calls put organizations to compete with each other over resources. They determine the rules of the game, and often these rules oblige organizations to adapt to the terms of reference. This has meant, as we have said, adapting objectives to international agendas, but it has also meant transforming the very composition of organizations. For instance, in the last decade, many of the open calls for feminist or women's organizations have imposed a trans* participation quota as a requirement. This, at first glance, might appear to be a simple affirmative action, but the impact it has had on relations between organizations and collectivities has been disastrous.

In the NPIC, the donors put the very identities they have produced in rivalry with each other. As if it were the colors in fashion catalogs, cooperation is changing the trendy populations it chooses to prioritize. Thus, for example, peasant and indigenous women's organizations have found themselves up against the wall when they are asked to redirect their productive projects for survival in rural areas

³³⁰ Free translation: Let's not talk about trans girls, let's talk about *travestis*, which is what we used to say at that time.

³³¹ Free translation: No, let's say, until recently, after many years we were not trans women. The word trans woman is heard until now. Before, say, *playo* or *travesti* or like that.

towards an agenda of sexual rights and diversity, or when lesbian collectives are conditioned to guarantee the incorporation of trans* activists into their ranks.

It is not that there are no trans* people in rural areas, nor that there are no trans* people who also identify themselves as lesbians, and participation among those organizations could be enriching for everyone, but their incorporation should be a consensus and not a mandatory quota. This prosthetic inclusion that comes from above is perceived as an order and generates resistance and tensions, not only with the donors but, specially, among the populations. I do not claim that the origin of the tensions between lesbian organizations and trans* collectivities lies in international cooperation, but I believe that the violent forms that these tensions have taken in Abya Yala have been fueled and exacerbated by these logics of competition imposed by the NPIC.

6.2.3. “Sala tomada”: a sad case of occupation

Perhaps the most shameful case of NPIC's impact in Costa Rica, and paradoxically one of the least known, is that of La Sala. La Sala is the oldest sex workers' organization in the country and in the Central American region. Founded in 1994, La Sala Association has been a safe space for the meeting and organization of women who are or were sex workers in the city of San José. The organization's main participants are cisgender women, although it is sometimes possible to find trans women in their activities.

The history of La Sala has not been easy. Throughout these 28 years they have resisted pressures from different sectors that look at this organization with repudiation, pity, condescension or greed. In an interview with one of its leaders, Nubia Ordoñez, she told me about the three most difficult moments they have faced, in relation to social actors that have put their organization at risk.

La Sala is a child (a somewhat undisciplined child, perhaps), of the NGOization process of the 80s and 90s. In fact, its emergence is directly linked to the cooperation funds of the Netherlands. An NGO working on sexuality issues obtained funding from the Netherlands cooperation to work with sex workers, especially on HIV prevention issues. The funds included a budget to support the organizational processes of this population, and its focus, at least on paper, was to generate capacities among sex workers, so that they could eventually lead their own processes. It was a regional initiative, so that similar processes were developed in several countries of the region, and there were even other organizations with the name La Sala in other latitudes of Abya Yala.

Considering everything discussed in the previous pages, it is not surprising that the origins of La Sala were cemented by professionals from the Social Sciences paid by the international cooperation, and that its first activities were determined by the international agenda of the NPIC:

Al principio, La Sala fue manejada por personas externas. O sea, personas que no eran trabajadoras sexuales y ellas eran la junta directiva, ellas eran las que daban las órdenes, las que... hacían todo. Y nosotras solamente lo que hacíamos era ser como voluntarias en la organización. Llegábamos a limpiar, a darle café a las compañeras, todas esas cosas, verdad³³² (Nubia, in discussion with the author, November 8, 2019).

La Sala works from the discursive position of human rights. However, the notion of human rights for La Sala is broader than that of the LG organizations that pushed for equal marriage. For La Sala, human rights go beyond property rights. It is about labor rights (insurance, vacations, Christmas bonus), the right to housing, access to health and respectful treatment in public institutions, and conditions to be able to work safely.

...al principio se trabajó mucho lo que era prevención. No se estaba pensando en los derechos ni nada de eso en este momento, verdad. O sea, se duró como 10 años para que La Sala entendiera que una de las cosas más fuertes por las que debía luchar La Sala eran los derechos humanos. Y que ahí venía lo demás. De ahí venía la salud, el derecho de la vivienda, el derecho de ser atendida bien, como se debe, dignamente, todo eso, verdad? Pero como el proyecto [de la cooperación] era eso, verdad, las enfermedades de transmisión sexual, cómo se usa el condón, cuando viene lo del condón femenino, todo eso. Fue cuando nos llamaron, nos agruparon y nos empezamos a organizar³³³ (Nubia, in discussion with the author, November 8, 2019)

After years of unpaid reproductive work, these women began to demand a more active role in the organization. They demanded to take part in decision-making, they wanted to have an influence on the work of the organization. This generated frictions with the salaried professionals who at the time managed the organization. Nubia remembers how one of the professionals treated them with contempt and showed misogynistic and classist attitudes towards them. Finally, in 2011, they could no longer tolerate this dynamic.

Una vez, que se nombró a un hombre presidente empezamos a ver la necesidad de que... primero que nada, no tiene por qué ser hombre, verdad, y segundo, queríamos ver la necesidad de que La Sala fuera una organización de y para mujeres trabajadoras

³³² Free translation: At the beginning, La Sala was managed by outsiders. I mean, people who were not sex workers and they were the board of directors, they were the ones who gave the orders, who... did everything. And all we did was to be volunteers in the organization. We would come to clean up, to give coffee to the *compañeras*, all those things, right?

³³³ Free translation: ...at the beginning we worked a lot on prevention. We were not thinking about rights or anything like that at that time, you know. I mean, it took about 10 years for La Sala to understand that one of the strongest things La Sala had to fight for was human rights. And from there came the rest. From there came health, the right to housing, the right to be treated well, as it should be, with dignity, all of that, right? But since the [cooperation] project was that, you know, sexually transmitted diseases, how to use condoms, when it comes to the female condom, all that. That's when they called us, grouped us together and we started to organize.

sexuales. Y que si algunas personas quisieran cooperar y ayudarle a la organización, que fuera desde afuera, verdad, no desde adentro³³⁴ (Nubia, in discussion with the author, November 8, 2019)

Thus, they held some closed meetings to talk among themselves about this situation. These meetings were practically clandestine, as the professional who was holding the presidency tried to dissuade any attempt of autonomous organization by the sex workers. At the beginning there was no consensus among them. The coloniality that characterizes these *NGOization* processes, added to the rejection of a society that constantly devalues the existence of women and sex workers, had permeated to such an extent that some of them believed that sex workers were not capable of building their own processes and that they always needed the advice of professionals to guide their paths.

Las mujeres, nos dividimos. Unas, pensando en que teníamos que ser una organización de y para, y otras de que podíamos ser para pero de no podíamos porque creían que no lo podíamos hacer, que no lo podíamos lograr, verdad? Entonces hubieron los dos criterios y en una asamblea que se hizo dijimos: nosotras lo podemos hacer. Y si no lo podemos hacer, buscamos ayuda, simple y sencillamente... En la misma asamblea donde se decide sacar a la persona que estaba de presidente en ese momento, que se quería postular otra vez, y le dijimos: no, queremos que una mujer sea la presidenta y queremos esa mujer sea mujer trabajadora sexual. Entonces tomamos la decisión, quitamos al presidente, o sea le dimos un golpe de estado [ríe] y montamos una junta directiva el 100% mujeres trabajadoras sexuales. Ahí no había ninguna profesional ni había nadie fuera de, que no fuera trabajadora sexual. Podía ser profesional, pero que fuera trabajadora sexual³³⁵ (Nubia, in discussion with the author, November 8, 2019)

This act of insubordination and self-determination marked a new stage for the sex workers' movement in Costa Rica. The Sala continued to grow, but now with an agenda agreed upon by sex workers. Autonomy enabled them to access spaces for dialogue and coordination with state institutions and activists from various sectors, which allowed them to develop collaborative relationships and alliances with other populations struggling to sustain life in the city of San José. Their relationship with international cooperation continued, but with care that this did not imply a threat to their autonomy in their decisions. Likewise, they continued to receive support from professionals and people from the

³³⁴ Free translation: One time, they appointed a man as president, so we started to see the need for... first of all, it should not be a man, right, and second, we wanted to see the need for La Sala to be an organization of and for women sex workers. And that if some people wanted to cooperate and help the organization, it should be from the outside, right, not from the inside.

³³⁵ Free translation: The women, we were divided. Some, thinking that we had to be an organization of and for, and others thought that we could do the "for" part, but we could not be "of" [sex workers], because they believed that we could not do it, that we could not achieve it, right? So, there were both criteria, and in an assembly we said: we can do it. And if we can't do it, we look for help, as simple as that... In the same assembly where we decided to remove the person who was president at that time, who wanted to run again, and we said: no, we want a woman to be the president and we want that woman to be a sex worker. So, we made the decision, we removed the president, in other words, we gave him a coup d'état [laughs] and we set up a board of directors made up of 100% sex workers. There were no professionals there and there was no one from outside who was not a sex worker. They could be professionals, but they had to be sex workers.

universities, but also demarcating very well the limits of outsiders who approached them with the intention of collaborating³³⁶.

However, the storms did not end with emancipation. Nubia relates how the second strike came from a Neo-Pentecostal church. It was a slow and subtle process, different from the frontal attacks they were used to receiving from churches, institutions and even abolitionist feminists who refused to recognize them as valid interlocutors to talk about their own realities. This time it was different, and that made it difficult for them to react and respond.

Llegó una persona, con toda su carita de ángel, su voz de ángel, su sonrisa de ángel y nos dijo que ella quería ayudarnos. A hacer algunas ferias de la salud, que ella venía, que ella tenía contacto con personas de iglesias, sí. De una vez, eso sí nos dijo, de iglesias de Estados Unidos, que la gente quería ayudar a las mujeres trabajadoras sexuales de Costa Rica y todo. Nosotras dijimos: "Wow! Aquí vamos a podemos salir de muchas cosas y todo eso", verdad? Y comenzamos a darle pelota, y a darle pelota. Después llegó una iglesia y un señor ahí, don Carlos, y dijo que ahora sí todo iba a cambiar para nosotras, que de ahora en adelante nosotras no íbamos a tener que estar peleando por plata, porque íbamos a poder pagar el local, y todas esas cosas, verdad? Yo dije: ¡Qué bueno! pero me empezó a dar sospechas³³⁷ (Nubia, in discussion with the author, November 8, 2019).

This religious altruism respectful of sex workers sounded too good to be true. Soon, Nubia's suspicions came true. Strategically, this church sought to seduce some of the women leaders to join their ranks. They took advantage of the conditions of extreme poverty that many of these women face to offer them assistance packages in combo with evangelization. Nubia points out the perverse dynamic in which, on the one hand, they approached them with a discourse of support and respect for the organization, and at the same time, those who agreed to receive the Holy word were lectured with abolitionist sermons full of guilt and stigmatization.

This is how they managed to introduce their agenda and ideological project into the organization. Along with this individual indoctrination, this church also channeled resources to begin a spatial occupation of the location that La Sala maintained for almost 20 years in the Red-light district of San

³³⁶ An interesting example of these collaborative forms of work between La Sala and the university can be found in the work of feminist sociologist Mariana R. Mora who has accompanied the work of this organization for many years. See R. Mora, Mariana. 2013. "Percepciones y Prácticas de Las Mujeres En El Espacio Urbano: El Caso de Mujeres Trabajadoras Del Sexo En La Ciudad de San José." Tesis para optar por el grado de licenciatura en Sociología., Universidad de Costa Rica.

³³⁷ Free translation: One person arrived, with her angel face, her angel voice, her angel smile, and she told us that she wanted to help us. To organize health fairs, that she was coming, that she had contact with people from churches, yes. She told us all at once, yes, from churches in the United States, that people wanted to help Costa Rican women sex workers and all that. We said, "Wow, here we can get out of a lot of things and stuff", right? And we started to give them a lot of space, a lot of space. Then a church arrived and a man, Don Carlos, and he said that now everything was going to change for us, that from now on we were not going to have to fight for money, because we were going to be able to pay for the house, and all those things, right? I said: That's great! But I started to get suspicious.

José. Again, their strategies were subtle and disguised as humanitarian aid. Volunteers from the United States and Costa Rica began to arrive to make improvements to the infrastructure of the building (painting, cleaning, tiling, etc.). Through these actions they guaranteed their daily presence in La Sala, where the participation of blond, white boys and girls became more and more naturalized.

One afternoon, Nubia was working in her office when she heard people entering the building. She continued working, and the people did not notice her presence.

Y veo que entra una y otra y otra, y toda la gente de la iglesia, verdad. Y digo yo: bueno, qué raro, verdad? Pero me quedé chiquitita y seguí trabajando en la computadora. Ellas no sabían que yo estaba ahí. No se dieron cuenta de que yo estaba ahí. Cuando oigo: ¡un culto! ¡Un culto en La Sala! [ambxs reímos nerviosamente] Mar, vieras que yo, sabe, yo decía: ¡tierra, trágame! No es porque yo no crea en Dios, yo creo en Dios³³⁸ (Nubia, in discussion with the author, November 8, 2019)

With the help of a couple of leaders of the organization who they had successfully evangelized, but without consulting or even communicating it to the community, this church began to organize worship sessions in the house of the sex workers' organization. Although some sex workers and other people living in the area participated in the worship service, the organization never agreed to the use of its facilities for evangelistic activities. This situation caused strong friction within the organization, between those who felt outraged and threatened by this occupation, and those who considered it a positive activity for the community. The frictions, Nubia affirmed, provoked an internal fragmentation that she remembers with great sorrow: "we almost became enemies," she says, recalling with regret what a church was capable of provoking in a grassroots organization.

But the church's entryism did not end there. Taking advantage of the fact that La Sala was going through a difficult time in terms of financing, this church took another step in their attempt at colonization. Once again, they convinced one of the leaders, who held a seat on the Board of Directors of the Sala, to request a meeting with the landlord. Of course, this meeting was not communicated to the organization. In the meeting, the church representatives agreed with the landlord to sign a new rent contract, in which the church would be responsible for the payment of the rent and, therefore, would be the official tenant of the premises. This action was carried out outside the law, since the organization still had a valid rental contract, but the church relied on the signature of the organization's leader, who they had convinced that this was the best thing for everyone.

³³⁸ Free translation: And I see one person coming in and another and another, and all the people from the church, right? And I said: well, that's weird, isn't it? But I stayed quiet and kept working on the computer. They didn't know I was there. They didn't realize I was there. And then I heard it: a cult! A cult in La Sala! [we both laughed nervously] Mar, you know, I was like, "Earth, swallow me!" It's not because I don't believe in God, I believe in God.

When Nubia discovered this situation, the new contract had already been signed and the church members were beginning to dispose of the place as they pleased. Burning with rage, Nubia consulted a lawyer and requested an urgent meeting with the landlord.

Cuando llegó don G. me dice: diay Nubia, ¿cómo está? Y todo bien y no sé qué. Le digo: Sí, don G., todo bien, pero me siento muy triste porque pasó esto, y esto, y esto. Y dice: "Aquí vino la presidenta y firmó una carta", me dice. "Sí", le digo yo, "pero no importa... Yo vengo como representante de la organización"... "Pero es que cómo fue lo que pasó, y no sé qué". "No importa. Con ella lo arreglamos nosotras", le digo yo, "pero con usted arreglamos lo del local. Nosotras necesitamos que usted le devuelva la plata que ha recibido de esta gente... estos cuatro o cinco meses"... Me dice: "No, es más, un poquito más." Le digo yo: "bueno, devuélvale a esa plata a ellos porque nosotras nos quedamos ahí. Nosotras todavía le estamos pagando a usted. Cuando nosotras dejemos de pagarle ya usted puede sacarnos de ahí, desalojarnos si usted quiere, pero antes no."

Le dijimos: "dele el local de a la par, que está ahí desocupado. Dele el local de a la par, a ellos. Si quieren hacer una iglesia, dele el local de a la par, pero el de nosotros no. Hasta que nosotras lo dejemos usted lo puede usar de él, ahorita no".

Y yo le dije: vea, licenciada -le dije yo- o ustedes arreglan esto, o nos vamos a la Corte. Yo no voy a dejar que le peguen ese golpe tan feo a La Sala así. El local es de La Sala. "Sí, pero es que ellos le pusieron el piso", me dijo el dueño. "Pues que lo quiebren y se lo lleven. Que lo quiebren y se lo lleven el piso, porque el piso no es La Sala. Nosotras tenemos un local ahí, y un convenio con el señor"³³⁹. (Nubia, in discussion with the author, November 8, 2019)

Finally, the situation was resolved favorably for La Sala, thanks to the fact that they still had a valid rental contract. As a result of this situation, they decided to terminate the relationship with the church, which ended up renting the premises next to La Sala to continue their evangelization in the area. Internally, relations were quite eroded, fraught with tensions and mistrust. Even so, the organization managed to survive this attempt of colonization, and continued to look for ways to advance its projects, in a complicated scenario in which sex workers were no longer an attractive population for cooperation.

³³⁹ Free translation: When don G. arrived he said to me: "diay Nubia, how are you? Everything alright?" and whatever. I tell him: "Yes, don G., everything is fine, but I feel very sad because this happened, and this, and this". And he says: "The president came here and signed a letter", he tells me. "Yes", I said to him, "but it doesn't matter... I come as a representative of the organization"... "But how could this happen, and I blah, blah, blah". "It doesn't matter. We'll sort it out with her", I told him, "but with you we'll settle the matter of the property. We need you to return the money that you have received from those people... those four or five months"... He said: "No, it's more, a little more". I told him, "Well, give that money back to them because we are staying. We are still paying you. When we stop paying you, you can take us out of there, evict us if you want, but not before". We told him: "give him the place next door, that is vacant. Give the place next door to them. If they want to build a church, give them the place next door, but not ours. Until we leave it, you can use it, but not now". And I said to the lawyer: "Look," I said, "either you two fix this, or we go to the Court. I am not going to let La Sala be struck such a nasty blow like this. The place belongs to La Sala. "Yes, but they put the tile on the floors," the owner said to me. "Have them break it up and take it away! Have them break it and take their floor, because the floor is not La Sala. We have a place there, and an agreement with the owner."

It is in this situation that the latest attack finds them, the toughest they have faced, according to Nubia. This time, the attack came from the NPIC. By the end of the 2000s, cisgender female sex workers had managed to lower all indicators of STI and HIV incidence in their population, to the point that they were no longer considered "key populations" by international organizations. This meant that they were excluded from calls for funding. In other words, since they did a very good job, the budget that financed their sustained work in prevention was slashed.

In this context, in the early 2010s, Costa Rica signed and began to implement the *Proyecto País de Prevención de VIH* (HIV Prevention National Project), financed by the Global Fund and administered by the giant transnational humanitarian NGO, HIVOS. This project contemplated as beneficiaries men who have sex with men and transgender women, so, despite the fact that La Sala tried to fight it, cisgender women who are sex workers were excluded from the prevention packages. In the same vein, La Sala was also unable to compete as a sub-recipient organization³⁴⁰. However, an ally organization that works on HIV prevention, composed mainly of gay men and some cis women, requested La Sala's support because they needed an organization who was legally constituted to compete, and their collective was not. Nubia now recognizes that they approached La Sala because they knew they were going through tough times, financially speaking, and it was this very situation that led them to accept. "[ellos] tenían problemas con no sé qué otras organizaciones de la sociedad civil, y encontraron que nosotras estábamos limpias, que podíamos hacer eso, y lo hicimos³⁴¹" (Nubia, in discussion with the author, November 8, 2019). La Sala agreed to lend them the organization's legal structure, which implies a great responsibility. The money for the rent went to the other organization. The only thing the Sala requested was for them to hire a couple of female sex workers to work on the project. This could temporarily resolve the economic situation of two women, although it implied a losing autonomy, since now they had to dedicate a good part of their efforts to do work for gay men. Thus, for some time two members of La Sala worked for the HIV prevention project, while La Sala continued looking for funds to attend to their own population. One afternoon, at a meeting, Nubia stops to look at a pen on the table. The pen had the inscription: "La Sala," but it had a different logo than that of their organization. Nubia was confused, as she did not remember having ordered the production of pens, so she began to investigate and discovered that a group of the professionals who

³⁴⁰ The sub-recipient organizations are in charge of implementing the Project's prevention activities, which gave them access to a small budget for renting an office, technological equipment, training processes in organizational management and a few jobs paid at minimum wages for those carrying out prevention activities.

³⁴¹ Free translation: [they] had problems with I don't know what other NGOs, and they believed that we were clean, that we could help them with this, and we did it.

had been hired by the organization that lent them legal structure, in complicity with a couple of gay activists, had created a new organization under the name of La Sala.

“Decían que como otra Sala. La Sala 2, le decían La Sala 2. Cambiaron el logo. ¡Le cambiaron el logo!”³⁴². They changed the logo and adopted an abolitionist position towards sex work. They sought to “rescue” these women and teach them skills so they could leave sex work. “Incluso... Incluso consiguieron otro local por aparte, pagaron otro local por aparte...”³⁴³, Nubia complains with indignation. What bothers her most is that the local Hivos staff was aware of this situation, and not only did they not discuss it with La Sala, but they also provided the legitimacy and budgetary support that allowed the creation of this mirror NGO.

Nubia: Pero [Hivos] nunca nos dieron nada. Incluso, nos utilizaron totalmente. Nos utilizaron. Incluso, este, imaginate vos que habían dado a la Asociación La Sala unas, creo que eran como 3 computadoras, como que dos laptop o no sé qué, y unas tablet... Todo se lo llevaron. O sea, no nos dejaron nada. Ni un escritorio, ni una... Nada. ¡Nada, nada, nada! ...

Mar: Se lo llevaron a esa "otra Sala"?

Nubia: Se lo llevaron ahí³⁴⁴ (Nubia, in discussion with the author, November 8, 2019).

Nubia considers Hivos' complicity with the other Sala's as a betrayal. They placed their trust in an allied organization and in Hivos, which they considered an emblem of human rights work in the country.

Pero nunca, nunca nos creímos que Hivos se iba a poner a dividirnos a nosotras, más bien. Y lo que hizo fue dividirnos. Unas que porque lo que le estaban pagando estaban por allá. Yo estaba prácticamente ya, como casi que con unas cuántas allá [en el local en La Zona] sola. O sea, peleando, porque no se hiciera los locos de nosotras... O sea, ¡lo cambiaron el logo! Para mí, la peor falta de respeto que pudo haber habido. De Hivos hacia La Sala³⁴⁵ (Nubia, in discussion with the author, November 8, 2019).

After having survived the coloniality of the 1990s, which underestimated its capacity for agency and self-determination, and the evangelical colonial occupation, which almost split the organization in two, this third strike finds a worn-out collective, suffocated by the dynamics of the NPIC that pruned its roots, its flowers and its stems. Without the resources to work with their community and to pay

³⁴² Free translation: They said it was like another Sala. La Sala 2, they called it. La Sala 2. They changed the logo. They changed the logo!"

³⁴³ Free translation: They even... They even got another office, they paid for another office on the side...

³⁴⁴ Free translation: Nubia: But they [Hivos] never gave us anything. In fact, they totally used us. They used us. They had even given La Sala Association some, I think there were like 3 computers, like two laptops or I don't know what, and some tablets.... They took everything away. I mean, they left us nothing. Not even a desk, not even a... Nothing. Nothing, nothing, nothing! ... / Mar: They took it to that "other Sala"? / Nubia: They took it there, yes.

³⁴⁵ Free translation: But we never, ever thought that Hivos was going to divide us, actually. And what they did was to divide us. Some were over there because they were paying them. I was practically alone with a few others there [in the house in the Red Light District]. In other words, fighting, so that they wouldn't play us... I mean, they changed the logo! For me, that was the worst act of disrespect there could have been. From Hivos to La Sala.

for a house, with part of their leaders hired to provide prevention services to men, and with a cloned and sanitized organization occupying spaces in institutional tables that sex workers had fought so hard to achieve, finally in 2019 La Sala closed the doors of the place that for 18 years was a home for sex workers in the Red-light district, and said goodbye to the area that for more than 25 years had seen them build a community of affection (Valencia 2019) to sustain life.

Fortunately, some of them saw this moment as a forced pause but not an end. Thus, Nubia and her *compañeras* packed up the few material resources they had and saved piles of memories, fragments of their stories and small trophies that tell the tale of their struggles and their journey. Nubia's house today stocks these raw archives, waiting for better times to come, so they can share a house again.

Porque La Sala no es un local, La Sala es... somos nosotras. Nosotras somos La Sala. Y nosotras, sí, y mientras nosotras luchemos y luchemos por los derechos de nosotras y todo eso la Sala no va a morir aunque no tengamos un local. Aunque sea trabajo de hormiguita lo vamos a hacer, pero no vamos a morir así ³⁴⁶ (Nubia, in discussion with the author, November 8, 2019)

In 2022, La Sala activists continue to develop small projects and important actions. For example, during the worst moments of the Covid-19 pandemic, they managed to channel donations of food, hygiene and cleaning products for the population of female sex workers whose economy was terribly hit by the health crisis. The *compañeras* gather to march together in demonstrations, holding the banner bearing the logo of the original La Sala. Small actions keep alive this organic collectivity, a community of affection that has sustained the lives of so many of them for almost 3 decades.

The case of La Sala is a bittersweet example in which the risk that these *NGOization* processes imply for organizations and communities becomes clear. It is also an example that shows the closeness that can and does exist between conservative sectors such as churches and progressive sectors such as human rights NGOs. At the discursive level we may identify very different rhetoric, even opposing or contrary in many cases. But deep down, if we analyze their practices from a critical and decolonial perspective, we can see that their forms actually share much more than we would like to accept. Despite their explicit human-rightism discursive position, the way in which the NPIC approaches a grassroots organization such as La Sala, formed by and for people whose existence is viewed with condescension by those who inhabit the *zone of being*, ends up reproducing practices of discrediting, othering, and silencing of those populations that they pretend to rescue or support. La Sala's history of strikes shows that NGOs, international cooperation as well as churches that wish to abolish sex work share the common discursive position of rescue. The idea that these women need to be rescued

³⁴⁶ Free translation: Because La Sala is not an office, La Sala is... us. We are La Sala. And we, yes, and as long as we fight and fight for our rights and all that, La Sala is not going to die even if we don't have a place. Even if it is the work of ants, we are going to do it, but we are not going to die like this.

reflects classist, misogynist and colonial thinking. To deny or minimize their reflections, their stances and their decisions, also coincides with the coloniality of knowledge and power. The NPIC speaks of a humanitarian model, but it seems that its definition of humanity is perfectly aligned with a kind of colonial supremacism of the good citizen subject that inhabits the zone of being.

6.3. Outside inclusion: Trans*olidarity to survive the pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic came to disrupt the economy and social life. Some LGBTIQ+ organizations in Costa Rica expressed their concerns when they saw a reduction in the funds allocated by international cooperation for their projects, and they were forced to look for sponsors in the also affected private sector.

The few calls for projects that persisted redirected their focus to support actions in the context of the pandemic. Some of them merely adapted their calls to the context and funded the implementation of virtual activities, provoking a generalized dematerialization effect on activism. Others redirected funds to provide technological equipment to organizations and individuals who did not have the basic resources to adapt to virtuality. They also temporarily financed connectivity costs.

However, although a good part of the trans* populations in the country required this type of material support in order to access these new formats of services and organization, the truth is that for most of them this solved only a part of the problem, since they did not have a regular bond with technologies and virtuality. In any case, participating in conferences, courses and virtual meetings was not their priority.

Trans* and migrant populations were greatly affected by the effects of the pandemic on their daily lives. Those who depended on informal jobs (cleaning houses, street vending, food sales, sex work) found themselves overnight without their source of income, which was already a fragile thread that sustained their existence. How, then, to sustain life in this adverse context?

In Costa Rica, as in many other parts of Abya Yala and the world, trans* organizations reacted with impressive speed and managed to channel donations from private companies and individuals to guarantee at least food, hygiene and cleaning products for trans* people. When the international cooperation bureaucracy finally allowed them to move some funds to attend to the emergency, trans* organizations had already been sustaining the lives of their fellows for months.

Images 150
Trans*olidarity campaigns to sustain life



MESART's campaign for LGBTQ+ people in exile
Source: MESART Facebook page



Antonella Morales preparing food packages in Transvida
Source: Antonella Morales' personal archive



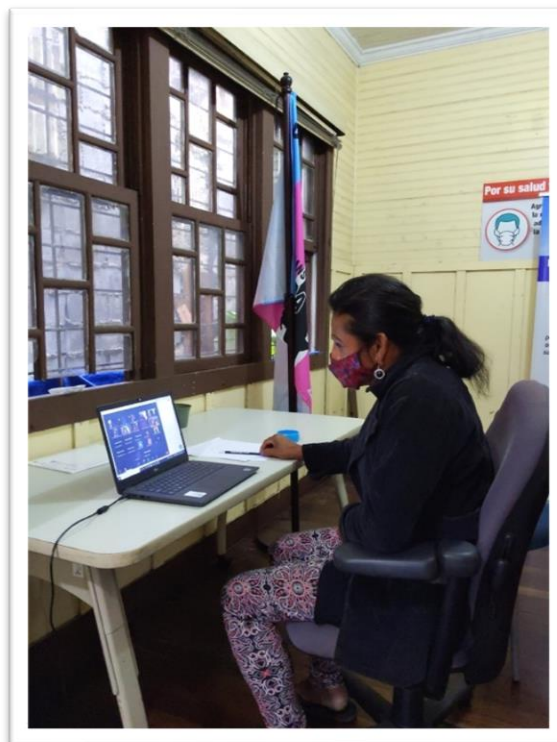
Síwo Alâr survival packages for trans men
Source: Síwo Alâr Hombres Trans Costa Rica Facebook page

The pandemic also meant transformations for my thesis. During 2020 I was trapped in France, in adverse conditions for writing. The second fieldwork trip I had scheduled for 2020 had to be cancelled. This meant adapting the work to the materials I had available for analysis, but also, it meant complications for the ethical/epistemic proposal I was trying to develop. As part of the compensation mechanisms for the participants, we had contemplated a series of support actions to be developed in that second fieldwork trip to Costa Rica, which in this context were impossible. But my main concern, given the material conditions in which many of the participants in this study live, was for their lives, their health and their safety.

Solidarity wove a bridge that crossed the Atlantic, a network to support life, which we like to call trans*olidarity. From France, I supported as much as I could the work of organizations that were trying to ensure the survival of trans* people. I wrote letters, translated projects, submitted applications for

emergency funds, shared calls for proposals and tried to channel monetary and other kind of donations to the organizations. I had a particular concern for the situation of Fabiola, who, while claiming her right to live in freedom, during the worst moments of the pandemic had no place to confine herself. It was not easy to contact her, as she has no fixed address and no cell phone. However, her friends from Transvida activated their networks and when one of them found her, we made a video call to evaluate her situation, her risks, her needs and make a plan of action. The conversation was both affectionate and distressing, full of uncertainty, fear and the helplessness of not being able to do more. We were able to channel money to rent a room where she could take shelter during the first two months of the pandemic. Transvida's activists facilitated the platforms to get the donation to her. They also supported her with food at their office, and they provided her with masks and information on how to prevent exposure to the virus. Fabiola survived the pandemic as the great warrior that she is. She also continued her pedagogical work in the streets and dedicated herself to explaining to her street family and friends the sanitary measures that they could implement to prevent the spread of the disease.

Image 151
Fabiola in an online training, Transvida, 2021



The Costa Rican State implemented a series of measures, which although somewhat confusing and contradictory, were effective in mitigating the impacts of the pandemic. During 2020, it provided some emergency funds for people whose incomes were affected by the pandemic. Several trans* people applied for these subsidies, and also sought alternative ways to sustain their existence.

For example, some were able to access small scholarships for technical training at the Instituto Nacional de Aprendizaje (National Apprenticeship Institute). This institution constitutes one of the most important public programs to provide impoverished sectors with access to technical training programs aimed at their insertion in the labor market. The scholarships included a small budget which they used to buy food. However, these scholarships contemplated a major contradiction: since the trainings were transferred to the virtual modality, students were required to have technological equipment and connectivity to participate. Most trans* students did not have these resources, so they were at risk of being excluded from the training process, and therefore losing their scholarship. In response to this, we mobilized solidarity networks and managed to get them the basic equipment to guarantee their participation.

This was not the only barrier in which the technological gap and access to resources caused exclusion dynamics for the participants of this study. As part of the sanitary measures, the government promoted massive and free vaccination for all people, whether they had insurance or not, and regardless of their migratory status. This allowed many trans* people, migrants and asylum seekers to be vaccinated. At the end of 2021, the government pushed for the use of a QR Code, as happened in France and other countries around the world. This led to serious complications for some people. The procedure to obtain the QR certificate had to be done online, through a platform of the Ministry of Health, which validated the information in the vaccination card that had been given to us in physical form. I was already in Costa Rica at the time, so I asked a couple of participants in this study how their application for the QR certificate had gone. Their response did not surprise me. In many cases, their relationship with technology is quite poor. Neither they nor their relatives had managed to complete the process. Most of these people do not have a computer, they depend on smartphones, sometimes in a bad condition, to carry out all the digital government procedures. The platform presented problems in generating the PDF document to save the vaccination certificate. In addition, many migrants and trans* people reported not even being able to access the system with the data on their vaccination card.

Given this situation, in coordination with trans* activists and organizations of people in exile, we launched a call to support people who were facing material or technical difficulties to generate their vaccination certificate. The organizations were in charge of circulating the call and channeling contacts, and I offered my time and my computer to do the procedure for those who needed help. In the end, we processed several dozens of QR certificates, but also several complaints to the Comptroller of Services for all the cases in which the vaccination card data were not recognized by the system.

As a general trend, we found two types of problems: on the one hand, in the case of some trans* people who had their names changed through the mechanism opened by the OC-24/17, there were inconsistencies between the databases of the Ministry of Health and those of the Social Security clinics. Because of this, some trans* people received QR certificates with their “dead name”, a name that no longer has any legal value, that does not match their ID cards or their gender expression, and that constitutes a form of institutional discrimination. On the other hand, in the case of migrants who do not have insurance, we found all kinds of errors that obstructed the process. Since they did not have insurance, the vaccination personnel had to assign a numerical code to the vaccination card. This code was not the same number assigned at their asylum seeker card or on their residency card. This only complicated the application, since in some cases the correct code was a fragment of the equation written on the carnet, without any instructions to guide them on how to proceed. On the other hand, we also found typing errors, in which the person who entered the information for these individuals inverted or omitted digits, entered dates that did not match those indicated on the card, or even typed the user's name incorrectly.

In the end, the complaints took several weeks to be resolved, leaving many people in a situation of uncertainty and vulnerability. The situation evidenced the existence of structural forms of discrimination that particularly affect historically oppressed populations, such as migrants and trans* people, and that, despite the discourse of inclusion, there are very few mechanisms to resolve the technical and material situations that cause discrimination. However, the people we were able to support were deeply grateful for the trans*olidarity and the help we provided to confront the system that was once again pushing them towards vulnerability.

The life-sustaining community efforts that emerged around the pandemic highlighted the limitations of the discourse of inclusion within the Nation-state, but also showed the contradictions of the humanitarian aid economy that underpins the NPIC. In June 2021, a non-profit foundation dedicated to the promotion of a culture of peace organized an activity with migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers. The activity was carried out in person, despite the fact that at that time the indicators of contagion were very high and hospitals were running out of ICU units. The participants were arranged in groups of 5 to 7 people per room. The groups for the accommodation were made up of people coming from different households, even from different regions of the country. Jacob participated in the activity, along with other members of their collective. A few days later, Jacob contacted me with great fear because one of the people with whom he shared a room was showing symptoms of Covid-19. I recommended him and all the people he had been in contact with to get tested. Tests were supposedly provided free of charge for anyone by the social security. However, the first clinics he approached denied him the right to get tested, under the excuse that he did not have insurance. In

addition, they disrespected his identity, refusing to use his chosen name and pronouns. Finally, after a couple of failed attempts, he and his 7 companions received a positive diagnosis.

All of the affected people were Nicaraguan asylum seekers. Several were queer, lesbian and trans* people. None of them had a stable job or social security. All of them lived in precarious conditions and had trouble covering their basic needs every month. Some had risk conditions such as asthma and hypertension. In this scenario, we were concerned about their health and their lives, as several of them developed moderate symptoms such as fever, body aches, fatigue and a lot of coughing. In addition, some of them come from indigenous communities and have a historical distrust of allopathic medicine and its drugs. Nevertheless, we were able to convince them to approach a public clinic to seek treatment for their symptoms. From the clinic they were sent to recuperate at home, with just a few packets of acetaminophen to control the fever.

In addition to the imminent risk to life, there was the anguish of material subsistence. Not only were they sick, but they had to stop all the activities they carry out on a daily basis to subsist (from informal jobs to participation in NPIC activities that gave them access to subsidies). They needed support to get basic food and medicine, and to pay rents. Since they had been infected in the context of an activity of a humanitarian NGO, where basic sanitary protocols were not followed, we advised them to explain the situation to the NGO in order to seek support. They were outraged by the response. The NGO managers said they regretted the situation, but they could not do anything for them as they had no budget line items for medicines or food subsidies. They washed off any responsibility in the matter and wished them a good recovery.

Faced with the irresponsibility and indifference of this NGO, we once again turned to solidarity networks. Among activists, scholars and trans* people, and with the support of the Departamento EcuMénico de Investigaciones, an organization that for many years has shown a commitment to migrants, women and queer* people, we gathered food, vitamins, medicines and also natural products used for healing from the traditional knowledge of their peoples. We raised a little money to support them with the rent. We accompanied their recovery with attentive listening and with the material resources we were able to obtain.

Jacob and his friends recovered from the infection and within a couple of weeks returned to their activities. Jacob told me about the bittersweet contradiction that this experience left him with. On the one hand, it fostered his distrust of the institutions and NGOs that constantly approached them to fill out quotas and attendance sheets to present as invoices for the international donors. On the other hand, he was deeply moved by all the solidarity that friends and strangers conjugated to sustain their lives.

With them, I also learned about these alternative ways of organizing and managing trans*olidarity. All these experiences show us that autonomous organization is not only possible, but sometimes it is the only way to sustain life. What Valencia (2019) calls communities of affection seem more urgent than ever. Plural communities that put in common the set of knowledge and strategies, contacts, resources, routes they have traveled and bodies that, with collective strength, are ready to open new paths. In the face of the necropolitics of the Nation-states and the complicity of the NPIC, what we are developing is an artisanal and alternative biopolitics, one that dissents from the aspiration to control and celebrates life and freedom. What binds us together is not the posts on the board of directors or the organization's organigram of positions. What moves us is not the terms of reference or the lines of action of the international cooperation. What binds us together is affection, bonds, the ones that exist and the ones we want to build. Also, the historical complicity, the trust we have built and the mutual recognition in those different corners of the matrix of oppression. What moves us is life, the will to exist, the fervent power of re-existence and the consciousness, as our ancestors taught us well, that the survival of one, is the survival of all our community.

Chapter 7. The profitability of inclusion: on diversity management and rainbow capitalism

*Estamos muy bien
Casi somos normales
Estamos tan bien
Casi heterosexuales
Estamos muy bien
Casi somos iguales
Sólo les pedimos
Que no nos maten*

Sudor Marika

In Spanish, inclusion rhymes with assimilation. It also rhymes with redistribution and yet it seems to be moving further and further away from that path. In Costa Rica we can observe something similar to what Jasbir Puar describes in her book *Terrorist Assemblages. Homonationalism in queer times*, when she analyzes the link between the nationalist imaginaries of exceptionalism in the United States and the imaginary of sexual exceptionalism. In Chapter 2 I described the ways in which Costa Rican imaginaries have been forged around a supposed exceptionalism. As Puar explains, exceptionalism implies a distinction from (in the case of Costa Rica, the distinction from the rest of Central America) and, at the same time, a supposed superiority: "...exceptionalism gestures to narratives of excellence, excellent nationalism, a process whereby a national population comes to believe in its own superiority and its own singularity" (2007, 5).

In the United States, as in Costa Rica, the imaginary of exceptionality was originally linked to heteronormative values, influenced by the heritage of Christian morality, which places an important weight on the heteropatriarchal family. However, the geopolitical and mercantile dynamics of recent decades have led to a reconfiguration of those bases, in which some gay and lesbian citizens are included as subjects within this exceptionality.

As discussed in Chapter 6, normative discourses and practices of inclusion have positioned certain forms of homosexuality inside the standards of normality. In this sense, certain gay subjects strive to demonstrate that they and their lifestyles are compatible with Costa Rican national identity. In the field of geopolitics and the international market, the last two administrations have tried to integrate this into the imaginary of Costa Rican exceptionality, as an advanced country that stands out in its region for being the spearhead in terms of LGBTIQ+ rights and inclusion.

However, this inclusion should not be interpreted as a rupture with the modern/colonial, capitalist/patriarchal Christian-centric/western-centric world system, but merely as an expansion of a biopolitical system of regulation of life. In order for a gay or lesbian person to be considered a good

citizen of the nation, he or she must adapt to a series of norms and comply with a series of requirements that are dictated in a game of mirrors with heteronormativity. That is to say, for a gay or lesbian person to be worthy of that exceptionality of the nation, he or she must assimilate to the good hetero citizen, and demonstrate, whenever possible, that his or her behavior conforms to that national homonormativity.

Sexual exceptionalism also works by glossing over its own policing of the boundaries of acceptable gender, racial, and class formations. That is, homosexual sexual exceptionalism does not necessarily contradict or undermine heterosexual sexual exceptionalism; in actuality it may support forms of heteronormativity and the class, racial, and citizenship privileges they require. The historical and contemporaneous production of an emergent normativity, homonormativity, ties the recognition of homosexual subjects, both legally and representationally, to the national and transnational political agendas of U.S. imperialism. Homonormativity can be read as a formation complicit with and invited into the biopolitical valorization of life in its inhabitation and reproduction of heteronormative norms (Puar 2007, 9).

In Costa Rica, that always looks to the North, the agenda of gay and lesbian collectives is strongly influenced by the United States' model, and by our version of homonormativity that reproduces the national imaginaries of whiteness, peace, equality, homogeneity, exceptionality and even, perhaps in a less obvious way, the Christian values that forge our morality. The model of inclusion that LGBTIQ+ collectives promote in the country is determined by these imaginaries. It seeks to demonstrate that the gay subject can fit perfectly into that normative system of the good citizen. They do not seek, therefore, to transgress or undermine the norms, but to adapt to them.

In this sense, for several years the agenda of the gay and lesbian collectives was saturated by equal marriage.

Image 152
Pride Parade 2013



Source: Jorge González,
<http://papelesdsx.blogspot.com/2013/10/en-costa-rica-recogen-firmas-para.html?m=0>

Although some alternative legal figures were discussed, the majority consensus was to push for equal marriage, under the argument that gays and lesbians deserve the same rights as any other citizen. "Citizenship" is another of those concepts that promises many good things but in practice seems to fall short.

Historian José Jiménez notes that the common denominator that identifies a community of citizens is the nation. (J. D. Jiménez 2018, 3). In this sense, citizenship brings us dangerously close to the ideal of modernity that coloniality has imposed.

Hoy en día, la retórica de la igualdad y la ciudadanía se convierte en una caricatura que encubre privilegios políticos y culturales tácitos, nociones de sentido común que hacen tolerable la incongruencia y permiten reproducir las estructuras coloniales de opresión³⁴⁷ (Rivera Cusicanqui 2010, 56–57).

When LGBTI organizations claim inclusion by means of incorporation into the institutions that regulate and produce citizenship in the *zone of being*, they often do so without problematizing the forms of oppression that these institutions produce in the *zone of non-being*. In this sense, Bourcier points out the trap of vindications such as marriage:

La revendication d'ouverture du mariage plutôt que de mariage gai et lesbienne a été celle du mouvement LGBT institutionnel. « Elle requérait une individualisation et l'adhésion à une subjectivité nationale qui consiste à s'identifier d'abord comme citoyen-ne et non comme gai ou lesbienne. Voilà qui est parfaitement cohérent avec un paradoxe français bien connu. La dénonciation de l'exceptionnalisme démocratique français, qui est structurel et qui est la source même des exclusions et des inégalités qui affectent les femmes, les minorités sexuelles et de genre et/ou racisées, ne peut se faire que par et au nom du sujet universaliste et du citoyen qui pratique l'assimilation excluante et meurtrière (Bourcier 2017, 31)

As I described in Chapter 6, in the last decade the LGBTIQ+ movements in Costa Rica have achieved a number of conquests in the legal/judicial sphere, and they have pushed for cultural transformations that make the presence of gays, lesbians, queer and trans* people, if not fully respected, at least less persecuted and more tolerated. At the same time, the more these changes advance, the more confusing their agenda becomes. Today, their demands are often focused on commodities, neoliberal self-care and individual, bourgeois, and depoliticized pleasure.

Inclusion has become a race in which the LGBTIQ+ subject increasingly resembles the heterosexual subject. A process in which what once was socially framed as dissident, or subversive is neutralized or adapted to fit within the neoliberal project. Thus, the neoliberal project has been forging something

³⁴⁷ Free translation: Today, the rhetoric of equality and citizenship becomes a caricature that masks tacit political and cultural privileges, common sense notions that make incongruity tolerable and allow the reproduction of colonial structures of oppression.

that we could call the homo-citizen subject, a subject that, although a bit deviant, it is possible to make fit within the normativity of the market.

Nadia Guidotto wisely remarks that when the term homo economicus was used to refer to the efficient agent of the Rational Choice Theory, nobody was thinking of a sexual orientation. In this chapter, on the contrary, I do use the adjective homo for the citizen, to name precisely the subject who is the protagonist of what Guidotto criticizes in her article. The gay, white, youthful male, who attracts all the media attention and the corporate sponsorship, embodies the normativity of the neoliberal project. His activism seems potable within what Guidotto calls the "McQueer phase", a dazzling configuration in which "people will buy queer images and eat them supersized, but they are not getting all the ingredients listed up front. Moreover, they are not giving anything back to the cash cows that they are devouring" (Guidotto 2006, 1).

This chapter analyzes two major aspects of inclusion in the neoliberal project: the production of the *homocitizen*, the subject of homonormativity; and the incorporation of the homocitizen into the market, as a consumer, as an entrepreneur, and as a merchandise. The first section analyzes the concept of sexual citizenship and the way in which it has been reproduced in Costa Rica through our own version of homonormativity, traversed by national imaginaries and the inequalities that characterize this country. This section analyzes some expressions of this homonormativity and the tensions generated with queer people who do not meet the criteria for neoliberal inclusion. I also analyze the way in which this project of sexual citizenship has been brought into the field of electoral politics by a political party that seeks to advance the agenda of inclusion. The second section delves into the analysis of the lucrative business of inclusion, through three examples: the Diverse Chamber of Commerce, which promotes inclusion in the private sector; Expo Boda Pride LGBTI, which fosters the growing market for diverse weddings in the country; and the Pride March, which in Costa Rica has become a business rather than a popular mobilization. Finally, I try to present some examples of resistance in these fields that, although scarce, demonstrate that it is possible to escape the seduction of neoliberal inclusion.

7.1. The homocitizen: a reputable gay

Citizenship is a universalistic concept, which refers to the condition of belonging to a political community. It also implies responsibilities and the guarantee of a series of rights (J. D. Jiménez 2018, 3). However, not every human being is a citizen, even if they inhabit the same nation as other individuals of their species who do enjoy this status. Throughout history, different populations have been excluded from citizenship: women, children, the insane, racialized people (Agambem 1998, 130).

In Costa Rica, as I discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, Afro-Caribbean and indigenous people have fought arduously for the State to recognize their status as citizens. In this line, in the last decades LGBTI activists and collectives, some organized under the figure of NGOs, have begun to claim their civil rights and ask for the recognition of their sexual citizenship. LGBTIQ+ collectives working in this field argue that people who are not heterosexual face restrictions in the exercise of their social, civil, cultural and political rights and duties as citizens, because of their sexual orientation (J. D. Jiménez 2018, 13). In light of this, they demand inclusion from the State. That is to say, they demand to belong to the nation.

This demand for inclusion in the nation is quite functional for the neoliberal project. As Puar rightly explains, the market is a complement to the Nation-state, an instrument of biopower. As we will see in the next section, the inclusion of the homonormative subjects in the market has proven to be a commercial success. But that inclusion cannot be considered delinked from the regulatory mechanisms of the state. In modern capitalist states, incorporation into the market and into the nation are part of the same process of neoliberal inclusion, in which the Nation-state strengthens its regulation mechanisms, while capitalizing on a liberal notion of inclusion:

the market is a foil for the state, producing consumer subjects (as well as highly skilled laborers) that simulate (and experience simulated) affective modes of belonging to the state, modes that assuage the angst of unrequited love. Thus the nation-state maintains its homophobic and xenophobic stances while capitalizing on its untarnished image of inclusion, diversity, and tolerance. Concomitantly, multicultural (and homonormative) subjects reorient their loyalty to the nation through market privileges, a remasculinization that Heidi Nast terms “market virility,” (Puar 2007, 26).

Defending the nation, dreaming of the nation, and pushing to be recognized by the nation has important consequences in biopolitical terms. On the one hand, as I have already pointed out, it implies assimilation to a system of values and behaviors determined by national imaginaries. At the same time, it reinforces the oppressions that the Nation-state inflicts on a number of populations. The struggles along the lines of citizenship are at the same time struggles over national identity (Duggan 2014; J. D. Jiménez 2018). The narrative of the citizenship does not escape the racist nationalism of the Nation-state, but rather often reinforces it. As Puar points out:

The paradigm of gay liberation and emancipation has produced all sorts of troubling narratives: about the greater homophobia of immigrant communities and communities of color, about the stricter family values and mores in these communities, about a certain prerequisite migration from home, about coming-out teleologies. We have less understanding of queerness as a biopolitical project, one that both parallels and intersects with that of multiculturalism, the ascendancy of whiteness, and may collude with or collapse into liberationist paradigms. While liberal underpinnings serve to constantly recenter the normative gay or lesbian subject as

exclusively liberatory, these same tendencies labor to insistently recenter the normative queer subject as an exclusively transgressive one (Puar 2007, 22).

In this sense, Puar stresses the urgent need to critically analyze the ways in which queerness functions as a regulatory mechanism rather than an emancipatory power:

...what we can say about the mechanics of queerness as a regulatory frame of biopolitics includes the following:

1. Queerness as automatically and inherently transgressive enacts specific forms of disciplining and control, erecting celebratory queer liberal subjects folded into life (queerness as subject) against the sexually pathological and deviant populations targeted for death (queerness as population).
2. Within that orientation of regulatory transgression, queer operates as an alibi for complicity with all sorts of other identity norms, such as nation, race, class, and gender, unwittingly lured onto the ascent toward whiteness (Puar 2007, 24).

As we shall see, the trap of sexual citizenship has produced in Costa Rica a form of *homocitizen* that reproduces precisely what Puar warns about in the quote above. In this sense, when I say "homocitize" I am not speaking of a legal status but of an aspiration, of a subjective position that configures a specific way of being in the world. Nor do I refer to a nationality but to sexual citizenship. The *homocitizen* then is a homonormative, homonationalist, entrepreneurial, capitalist, subject. Namely, a liberal queer subject who invests in himself, fights for his individual rights, but distances himself from the deviant and impoverished populations, whom he looks down upon with contempt.

7.1.1. Visa for a sexual citizenship

Citizenship implies adherence to a set of behaviors expected of a good citizen, namely a certain normativity. LGBTIQ+ collectives fighting for sexual citizenship hold the idea that minoritized sexual groups can be good citizens, and therefore deserve inclusion in society.

Il y a trois niveaux d'intervention politique : celui des droits (le cadre juridico-légal), celui de la discipline (le corps et les normes) et celui de la population (l'administration au sens large). Depuis trente ans, le mouvement gai et lesbien s'est enlégé au premier niveau. Ce faisant, le gai et la lesbienne se sont laissé·e·s définir par la loi en tant que sujet juridique, que celle-ci soit contre lui-elle ou qu'elle le·la protège. C'est précisément à ce moment qu'intervient le rétrécissement politique et que les LG deviennent des conservateurs et alliés objectifs des inégalités systémiques (Bourcier 2017, 54–55).

The demand for inclusion in the legal system entails the recognition of rights, but at the same time implies submitting to a series of norms and their mechanisms of control. It is a movement that evokes the sort of twist that Foucault (2009) observed in the security apparatus, a form of biopolitical regulation in which the subjects themselves demand to be watched and managed, in exchange for the security that the State or the market can provide them with.

This new homonormativity comes equipped with a rhetorical recoding of key terms in the history of gay politics: "equality" becomes narrow, formal access to a few conservatizing institutions, "freedom" becomes impunity for bigotry and vast inequalities in commercial life and civil society, the "right to privacy" becomes domestic confinement, and democratic politics itself becomes something to be escaped (Duggan 2014, 65–66).

Nevertheless, these forms of freedom and security are not for everyone. Not every queer person is eligible for a homocitizenship. What interests the Nation-state and the market is, as Bourcier rightly points out, the “bons homos”, the good gays.

Ceux qui travaillent et font de enfants. Ceux qui demandent à l’entreprise et aux institutions de les protéger. Ceux qui pratiquent les politiques de la respectabilité. Ceux qui, très libéraux en cela, demandent de la liberté et de la sécurité (Bourcier 2017, 30).

In this sense, the recognition of citizenship implies for sexual dissidents a process of assimilation so that their lifestyles are as similar as possible to those of normal citizens. That is to say, that their lifestyle conforms to the parameters of heteronormativity, producing a new homonormativity. This homonormativity is enhanced by visibility politics, that seek, on the one hand, to highlight the exclusions that homocitizens suffer, but at the same time, to show that we can also be good citizens (J. D. Jiménez 2018, 8).

Sexual citizenship is not only a matter of identity. It is not enough to wish to belong to the nation. The homonormativity demanded of the homocitizen is also a matter of materiality. As Jin Haritaworn points out, in the neoliberal city the “this process of valorisation and distinction is magnified under finance capitalism, whose ideal citizen is the entrepreneur who manages his life and makes it profitable” (Haritaworn 2015, 29) Within the framework of the neoliberal project, a frequent argument to support the recognition of gays as citizens is to characterize them as consumers. In this way, the citizenship of this marginalized populations is constructed through the consumption of sexualized commodities specifically crafted for the pink market (J. D. Jiménez 2018; Guidotto 2006).

On this subject, after having promoted several processes of juridical alternativism that sought to stress the notion of citizenship and expand it in a way that makes it more porous and less totalizing, Elizabeth Vásquez believes that there is a broad potential for alternative uses of the law in citizenship when it is understood as the exercise of rights (Lind and Argüello 2009, 98). However, she cautions that the concept of citizenship as a universalizing legal quality is never sufficient.

yo creo que el concepto de ciudadanía sirve cuando no se limita a “entregar”, desde arriba, instituciones legales a la gente; sino cuando se atreve con la convalidación

paralegal de las instituciones (sociales, culturales) de la gente³⁴⁸ (Lind and Argüello 2009, 99).

But this has not been the case in Costa Rica. Heavily influenced by the journey of the official gay and lesbian organizations in the United States, sexual citizenship in Costa Rica has not been organized around alternativism. Most LGBTIQ+ collectives in Costa Rica do not speak of redistribution or the dismantling of coloniality. Rather, it is about getting into the system, changing some of the rules but without dynamiting its foundations. With the bases of structural oppressions intact, not every queer person can be a homocitizen. Sexual dissidence is not enough to achieve sexual citizenship. Another set of conditions is needed, starting with a regular immigration status.

As Alexander Jiménez points out, in the institutions of the Nation-state, many officials operate with a dangerous confusion between being the bearer of a nationality and being the bearer of rights. In his opinion, it is a matter of the difficulty of accepting that rights are a result of the human condition, and not of the fact of possessing a nationality or a culture (A. Jiménez 2005, 97). His vision, perhaps a bit romantic of citizens' rights, describes what queer and trans* migrants denounce:

[La oficina de] Migración no está haciendo ni mierda para temas de derechos humanos de las personas migrantes. No lo está haciendo. Si aquí es como, ellos son pioneros, hasta master en traer inmigrantes. ¿Y no van a tener políticas públicas acondicionadas a tu condición? No, no. O sea, no es. Es un doble discurso³⁴⁹ (Jacob, in discussion with the author, October 30, 2019).

José agrees:

Realmente es preocupante ver una población que se está asfixiando, porque los derechos son básicos, no? No solamente es el asilo. Es también las otras necesidades. Techo, casa, comida, y bueno, trabajo, educación, verdad, todo eso que es básico, básico, básico... Todo tema que está relacionado, creo, que por derechos y por humanidad debe también preocuparnos a todos y a todas. ¿Sí?³⁵⁰ (José, in discussion with the author, October 21, 2019).

The situation of asylum seekers highlights the limits of the notion of sexual citizenship. By mid-2022, none of the participants in this study, who were seeking asylum in 2019, had received a response to their application. Some have been waiting for over 4 years, in a very unstable condition. They face many difficulties in finding employment, a situation that is aggravated in the case of queer and trans*

³⁴⁸ Free translation: I believe that the concept of citizenship is useful when it is not limited to a vertical form of "delivering" legal institutions to the people; but when it ventures with the paralegal validation of the people's (social, cultural) institutions.

³⁴⁹ Free translation: Immigration [Department] is doing absolutely nothing to address the human rights issues of migrants. They are doing nothing. If here it is like, they are pioneers, even masters in bringing immigrants. And they do not have public policies adapted to our condition? No, no. I mean, it is not. It is a double standard

³⁵⁰ Free translation: It is really worrying to see a population that is suffocating, because rights are basic, aren't they? It is not only asylum. It's also the other needs. Shelter, house, food, and, well, work, education, really, all that which is basic, basic, basic... Every issue that is related, I think, if it is about rights and humanity, it should also be of concern to all of us. Right?

people. Without an income, the citizen rights are limited, as they do not have access to basic rights such as health and education, or even basic needs such as housing and food. As José describes:

he estado también trabajando con los compañeros de la Mesa Nacional LGBTI Nicaragüenses en exilio, y creo que ellos necesitan bastante apoyo. Estaban diciendo que estaban queriendo declarar un estado de emergencia para los nicaragüenses [en Costa Rica]. Yo creo que sería válido, no solamente para toda la población, sino en particular, el nicaragüense LGBTI. Y también que está relacionado con la parte de asilo, también y los derechos a salud, ¿verdad? Porque muchos compañeros vienen, digamos, ya con diagnóstico de VIH y entonces hay más de 100 personas identificadas, que de alguna u otra manera requieren esa atención y a pesar de que está una directriz y está en derecho a atender, digamos, la salud, en algunos casos, bueno, no es tangible... Porque yo he estado y he ido a la Caja del Seguro, he ido a los EBAIS [clínicas públicas], he ido, digamos, al San Juan de Dios [hospital], y desgraciadamente en el San Juan de Dios solo tengo que llegar cuando sea apuñalado o con un infarto, o digamos un accidente que realmente está fatal. Entonces, creo yo que hace falta esa parte sensible, ¿no?, con la población que está migrando ³⁵¹ (José, in discussion with the author, October 21, 2019).

As part of the efforts in the fight against HIV, the government of Costa Rica approved a decree (Directive 037, dated December 1, 2015) that was promoted as part of the HIV Prevention Country Project, and signed with great fanfare by President Solís in 2015, which establishes free and open access to antiretroviral treatment for anyone who needs it, regardless of their insurance status. However, as José pointed out, more three years after the decree was signed, they had identified 100 people with an HIV-positive diagnosis, who were facing obstacles to access antiretroviral treatment because of their migratory status. The double standard that Jacob criticizes takes on a necropolitical nuance here.

His experience as a trans, Afro-Caribbean migrant in exile has led Jacob to be suspicious of the entire international humanitarian aid system and the discourse of rights that they proclaim.

Yo soy sujeto de derecho, no objeto de derecho, ¿me entendés? Que me digan: andá hacé esto, andá a hacer lo... No me gusta... La burocratización que uno vive es mucho, muchos no lo entendemos. Y la burocratización es como una inyección que te meten. Y tenés que hacerla. Yo siento que es un control, es un control, pero más que un

³⁵¹ Free translation: I have also been working with the colleagues from the Mesa Nacional LGBTI Nicaragüenses en exilio, and I think they need a lot of support. They were saying that they want to declare a state of emergency for Nicaraguans [in Costa Rica]. I think that would be valid, not only for the whole population, but in particular, the LGBTI Nicaraguan. And also, that it is related to the asylum issue, also, and the rights to health, right? Because many people come, let's say, already diagnosed with HIV and then there are more than 100 people identified, who in some way or another require this attention and despite the fact that there is a guideline and there is the right to get treatment, let's say, health care, in some cases, well, it is not tangible.... Because I have been and I have gone to the Social Security, I have gone to the EBAIS [the public clinics], I have gone, let's say, to the San Juan de Dios [hospital], and unfortunately at the San Juan de Dios I must only get there when I am stabbed or have a heart attack, or let's say an accident that is really fatal. So, I think we need that sensitive part, don't we? With the population that is migrating.

control es encajar las cosas...³⁵² (Jacob, in discussion with the author, October 30, 2019)

Jacob's strong words show this tension between access to rights and control. He feels exhausted and conflicted, and he is not comfortable with the normativity to which he is required to assimilate as a prerequisite for access to basic rights. The most perverse thing, perhaps, is that in the case of queer asylum seekers, this assimilation does not even translate into a respectable sexual citizenship, as it does for good homocitizens. In this limbo, enabled and nurtured by nation-states and by the international human rights system, asylum seekers cling to the hope of one day being recognized as refugees, which in the hierarchy of citizenship is one of the lowest places one can get. On the one hand, the refugee is not and never will be a legitimate child of the nation, and on the other hand, their refugee status does not necessarily guarantee the fundamental requirement to be recognized as a citizen within the neoliberal project: capital.

Porque aquí igual es como en Nicaragua: por la plata baila el mono. Y entonces para las otras personas vulnerables, que no venimos con dinero, y con costos tal vez venimos con una mochila o lo que sea, el atropello que dan las instituciones del Estado para vos es horrible. O sea... ¿Entonces dónde está ese discurso más de humanismo, y eso? Te atropellan. Y lo único que uno viene aquí es con dignidad, y te la pisotean³⁵³ (Jacob, in discussion with the author, November 26, 2019)

7.1.2. Citizens at last: the homocostarrican and the #EliteGay

We have already seen that queer and trans* asylum seekers do not live like citizens in this country. So who, then, are the subjects of sexual citizenship in Costa Rica? What is the Costa Rican *homocitizen* like? Hardt and Negri point out that

The great industrial and financial powers thus produce not only commodities but also subjectivities. They produce agentic subjectivities within the biopolitical context: they produce needs, social relations, bodies, and minds. which is to say, they produce producers (Hardt and Negri 2013, 223).

The Costa Rican *homocitizen*, the *homocostarrican*, functions in the logic of the market and reproduces colonial normativity. The *homocostarrican* is caught in biopower.

³⁵² Free translation: I am a subject of rights, not an object of rights, you understand? To be told: go and do this, go and do that.... I don't like it... The bureaucratization that one lives is too much, many of us don't understand it. And bureaucratization is like an injection they give you. And you have to do it. I feel that it is a control, it is a control, but more than a control it is a way of making things fit in...

³⁵³ Free translation: Because here it is the same as in Nicaragua: the monkey dances for the money. And then for the other people, vulnerable people, who do not come with money, and maybe we come with a backpack at best, or whatever, the abuse from the state institutions is horrible for you. In other words... So where is that humanism discourse, and all that? They run over you. And the only thing we come here with is dignity, and they step over it.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, Rabinow and Rose (2006) identify three dimensions on which the strategies of biopower are configured: (1) a regimen of truth about living beings; (2) intervention strategies to manage life and health upon collective existence; and (3) modes of subjectification, in which individuals interiorize the norm, and are brought to “work on themselves” in the name of individual or collective life or health (Rabinow and Rose 2006, 203). These dimensions coincide approximately with what decolonial studies have called the coloniality of knowledge, the coloniality of power and the coloniality of being, and in the middle of these, without a doubt, is the coloniality of gender crossing all dimensions. This subjects who internalize the norm and work hard on themselves, reminds us of what Sayak Valencia describes:

This expansion of economic rationality into new arenas leads to a weak form of State government and its eventual outsourcing, making economics the driving factor for all of the activities of governance. As a consequence (and via globalization’s insistence on deregulation), a double-standard arises that makes labor precarious globally and fosters the emergence of gore practices. In an effort to attain economic, gender and (ultimately) social legitimacy, these practices are enacted by subjects who attempt to comply with one of the foundations of liberalism: embodying the masculinist figure of *the self-made man* (Valencia 2018, 25).

A continuation of this is the “masculinist figure” is the *homocitizen*. Not to say that there are no women playing the good citizen game, but the mainstream representation of the *homocitizen* has been embodied by men who, with all their masculine privileges, strive to conform to the ideal of the “the good gay”.

As Elizabeth Vásquez points out, the social circumstance of male privilege is inescapable, but what to do with that circumstance is a political decision (Lind and Argüello 2009, 101). The Costa Rican *homocitizen* not only chooses not to touch that circumstance of privilege, but rides on it in order to climb, as high as possible, the ladder of citizenship. Homonormativity produces the *homocitizen*. His class, gender and racial privileges pave the way for him.

The *homocitizen* is an individualistic subject and his agenda is monothematic. Under the aegis of neoliberalism, he moves away from collective and public instances who fight for justice, and sticks to a model of inclusion that relies largely on one's own merits as a good citizen.

Dans le contexte néolibéral actuel, les politiques LG libérales « naturalisent » le démantèlement de l’aide sociale et la manière dont les politiques néolibérales reversent la charge de la reproduction sociale sur les familles. Ce faisant, elles échouent à prendre en compte les formes de sociabilité et de reproduction sociale queer et trans* qui sortent de ce cadre, qui son collectives et qui représente un travail de care et affectif systématiquement effacé par le capitalisme et le néolibéralisme (Raha)... (Bourcier 2017, 37).

Now that homosexuality is decriminalized, that we can get married and that the law even recognizes hate crimes as an aggravating factor when someone takes it in his hands to remind us that we are not equal in this society, the *homocostarrican* does not find it problematic to resort to the law. Perhaps because, unlike migrants, sex workers or impoverished people, the *homocostarrican* rarely gets in trouble with the law. He has behaved so well, following the rules of the nation and the market, that he has succeeded in taking cover under the hem of the blanket of the security apparatus.

Homocitizens offer us narratives of success in the neoliberal sense, they show us their parcours as entrepreneurs, as politicians, as civil servants who, "in spite of their sins in bed", fulfill the productivity and consumption mandates of patriarchal capitalism better than any straight person. Their sins are atoned if they pray and give their tithes to the gods of the market. Says Sam Bourcier : "À l'ère néolibérale, le paradigme n'est plus le modèle libérationniste des sixties ou des seventies qui cherchait à transgresser les normes sexuelles et de genre mais celui de l'homo productif" (Bourcier 2017, 36).

Image 153 is a profile picture provided by a participant who asked to remain anonymous. He shared the pictures with me in the midst of a discussion, as an example of the complicity of many gays with the neoliberal project. Although it was a public profile pic, I blurred the head of the image to protect his privacy. Like the anonymous participant who provided the picture, I believe that this image condenses several of the imaginaries of the Costa Rican homocitizen.

Image 153
Homocostarrican



Caption : #HuelgaCR DOESN'T represent me

The image shows a young, fit, white man watching the sunset from a private jacuzzi somewhere in Costa Rica. The photo has a frame featuring the national flag and the patriotic remark that the strike does not represent him. The context is the 2018 union strike, the longest workers' strike in Costa Rica's recent history. We can assume that this citizen does not share the reasons for the strike, although there is really no way of knowing. In any case, the content is not what is relevant. What matters is the form. The strike as a mechanism of struggle, it is that what does not represent him. The commodities and privileges enjoyed by the "good *homocitizens*" have been driving them further and further away from the popular movements. It is no surprise then that they demonstrate their loyalty to the nation and to capitalism by condemning strikes and raising the national flag. In Puar's words: "...what is noteworthy is that an exceptional form of national heteronormativity is now joined by an exceptional form of national homonormativity, in other words, Homonationalism (Puar 2007, 2).

Bourcier proposes that this neoliberal homonormativity must be read as a biopolitical issue. In continuation of the confessional regime that produces the truth about sex in modernity, now we are asked about our sexual identity, but at the same time, and above all, we are asked: how much do we produce for the market.

«Combien tu coûtes? », « Combien tu nous coûtes ? », « Combien tu produis ? », « Combien tu vaux ? », sont les nouvelles questions que pose un régime de production de la vérité du sexe et des genres indexé, branché sexuellement et racialement dus le marché à l'ère néolibérale (Bourcier 2017, 19).

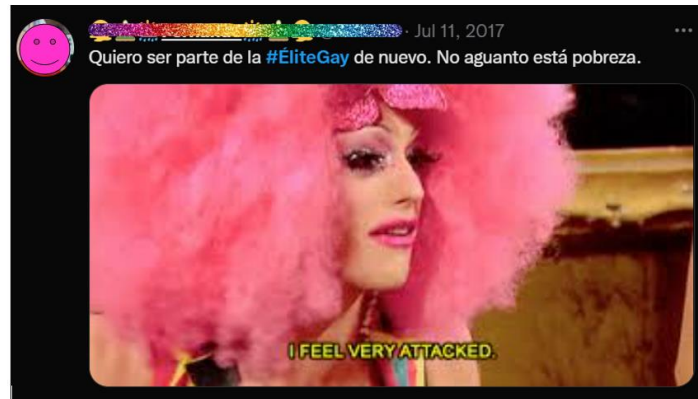
In 2017 a few dozen queer activists launched a call to organize a dissident bloc for the Pride march. Their dissent had to do with the rejection of pinkwashing and pink capitalism that reigned in those parades. This group published a statement inviting people to join their dissident and feminist bloc, with the image of a banner that read "While the gay elite only wants to marry, we fight so that no one is left behind".

This publication made twitter explode with the hashtag #elitegay. Many homocitizens felt concerned. Some were offended, others made fun of the whole thing, and some even felt represented by the label, and began to vindicate it with humor:



Source: Screenshot from twitter #EliteGay
Caption: We have to get an #EliteGay t-shirt.

Image 155
#EliteGay joke



Source: Screenshot from twitter #EliteGay
Caption: I want to be part of the #EliteGay again. I can't stand this poverty.

Although the dissident bloc never made explicit who they referred to as the gay elite, many people accepted this qualifier without any problem. The jokes on Twitter mixed a classist humor with a sort of pride in recognizing themselves as part of the gay elite.

Image 156
#EliteGay classism



Source: Screenshot from twitter #EliteGay
Caption: 1. Of course, if there is a #GayMafia there must be an #EliteGay. And a #GayMiddleClass. Diversity they call it.
2. I went to Palí [a supermarket known for its low prices] to be less of a #EliteGay but there were so little options that I only bought rice and eggs and went straight to de Mas x Menos [a supermarket with middle range prices]
3. I thought I could only find sugar free jam from the brand Ujarrás in AutoMercado [an expensive supermarket]: BITCH WHAT? So #EliteGay from my part!

There is no need to explain the jokes about the grocery stores. It is a form of class violence in which the *homocitizen* looks down on those (gay or straight) who shop in the cheaper stores. The fact that shopping in Palí is a motive for mockery and is inconceivable for a Costa Rican *homocitizen*, shows precisely the elitization that the dissident bloc criticized.

Impelled not only by this folding of queer and other sexual national subjects into the biopolitical management of life, but by the simultaneous folding out of life, out toward death, of queerly racialized “terrorist populations,” biopolitics delineates not only which queers live and which queers die —a variable and contestable demarcation— but also how queers live and die (Puar 2007, xii).

Image 157

LGBTIQ community is the diversity



Source: Screenshot from twitter #EliteGay

Caption: Dissident and feminist Pride, or #EliteGay
WHAT THE FUCK STOP SEGREGATING YOURSELVES IT IS THE WHOLE LGTBIQ COMMUNITY that is the DIVERSITY

Beyond the crushing synecdoche with which this tweeter erases all other forms of human diversities, what he poses to us is paradoxical. "Stop segregating yourselves" he states authoritatively while affirming that we are all part of the same community. As Jacob and José's reflections throughout this chapter show, this is far from true. We do not all embody diversity in the same way, with the same life chances of surviving the violence of heteropatriarchal racist capitalism. We do not share the same conditions and privileges, nor do we share the same life ethics. Not all of us feel comfortable taking part in classist jokes that make fun of impoverished queer folks, or resorting to misogynistic humor, like the tweeter in image 158, to make a stand against those who question their privileges and the system that sustains them.

Image 158

Misogyny and #EliteGay



Caption: *ojodeloca* [a youtube channel featuring contents of gay mainstream culture] this, #elitegay that, *musculocas* [a slang for muscular gay men] that... Go change your tampon and try to be happy already.

Some of these tweeters have used Facebook frames that cry "love is love", celebrate pride or praised their sexual citizenship. But as these tweets show, it is not all love in rainbow pride. We also find

classism, sexism, racism and violence. Huge chasms of inequality and political distances separate our bodies, our lives and our struggles.

This is one of the risks of the politics of visibility catalyzed by social networks. It is a culture of images, and an image is not a body, even if it represents one. These disembodied images do not suffer from cold and hunger, or the anguish when the income is not even enough to buy food at Palí. The profile picture can withstand any frame, but it is not the same to support a Facebook cause (as the platform itself designates it) than to support a person, a living body, a community. With the politics of visibility in this McQueerization phase that Guidotto (2006) describes, some people really manage to dissociate the discursive plane from the material, the image from the materiality of existence, and find no contradiction between the "love is love" profile frame and the classist, sexist or xenophobic comments. The authors of these tweets will perhaps never come to understand the conditions in which those who live at the bottom of the *zone of non-being* survive. They live in different countries within the same country. They live in different Costa Ricans.

7.1.3. Homopolitics: the VAMOS party

In Costa Rica sexual citizenship has so that we even have an LGBTIQ+ party. VAMOS is a local party in the province of San José, that presented candidacies for Congress in the 2018 and 2022 national elections. It also participated in the 2020 municipal elections through "Coalición Chepe", an alliance with the ruling party (PAC) that sought, unsuccessfully, to dethrone Johnny Araya as mayor of the city.

VAMOS's program revolves around a human rights agenda, quite aligned with the discourse of international cooperation and the NPIC, where many of its founders come from.

Sentíamos que desde los movimientos sociales estábamos avanzando a pasitos muy pequeños, surgió entonces la necesidad de aumentar la escala de nuestro impacto... Llevamos años pidiéndole a gente que hable por nosotros en la mesa, en vez de tomar nosotros nuestro lugar en la mesa³⁵⁴ (Salas 2016, para. 2).

The VAMOS party is made up predominantly by lesbian and gay people, and also some straight people who are activists in other fields, such as urban mobility, cannabis regulation, and harm reduction programs. They promote a human rights agenda. However, the party has a class bias. Being a local party in San José, it is understandable that their agenda is primarily urban. However, the party's sort of homogeneous conformation provokes a narrow perception of the problems of the country and the city, where the concerns of urban, educated, professional, middle and upper-class sectors are overrepresented, while ignoring the needs and urgencies of the impoverished, racialized, migrants,

³⁵⁴ Free translation: We felt that from the social movements we were advancing in very small steps, therefore we needed to increase the scale of our impact... We have been asking people to speak for us for years, instead of taking our place at the table ourselves.

sex workers, among others. In other words, its program reflects the self-representation of the white, middle-class, urban and well-educated Costa Rican *homocitizen*.

The party's president, Margarita Salas, has insisted that her party is neither left-wing nor right-wing, because those labels do not represent the diversity that is agglutinated in its ranks:

Aclaro que nosotros hemos rechazado el tema de ubicarnos en izquierda o derecha. Eso ha suscitado todo tipo de discusiones, pero no es una maniobra de comunicación o algo por el estilo. No es que le tengamos miedo a las etiquetas. ¿Cómo nos van a dar miedo si hablamos de aborto, matrimonio gay y marihuana? Más bien lo nuestro es un ejercicio de total honestidad... alguna gente de izquierda probablemente nos va a tildar de fachos para arriba cuando lea propuestas que tienen que ver con modernizar la legislación laboral o brindar incentivos para que crezca el pequeño emprendimiento. Por el otro lado probablemente la derecha nos vea diciendo que hay que reducir la jornada laboral y nos tilden de comunistas para abajo³⁵⁵ (Salas 2016, 25).

What Salas defends in this interview is the neoliberal flexibility that allows them to combine in the same program measures that reduce the labor rights for workers, with proposals of inclusion for the "*bons homos*" as consumers and citizens. The use of spatial metaphors in the above quote is curious. When Salas distances her party from the left, she says: "nos van a tildar de fachos para arriba", which literally translates into "they are going to label us from fascist upwards". The metaphor means that they are going to be called fascist or more. When she distances herself from the right wing, she says: "nos tilden de comunistas para abajo", they label us as communists downwards, meaning communists or less. The imaginary map she draws is noteworthy, where the fascists are in the upper plane and the communists in the inferior one. From fascism one can only go upwards. From communism, downwards.

VAMOS attempts to break out of the left/right dichotomy rhetoric, yet their programmatic plan seems to lean to the right. When Salas states that some of her proposals conflict with the right, her inspiration is not that of the Latin American left, but that of the rich countries of the Global North. Her rhetoric coincides with that of the neoliberal project. Taking the example of Nordic countries, she claims that reducing the working day benefits the country's growth because having happier workers increases productivity (Salas 2016, para. 10). On the contrary, when she seeks to distance herself from

³⁵⁵ Free translation: I clarify that we have rejected the issue of placing ourselves on the left or on the right. That has raised all kinds of discussions, but it is not a communication maneuver or anything like that. It is not that we are afraid of labels; how can we be afraid of them if we talk about abortion, gay marriage and marihuana? Rather, ours is an exercise of complete honesty... some people on the left are probably going to label us as fascists or more when they read our proposals that have to do with modernizing labor legislation or providing incentives for small businesses to grow. On the other hand, the right wing will probably see us saying that we have to reduce the working day and they will label us as communists or less.

the left, her point of reference is Costa Rican communism, and their achievements in the 1940s in terms of labor rights:

sé que este es un tema que sobre todo en los sindicatos para el pelo, porque les da miedo que perdamos las conquistas sociales pero es el miedo no es un lugar desde donde podamos construir el país que queremos. Costa Rica tiene una legislación que pareciera pensar que vivimos en 1940³⁵⁶ (Salas 2016, para. 10)

The idea that the labor rights achieved in the 1940s are archaic has been replicated time and again by ultra-right libertarian parties seeking to reduce the state and make the market more flexible in the country. While VAMOS does not adopt such an openly neoliberal stance, their metaphors place their discourse within the imaginary production of the communist as a residual subject, and in this sense, on the map of the ideological spectrum, bring them closer to right-wing parties.

In fact, in the interview Salas makes reference only to two political parties: the Liberación Nacional Party and the Movimiento Libertario, both of which are committed to the neoliberal project. Regarding Liberación Nacional, Salas assures that she is convinced that José María Figueres (former president, former candidate and emblematic figure of the party) has no problem with equal marriage, given that he has lived for a long time outside the country (in Europe, in Switzerland) (Salas 2016, para. 18). In other words, in an expression that reproduces coloniality, Salas suggests a sort of relationship between having had the experience of living in the Global North and respect for sexual diversity. With the Movimiento Libertario, a far-right party, she notes that it was the first political group to approach the LGTBIQ+ movement, before it turned to Christian values (Salas 2016, para. 18). One might ask what she means by "LGBTIQ+ movement" and what she means by political group, as she seems to be referring exclusively to partisan politics. In any case, it is noteworthy that these are the references for comparison, and that she mentions them in order to point out the things they have in common. She does not do this with the Frente Amplio party, a moderate left-wing party that also shares a progressive agenda on the rights of women and LGTBIQ+ people. She does not even compare her party with the restrictive progressivism of the Acción Ciudadana party, which, a few years after the aforementioned interview, during the administration of President Alvarado, appointed Salas as Presidential Commissioner for LGBTI issues. Her referents are the parties of the political and economic elites, and what brings them closer is precisely the agenda of rights for the good homocitizen.

Only within a biopolitical horizon will it be possible to decide whether the categories whose opposition founded modern politics (right/left, private/public, absolutism/democracy, etc.) -and which have been steadily dissolving, to the point of entering today into a real zone of indistinction- will have to be abandoned or will,

³⁵⁶ Free translation: I know that this is an issue especially in the unions, because they are afraid that we will lose our social conquests, but fear is not a place from where we can build the country we want. Costa Rica has a legislation that seems to think that we live in 1940.

instead, eventually regain the meaning they lost in that very horizon (Agamben 2013, 137)

Although they seek to escape this dichotomy, the rhetoric of VAMOS is the rhetoric of neoliberal inclusion. In their government plan for 2018 there is no mention of redistribution of wealth, and although there is talk of adjusting fiscal policy, these reforms seem to be aimed at improving the conditions of the middle classes, without touching the structures that cause inequalities (Partido VAMOS 2018). Salas defends that in Costa Rica we have excellent conditions to create new businesses. Proof of this, she affirms, is that numerous transnationals are attracted to the country (Salas 2016, para. 11). With phrases that sound dangerously close to SAPs, VAMOS suggests that the country should bet on the generation of technical jobs and rapid training (6 months) for people who have fallen out of opportunities (people over 40 years old, they say) to enter the labor market (Salas 2016, para. 13). In this sense, Salas calls for leaving behind agriculture as a means of subsistence, making clear her urban-centric perspective: “Tenemos que generar nuevas posibilidades de empleo porque aquella añoranza de ‘volvamos a la tierra’ simplemente no va a suceder. Los nuevos productos son de mayor valor agregado, son más competitivos y hacia ahí va el país³⁵⁷” (Salas 2016, para. 12).

This center that VAMOS disputes actually resembles the center pursued by the PAC, a center that is the result of adding progressive policies on civil, cultural and property rights of certain populations (notably homocitizenship), and liberal policies on labor rights and other collective spheres under the tutelage of the State.

Duggan believes that this type of gay politics that flirts with the right is not, actually, single-issue but multi-issue, insofar as it has integrated some other issues that are compatible within its agenda. However, this multi-issue but narrow agenda is functional to the neoliberal project.

This gay right wing, self-constituted as a new center, is definitively *not* a single-issue political lobby. The IGF's gay equality rhetoric is a proffered new window-dressing for a broad, multi-issue neoliberal politics. The privacy-in-public claims and publicizing strategies of "the gay movement" are rejected in favor of public recognition of a domesticated, depoliticized privacy (Duggan 2014, 65)

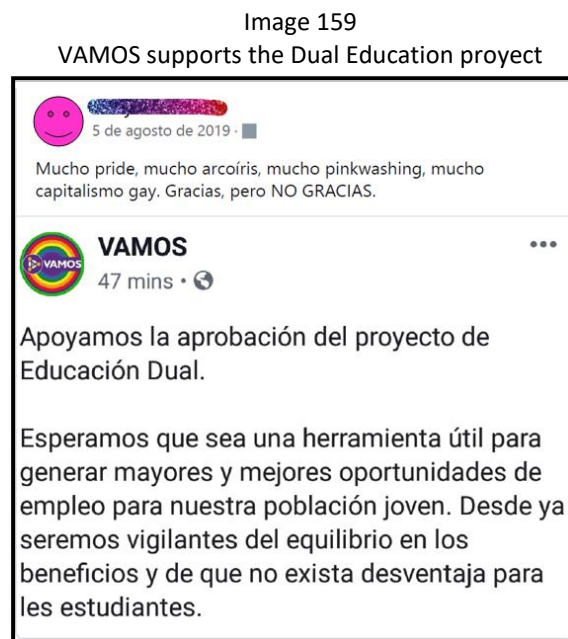
It is not that the homocitizen agenda is single-issue, despite the enormous weight in the marketing of inclusion sometimes makes it seem that way. It is not that they do not have an economic project. In reality, the legal reformism proposed by groups and political parties such as VAMOS pushes a broad agenda in which the weakening of the public and the commons camouflages in the middle of the liberal defense of individual rights.

³⁵⁷ Free translation: We have to generate new employment opportunities because that longing of "let's go back to the land" is simply not going to happen. The new products are of higher added value, they are more competitive and that is where the country is headed.

Thus, for example, the VAMOS government plan promises to promote "sustainable environments", a "healthy financial situation" and a "modern, open, digital, transparent and governable State" (Partido VAMOS 2018). It does not speak of redistribution but proposes to rethink the development model to improve competitiveness. It does not speak of fair employment, but at least it speaks of promoting employment opportunities. It proposes to restrict some labor rights, but it proposes to improve conditions for the self-employed. In any case, their model seems to be more one of entrepreneurship, technological and business innovation to open up more and better opportunities (Partido VAMOS 2018). This, as Spade points out, entails significant compromises:

Workers are now “free” to move between workplaces, working temporarily and flexibly, without those cumbersome relationships to long-term employers accompanied by things like meaningful rights to organize, pensions, health insurance, and job security (Spade 2015, 28).

Some of VAMOS party's stances on neoliberal reforms have caused indignation in a sector that is trying to build a critical queer and trans* politics:



Source: Facebook, Anonymous profile

Caption: Anonymous user: "Lots of pride, lots of rainbows, lots of pinkwashing, lots of gay capitalism. Thanks, but NO THANKS."

VAMOS post: "We support the approval of the Dual Education project. We hope it will be a useful tool to generate more and better employment opportunities for our young population. We will be vigilant to ensure that the benefits are balanced and that there is no disadvantage for the students".

The Dual Education project is a controversial reform promoted by the government of Carlos Alvarado, which opened a training/labor modality for high school students in the country, a sort of unpaid internship for students over 15. The project's detractors pointed out that it implied a turn towards neoliberal education, which prioritizes functional technical training for the market, to the detriment

of training in areas that are increasingly devalued in the market, like humanities or critical thinking. They also warned that this project could involve students in exploitative relations with the private companies where they would do their internships, since companies would earn free labor, and students perform unpaid work disguised as education. VAMOS supported this project, despite the criticism that rained on them from queer and trans* anti-capitalist activists in social media.

In reference to the city, VAMOS uses metaphors that are common to the rhetoric of rescue used by other groups (including religiously based) analyzed in this thesis, such as "urban improvement" and "bringing our cities back to life" (Partido VAMOS 2018). This idea of dead cities that need to be resuscitated and improved resonates with hygienist discourses that disregard the bodies and the life that inhabit those cities. The resuscitation of cities is thus conducted from a position of knowledge/power, *by* and *for* good citizens (in this case *homocostarricans*, in other cases Christians, families, etc.), without taking into account the people that inhabit the city today. The city dwellers seem as inert beings, bodies that are disposable, displaced, unimportant, or even bodies and ways of life that are considered part of the problem to be improved.

When they talk about the problems that suffocate hundreds of thousands of people on a daily basis, they make it clear that they do so "regardless of their socioeconomic status" (Partido VAMOS 2018). Salas affirms that "her passion is social justice" (Salas 2016, para. 2). I wonder what their understanding of social justice is. VAMOS claims in its government plan that it is a party with an intersectional approach, in which they will fight for the rights of all people. When reviewing their government plan for 2018, some other oppressed populations are indeed mentioned, such as people with disabilities, drug users and indigenous peoples. However, in their 2018 government plan there is no mention of the situation of Afro Costa Ricans and migrants. For 2022 they included a small clause that mentions that they are committed to ensure compliance with existing legislation for Afro Costa Rican populations. In other words, the notion of intersectionality that VAMOS reproduces seems to be the whitewashed and lightened version of the human rights system and international cooperation (Falquet 2020), a sum of identity categories that leaves aside precisely that which gave rise to the concept of intersectionality: race. Although Salas states "Nuestro enfoque es de interseccionalidad, no privilegamos una condición como única preocupación sobre todas las demás..."³⁵⁸, in the light of its economic and labor policies, it seems that in this model of intersectionality the class perspective is also absent

³⁵⁸ Free translation: Our approach is intersectional, we do not privilege one condition as the sole concern above all others...

Their understanding of oppression is permeated by a white-washed, urban and middle-class version of intersectionality, and thus so are their policy proposals. For example, one of their arguments to support equal marriage for the 2018 campaign was the possibility that migrants coupled with *homocostarricans* could access a residence permit in the country. Aside from this, completely absent from their program is a discussion of immigration policy and the immeasurable flow of violence that occurs at the borders, at the hands of the immigration police and at the windows of almost any public institution in this country. As Bourcier points out:

À ceux qui prétendent que le mariage est une solution pour aider un·e aimant·e sans papiers ou étranger·e, AE répond que ce scénario reprend le topos raciste du « blanc qui sauve son ami brun » et que bien des couples LG ne comptent pas forcément un citoyen national (Stanley) (Bourcier 2017, 37).

In short, the inclusive project of VAMOS is quite compatible with the neoliberal project. Their proposals coincide with the solutions that the Gay & Lesbian movements in the United States propose for major social problems (Spade 2015, 32). They even use images from the gay & lesbian movement in the United States instead of pictures from our local struggles to illustrate their website:

Image 160
Reform Amerika



Source: VAMOS website, <https://www.vamos.cr>

Their program moves away from a redistributive agenda, and from critical queer and trans* politics that seek to attack the roots of oppression. Equal marriage, urban improvement, self-employment, entrepreneurial innovation and a competitive development model are all forms of neoliberal inclusion. This cocktail that promises quality of life for the homocitizen, falls, as Almeida and Vásquez point out, into a legal reformism:

Reformismo legal, consistente en el reclamo acrítico de la ampliación de instituciones jurídicas de las que los homosexuales han permanecido excluidos, sin cuestionar los sesgos de esas instituciones ni proponerles ampliaciones, mejoras, limitaciones o

transformaciones; menos aún, pensar en que algunas de esas instituciones harían mejor en desaparecer³⁵⁹ (Almeida and Vásquez 2010, 33)

Beyond equal marriage, VAMOS has tried to incorporate demands and visible representation of trans* people. Despite not having an organic or sustained relationship with trans* organizations, VAMOS was the first party to bring a trans* person to the legislative race. Dayana Hernandez, an activist at Transvida and a key figure in trans* struggles in this country, was the first trans* candidate to for the congress in 2018, while Samantha Araya, also a leading activist in Transvida, was a candidate for the congress in 2022. For the party's purposes, the inclusion of these two trans* activists, whose work is valued and respected within the progressive sectors, attracted a considerable (although insufficient) number of voters. In reality, the position they occupied on the ballot made any possibility of getting a seat impossible. Beyond this, what is certain is that their presence pushed debates in the media about the living conditions of trans women.

However, the distance between the material conditions in which the *homocitizens* of the VAMOS party live and the queer and trans* people who embody in their daily lives the imbrication of oppressions, becomes evident and provokes tensions.

Margarita Salas usually presents herself in the media, debates, and public meetings mentioning that she has a master's degree in public administration from Harvard University, in the United States. Presenting oneself with academic degrees is a common practice in academia, and perhaps also in politics. However, although we often benefit from the social capital that an academic degree can give us, we rarely reflect on the symbolic weight of these, and on the hierarchies they inscribe. Neither do we reflect on the history that allowed us to reach that place.

³⁵⁹ Free translation: Legal reformism, consisting in the uncritical demand for the expansion of legal institutions from which homosexuals have remained excluded, without questioning the biases of these institutions or proposing expansions, improvements, limitations or transformations; even less, thinking that some of these institutions would do better to disappear.

Image 161

Official announcement of appointment of LGBTI commissioner



Source: Casa Presidencial Facebook

I do not mean that we cannot talk about our academic achievements, but it is important to rethink the way we do it. The issue of academic qualifications is especially sensitive for trans* people in Costa Rica, due to the historical exclusion from the educational system, which translates into a chain of impoverishment, exploitation, inferiorization and disregard for their knowledge and abilities of trans* people, with devastating effects on the materiality of their existence.

I illustrate this reflection with a situation that occurred on October 4, 2019, while I was doing a participant observation exercise at Transvida. I was chatting with the girls on the terrace of their house, when a trans woman came in. She was visibly above the average age of the trans women that frequent Transvida. "Come, let me introduce you to a legend," Cassandra tells me with a smile. "This is Marilyn, remember? We've told you about her. She's just got out of jail." Marilyn spent many years in prison for situations to which she was pushed by the structural exclusion that trans women live in our country. She is truly a legend in the trans* world, as she is one of the few survivors of the necropolitics of the 70s, 80s and 90s. A war survivor. She had recently been released from and she came to Transvida to reconnect with her trans sisters, and to seek some livelihood support outside of the prison system. Coincidentally, Cassandra had just given me a package of old photographs for a project of a trans* affective memory archive. One of these photographs showed Marilyn a few decades ago, posing in a beautiful dress. I showed it to her, and she was deeply moved. I proposed to take a photograph of her today holding the photo of her youth for the archive and she agreed.

Image 162
Marilyn holding a picture from her youth



I do not usually talk about my academic career, to avoid creating hierarchies with the girls who frequent Transvída. However, in the middle of a history lesson that Marilyn was giving us, Dayana mentioned to her that I am studying for a PhD abroad, and that I am a professor at the University of Costa Rica. Marilyn looked at me with broken eyes and asked if she could give me a hug. I said yes. She came over and hugged me very tightly. I could feel her tears falling on my shirt. "Are you really a professor at the university?". "Yes" I replied. She then *transplained* to me the reason for her excitement. She told me that she always dreamed of studying. That dream was ripped away from her by society. Therefore, she devoted herself to raise awareness among trans girls that they should fight for their right to study. She told me how, while she was in jail, she got excited hearing the news about trans* students in high school fighting for their rights, and how she was surprised when they told her that there were already some trans* people studying at the university. She told me that inside the prison cell, she sometimes dreamed of a different life and a different world, and she imagined trans* teachers and professors. "It was just a dream," she said, "I never imagined it was already happening, and today you are making my dream come true. Thank you, thank you for this!" With tears in my eyes and my voice now breaking, I told her that I was the one who had to be grateful to her, because I have the absolute clarity that if I am a professor in a public university today, it is thanks to her and her generation of warriors who opened the roads with their blood.

Returning to the president of VAMOS, the way she talks about her degree is not in line with the recognition of the historical conquests of feminists and lesbians, but in line with the social hierarchy

that the modern university and the coloniality of knowledge inscribes in society. Her degree at a prestigious university in the Global North is a discursive resource that invests her with a kind of legitimacy to insert herself into politics and represent the interests of the misnamed LGBTIQ+ community.

It is not that a person with graduate studies and a portfolio of inherited privilege cannot work with and for queer and trans* people who are most impacted by racist heteropatriarchal capitalism. This thesis precisely intends to weave something of that sort. However, the starting point is the recognition of those differences, the denaturalization and the awareness that it is not about individual merits but about structural conditions of oppression and privilege. Without a bridge that connects us with the history of our ancestors, without a questioning of our own privileges and without a position that problematizes their origin, we are easily trapped in self-representation. As Spade warns:

The gay rights agenda, then, has come to reflect the needs and experiences of those leaders more than the experiences of queer and trans people not present in these elite spaces. The mostly white, educationally privileged paid leaders can imagine themselves fired from a job for being gay or lesbian, harassed on the street (often by an imagined assailant of color), excluded from Boy Scouts, or kept out of military service. They do not imagine themselves as potentially imprisoned, on welfare, homeless, in the juvenile punishment and foster care systems, in danger of deportation, or the target of continuous police harassment (Spade 2015, 34–35)

The discourses and positions of VAMOS have provoked the disapproval of some queer and trans* people who claim that the party is disconnected from the needs of impoverished people, and complicit with the neoliberal project:



Source: Facebook, Anonymous profile

Caption: The VAMOS party affirms that Carlos Ricardo Benavides, as president of the congress, did a remarkable job. I am not surprised that they are unable to meet their own standard (human rights), in political Science there is a theoretical reflection about the nature of catch-all parties - apparently monothematic - like this one, since the first generation of thinkers from the Frankfurt School, with Otto Kirchheimer; Nor am I surprised to see that they are no

different from the PAC that continues to be allied with Restauración Nacional; had they reached parliament, they would have joined the tradition of reducing the social agenda to a bargaining chip, because, oh surprise, human rights, in addition to their civil components, are also collective, social and economic.

This Facebook post summarizes the political project of the VAMOS party: a catch-all party that plays to be monothematic, willing to renounce to collective rights and social guarantees, in exchange for individual civil rights for the homocitizen. Their struggle is not to dismantle the system but to be included in it.

Narrowing political resistance strategies to seeking inclusion in anti-discrimination law makes the mistaken assumption that gaining recognition and inclusion in this way will equalize our life chances and allow us to compete in the (assumed fair) system (Spade 2015, 43).

7.2. Incorporation and gay entrepreneurship

There is a vein of sexual citizenship rooted in market. An argumentative resource often used to defend LGBTIQ+ rights is to present the *homocitizen* as a consumer, who deserves the same treatment as straight consumers. The *homocitizen* contributes to the economy, produces and consumes, stimulates the market and this makes him a respectable citizen. The market, in turn, discovers in the *homocitizen* a new field to exploit.

According to this logic, historian José Jiménez affirms, "...todas las sexualidades tienen el potencial de ser mercantilizadas; como consumidores se establecen individuos únicos con necesidades, identidades y estilos de vida, los cuales se expresan a través de la compra de mercancías específicas³⁶⁰" (J. D. Jiménez 2018, 6). Image 164, Mattel's non-binary doll, shows an example, just one of many, of how our identities are sold to us in the form of stylized products.

Image 164
Mattel's gender neutral doll



Source: Target, <https://www.target.com/p/creatable-world-deluxe-character-kit-customizable-doll-blonde-curlly-hair/-/A-76388860>

³⁶⁰ Free translation: all sexualities have the potential to be commodified; as consumers, unique individuals with needs, identities and lifestyles are established, which are expressed through the purchase of specific commodities.

But homocitizens are not only passive consumers, they also take their share of the market. If most NGOs still maintain a discursive position that tries to give a humanitarian face to their economy of rights, gay corporatism is openly neoliberal, and its rhetoric is that of the market and the big business of inclusion. For several years, activists of the TRVNSGÉN3RO PROJECT in Ecuador have been using the term "corporate gays" to refer to certain organizations of gay men (and some of lesbians and trans* people) that follow the corporate model (Almeida and Vásquez 2010, 32). In a similar vein, authors have analyzed the effects of this gay corporatism in different parts of the world (Bourcier 2017; Spade 2015; Duggan 2014).

Corporate gays, say Ana Almeida and Elizabeth Vásquez (2010), are characterized by their class bias. They idealized a whitened, individualist, consumerist, and liberal civilizational model. They are also characterized by their patriarchal bias and the unwillingness to abandon or problematize their masculine privileges (which generally translates into indifference or contempt for the struggles of women, lesbians, and trans* people). Their repertoire of actions relies predominantly on social marketing techniques, prioritizing visibility politics over substantive discussions. They generally work for legal reformism with a discourse of inclusion.

Gay corporatism is monothematic and individualistic, interested only in their own agenda. In this sense, they find no contradiction in selling services or receiving funds from transnational corporations, even when those corporations have been denounced for discriminating and oppressing other populations.

Where the money for this lesbian and gay rights nonprofit formation comes from, and how it is distributed, is also an area of significant concern. The largest white-founded and white-led organizations doing lesbian and gay rights work have generated much revenue through both foundation grants and sponsorship by corporations (Spade 2015, 35).

In countries such as the United States, Colombia, Argentina, Uruguay and Peru, corporate gays have pushed for controversial reforms such as the elimination of bans on serving in the military. As Duggan points out:

the push for gay marriage and military service has replaced the array of political, cultural, and economic issues that galvanized the national groups as they first emerged from a progressive social movement context several decades earlier (Duggan 2014, 45).

In Costa Rica, perhaps because we have no army to be included to, corporate gays have very quickly made the leap from NPIC to the business world. In this sense, they do not waste time with activism.

They place their trust in the market, promoting the commodification of the gay style of life, and innovating with products and consumer experiences.

Quand on parle de capital gai, on pense tourisme gai, gentrification ou industrie du sexe gai, marché de la reproduction avec la PMA et la GPA. Ces parts de marché font la partie du marketing et du marché au sens classique du terme. Ce sont autant de réserves d'exploitation biopolitique et la niche est devenue maison (Bourcier 2017, 21).

Once again, inclusion in the market does not work the same for all the letters in the soup, nor in all the colors inside and outside the rainbow. When we talk about integration and inclusion of trans* people, for example, they are not imagined as successful entrepreneurs, like gay men, but rather as workers to be incorporated into the labor market, in subordinate positions, poorly paid jobs with no possibility of promotions or growth. If in other countries the *homocitizens* fight for the inclusion of queer and trans* people in the army, in Costa Rica we fight for our inclusion in the reserve army of labor, in the neoliberal reserve army, where we can be recognized as citizens because we have an employer who mistreats and exploits us.

Neoliberalism not only recovers struggles, but is now part of its agenda, and gays (and increasingly some lesbians and trans* people) become important actors in its project (Duggan, 2014, 49). Thus, for example, in Costa Rica we find activities such as this webinar, promoted by a powerful business group, Alianza Empresarial para el Desarrollo (AED). Image 165 shows a webinar brings together companies, activists and UN cooperation to showcase good practices in inclusion in the workplace.

Image 165
Inclusion of trans people in the company



Caption: Inclusion of trans people in the company in the context of the Transgender Remembrance Day.

AED has been questioned for the millionaire contracts it held during president Carlos Alvarado's administration (Díaz 2020), yet they are at the forefront of sustainability and competitiveness in the country. This group promotes responsible and sustainable business models in companies, including a series of actions and activities in the field of neoliberal inclusion.

Corporatism is also articulated at the level of transnational capital. Thus, for example, we find LGBTIQ+ activists in Costa Rica providing training and awareness-raising services to companies such as Walmart. Walmart then publicizes these activities to present themselves as champions of inclusion.

Image 166
Inclusive Walmart



Source: Walmart Instagram
Caption: Lets talk about inclusion and diversity. Walmart without borders

Walmart has been denounced in different countries for its colonization practices that push local businesses to bankruptcy. In Costa Rica we have seen this happen in many of our communities. In addition, in the United States, Walmart has been accused of violating labor rights, especially those of racialized people, migrants, women and LGBTIQ+ people. Their anti-union policies and unfair conditions (low wages, inadequate insurance, etc.) have also been denounced (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre 2013; Katz 2011; Segal 2021). Besides this, Walmart is one of the main sellers of weapons in the US, including AR-15 rifles that have been used in massacres, among them those targeting racialized people or LGBTIQ+ people (The Times 2022).

However, there are organizations willing to sell their flag at a modest price, and with this, they help companies like Walmart to clean up their image and appear as if interested in the rights of minoritized populations, without in the end producing structural transformations towards social justice. This is

one more way in which transnational capital absorbs our resistances, converts them into commodities and articulates them for control.

Corporations recuperate dissent everywhere. They play an important role in neutralizing what is subversive. Moreover, in regions such as Central America, transnational capital perpetuates North-South colonial relations. They often sell us empowerment and yet it seems that this is another concept that we should be suspicious of:

...les femmes sont actuellement disempowered par les discours d'empowerment qui leur sont offerts comme substitut au féminisme. De la même manière, les gais et les lesbiennes sont disempowered par les discours d'empowerment et le management néolibéral de la « communauté » qui leur sont offerts comme substitut aux politiques gaies et lesbiennes progressistes et de gauche qui étaient les leurs. La transmission de leurs cultures (y compris politiques) est impensable et non désirée (Bourcier 2017, 48).

In this context, it is not surprising that LGBTIQ+ organizations often operate with the logic of corporations (Almeida and Vásquez 2010). Those who are more audacious do not even bother to talk about social transformations, but measure progress in terms of costs and benefits. Others turn demands into brands and commodities for the *homocitizen* with the purchasing power. In any case, the *homocitizens* have also discovered the lucrative industry of inclusion, a rich field for gay entrepreneurship.

In the following pages I will explore some examples of gay corporatism and entrepreneurship in Costa Rica. The selection of the cases was made based on the disposition of the organizations to provide an interview and/or the availability of open access data and information. Therefore, these are not to be read as the only examples, but they are representative of gay entrepreneurship and the marketing of inclusion in the country.

7.2.1. The Diverse Chamber of Commerce

Almeida and Vasquez (2010) describe that in the Ecuadorian context corporate gays depend mainly on international cooperation for HIV prevention, which determines their agenda. In Costa Rica a part of them still live on HIV action funds, but it is significantly less than it was 20 years ago, as funds have narrowed in this field for middle-income countries such as Costa Rica. In this sense, corporate gays have taken a discursive and programmatic turn, a turn that, following Bourcier (2017), we can identify as biopolitical (23). Increasingly, the State, international cooperation and corporations offer funds to fight against LGBT discrimination.

Si le capital de la gouvernamentalité néolibérale est le « capital humaine », l'un de ses secteurs le plus profitables est la discrimination comme le soutenait dès 1957 Gary

Becker, le « père » de la théorie du même nom avec son best-seller *The Economics of discrimination* (Bourcier 2017, 23)

In Costa Rica, the businessmen of the Diverse Chamber of Commerce (CCDCR) have been able to successfully exploit the economic analyses that specialists launch indicating that discrimination has a monetary cost, and that it is more profitable to include and respect than to discriminate. Based on this, they have developed a series of strategies and business alliances in what they recognize as a win-win situation: we win in terms of inclusion and respect, and the companies win by increasing their profits.

Relying on evidence-based information, the CCDCR aims to convince companies of the benefits of aligning themselves with respectful and inclusive practices. Image 167 (curiously featuring a stock image of a straight couple) proclaims that the LGBTIQ population constitutes a huge market of 730 million consumers worldwide, and a local market of between 487K and 584K potential consumers in the country. They add that 78% of LGBTIQ+ consumers prefer to buy from businesses who support the "community". We might wonder how many people from this alleged "community" actually have the capital to consume commodities in this country, but that is something the CCDCR is not going to publicize. The important thing is that they estimate that in Costa Rica we receive around 300K LGBTIQ+ tourists a year, and that is a considerable market to exploit.

Image 167
The LGBTIQ Market, CCDCR



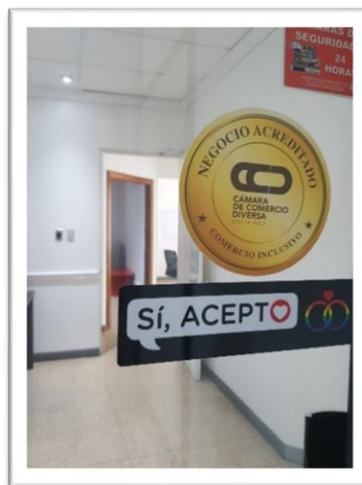
Source: <https://www.ccdcr.org/>

The CCDCR created a certification for businesses that are committed with inclusion and are willing to pay a membership fee to the Chamber.

Nosotros hemos creado un programa de sensibilización, para que cada empresa nueva que se afilie a la Cámara, reciba unas tres horas de inducción sobre el mercado LGBTI, cómo somos las personas LGBTI, por qué somos LGBTI, qué significa cada sigla, todo eso lo vemos en, en los talleres. También información del mercado, cómo piensa, qué consumimos, qué queremos. Cuáles son las 3 cosas en las que invertimos como prioridad, como mercado. Qué exigimos, verdad? Eh, como mercado, qué es un trato igualitario, en todos los servicios, verdad, ni más ni menos. Eso es como parte de las acciones que hacemos. Y, eh, promovemos los productos de la Cámara, los servicios de la Cámara, o las marcas que están dentro de la Cámara como empresas que son inclusivas. No "gay friendly", porque para nosotros eso no existe³⁶¹ (Julio César, in discusión with the author, October 7, 2019).

In exchange for their commitment and membership, companies receive a 3-hour training that accredits them with an inclusive business certification. They also receive the benefit that their products, services or brands will be promoted by the Chamber.

Image 168
Inclusive business certification, CCDCR



This certification is given to those companies that agree to sign a commitment for inclusion and against discrimination. It should be noted that the golden sticker that companies can proudly display in their windows has not stopped the discriminatory practices of some of the signatories. This was the case of

³⁶¹ Free translation: We have created an awareness program, so that every new company that joins the Chamber receives about three hours of induction on the LGBTI market, how we LGBTI people are, why we are LGBTI, what each letter of the acronym means, we see all of that in the workshops. Also information on the market, how we think, what do we consume, what do we want. What are the 3 things that we invest in as a priority, in the market. What do we demand, right? Uh, as a potential market, what is equal treatment, in all services, right, no more, no less. That is as part of the actions that we do. And, uh, we promote the Chamber's products, the Chamber's services, or the brands that are within the Chamber as companies that are inclusive. Not "gay friendly", because for us that does not exist.

COPA Airlines, which was denounced in 2019 for discriminating against a couple of gay tourists traveling with their children. Faced with pressure in social media, the CCDCR made a public statement, indicating that:

la aerolínea es miembro activo de nuestra Cámara desde enero pasado, y en virtud de ello hemos trabajado con ellos en el desarrollo de actividades de consciencia y capacitación para el respeto a los derechos de la comunidad lgbtiq. A propósito del incidente, hemos estado en conversaciones con los representantes de Copa Airlines en Costa Rica, para dar seguimiento interno a la situación... Nos mantendremos atentos a la evolución del caso, y continuaremos apoyando el perfeccionamiento de las capacidades y procesos de promoción de la diversidad tanto con Copa Airlines como con el resto de nuestras empresas afiliadas³⁶² (Cámara de Comercio Diversa 2019) .

Under this discourse, the incident in question is attenuated. It is not presented as an act of discrimination by the airline, but rather as a kind of imperfection in the processes of promoting diversity and inclusion. The message seems to be: don't worry, we have it under control, and be patient, it takes time for companies to dismantle their discriminatory practices. Perhaps most concerning is the fact that when the gay couple filed a discrimination complaint in court (which was ultimately dismissed), the company used in their defense the argument of being members of the CCDCR, whose mission is to promote and strengthen the diversity and inclusion of the LGTBQ+ population. Thus, in this context, in which a gay couple has the resources to take a case of discrimination to court, the certification of the CCDCR, which is supposed to protect the LGTBQ+ consumer market, was used as a defense by the company denounced for discrimination.

Regarding life in the city of San José, the issue of the safety of LGTBQ+ people does not seem to be a concern for the CCDCR, or if it is, it is only insofar as it could affect business. When I tried to inquire with its director on the issue of security and police violence in the city, he responded by reframing the CCDCR as a business organization:

la Cámara como tal es una Cámara de Comercio, entonces nosotros lo que buscamos es traer negocio y traer turismo al país. Y trabajamos las áreas que tienen que ver con la parte de comercio. Lo que son instituciones públicas, ahí ya hay muchísimas asociaciones y organizaciones en el país y en San José que hacen trabajo de sensibilización, verdad. Y les pagan por hacer eso, además. Entonces nosotros no nos hemos querido meter ahí porque, primero, no lo vemos como parte de nuestro

³⁶² Free translation: the airline has been an active member of our Chamber since last January, and as such we have worked with them in the development of awareness and training activities for the respect of the rights of the lgbtiq community. Regarding the incident, we have been in conversations with Copa Airlines representatives in Costa Rica, to follow up internally on the situation.... We will remain attentive to the evolution of the case, and we will continue to support the improvement of abilities and processes to promote diversity with Copa Airlines as well as with the rest of our affiliates.

quehacer diario, pero por supuesto que apoyamos a las organizaciones que lo hacen³⁶³ (Cámara de Comercio Diversa 2019).

My question actually arose from a series of events involving the CCDCR that occurred in September 2018. At that time, Costa Rica was going through the longest strike in its history. Thousands of workers in the public sector, especially teachers, mobilized against the fiscal package that the government of President Alvarado was pushing. In the midst of large demonstrations and blocked streets, the CCDCR hosted a large international conference in a luxurious hotel in the capital:

Image 169
Trade Mission Costa Rica LGBTIQ 2018



Source: <https://www.ccdcr.org/>

The CCDCR describes Trade Mission as the most important LGBTIQ business event in the country. In this sense, and in complete coherence with the neoliberal project, the CCDCR aligned itself with the government against the unions and had no qualms about calling to sabotage the workers' strike.

³⁶³ Free translation: The Chamber as such is a Chamber of Commerce, so what we are looking for is to bring business and tourism to the country. And we work in the areas that have to do with commerce. As for public institutions, there are already many associations and organizations in the country and in San José that do awareness-raising work, you see. And they are paid for doing that, besides. So, we have not wanted to get involved there because, first of all, we do not see it as part of our daily work, but of course we support the organizations that do it.

Image 170

The country does not stop, neither do we



Source: Cámara de Comercio Diversa Facebook Page

Caption: Post: Because we know that Costa progresses through hard work. We continue with the preparations for the Costa Rica LGBTIQ Trade Mission 2018. We will be waiting for you tomorrow from 8 am at the Hilton Garden San José Hotel.

Image: The country does not stop, neither do we

The CCDCR director's response to my question on [in]security made it clear that their priority is the market and not the people. In this sense, neither their anti-strike position is surprising, nor their silence in the face of the police abuses that trans* people frequently suffer in the city. For example, in the same week this conference on the benefits of pink capitalism was held in a hotel in San José, less than a kilometer away, the police carried out an “urban cleaning” operative called “Safe Dawn”, in which they searched, detained and displaced several unhoused residents of the city.

Image 171
Safe Dawn



Source: Facebook, Municipalidad de San José

Caption : In a coordinated action with other police forces, the Municipal Police of San José carried out from early hours of Monday the operation "Amanecer Seguro" (Safe Dawn) with the aim of ensuring the safety of passersby in the capital #SJOlives #SecuritySJO.

The police cleared the streets of undesirable bodies, displacing dozens of people who make of the sidewalk their bed. Some of the displaced people are queer and trans*. Many of them come from across the borders as well, but they are not LGBTIQ+ tourists, they are migrants. They do not have the purchasing power demanded by the LGBTIQ+ market that the CCDCR exploits. They strive to survive every day. They will not find answers for their needs inside de luxury halls of a conference of this sort, where enterprises get advised on how to get revenues from inclusive policies, and how to target a disattended section of market. They probably would not even be admitted anyway, because of the clothes they wear, because of the way they speak, because they cannot pay the entrance fee, and because of the absences and gaps in inclusion that their bodies and existences reveal.

The demands of trans* activists are actually closer to those of the workers' movements that reclaimed the streets during the same dates of the Trade Mission event. They ask for education, access to health, decent housing and decent work, something that neoliberal capitalism still fails to provide.

Image 172

Trans women demanding job opportunities, May 1°, 2015



The president of the CCDCR affirms:

la palabra inclusión para nosotros incluye absolutamente a todos, no solo población LGBTIQ. Y estamos empezando a trabajar el plan 2020 que quedará listo este mes de octubre, en donde vamos a abrir total y completamente la sombrilla de lo que significa inclusión, verdad. Este, para, para incluir precisamente a todas, a todas las minorías que estamos ahí³⁶⁴ (Julio César, in discusión with the author, October 7, 2019).

I listened to his explanation and what I heard was his intention to open up more markets. I do not question his sensitivity and interest in including other minoritized populations, but his notion of inclusion is an example of the dangers that the dialectic of inclusion/exclusion (Sawaia 1999) poses. Inclusion in neoliberal terms seems to be a nice word that allows companies to increase their profits, without the need to carry out major transformations or take responsibility for the precariousness of life faced by many of the people that their labels and banners claim to protect.

7.2.2. Expo Boda Pride LGBTI

As I mentioned in Chapter 6, the strategy for the approval of equal marriage in Costa Rica was developed in vicepresident Ana Helena Chacón's office, in dialogue with activists who had been pushing for the approval for years. Before that, several projects with different figures to legalize same-sex unions were stranded in Congress for more than 10 years, without any prospect of prospering. For several years, a large group of activists and collectives articulated in the Frente por los Derechos

³⁶⁴ Free translation: the word inclusion for us includes absolutely everyone, not only LGBTIQ population. And we are starting to work on the 2020 plan that will be ready this October, where we are going to completely and totally open the umbrella of what inclusion means, you know. This, to, to include precisely all, all the minorities that we are there.

Igualitarios (Front for Equal Rights) promoted a campaign to introduce an equal marriage bill in Congress, through the procedure known as "people's initiative". This procedure requires the collection of the signatures of 5% of the voting roll (about 170,000) in support of the project.

As activists toured communities, some congressmen presented their own bills for and against equal marriage. I was never really interested in marriage. As Spade points out, I believe that in the long run what marriage grants is "access for same-sex couples to the fundamentally unequal institution designed to privilege certain family formations for the purpose of state control" (Spade 2015, 35). However, I found the idea of walking the streets and visiting communities to talk with people about sexuality and sex/gender dissidence valuable, so I got involved in some of the FDI activities.

In 2014, tensions arose with one of the Trotskyist parties that had joined the FDI and made of equal marriage one of its main demands. Tensions revolved around the Trotskyists' claim that the LGBTIQ+ movement was complicit with authoritarian and neoliberal companies, institutions and governments, and demanded that we take an anti-capitalist position (Nuevo Partido Socialista 2015). While I agreed with their arguments, I disagreed with their forms. One of the party leaders had offered to keep in his house the papers with more than 6000 signatures that had been collected over a year. When the FDI refused to take a stand against pinkwashing and capitalism, the Trotskyist party broke off relations with the FDI and confiscated thousands of pages with the signatures that belonged to the movement (Núñez 2014). They argued that LGBTIQ+ activists did not have the capacity or the political clarity to safeguard the signatures, so they would be safer in the hands of a cis heterosexual man. The FDI leadership, predictably, turned to the State and the law to recover the signatures that were being retained. This episode ended up breaking the fragile bridge that existed between the gay and lesbian organizations and the partisan left. In the end, equal marriage was approved through an alternative route. The Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruled in 2018 and no matter how hard the conservative political forces tried to hinder the entry into force of equal marriage, finally in May 2020 it became a reality.

With the anticipation of arrival of equal marriage, many gay, lesbian and straight but "inclusive" entrepreneurs saw a great business opportunity. Thus, in 2019 the first edition of Expo Boda Pride LGBTI was held in San José. Expo Boda Pride is a business fair with more than 100 stands with products and services related to the production of weddings.

Image 173
Expo Boda Pride 2019



Source: [http://www. https://bodapride.com](http://www.https://bodapride.com)

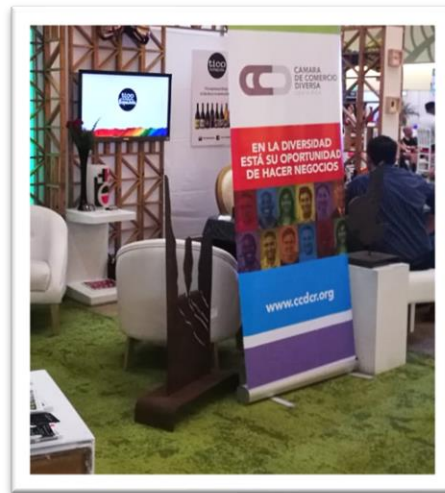
I was not in Costa Rica when Expo Boda Pride 2019 took place, so I had the collaboration of a person who agreed to participate as an informant. I will call her Nana. She is a cis bisexual woman with a college degree. She asked to remain anonymous because, at the time, she was working for one of the companies that held a stand in the fair, and she feared her job could be at risk if they found out she criticized the event. However, she offered to do a participatory observation because she was interested in sharing the contradictions that she saw in the event.

Nana walked around the stands as a potential consumer and she also worked on a stand, giving information to customers. I rely on her pictures, videos and reflections for this section. Among the stands, she reported, one could find wedding planners, florists, cake designers, hotels, boutiques, couture stores, and other products of the lucrative wedding industry.

Image 174
Expo Boda Pride LGBTI stand

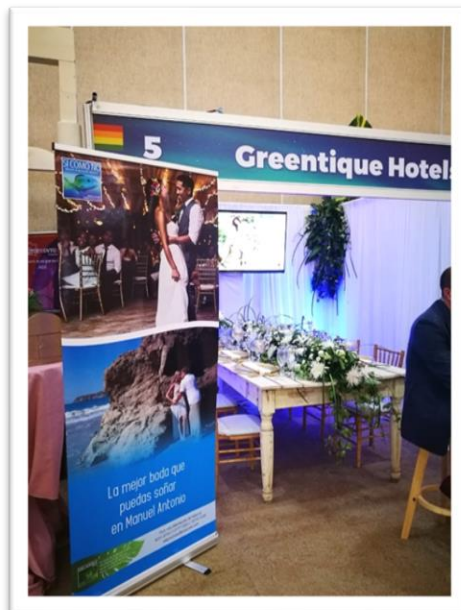


Image 175
CCDCR's stand



Many companies had already been selling wedding services for some time, but now they were expanding their market to the fresh audience of gays and lesbians. As shown in image 176, some did not even bother to renew their banners portraying straight couples.

Image 176
Greentique Hotels' stand



Perhaps it matters little when the target clamors for inclusion in assimilation. In any case, “diverse” weddings have turned out to be a lucrative industry for entrepreneurs. It is not that much about rights but about business. Nana's reports reflect this. She had not disclosed being bisexual with her company or her team. The company is owned by straight people, and this was the first time she heard of the interest in the LGBTIQ+ market. She felt glad to be assigned to work at Expo Boda Pride, but she was worried because the company did not give any training for the workers they sent to the event.

Apparently, this was the norm. She recalls feeling upset by the comments that she heard from other workers all around the exposition. For instance, a woman at the stand of a real estate project next to them told her they had recently managed to sell all the apartments in a luxury residential tower in the west of San José. I quote Nana:

Como el 30% fue vendido a parejas homosexuales, me dijo. Y dice: “son los mejores clientes” - refiriéndose económicamente hablando, a que tiene poder adquisitivo- “Y hay muchos de ellos que usted los ve y no se imagina, o sea, que son pareja. ¡Guapísimos! Y yo digo: es un desperdicio”³⁶⁵ (Nana, in discussion with the author, August 10, 2019).

Her tone is sad and full of disappointment when she narrates what happened. She states she felt affected by the things she had to listen to in a work activity that she thought would be a safe space. Outraged, she shows me a video of one of the business presentations, in which the speaker begins her presentation by saying: “Gracias a Dios que nos da la vida, comencé a ser oficiante de bodas destino. Una boda destino es cuando dos extranjeros vienen a casarse a Costa Rica, aprovechando el destino turístico...”³⁶⁶. In the Costa Rican context of 2019, starting a speech with a praise to the Creator made Nana feel insecure.

She comments that she also felt uncomfortable because of the way her colleagues stared at trans women in the room. She recalls that a man in the stand beside her kept staring insistently at a group of female models passing by. He sensed her discomfort and justified himself: “Es que me les quedo viendo porque, diay, uno aquí no sabe... Después uno se embarca, y [la mujer trans] dice: "me llamo Ramón”³⁶⁷. In a similar line, her direct boss told her, when he saw some trans girls passing by:

“Ahí uno se va de culo, verdad? Uno se va fácil. Esas sí son? Sí son viejas?” Entonces yo le dije: “Sí, ellas son mujeres trans” A lo que él respondió: “Mae es que hay unas que tienen un cuerpazo, mucho mejor que cualquier culo”^{368 369}...”

Perhaps it was too much to ask of an event like this to show some respect or at least sensitivity towards trans* people, since they could not even get right the basic consensus on how to treat gay and lesbian costumers respectfully.

³⁶⁵ Free translation: About 30% was sold to gay couples, she told me. And she says: "they are the best customers" - meaning economically speaking, that they have purchasing power - "And there are many of them that you see them, and you can't imagine, you know, that they are a couple. They are so handsome! And I think: it's such a waste".

³⁶⁶ Free translation: Thanks to God who gives us life, I started officiating destination weddings. A destination wedding is when two foreigners come to get married in Costa Rica, taking advantage of the tourist destination...

³⁶⁷ Free translation: I keep staring at them because, well, here you never know... You might get on board, and then [the trans women] says: "my name is Ramón"...

³⁶⁸ Free translation: “You get easily fooled, right? You get easily fooled. Those are? Are they chicks?” So I told him: "Yes, they are trans women" To which he answered: "Man, some of them have a great body, better than any chick.”

³⁶⁹ “Culo” means literally ass, and it is used as a degrading synecdoque to speak of women.

One does not need to be gay to exhibit your products at Expo Boda Pride. As their website indicates, they also set up a space called the *Hub Business Pride LGBTI+ Friendly* to promote the products and services of inclusive companies. But it seems that a commitment to support the rights of this population is not even a requirement to participate in the exhibition. What is important is to have a good marketing strategy aimed at the right target.

A clear example of this is the stand of the Alma de Escalante housing project:

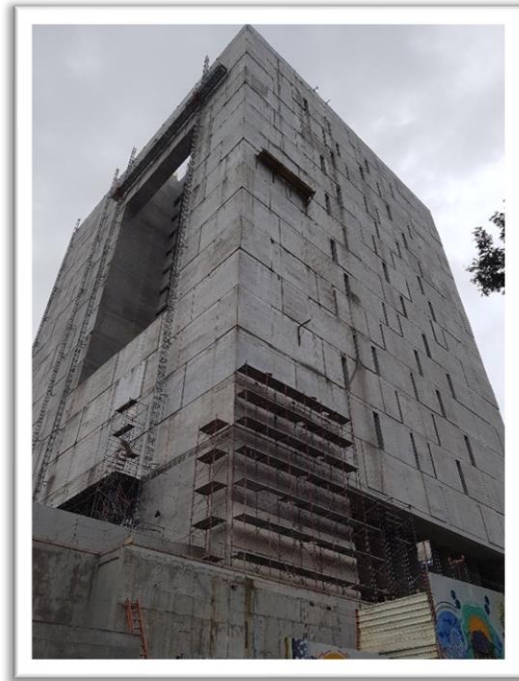
Image 177
Alma de Escalante at Expo Boda Pride



Source: screenshot Google search

Alma de Escalante is a luxury housing tower located in Escalante, a trendy neighborhood I will be discussing further in the chapter 8. As part of the ethnographic process in Escalante, I consulted one of Alma de Escalante's real estate brokers about their inclusion policies, apropos of their participation in Expo Boda Pride a few months before. She replied that Alma de Escalante is an inclusive company because they sell their apartments to couples or individuals without discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation. I hypothetically asked her what would happen if I, as a homeowner, suffered any kind of violence or discrimination from other tenants because of being queer. I used as an example a situation I lived a few years ago, when I had to move out of an apartment because the tires of my car were slashed every time my partner slept over. She confirmed that they did not interfere in neighborly relationships. Their inclusion project consisted of agreeing to sell a fancy apartment to a queer person or couple.

Image 178
Alma de Escalante 2019



This is not surprising, especially considering that the name of the building, Alma, is an acronym formed from the surnames of its owners: **Á**lvarez and **MA**rín: Antonio Álvarez Desanti and Nuria Marín. I mentioned Antonio Álvarez Desanti in a previous chapter. He was responsible for the persecution of lesbians in 1990, when he was Minister of Government and Public Security. Caught by sex panic for the II Lesbian Feminist Meeting of Latin America and the Caribbean, he allied with the Archbishop of the Catholic Church and issued a warning to all Costa Rican consulates abroad so that visas would not be granted to single women, and he warned that women arriving unaccompanied at national airports should not be admitted into de country.

He was also a presidential candidate in 2018, for the Liberación Nacional party. During the campaign, Alvarez said he could endorse a figure such as civil unions for same sex couples, but not marriage: “yo quiero decirles sinceramente que mi posición sobre la ideología de género, que es aquella que defiende el aborto y defiende el matrimonio igualitario, yo no la comparto³⁷⁰” (Romero 2017, para. 2). Regardless of one’s own position on marriage, Alvarez’s speech makes it clear that he does not believe that gay and lesbian people should have the same rights as heterosexual people, yet he does believe that they should have the same access to the market.

The hallmarks of neoliberalism are co-optation and incorporation, meaning that the words and ideas of resistance movements are frequently recast to produce results

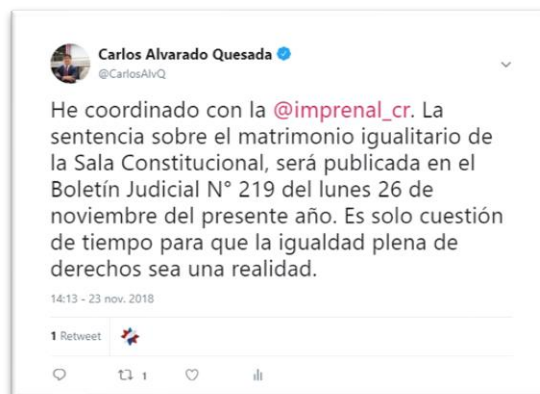
³⁷⁰ Free translation: I want to tell you sincerely that I do not share the position of gender ideology, which is the one that defends abortion and defends equal marriage.

that disserve the initial purposes for which they were deployed, and instead become legitimizing tools for white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal, ableist political agendas (Spade 2015, 13).

When President Carlos Alvarado announced the publication of the ruling that would open the door to equal marriage, he said: “It is only a matter before full equality of rights becomes a reality”.

Image 179

Publication of the ruling on equal marriage



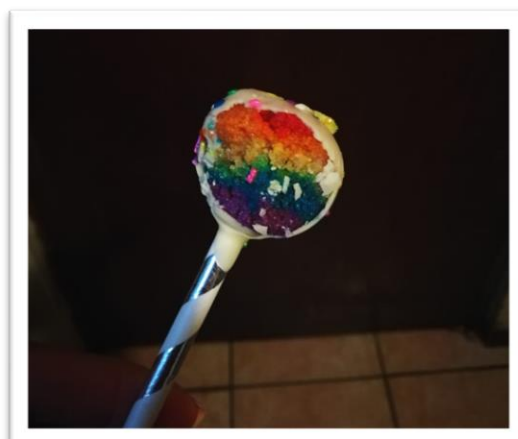
Source: Twitter @CarlosAlvQ

However, as with the Trade Mission event and the CCDCR, it seems that the notion of equality is a bit narrow. While some gay and lesbian people live homeless in the city, other gay and lesbian people become attractive to real estate developers in San Jose. And while tourism companies offer destination wedding packages for gay and lesbian couples from abroad, in San José police forces harass and hurl xenophobic insults against lesbian feminist migrants during a demonstration for International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (Colectivas feministas 2021). When inclusion becomes a market stake, it is then available only to those who have the resources to buy it.

La revendication du mariage, comme celle du droit à servir dans l’armée ou à donner son sang témoignent d’un désir d’être inclus dans la nation qui peut se manifester de manière violente et décomplexée (Bourcier 2017, 30).

Image 180

Cakepop, Expo Boda Pride



7.2.3. From incarceration to trendy topic: Pride March

In Costa Rica, the Pride march is now a trademark. A group of gay men who have been organizing the event for several years, claim that they are the founders of this activity in the country (Rueda 2017). In fact, as José Jiménez (2017) points out, the Pride celebration has an earlier origin. However, this has not stopped this team of corporate gay men who, in 2012, registered a foundation, *Fundación Celebración de la Diversidad*, which has since proclaimed itself as the rightful owner of Pride march, and therefore, the legitimate organization with power to convene, direct and channel the millionaire resources that revolve around the march. As with any private property, it is the owner who makes the decisions. Thus, the owners of Pride march decide, in *petit comité*, all the details of the march, they launch the calls, and dictate the instructions and norms to participate. In 2022, for instance, organizations that wished to participate as a block in the march were asked to fill out a google form in which they were even asked to report what the slogans in their banners would say (MESART activists, in discussion with the author, June 9, 2022).

Among its owners is Javier Umaña Rivera, an activist and professional drag queen, who has been the president of the *Celebración de la Diversidad* foundation since the beginning. Umaña claims that the pride marches began in Costa Rica in 2010, at the initiative of him and a group of drag friends who went around the city taking pictures with the figures of the Cow Parade, in protest because the police had prevented a trans women from taking pictures with one of the urban sculptures (Rueda 2017). Umaña's version does not mention the pride festivals that had been organized around June 28 since 2003 in San José, nor does it take into account the national context at the time, when conservative groups were pressuring the Supreme Electoral Court to take the decision on same-sex unions to a popular vote. After the experience of the 2007 referendum regarding the CAFTA, social movements became suspicious of such institutional instruments, and feared that conservatism would triumph at the ballot box. However, Umaña is right to point out the leap that occurred in 2010, when the Pride celebration ceased to be a static festival in the public space and became an itinerant demonstration in the streets.

Since then, Umaña and his team have been at the forefront of the activity. The team is made up primarily of cisgender gay men:

Image
Pride's male team



Source: Facebook, Marcha Diversidad

The paradoxical lack of diversity in the organization of Pride march (that was originally called in Costa Rica “Marcha de la Diversidad” - diversity march- before the switched it to English (Pride), in order to conform to the international trend of World Pride TM), has generated multiple criticisms and complaints:

Image 191
Tag Pride March



Tag in the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Costa Rica
Caption: Pride march = gay men march

The tag, documented during the 2019 occupation of the Social Sciences building as part of student protests, resonates with what this meme seeks to parody:

Image 192

Diversity according to the homocitizen



Facebook Page Ken y Ken Mariquitas de bien, 04/25/2019

Caption: Hello, we invite you to our workshop on colonialism and diverse corporealities.

Their model of diversity is restricted to a nice discourse that accurately reproduces the hierarchies that shape power in modern times. Diversity consists only in their homoerotic practices. Otherwise, their model suits the *homocitizen*, male, whitewashed, young, productive, consumer, respectful of the law, with good morals and a great love for the nation.

The multiple criticisms of male overrepresentation have provoked some attempts (by Umaña as well as by activists and collectives outside the Foundation) to decentralize the organization. Sometimes they have been able to include the participation of a lesbian or a trans woman on the team. Although women have not played a leading role, this inclusion allows them to justify the female quota in their hypermasculine space. However, despite these efforts, there has been an important complaint from activists about the lack of diversity in the organization of the march and other events like the Pride Awards.

Image 193
Tag The gay bourgeoisie



Tag in the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Costa Rica
Caption: Marsha did not start the first pride so that it would be taken over by the gay bourgeoisie.

In the last decade the march has been growing exponentially in numbers. In 2010 the march was attended by a few dozen people. In 2012, the situation with congressman Justo Orozco and the conservative attacks on LGBTI rights, and the antecedent of the Invisibles March provoked a significant growth of the Pride demonstration. It is estimated that that year about 3,000 people arrived. For 2014 estimations speak of 7000 participants and for 2016 it is estimated about 40,000 participated (J. D. Jiménez 2017).

Umaña recalls that in 2010 some organizations considered it inappropriate to take to the streets because they could scandalize the nation (Rueda 2017). However, Umaña and his friends proudly took out their glitter and feathers, and they strutted around San José as our ancestors did in the 70s underground. The 2010 irreverence was short-lived, and in less than 10 years those who defended their feathers starting giving orders to the participants on how to behave at the march:

Image 194
The diversity march will be enjoyed by the whole family



Source: Facebook, Marcha Diversidad

Caption: OFFICIAL RELEASE - The Diversity March will be enjoyed by the whole family. Organization calls attendees to maintain a peaceful and respectful environment even for those who have not shown the same for the Costa Rican LGBTI community.

They asked for respect, even for those who do not respect us, and evoked the imaginaries of family and peace, in a sort of homonationalism, in which the homocostarricans have to demonstrate that they are good citizens. Other organizations echoed their call, and asked participants to maintain modesty, to avoid nudity and obscenity, and to behave according to good morals, because President Carlos Alvarado had promised to attend the march, and he was not to be embarrassed in front of the country and the whole world.

Image 195

Call of the Movimiento Diversidad Abelardo Araya



Source: Facebook, Movimiento Diversidad Abelardo Araya

Caption: Good morning friends and customers of Puchos Men's Club, I just saw that the President of the Republic, will accompany us this Sunday at the March, let's try not to make him look bad, before the country and the world, no obscenities, no nudity, nothing that affects morality, remember that this is for our rights, to be naked and make a mess, there are other places, please spread the word and I ask the organizers to be vigilant on the subject... Good day...

Today, the march is a perfect example of the depoliticization of diversity, where dissidence is totally neutralized. The Pride march has become so assimilated to the celebrations of cosmopolitan cities in the Global North, that even InterPride representatives traveled to Costa Rica in 2017 to consolidate the inclusion of our small country in the World Pride™. This, for the great part of us who march in San Jose may not mean much, but for the organizing team it means access to resources and support from the transnational diversity industry. As Puar notes, InterPride is a transnational organization based in the US, run predominantly by North Americans and some Europeans, who work in the industry massive international pride parades. This organization has been strongly criticized for its complicity

with governments with imperialist and pinkwashing practices such as the State of Israel, which hosted World Pride in 2006 (Puar 2007, 16).

Receiving money from international partnerships has its implications, as we have seen with NGOs. Thus, for example, in 2019 the Pride march was held in Costa Rica a week earlier than usual (June 23). This raised concerns among a sector of the participants, not only because they changed the date precisely in the year of the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots, but also because it now coincided with the celebration of Father's Day, which for many people in this country is an important day of family gathering. There was pressure on social media to keep the original date, but the organizers refused because they were invited to celebrate World Pride in NYC, as part of the 50th anniversary of Stonewall. In other words, the agenda of the owners of the march was imposed over history and popular will.

As in other countries, national and transnational companies march here with large floats. Some of these companies are known for their exploitative practices towards their workers (many of whom are, of course, LGBTIQ people).

Image 196
Pride 2020 sponsors



Source: Facebook, Marcha de la Diversidad

The capital that moves around this march and the participation of sponsors generates discontent in some sectors, especially in those queer and trans* people who are exploited by some of the companies that sponsor and parade in the march.

Image 197
Tag Fuck Amazon!



Tag in the Faculty of Social Sciences #3, University of Costa Rica
Caption: Fuck Amazon!

The organizers, on the other hand, have no problem with the use of corporate logos. In 2020, they even held a contest during the transmission of the Pride. The contest consisted in naming the number of logos that appeared in the Facebook Live broadcast of the Pride, to participate for a box of sponsoring products:

Image 198
Pride's logos contest



Source: Facebook, Marcha de la Diversidad

Government institutions and political figures also attend the march, and during the governments of the Acción Ciudadana party, public officials received an invitation to participate on the behalf of the Presidential House.

Image 199
Call from Casa Presidencial to the public sector



Source: Facebook, Casa Presidencial

Embassies from several countries also march here. In 2018, for example, the embassies of Germany, Argentina, Canada, Chile, the United States, Spain, France, Israel, Mexico, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Switzerland, in addition to delegations of the European Union and the United Nations System, with all its agencies, officially participated. It should be noted that the governments of several of these countries have been singled out for their pinkwashing practices (Puar 2007).

Image 200
Participation of embassies in Pride 2018



Source: Facebook, Marcha de la Diversidad

The participation of the embassies is not only performative. For several years the U.S. Embassy has been one of the main sponsors of the march, financing part of its expenses and bringing queer artists for the closing concert of the activity. Accordingly, English has been adopted as the language of diversity for some years now. Although many of us pronounce their names with a strong accent, we now have "Pride Awards" (a red-carpet event with restricted VIP access where LGBTIQ+ celebrities and activists receive awards), and a "Pride Connection™" (articulated in conjunction with the Alianza Empresarial para el Desarrollo).

In 2020, the pandemic forced the owners of the march to switch to an online Pride. Although this reduced operating expenses considerably, the online Pride had more sponsors than ever before:

Image 201
Online Pride 2020



Source: Facebook, Marcha de la Diversidad

The Pride march is naturally crossed and fed by national imaginaries of whiteness and exceptionalism. The homonormative imagination that tears us away from Central America and transports us to Europe can be observed in the images chosen for the official flyers of the organization.

Image 202
Flyer for 2018 Pride



Source: Facebook, Marcha de la Diversidad

As I have discussed in previous chapters, most people in Costa Rica are not blond nor white, like the drawings in this flyer. Yet, the flyers for the Pride frequently look more like a poster of a European Spring festival than a march in Abya Yala. The image shows us the body aspirations of the homocitizens: white, blond, young, tall, fit, abled, fashionably dressed bodies ready to celebrate a form of diversity that will not disturb others.

In reality, queer and trans* movements in Costa Rica do not all dress like the showcase of a chic store, and even if some of us like glitter and sparkles, if we take a glimpse on the trans* movements in the country it would look more like this:

Image 203
Trans* demonstration 2016



Source: Ángel Damián Reyes private collection

The choice of the image for the official 2018 flyer is therefore striking. In light of other similar campaigns that try to reflect the alleged diversity, such as image 204 by the organization MESART in 2022, it seems that the choice of bodies to illustrate Pride 2018 projects of a whitewashed imaginary unconcerned with discussions about race, able-bodiedness, fatphobia, and so on.

Image 204
Lesbian Visibility Day Flyer, MESART



Source: MESART Facebook

Ableism in the Pride Parade is one of the main issues that emerged in the fieldwork for this study while talking about inclusion with Alex Vazque, an activist for LGBTIQ+ and disability rights. Alex stated that he and his friends who are wheelchair users have mixed feelings about the Pride.

La misma marcha de la diversidad es como todo un planeamiento previo mío, emocional y de otras cosas para poder de verdad lograrlo. Necesito encontrar un amigo o amiga que me lleve y se sacrifique de que luego va a tener ampollas en los pies. Entonces tiene que llevar a una persona, y todo, o sea, no es tarea fácil³⁷¹ (Alex Vásquez, in discusión with the author, November 9, 2019)

Some of his friends have even desisted from going, because despite the multiple inclusive sponsors and the huge budget that finances the event, the organizers have failed to take measures to ensure the inclusive participation of people with disabilities. Alex says that they did not even think about accessibility when he was invited to speak at Pride 2019 about his activism as a queer person with disabilities:

Este año me invitaron a hablar en la tarima. ¡no lo pude hacer! ¡Eran un montón de gradas! Según ellos, me iban a alzar entre todos. No entienden que no se trata de

³⁷¹ Free translation: The Pride march itself is like a whole lot of work for myself, emotionally and otherwise, in order to actually make it. I need to find a friend who can push me and make the sacrifice that will give them blisters on their feet. So they'll have to carry a person and all that, I mean, it's not an easy task.

alzarme. Se trata de que si me botan, ellos no van a pagar las consecuencias. Soy yo. Y mi salud, y mi integridad física. Entonces al final yo les dije: "No, salados. Alguien más tendrá que hablar". Claro, ellos lo vieron como: salado usted, le estábamos dando la oportunidad de hablar". ¿Me entendés?³⁷² (Alex Vásquez, in discussion with the author, November 9, 2019).

This episode that Alex narrates with regret is indicative of the compulsory able-bodiedness that still lives inside the mainstream LGBTIQ+ movements. Instead of demanding justice and respect for his body and his dignity, the organizers think Alex should be grateful that they are giving him a few minutes in the microphone to amplify his concerns. For them, Alex is the sole loser in this situation. They lose nothing, as his words are replaceable or disposable. In this context, unfortunately, the Pride march is neither a safe nor inclusive space for queer people with disabilities.

It is a shameful and complex situation. But the matter does not end there. In 2022, the Pride organizers brazenly assumed their profit motive. Instead of the closing concert, which was usually free and open, they organized a private concert at the National Stadium with the cisheterosexual artist Paulina Rubio, with tickets costing as much as \$285. The organizers also arbitrarily reversed the route of the march, so that it would end at the National Stadium and make it easier to attend the concert. This annoyed people greatly, and provoked a multiplicity of protests, dissident blocs, counter-marches and a successful boycott of the concert (estimated to have cost close to \$500,000) (Muñoz 2022). In the face of popular indignation, the organizers of the march tried to justify their decision to change the route on the grounds that it was more accessible to people who are wheelchair users. But this argument, like the invitation to Alex to speak on the stage, is an example of simulated inclusion. This same year an activist who suffered an injury that hinders their mobility consulted with Javier Umaña about the possibility of installing an awning in the middle of the route, so that people with disabilities could rest for a while. Umaña responded that this was impossible to manage (Anonymous activist, in discussion with the author, June 20, 2022). In short, they have never bothered to ensure accessibility, but they have no problem using it to try to cover themselves from criticism.

Alex affirms that the oppressions that are imbricated in their bodies confront them with rejection everywhere. Alex has already made his way resisting the violence of the conservative sectors that use his disability to insult him or to deny his autonomy as a gay person. In a valiant effort to reappropriate the insult, Alex jokingly shares the meme that circulated on conservative social media pages and anti-gender ideology groups in 2017:

³⁷² Free translation: This year I was invited to speak on the stage. I couldn't do it! There were a lot of stairs! They said they were going to lift me up. They don't understand that it's not about lifting me up. It's about the fact that if they let me fall, they are not going to pay the consequences. I am. And my health, and my physical integrity. So in the end I told them, "No, sorry. Somebody else will have to speak". Of course, they saw it as: "sorry for you, we were giving you the opportunity to speak". Do you understand me?

Image 205
Horrible meme about Alex Vásquez



Source: Facebook, Alex Vásquez
Caption: Dudes!!! Fabricio's followers made me a MEME!!! I want to thank my parents for having such a fabulous gay son. My objective in life is complete.

This meme takes a photo of Alex at the Pride march and intervenes it with the text: "This is how I left you for being a fag". In other words, the meme suggests that Alex's disability is a sort of punishment for being queer. While the level of violence in this image is not comparable to the indifference of the organizers to make the Pride accessible to people with disabilities, both acts share the same root: compulsory able-bodiedness. This is something we should be taking seriously in the fight for inclusion. But as Alex rightly points out, the problem is compounded as the Pride owners fail to understand the underlying problem in this situation.

I could probably go on for many more pages describing examples of how Pride in Costa Rica is designed by and for the homonationalist ideal of gay men: masculine, able-bodied, white, wealthy, well behaved and, of course, always sexy.

Image 206
Homocitizen Pride



Source: Facebook, Marcha Diversidad

Homonationalism does not arise by spontaneous generation within the LGBTIQ+ movements. As discussed above, the production of the homocitizen subject is one more strategy within the neoliberal project, which is used by the state to expand its repertoire of biopolitical regulations and its international legitimacy.

I will dwell on just one more example. For Pride 2017, inclusion had already become part of the government's propaganda discourse. This edition of the Pride march featured the participation of representatives of the Ministry of Justice, who had been appointed as marshals at the march, in virtue of a series of reforms adopted by the prison system to combat discrimination and promote respect of trans* people in the country's prisons. The reforms included the possibility for trans* inmates to choose, according to their gender, in which prison they would be incarcerated.

The support provided by the authorities to the Pride march gave rise to an unusual event: alongside representatives of the prison system, this Pride march featured the extraordinary participation of 2 trans* people (a man and a woman) who at the moment lived incarcerated in Costa Rican jails. They were granted an exceptional permit by the government to attend the parade. They were taken out of jail under custody, brought to the Pride march in San José, paraded on a float as a trophy of inclusion, and at the end of the day they were returned to their cells, full of glitter and pride. The request, that Umaña notes came from the Pride's organizers, was enthusiastically received by the authorities of the Ministry of Justice and Peace:

Image 207

Integration of an imprisoned trans woman in Pride



Source: Facebook, Javi Umaña

Caption: I do not know if you know her, but her name is Estéfany, she is a trans girl and she is a person deprived of liberty, yesterday at the diversity march she was able to share with everyone. We are very grateful to the Ministry of Justice and peace for responding to the request of the organization. We hope you can soon be reintegrated into our society.

The image shows Estéfani radiant and smiling. Umaña closes his post by wishing her that she can soon become reintegrated into *our* society. Beyond what is implied by the idea that imprisoned people are outside of society and need to be "reintegrated", we cannot deny that Estéfani's smile shows that this opportunity filled her with joy. The fact that these two people were able to enjoy the Pride march does not cancel the tokenization from which both the Ministry of Justice and Peace and the owners of Pride celebration make profit. Those of us who have been trying for some time to improve the living conditions of imprisoned trans* people know that this exhibition at Pride 2017 does not change a thing for the trans* population inside the prison. It does not transform the structural conditions that push trans* people into prison, nor does it reduce the daily violence that these people suffer inside prisons. It brings nothing but visibility. A visibility that benefits mainly the prison authorities. Surely today no one remembers Estéfani's name or cares about the course her life has taken, while many people will remember as an act of inclusion when a few years ago the Ministry of Justice and Peace took two trans* prisoners out for a parade.

Some time ago, the bloc of trans* people and their handcrafted float used to be assigned to the last place of the march, behind the commercial floats, national authorities, companies and embassies. This affirmative action in 2017 Pride march shows how trans* visibility has gone from being a reason for criminalization to a trendy topic. But again, this visibility is determined by the logics of the neoliberal project. In the logic of extractivism in gore capitalism, where visibility is extracted from the abject bodies, visibility is presented as a consumable and marketable product for large audiences. The consumption of these images does not bring great transformations for the bodies that are exploited for this visibility. At the Pride march, everyone wants to have a selfie with the activists of Transvida or with the exotic drags that fill the city with color. Unfortunately, this hardly translates into support and engagement, and the glittered faces of those selfies at the end of the day return to the precarious conditions they historically inhabit.

la fierté a changé de nature et de champ. Elle n'est plus cette technique collective et affectivo-politique des années 1990 qui s'opposait à la honte et au placard. Elle est devenue straight. Il est grand temps d'abandonner cette rhétorique militante vu ce qu'elle est devenue et à partir du moment où ce n'est plus un usage ironique du drapeau y compris du drapeau arc-en-ciel qui prime (Bourcier 2017, 58–59).

7.3. Resisting inclusion: the persistence of dissidence

The picture described throughout these chapters may seem daunting. The situation is in fact not very encouraging. Few people in Costa Rica resist the seduction of inclusion in normality. We carry a long history of dependency, and it is not easy to deconstruct centuries of coloniality. It is particularly difficult to resist with an empty belly and constant anguish when the day of paying rent is approaching. It is understandable, then, that so many gay, lesbian, queer and trans* people dream of that inclusion, even if it is a pittance, and that they accept, therefore, the mandates of the NPIC, the normativity of sexual citizenship, and the uncritical promises of inclusive political parties. While they wait for the promised inclusion, time passes and the #GayElite, corporate gays and opportunistic straight businesspeople get richer at our expense. Insatiable capitalism devours our struggles and digests them in its colonial intestine, and then it sells us this waste in the form of trendy merchandise that homogenizes and normativizes our bodies and our struggles.

Image 208
Pride 2018



Source: Marcha Diversidad Facebook Page

In Costa Rica, after the strong NGOization process and the boom of the inclusion industry, we are witnessing the devastating effects pointed out by Bourcier:

Ce qui disparaît, avec le discours et les pratiques convenues de la lutte contre les - phobies mais aussi le sexisme, ce sont les ressources communautaires et subculturelles, les démarches à la fois créatives, collectives et affirmatives, bref, d'autres manières de faire de la politique, du lien et de la résistance, y compris pour analyser et répondre aux violences (Bourcier 2017, 55).

We have great difficulty in organizing ourselves in horizontal ways, because neoliberal normativity has penetrated deep into our subjectivity. However, not everything is neoliberal inclusion. Even if they are scarce and marginal, we can find some collective articulations that seek to resist assimilationist inclusion. In this section, I refer a couple of experiences that confront the neoliberal project and seek to open alternative paths in the field of critical queer and trans* politics.

A critical trans politics is emerging that refuses empty promises of “equal opportunity” and “safety” underwritten by settler colonialism, racist, sexist, classist, ableist, and xenophobic imprisonment, and ever-growing wealth disparity (Spade 2015, 19).

Pages above I mentioned the group that organized around the dissident and feminist bloc for the Pride march. The people who launched this effort did not achieve to articulate themselves into a permanent collective. However, they have been calling for a growing dissident bloc every year. As I mentioned, their actions did manage to make the #EliteGay uncomfortable and to open a discussion about the inequalities that exist within this imagined LGBTIQ+ community and its supposed homogeneity.

Image 209
Feminist and dissident pride block banners, 2017.



The controversial slogan of this group: "While the gay elite only wants to get married, we fight so that no one is left behind", speaks of that critical trans politics mentioned by Spade, a biopolitical commitment with life under an ethic that pursues justice, solidarity and freedom:

A critical trans politics imagines and demands an end to prisons, homelessness, landlords, bosses, immigration enforcement, poverty, and wealth. It imagines a world in which people have what they need and govern themselves in ways that value collectivity, interdependence, and difference (Spade 2015, 37).

What this group wanted was precisely to point out that not all queer people in this country think alike. Not everyone laughs at sexist and classist jokes. Not everyone celebrates the participation of embassies from warmongering and imperialist countries in the Pride march. Not everyone believes that assimilation is the way. Not everyone wants a visa for homocitizenship. Not everyone wants neoliberal inclusion. And yet, they claim their desire and their right to occupy the streets, to shout their dissidence. They claim that the Pride, even if it has an owner, is also theirs.

In Costa Rica there is still no alternative mobilization like the Pride de nuit in Paris, or the Queer Liberation March in NYC, the Orgullo Disidente in Madrid, the Pride counter-marches in Bogota or

CDMX, and other initiatives that reclaim spaces of their own in the streets. Therefore, the dissident and feminist bloc chose to break into the Pride March without permission or coordination with its owners, in order to disrupt the order, rhythm and slogans of that activity.

Image 210
Pride march, 2017



This feminist and dissident bloc sought to demonstrate that the so-called "LGBTIQ+" movement is not homogeneous, and that although it has a mainstream line, married to the neoliberal project, there are forces within it that demand space for critical queer and trans* politics. In line with Elizabeth Vásquez:

No tengo problema en llamar movimiento, en sentido amplio, a la presencia política, cada vez más pública, de los colectivos organizados LTbGI... Sí me resulta problemático que se piense en un movimiento homogéneo³⁷³ (Lind and Argüello 2009, 100).

In this sense, they embody dissidence. They do not dissociate themselves completely from the Pride march, they do not present themselves as a new movement. They reclaim their roots and the heritage of the struggles of their ancestors. It is a position that implies the recognition of some common ground with the bulk of the participants in this march. However, it is a position that also points out the contradictions, and that proposes not to allow the #GayElite to turn rights into privileges and business without a fight.

In that same march (Pride 2017), spontaneously the dissident and feminist bloc ran head-on into another group of people who also shared the critique of pink capitalism and the McQueerization of the movement. This group took the critique a step further, clearly pointing out who they consider responsible for the necropolitics of inclusion. This group did not join the march, thus showing their

³⁷³ Free translation: I have no problem calling a movement, in a broad sense, to the political presence, which is becoming increasingly public, of the organized LTbGI collectives... I do find it problematic to think of it as a homogeneous movement.

distance from the activity and the movement. They held this banner for several hours at the side of the sidewalk, provoking a bit of a shock to the tens of thousands of participants.

Image 211
Gay capitalism kills



Source: Facebook, Marcha de la Diversidad

The banner reflects a detailed handwork in which they painted the logos of different inclusive companies, NGOs, LGBTIQ+ collectives, gay entrepreneurs, and embassy flags. Within the logos we can observe the most important collectives that at that time were working for the LGBTIQ+ rights agenda. We can also see gay bars, like Venue and Bochinche; gay cultural ventures, such as Ojo de Loca; political parties such as VAMOS and PAC; international human rights organizations like the UN; and transnational NGOs such as Hivos, that finances projects along the lines of inclusion. There are also transnational companies that participate in the march as "inclusive companies", such as Amazon, HP and Uber; and national brands, such as Pozuelo, which that year launched marketing campaign portraying well-behaved homocitizens and their families. In short, a wide collection of the fauna that makes up the profitable business of inclusion.

This banner was so radical that it even upset some of the participants in the dissident bloc, who felt it was unfair to see the logo of their collectives next to exploitative companies such as Uber and Amazon, and flags of imperialist countries such as the U.S. This probably shows that they achieved their objective: to point out the complicity of the LGBTIQ+ movement, even of those who attempted a dissident stance, with the necropolitical system of gore capitalism. The people who carried this banner in 2017 did not give continuity to this action either. Most of them do not even live in Costa Rica anymore, or are no longer alive on this plane. Their intervention will probably be erased from the official history of the LGBTIQ+ movements, hence the importance of recovering it as part of the collective memory.

In a similar vein it is worth mentioning another action that has also been erased from the recent history of the LGBTIQ+ movements. Paradoxically, this action was developed in the context of the opening of an exhibition that sought to historicize the memory of the LGBTIQ+ movements in Costa Rica: *Vamos a besarnos* (Let's go kiss).

Image 212
Vamos a besarnos



Source: TEOR/ÉTICA Facebook,
<https://www.facebook.com/teoreticapagina/photos/gm.1770176793293272/1188419371280503>

Vamos a besarnos was a project developed by the Frente por los Derechos Igualitarios in coordination with TEOR/ÉTICA Foundation. The project was funded by Hivos, that provided resources to print a series of materials, edit video interviews and maintain an online version of the exhibition on a web page for several years. The FDI was in charge of the research, in which they interviewed some visible figures of LGBTIQ+ activism at the time.

I can recognize that it is an important effort to collect a part of the history of the LGBTIQ+ movements in the country. An effort that, just a few years ago was impossible to imagine in that format (sponsored and supported by national and international authorities). In that sense, with all the contradictions, I think there is a valuable side to this attempt at historicization. However, I also recognize the risk that this type of history, told from the self-referential perspective of the homocostarrican.

I had some reservations about the project and the way this project was constructed. I feared that the result would be a history that revolved around the self-representation of the Costa Rican homociotizen. Nevertheless, at their insistence, I finally granted an interview in which we talked about the history of trans* struggles in Costa Rica, under the commitment that they would also interview some of the trans women who were survivors of that war, and who were the protagonists

of the stories that I had systematized in my research. Unfortunately, this did not happen, even though I facilitated their contacts and expressed my willingness to help them get an interview.

This situation possibly occurred with other people, since among the critical queer sectors there were concerns about the version of history that the exhibition was going to present. There were questions about the name (which inevitably referred to the VAMOS party), and about the absences that such an ambitious project, centralized in a few people from a single collective, could produce.

In response to this, a group of queer people, trans* people and male sex workers organized a performance at the opening of the exhibition. Prominent political personalities were invited to the opening, including the then vice president of the Republic, Ana Helena Chacón (strategist of OC-24/17), representatives of international cooperation, authorities of European embassies, artists, activists and the general public.

Unfortunately, this performance was not registered or documented in the memory of the activity, and after arduous research I have not been able to find a single photo of the action. I was not present, as I declined the invitation in protest for the lack of representation of trans women from popular sectors in the exhibition. I found out about the action through social media, and subsequently spoke with some of the people who organized the performance. For this study, I got back in touch with one of them to recall what happened. Amid speeches, toasts, applause, and ovations, this group burst into the inauguration. Their half-naked bodies walked around the gallery offering business cards to the participants. The cards bore the phrase "Vamos a culiarnos" (Let's go fuck), and the phone number of the workers offering their sexual services.

The performance had the objective of making visible some of the absences that the exhibition produced. The performers put sex work on the table, and claimed the invisibilization of sex workers who have been part of the LGBTIQ+ movements in Costa Rica, as well as in other countries³⁷⁴. Beyond this, they denounced that the version of history that the expo presented was somehow sanitized, censored and adapted for all audiences. It talked about love but not sex (hence the play on words between Let's go kiss and Let's go fuck).

There was no major mention of sex in clandestine conditions, sex in public spaces, sex outside the assimilationist standard of the homocitizen of good morals. Discussion of class was totally absent. Let alone raciality. Police persecution and abuse was talked about as if it were an issue of the past. Violence was discussed without mentioning the contemporary State, and when the State violence was

³⁷⁴ See, for example, Leticia Sabsay's text, *Fronteras sexuales: espacio urbano, cuerpos y ciudadanía*, which discusses the organic link between the struggles of sex workers and the LGBT movements in Argentina, and the way in which this history has been obscured.

discussed as something that happened in the past, there was no demand, not even a question about compensation. In short, it presented the struggles within the framework of sexual citizenship, to which the performers, like many other queer and trans* people, still do not have access.

Image 520
Vamos a culiarnos



Source: Facebook event, Vamos a culiarnos
Caption: Always scandalous

What this group denounced was the bleaching of the history of sexual diversity in the country, in which dissidence and resistance to the morality of homonormativity were washed away. They claimed that this history seemed to have been written without bodies, or that some bodies were erased from official history because they did not meet the aesthetic and moral standards of Costa Rican homocitizenship.

As the Against Equality collective argues, is of utmost importance

to document our resistance to a gay agenda that has actively erased radical queer history by rewriting recent events into a narrative of progress, one where gays and lesbians flock towards marriage, military service, hate legislation, and the prison industrial complex (Conrad et al. 2014, 4).

The memory of these resistances allows us to anchor ourselves with the history of struggles and irreverence of our ancestors, who resisted assimilation and indoctrination, cure and imprisonment, dispossession, occupation, discipline, and punishment. Although the actions discussed in this section have not resulted in collective projects sustained over time, they reflect the existence of opposition and resistance, the desire and the will for critical queer and trans* politics.

In times of biopower and neoliberal necropolitics, this collective memory allows us to situate our struggles within the complex power landscape of modernity, to understand the origin of our

oppressions and the imbrication of these in our bodies. It allows us to understand that our liberation cannot come at the cost of the exploitation and oppression of others, that inclusion must not be the spring of exclusion. And in this sense, it also allows us to engage in plural dialogues and weave collaborative bonds with other sectors that are also suffocated by the neoliberal project and colonial modernity.

Perhaps, someday, the spiraling path of collective memory will lead us to other forms of organizing anger, protest and dissent, forms that will allow us to move collectively towards justice, along the lines that Bourcier points out, with an agenda:

multi-issued et non *single-issued*, collective et non individualisant, *community-based* et non *elite-based*, affinitaire et coalitionnel avec un fonctionnement collaboratif et horizontal qui n'a rien à voir avec sa resucée managériale ou l'absorption de la « critique artiste » et ses valeurs de « créativité » et d' « autonomie » par la culture néolibérale (Bourcier 2017, 66)

Chapter 8. Safe Space: Dwelling, leisure and security in the city of San José

*¿Por qué cree usted que a los locos los encierran en espacios pequeños? Para poder controlarlos³⁷⁵.
Chofer de Uber, October 29, 2019*

"Why do you think they lock up the insane in small spaces? To be able to control them," an uber driver says to me as we drive under the shadow of the tall residential towers that have proliferated throughout San José. And he continues: "The rich don't live in towers. They have their big houses with their big yards. We are the ones who get into debt just for status".

Costa Rica is a country where security occupies a central place. The culture of (in)security is deeply rooted. Insecurity and promises to combat it have been an inescapable theme in political campaigns for many years. The suburbs of San Jose are full of gated communities. The houses in the city have bars on all the windows. Many are also hemmed in with razor wire or electric fences. In many of the capital's neighborhoods there are private security guards. In fact, by 2020 the Directorate of Private Security Services of the Ministry of Public Security estimated that there were 29,043 private security guards in the country, meaning 31% more than officers of the Public Police Force (Contraloría General de la República, Costa Rica 2020, 10). In short, this is a country where security is a powerful business and a way of life.

Image 214
Imagine San José without bars



Source: Ana Vega, <https://br.pinterest.com/pin/194569646371122424/>

³⁷⁵ Why do you think they lock the insane in small spaces? To be able to control them. Uber driver, October 29, 2019.

Security is a business because fear is a technology of power. People invest in securing their homes against burglary and lock themselves in with fear of the outside world. When people asked me what my thesis was about and I said I was working in San Jose, I often received looks of disbelief and words of discouragement, and the usual advice: be very careful, San Jose is very dangerous. The curious thing is that the people who expressed panic about the city would probably have very different fears than those felt by the participants in this study, or the threats I tried to observe in San José. In any case, we are all trapped in the security apparatus, through which biopolitics manages our lives and distributes life chances according to the laws of the market and coloniality.

Researcher and professor Jin Haritaworn calls “for a bio-, necro- as well as geopolitical lens that explores how populations are moulded and fostered for life and discarded for death in ways that are intrinsically spatialized” (Haritaworn 2015, 33). The construction of safe spaces from a neoliberal and colonial model often implies the displacement, criminalization or exclusion of certain social practices and certain bodies, in favor of the capitalist revaluation of urban space (Sequera 2013, 4). In this sense, in this chapter I seek to observe how spaces are regulated through a decolonial reading of the ways in which biopolitics and necropolitics administer life and death in the city.

The first section of this chapter looks at two projects involving gay entrepreneurs. The first was an attempt at queer regeneration of the Red Zone of San José, in which gay entrepreneurs promised to inject color into an area they depict as depressed but with a lot of potential for business. Next, I analyze a housing project inspired by queer design, which promises a safe space full of comforts and luxuries for its tenants. The second section analyzes how compulsory able-bodiedness and the coloniality of ability shape the spaces that many of us consider safe: the gay-friendly restaurants in the trendy Escalante neighborhood, and the gay bars and clubs. The third section analyzes the pilot plan for a community security project promoted by the Public Security Forces, in which neighbors and business owners join forces with the police to patrol and clean the city. Finally, a fourth section explores a number of collective practices that seek to build alternative forms of security that move away from authoritarian and exclusionary models and aim to rescue the commons and the community.

8.1. Queer regeneration: On the privatization of the commons

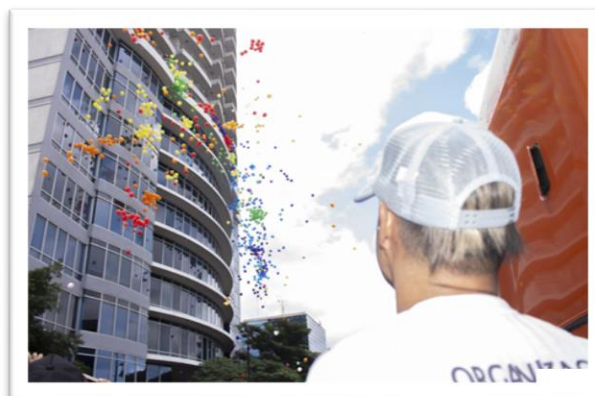
In their book *Queer Lovers and Hateful Others, Regenerating Violent Times and Places*, Jin Haritaworn introduces the notion of queer regeneration “to describe the sometimes spectacular and often banal encounters, co-habitations, hauntings, mobilisations and reverberations that occur when formerly degenerate bodies, times and places come to life” (Haritaworn 2015, 3). In their study of queer regeneration in some Berlin neighborhoods, Haritaworn gives an account of the living contradictions

that inhabit these neighborhoods, and of the difficulty of thinking of them in binary terms. To take a critical approach to this dynamics, it is necessary to “enquire about queer regeneration would mean to push the scholarship on queer space beyond a celebration of gay or even queer or trans territories” (2015, 81).

Christina Hanhardt (2013) offers an interesting critical analysis of the effects of discourses, policies and practices that seek to create safe spaces through "gay enclaves". Gay enclaves are fairly defined spaces where LGBTIQ+ people (especially gay men) inhabit, party or consume. Hanhardt notes that they have evolved from places of residence to niche markets (221), and even when not all of these gay enclaves produce active displacement dynamics, they might be sites for the construction of ideology and policy (310), where safety is always a salient concern. In her book, *Safe Space*, she analyzes how the way in which LGBT movements have framed their struggles for security and safety in the city produce a series of tensions that often exacerbate the conditions of oppression in the space. Thus, in the gay enclaves “the thing to be protected was, by extension, a specific gay identity that reflected the race, gender, and class dynamics of the city itself” (Hanhardt 2013, 222).

In San José we do not (yet) have a place that we can call a "gay enclave". However, there are territorialized processes that seek to manage spaces where queer existence (or perhaps more precisely the homocitizen lifestyle) can inhabit free of risks and violence. From the intention of turning the Red-light district into a rainbow area for tourism, to housing projects based on queer design that promise safety and status for its tenants, in San Jose we can find a series of spaces that, although not articulated in a "gay enclave", consciously point towards a queer regeneration of the city.

Image 215
Pride celebration in habitational tower in San José



Source: Amelia Rueda, <https://b122fe8e0b8ea4d16cb3-8420fc0ce05d0ddef095398ad3e98f10.ssl.cf5.rackcdn.com/230619-marcha-full00.jpg>
Description: Javier Umaña observing the release of rainbow balloons from a luxury residential tower during the Pride March.

I find it difficult to think of them in binary terms. Indeed, such queer safe spaces provide safety for certain populations that not so long ago were forced to live their sexuality underground. It is also true that clandestine conditions, powerful networks that self-managed safety and life were created, and we have not done enough to recognize the collective knowledge that germinated in those spaces. Moreover, some of these projects that today are marketed as safe spaces are suffocating the memory of these other ways of collectively building security. As part of the population that could potentially benefit from these projects of inclusion, I believe that it is necessary to problematize them and their effects (collateral or intentional), taking into account what Hanhardt signals:

two of the primary activist solutions to anti-lgbt violence since the 1970s — the establishment of protected gay territories and the identification of anti-lgbt violence as a designated criminal category — must be paired with two of global capital's own "spatial fixes": gentrification and mass imprisonment. (Hanhardt 2013, 14)

Alongside the celebration of the rainbow, alongside the inclusion and safety that these projects provide for certain homocitizens, the city is also inhabited by other beings (including queer and trans* people) who are not only left out but also violated by these types of initiatives. These projects are not accessible to all queer people, and at the same time provoke dynamics of exclusion that provoke tensions and disputes over space.

This section seeks to analyze some of these self-proclaimed safe spaces for queer people in the city, following Jin Haritaworn's provocation to recast "queer space in the neoliberal city, and the ways in which gay assimilation, or the homogenisation of queer spaces, coincides with gentrification, or the homogenisation of inner city spaces" (Haritaworn 2015, 41)

8.1.1. Zona Rosa: classism, abolitionism and gay entrepreneurship

Various authors, social movements and neighborhood organizations have coined the term gentrification to refer to the "recovery" of urban centers for the middle and upper classes, and the attraction of private capital investment, which has strong social effects such as the displacement and segregation of the working class (Sequera 2013, 1). Sequera defines gentrification as the transformation of a working-class area of the city center into a middle class area for residential or commercial use. It involves processes of transformation of impoverished neighborhoods that have been labeled as "degenerate" into fashionable areas that attract people with high economic and cultural capital. Gentrification is enabled by processes in which certain urban areas have previously undergone disinvestment in infrastructure, generating neighborhoods whose renovation can be very lucrative (Sequera 2013, 31).

Sequera argues that under the model of urban recovery, gentrification has become a technology of power, in which states and private capital manage spaces, the bodies that inhabit them and the relations that occur in them. In this sense, he also argues that gentrification is a current expression of the class struggle (Sequera 2013, 287). It is a process that can be framed within coloniality, as it perpetuates the dynamics of invasion, displacement and subjugation of populations that are considered inferior, decaying or backward, in order to produce spaces that are enjoyable and profitable for respectable citizens.

In this line, Jin Haritaworn (2015) rightly points out that the socio-spatial processes that we observe today in neoliberal cities, such as gentrification and regeneration, are not an exclusive phenomenon of the neoliberal project. They rather draw a complex continuity with the practices of colonial expansion developed for centuries in different urban and rural spaces of the planet. A particularity, perhaps, is the introduction of the queer subject in the position of "regenerator". As authors such as Haritaworn (2015) and Lugones (2016) point out, European colonization displaced and civilized indigenous peoples who failed to conform to the binaried gender, patriarchal hierarchy and European sexual morality. Today, we see rather some queer subjects aligned with power and coloniality, actively participating in complicity and/or obedience to neoliberal normativity.

In the neoliberal city, older colonial notions of degenerate populations that fail to cultivate space and remain themselves uncultivable are remapped onto queerly regenerating spaces, whose recovery demands the expulsion of poor racialised bodies (Haritaworn 2015, 32).

Mbembe highlighted the centrality of space for necropolitics: "space was therefore the raw material of sovereignty and the violence it carried with it. Sovereignty meant occupation, and occupation meant relegating the colonized into a third zone between subjecthood and objecthood" (Mbembe 2013, 174) While urban regeneration cannot be equated with the military invasion of a territory, the frequent use of language typical of the processes of colonization and war in projects seeking "urban regeneration" is not accidental. It is a logic that is traversed by coloniality, by the idea that certain spaces need to be intervened and rescued from certain populations whose ways of life degrade and delay the civilizing advance of modernity.

Around the world we observe transformation in the cities following the neoliberal city model. Although San José is neither a metropolis nor a cosmopolitan city, it is interesting to see how the dynamics of homogenization are reproduced here. This chapter presents a series of experiences that reproduce, on a small scale, what Jin Haritaworn points out:

In order to ease the mobility of capital, the entrepreneurial city rebrands itself and homogenises its areas. This leads to the formation of cloned spaces, as each city requires its own gay village, ethnic towns and other themed quarters. Existing queer spaces, in turn, become internally homogenised and are desexualised in order to make straight visitors and consumers comfortable (Haritaworn 2015, 41).

Gentrification is part of governmentality, it is a way of managing populations that reproduces a neoliberal normativity. The regulation of spaces and the bodies that inhabit them does not occur through discipline and punishment, but from a sugarcoated logic that uses the rhetoric of rescue. For this rhetoric to make sense, for a gentrification process to appear as a salvation and not an invasion, the place being intervened, as well as the subjects that inhabit it, must be portrayed as decaying, uncivilized, without agency and even threatening to the rest of society. Frequently, the spaces to be gentrified are described as dead territories, wastelands that need to be revived. As we will see, this is how the Red-light district was described in this gentrification attempt that I analyze in this section.

On this point, it is important to take up Haritaworn's warning, who points out that the tensions and dynamics generated by gentrification processes cannot be read in a binary way, under a logic of fixed functions. The critical analysis developed by Haritaworn on queer regeneration in Berlin demonstrates how a perspective that escapes the dichotomous division between, for example, assimilationist gay gentrifiers and transgressive queer victims of gentrification, allows us to deepen and understand the ways in which power is exercised beyond verticality (2015, 58). This is ultimately what this chapter pursues: to analyze the power relations that are entangled in the city of San Jose.

In this vein, this section draws on Jin Haritaworn's analyses in his book *Queer Lovers and Hateful Others: Regenerating Violent Times and Places*, and in particular on the notion of queer regeneration. Haritaworn proposes that:

It is in the shadows of degenerate bodies, and the architectures of formerly degenerate spaces that queer regeneration occurs. As the old trope of the degenerate 'gettho' converges with the new trope of 'recovering' inner city, where the properly alive like to live, eat, and party, a recognisable queer subject worthy of protection and visibility comes to life (Haritaworn 2015, 37).

As I have been developing throughout this study, I seek to inquire how these dynamics operate in a city like San José, which is not a cosmopolitan metropolis, although Costa Rican citizens (homocitizens included) dream of turning it into one. Different gentrification processes are expanding in San José. I will focus on one in particular, which is relevant to this study both in spatial terms (the area to be regenerated) and social terms (the subjects who intervene in that space, and the subjects who have historically inhabited that place). This was an attempt to gentrify the Red-light District of San José, which I believe we could call queer regeneration. I speak of an attempt because the project did not achieve its goal, and after three years it ended up closing its doors in the Red-light District. However,

I believe it is worth analyzing this project, because it represents the clearest and most avowedly queer regeneration proposal that has taken place in San José.

The first time I heard about this project was a radio show in charge of journalist Amelia Rueda, on February 17, 2017. The journalist had invited to her radio talk show three respectable homocitizens: Javier Umaña, one of the owners of the Pride March, Roberto Chaves, a young gay businessman and owner of the POPPOP project, and Juan Carlos Alonso Reguero, a Spanish gay man, president of the organizing committee of the "World Pride" organization, who was visiting the country on a mission to dictate guidelines for the Costa Rican Pride. In the program, the three men celebrated the transnationalization of Pride parades, talked about the importance of visibility and its potential to transform our realities, and defended the benefits of urban regeneration when it is driven by gay people injecting color into depressed areas of a city.

In analyzing queer regeneration in Berlin's neighborhoods, Haritaworn draws attention to two processes involved in these dynamics:

...the inner city emerges as an ideal setting of revitalisation, for formerly degenerate subjects as much as for the formerly degenerate spaces within which they come to life. This phenomenon, which I have called queer regeneration, involves two intersecting processes each of which requires attention: of the built environment, which recovers the moment racialised people leave; and of the queer subject who, freshly decriminalised and depathologised, prepares the ground for a progressive whitening and straightening of this environment and, as we shall explore next, deserves protection in return (Haritaworn 2015, 81).

In San Jose's Red-light District, queer regeneration has its own particularities. The imaginaries of Costa Ricans as white, middle class, democratic, peaceful and protected by God and the virgin, also configure what is considered as degraded. Now that the presence of homocitizens who conform to Costa Rican imaginaries is more tolerated in the city, we will find tensions around racialized bodies, but also other undesirable bodies that inhabit this area: sex workers, unhoused residents, drug users, and in general bodies that make visible the hunger and poverty in the city. Some of these people are queer and trans*, but as we will see, that does not bring them closer to the gay entrepreneurs who seek to revitalize and commodify the area.

On the radio broadcast Alonso Reguero spoke about the benefits of queer regeneration in the Chueca neighborhood of Madrid and was enthusiastic about the potential he saw in the POPPOP project in San José:

El barrio de Chueca, en aquellos años 80's, era una zona totalmente deprimida de la ciudad. Era la zona donde la pandemia del VIH-Sida azotaba muy fuerte. No sólo a nuestro colectivo, sino a toda la sociedad. Una zona llena de drogas, llena de violencia, llena de actos delictivos. Y gracias a que la comunidad puso sus ojos ahí, y fue poco a

poco avanzando, poco a poco avanzando, poco a poco consiguiendo cambiar el barrio. Por eso a mí que hicimos un acto ayer, muy emotivo para mí, aquí en San José, el lugar, el POPPOP en San José, en la zona roja de SJO, me hizo recordar, me hizo recordar aquello. Y cómo evidentemente hay, sigue habiendo lugares donde ese **milagro** se produce³⁷⁶ (Reguero in Rueda 2017, emphasis added).

I emphasize the metaphor of the miracle, which has an important weight in our cultures strongly influenced by Catholicism. A miracle is a marvelous event that defies or escapes the laws of nature and can only be explained by divine intervention. So, the healing of these depressed areas, taken over by drugs, violence and crime, is a miracle performed by the LGBTI "community". This religious metaphor recalls what Haritaworn describes as a kind of almost metaphysical transformative power conferred on queer regenerative processes and the subjects who develop them:

The unique affective traits of non-trans white gay men are reflected in the almost metaphysical transformation they induce in their houses. Once restored and occupied by a gay man, a building becomes 'distinctive and valuable'... These 'gay' qualities imprint themselves not only on individual houses but on the whole city (Haritaworn 2015, 46).

The radio program left me with several concerns, so I decided to inquire more about the project that these gay men were talking about with such passion. POPPOP SJO was a place located in the heart of San Jose's Red-light District. In the words of its owner, Roberto Chaves,

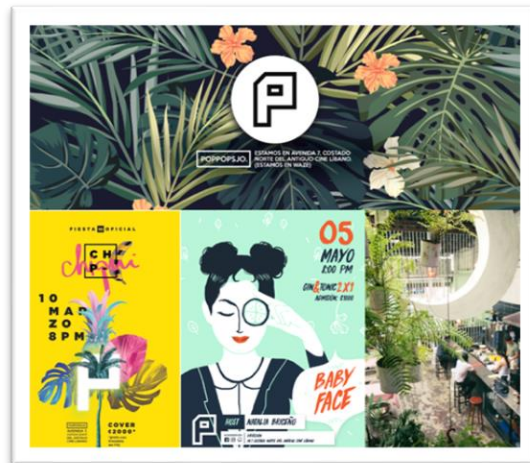
POPPOP nació como una idea de crear un espacio neutral, un espacio libre de discriminación en todo sentido. Para crear diálogos y generar situaciones, que sobre todo nos vinculen a una discusión y llegar a conclusiones que eventualmente se pueden implementar³⁷⁷ (Chaves in Rueda 2017).

Although its owner describes it as a space for dialogue, meeting and deliberation, in practice it functioned mainly as a space for partying and culture. Its aesthetics, its menu and the activities it promoted attracted young queer sectors of the middle and upper classes, which are not usually seen in that part of the city.

³⁷⁶ Free translation: The neighborhood of Chueca, in the 80's, was a totally depressed area of the city. It was the area where the HIV-AIDS pandemic was raging. Not only to our collective, but to the whole society. An area full of drugs, full of violence, full of criminal acts. And thanks to the fact that the [gay] community put its eyes there, and little by little it started moving forward, little by little we managed to change the neighborhood. That's why the event we held yesterday was very emotional for me, here in San Jose, the place, the POPPOP in San Jose, in the Red-Light District of San José, reminded me, reminded me of that. And how evidently there are, there are still places where that **miracle** can happen.

³⁷⁷ Free translation: POPPOP was born as an idea to create a neutral space, a space free of discrimination in every sense. To create dialogues and generate situations which, above all, link us to a discussion and reach conclusions that can eventually be implemented.

Image 216
Posters and photos of POPPOP SJO



Source: POPPOP SJO Facebook page,
https://www.facebook.com/chinamocosmico/photos/?ref=page_internal

At the time of the interview with Amelia Rueda, POPPOP SJO functioned as a private space that hosted parties and special events. For example, POPPOP was the venue that saw the formal birth of the VAMOS party (analyzed in Chapter 7) and hosted several of their assemblies. It also hosted parties from the fashion scene (such as the 2017 International Design Festival). Later, the project evolved in the form of a bar and restaurant that sought to attract national clients and tourists to that area of San José.

Among the activities that took place at POPPOP was the one mentioned by Alonso Reguero in the radio program. An activity entitled "Dialogue for Diversity". Various LGBTIQ+ collectives gathered at POPPOP SJO to discuss, among other things, the potential they envisioned for regenerating and reactivating the Red-light district. The activity was also attended by representatives of InterPride, who took the opportunity to lecture third world homocitizens on the benefits of gay regeneration in Madrid, among other things.

Image 217
Dialogue for Diversity



Source: POPPOP SJO Facebook page,
<https://www.facebook.com/chinamocosmico/photos/1624666287550427>

This was not the beginning of POPPOP SJO, but it was its coming out as a queer regeneration project. At that time, I already had bonds with people who inhabited or had inhabited the area, especially cis and trans sex workers, who often taught me lessons about life in that part of the city. I remember making some critical comments in social media. Mine was not the only criticism of the discourse expressed by the three homocitizens in Amelia Rueda's program. A few days later, I was contacted by a friend who was a militant in the VAMOS Party. She told me that she had read my criticism and shared it, that she did not feel comfortable with the discourse of the owner of POPPOP SJO, but that VAMOS was working on urbanism and urban planning, and from that perspective she thought it was worth engaging in a dialogue with that project. Thus, she invited me to participate in a debate that was being organized by VAMOS, which was to be held at POPPOP SJO. Her invitation was sincere and open, she wanted me to share my critical perspective in that debate, and to have a plural dialogue about inclusion in the city for everyone. I declined the invitation, on the one hand, because I did not feel comfortable legitimizing that space that I distrusted, and on the other hand, because I do not believe that conversations about this area should take place between experts who are outsiders. On the contrary, I told her I believed that these dialogues must be held with the people who inhabit that space. I advised them to approach La Sala, which at that time still had its premises in the area, and I reiterated my interest in participating in horizontal dialogues with sex workers, unhoused people and inhabitants of the area, hopefully in a more welcoming and less class-biased space.

My friend received my response well and tried to promote a rapprochement with the populations that inhabit the Red-light District. However, there was little room for this, and in the end the discussions were held between experts and people from outside the area. Plurality and horizontality were not the focus of this project, as the rhetoric of rescue always implies hierarchical positions.

A few months later, close to Easter, POPPOP SJO jokingly published the 10 commandments guiding their project. In general terms, it is a manifesto for regeneration. Commandment II, for example, dictates: "We are the generation called to change for the sake of well-being and prosperity". The VII Commandment states: "We have the power and energy to transform things".

Image 218
POPPOP SJOS's Commandments



Source: POPPOP SJO Facebook page,
<https://www.facebook.com/chinamocosmico/photos/1616863778330678>

Change, well-being, prosperity, transformation and power, words that set the direction of the interventions sought by this project. However, these commandments are too abstract, and in their syntax the subjects are absent. For whom would this prosperity be? What do they understand by well-being? Who "has" the power? How is change and transformation translated into urban space? The answers to some of these questions can be found in the dialogue between Chaves, Umaña, and Alonso with Amelia Rueda in the program *Nuestra Voz* on February 17, 2017.

In addition to the miracle metaphor mentioned above, the interview is full of expressions typical of the language of gentrification: regeneration; pioneers; the rescue of marginal areas; a beautiful, inclusive, happy San José; to make that area beautiful; to work positively; to seize the Red-light District; to take over this Red-light District.

Costa Rica no es el primer país, San José no es la primer ciudad que tiene tendencias de **regeneración**. Y por lo general, los artistas, y los colectivos activistas han sido siempre como **pioneros** en lo que es **rescate de zonas marginales**. Entonces por eso POPPOP decidió colocarse sobre todo en este punto para tratar de mejorar un poco el barrio y contribuir al diálogo³⁷⁸ (Chaves in Rueda 2017, emphasis added).

Chaves heeds the call for regeneration, and proposes himself as a gay pioneer willing to rescue this area in need of improvement. For a neighborhood to be the object of regeneration processes, it is first necessary to portray it as a problematic, decaying or even a dead space. Journalist Rueda reinforces this idea with her assessments: "Vean que bonito que ellos se planteen tomar la zona roja y hacer de

³⁷⁸ Free translation: Costa Rica is not the first country, San José is not the first city to have **regeneration** tendencies. And in general, artists and activist collectives have always been **pioneers** in the **rescue of marginal areas**. That's why POPPOP decided to focus on this point to try to improve the neighborhood and contribute to the dialogue.

la zona roja algo decente, algo humano, y no lo que vemos ahí todos los días. Y tienen razón³⁷⁹ (Rueda 2017).

Rueda's argumentative construction is sustained in opposition. She celebrates that these gay entrepreneurs want to change "what you see every day" in the area. When she affirms that it is nice that they are considering making the Red-light District decent and humane, the implicature in her words draws the unspoken side of that argument. The Red-light District is a space that lacks decency and humanity. Once again, the Red-light District is portrayed as a geographical materialization of the zone of non-being.

The most repeated metaphor throughout the interview is the "injection of color" (inyección de color): to put in/to add/ to inject color is mentioned 9 times by the gay entrepreneurs, 6 times by the interviewer. To paint in rainbows: 4 by the gay entrepreneurs, 1 by the journalist. For example:

Umaña: Hay muchísimas otras cosas que hacer para esta zona, y nosotros como colectivos LGBTI hemos tomado también la iniciativa, en conjunto con Roberto, con el apoyo de él, para **meterle un poquito de este color** que es tan importante verdad, a la zona (...).

Rueda: Porque nadie se ha preocupado de la zona roja hasta el día de hoy. "Entonces ahora que van a llegar los gays, diay que va a pasar, ay no!" Ojalá que llegue, ojalá que lo reivindicquen, que reivindicquen la zona, que sea un lugar lindísimo, **que haya luz, que se pinte de rosado todo, el rosado en el mejor de los sentidos** (Rueda).

Chaves: Un **arcoíris** (...).

Umaña: ...el **inyectarle color**, el pensar en una zona roja completamente distinta. La bandera de la diversidad, o la bandera del arcoíris, no tiene solamente el color rojo. No tiene que ser la zona roja, **puede ser la futura zona arcoíris**³⁸⁰ (Rueda 2017).

These metaphors had actually already been used by the POPPOP SJO Project in an activity they held a few months earlier, called "Luz en la Zona", light in the [Red-light] District. The poster evokes an image familiar to those of us who were socialized in a Christian culture (and possibly to others as well): the heavenly light. In this case, instead of God or the holy spirit, the light emanates from the POPPOP SJO

³⁷⁹ Free translation: See how nice that they would consider taking over the Red-light District and making the Red-light District something decent, something humane, and not what we see there every day. And they are right.

³⁸⁰ Free translation: Umaña: There are many other things to do for this area, and we as LGBTI collectives have also taken the initiative, together with Roberto, with his support, to **add a little bit of this color** that is so important to the area. // Rueda: Because nobody has cared about the Red-light district to this day. "So now that the gays are coming, what is going to happen, oh no!" I hope they come, I hope they vindicate it, that they vindicate the area, that it becomes a beautiful place, that they bring light, **that they paint everything in pink, pink in the best sense of the word** (Rueda). Chaves: **A rainbow**. // ...**to inject color into it**, to think of a completely different Red-light district. The diversity flag, or the rainbow flag, is not just about the color red. It doesn't have to be the Red-light district; it can be the future **Rainbow District**.

logo. A powerful visual metaphor, in which POPPOP SJO takes the place of the divinity that will illuminate the area, and bring the expected miracle.

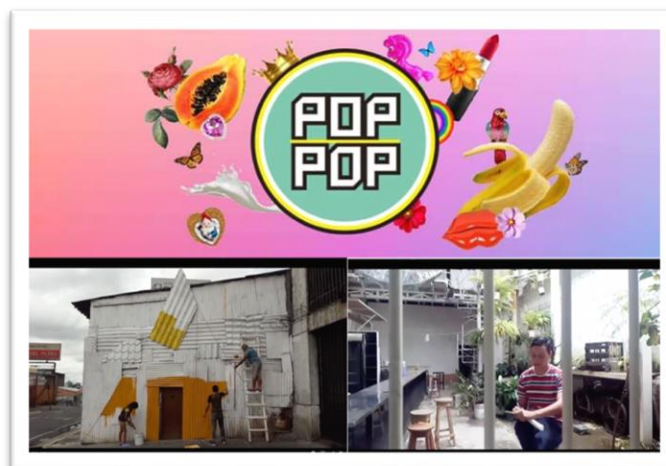
Image 219
Luz en la Zona



Source: POPPOP SJO Facebook Page,
<https://www.facebook.com/chinamocosmico/photos/gm.329393784098980/1512387035445020/>

Although the aesthetics of their online branding does adopt the concept of color injection, the physical space of POPPOP SJO did not materialize the rainbow. Apart from its entrance, made up of zinc sheets painted with a mural by an urban artist, the space at POPPOP SJO is rather white and discreet.

Image 220
Aesthetics in POPPOP SJO



Source: Screenshots from pictures and videos in POPPOP SJO Facebook page,
https://www.facebook.com/chinamocosmico/photos/?ref=page_internal

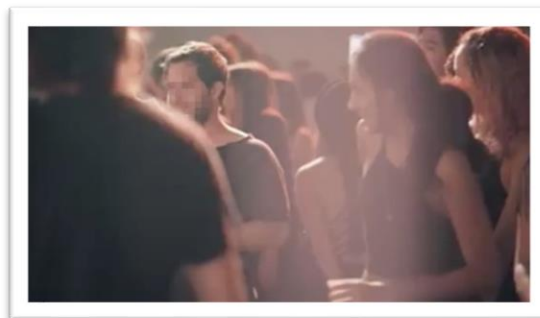
Decorated with a few plants, this old warehouse welcomed its public in a simple and rustic but clean and stylish atmosphere. Paradoxically, the white walls of the interior contrast with the colorful and gnawed facades of this neighborhood. Undoubtedly, it is a whitewashed aesthetic, which seems alien and out of tune in the area:

Image 221
Zona Roja, San José



POPPOP SJO's III Commandment advocates for diversity, yet a glance at the photos of their events shows that their crowd is quite homogeneous:

Images 222
POPPOP SJO's crowd



Source: Screenshots from DO NOT video,
<https://www.facebook.com/donotfit/videos/654668051352523/>

The injection of color seems more like a metaphor for investment, an injection of rainbow capital that hopes to receive revenues as the queer regeneration process moves forward. As Rueda points out:

...a la luz de esa terminal, se podía recibir como un apoyo adicional para poder bonita esta área. Y para poder trabajar en positivo en esta área. Y es un área impresionantemente con posibilidades preciosas de hacer algo lindo ahí...Y eso pueden ser negocios, habilitar lugares para vivir, habilitar parques para caminar, o sea, es algo que puede convertirse en algo grande y muy bonito. De verdad, o sea, no

sólo con colores, sino con activo comercialmente, activo para que la gente pueda trabajar, vivir, me encanta la idea³⁸¹ (Rueda 2017).

Rueda seems dazzled by the project and its promoters. He celebrates the fact that despite having the opportunity to buy land in another neighborhood and create an elegant space, they decided to invest in order to reactivate this area. Rueda's praise for the gay entrepreneurs is an example of the enhancement brought about by neoliberal normativity, which as Haritaworn points out, operates through a process of "valorization and distinction in magnified under finance capitalism, whose ideal citizen is the entrepreneur who manages his life and makes it profitable" (Haritaworn 2015, 29).

The 7-10 "terminal" to which both Rueda and the interviewees allude is a bus station that was inaugurated in 2015, and is located right in the Red-light District. It is the point of departure and entry to various touristic sites in the country. It was after the inauguration of this terminal that Chaves had the vision of the area's growth potential and decided to undertake a project that sought to channel the movement of bodies and capital that was beginning to flow through those streets.

Haritaworn affirms that "it is indeed important to investigate gay villages as competitive features of global cities, which redevelop and brand inner-city areas into themed ethnic or sexual quarters whose main purpose is to attract tourists and investors" (Haritaworn 2015, 31). San José is not a global city, and the inequalities and dispossession described in the previous chapters have resulted in the failure of this city to position itself as a safe and clean destination for tourists, as other cities have been able to do (Haritaworn 2015). Nevertheless, the POPPOP SJO project was confident that the new Terminal 7-10 could transform the image of the Red-light District, and attract a different crowd of tourists and local customers. Thus, they began marketing their space as more than just a bar/restaurant. Image 223 shows a flyer in English, aimed at foreign tourists using Terminal 7-10, in which they position themselves as a hidden and magical place to socialize and chat.

³⁸¹ Free translation: ...in the light of that terminal, you could receive additional support to make this area beautiful. And to be able to work positively in this area. And it is an impressive area with beautiful possibilities to do something nice there... And that could be businesses, to develop residential buildings, to develop parks for walking, in other words, it is something that could become something big and very beautiful. Really, that is, not only with colors, but with commercial assets, assets for people to work, to live, I love the idea.

Image 223
POPPOP SJO flyer for English-speaking tourists



Source: POPPOP SJO's Facebook Page,
<https://www.facebook.com/chinamocosmico/photos/1661933763823679>

The poster makes clear its commitment to urban regeneration and invites its customers to be part of this process. This aligns with their VI Commandment, which dictates, "We are all tourists heading to the same destination". This metaphor about life and death conceals the reality in which life chances are unequally distributed among the inhabitants of this area. Beyond the metaphor, it is not true that we are all tourists. The area has its locals, those who were not included in the dialogues for diversity and "the city for everyone". As for us, outsiders, if we do not reflect on the ways in which we approach this area, or if we have hidden agenda, we become more than tourists, we become colonizers.

Rueda wishes the entrepreneurs that their project will be well received and respected by the people living in the area:

Y ojalá que reciban el respeto de todas las personas de la zona roja y de nuestras autoridades. Déjenlos a ver qué va a salir de ese espíritu solidario, y de ese deseo de ayudar adonde está peor la cosa. No es cualquiera que se mete ahí³⁸² (Rueda 2017).

However, this project did not really seek the respect of the inhabitants of the area, but rather to attract homocitizens and other respectable people who could inject money into the area. If we look at the new crowd that visited the POPPOP SJO, none of their photographs show local inhabitants. I confirmed

³⁸² Free translation: And hopefully you will receive the respect of all the people of the Red-light District and of our authorities. Let them be, to see what will come out of this spirit of solidarity, and this desire to help where things are at their worst. It is not just anyone who gets in there.

with the activists of La Sala that during the time the POPPOP SJO was open, they never approached them. Fabiola did not know what I was talking about when I mentioned the name either. The only time the Red-light District inhabitants appear in POPPOP SJO's publications is in a promotional video of a Halloween party, in which Roberto Chaves addresses his audience from outside the venue. As he speaks, two men are seen in the background pulling materials. Perhaps they were on their way to a construction site, or perhaps they are those dear companions that Fabiola described on our tour, whom she is happy to see pulling materials to the recycling center where she often takes the waste she collects from the streets:

Image 224
POPPOP SJO's Halloween party promotional video



Source: Screenshots from video, POPPOP SJO's Facebook Page,
<https://www.facebook.com/chinamocosmico/videos/1905711042779282/>

Chaves notices their presence in the background and gives a playful smile. He turns his body so that the camera captures those bodies as part of the scenery of the area. Probably, one of the men takes notice, because in the background we hear someone yelling at Chaves: "Son of a bitch!". Chaves fidgets nervously and leaves the picture for a split second, then returns to his invitation. As much as he tries to disguise it and treat it with humor, the tensions are evident. This is not surprising. As Haritaworn points out, in regeneration processes, queer and trans interventions can be cannibalistic upon bodies and spaces that are treated as degenerate (Haritaworn 2015, 74).

Compared to the other projects analyzed in this study, POPPOP SJO is undoubtedly the most disconnected from the community. By failing to weave bonds with the inhabitants of the area, POPPOP SJO's project seems more threatening than *Chepe se baña* or *The Street Games* for the locals. In the interview, Umaña and Chaves criticize the projects being implemented in the Red-light District, pointing out that handing out food to the homeless is fine, but it is not enough.

Chaves: Si y es bueno verdad, estas iniciativas. Pero yo creo que en la actualidad las necesidades son un poco distintas. Sobretudo de regeneración urbana.

Umaña: "ah, es la zona roja, no la toquemos, no incorporemos nuevos proyectos, no pensemos en ella, no metámosle color". Y muchas veces son errores que cometen, como decía Roberto, las instituciones porque creen, por ejemplo, que ir a darle comida a los indigentes es suficiente. Y no es suficiente. Hay muchísimas otras cosas que hacer para esta zona, y nosotros como colectivos LGBTI hemos tomado también la iniciativa³⁸³. (Rueda 2017)

I may partially agree with their critique, although I recognize that distributing food is an action that today sustains the materiality of life in the area. However, Chaves and Umaña's criticism has nothing to do with the forms of those projects, nor with the power relations they establish. Their claim is rather the inclusion of other sectors. POPPOP SJO's does not turn its gaze towards the inhabitants of the Red-light District, but rather seeks that respectable homocitizens turn their gaze towards the area. Their IV Commandment stipulates neutrality and peace as the fundamental pillars of the POPPOP SJO project. Having spent many hours in the area, I find this statement striking. How can one remain neutral in the face of hunger and poverty? How can one speak of peace when violence is obscenely differentiated in these streets?

I propose to treat queer regeneration as a cultural as well as material process that inscribes actual places where people 'live, work, play and worship'... urban spaces are not transparent or static... yet they are more than just figures, as the unequal chances of life and death in the inner city bring home (Haritaworn 2015, 38).

The queer regeneration project promoted by Chaves and Umaña reproduces an ahistorical vision of the Red-light District. This is no coincidence; it is a mechanism that facilitates the dynamics of colonialism and displacement. If that area is empty, depressed and dead, regeneration can only bring development and well-being.

Javier Umaña launches a call to the LGBT community to "...take over this Red-light district. To bring a little bit of color, a little bit of diversity". He adds:

Ayer se acercaban algunos indigentes y personas que estaban cerca de la zona, y decían "¿qué es lo que hay?, ¿cuál es la actividad?" Y donde veían entrar transformistas, y transexuales, y lesbianas y gays, y decían "¿qué es este espacio?"

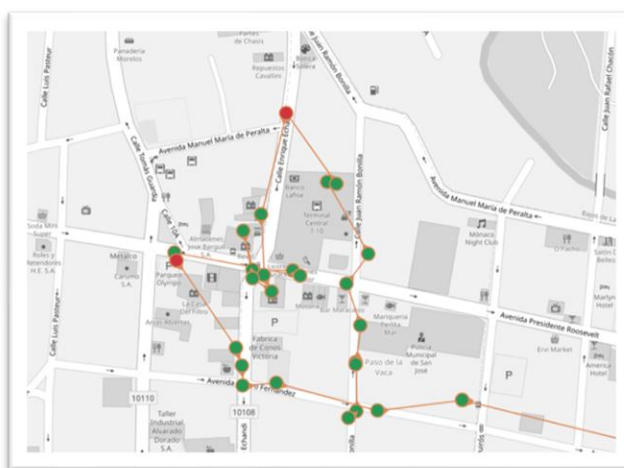
³⁸³ Free translation: Chaves: Yes, and these initiatives are good, it is true. But I believe that at present the needs are a little different. Especially in terms of urban regeneration. // Umaña: "Oh, it's the Red-light district, let's not touch it, let's not incorporate new projects, let's not think about it, let's not add color to it". And many times, these mistakes are committed, as Roberto was saying, by the institutions because they believe, for example, that giving food to the homeless is enough. And it is not enough. There are many other things to do for this area, and we as LGBTI collectives have also taken the initiative.

¿Que se está **integrando** a esta zona roja? Metiéndole un poquito de color³⁸⁴ (Umaña in Rueda 2017).

I highlight this word because it illustrates the erasure of the queer and trans* history of this neighborhood. It is produced as an absence. The idea of a place without history renders the call to take over that deserted area more powerful and potable. Umaña describes homeless people who are surprised by the new diversity that is integrated into the area. But the truth is that the colors have been there for decades, even before Umaña and I were born. This area has been inhabited by queer and trans* people for a long time. These are precisely the streets where Cassandra and her friends fought a war against the murderous violence of the State, and although they were displaced from this space by the hygienist policies of Mayor Araya, they continue to visit this area.

With a group of trans women who are part of the generation of war survivors, we walked through the area to conduct a collective mapping exercise, with the purpose of generating inputs for an archive of trans memory. This archive is currently under construction. Its development was affected by the pandemic, which forced the participants to devote their time and energy to resolving the materiality of existence. However, we have a number of raw materials (audio and video recordings, photographs, newspaper clippings and objects) that we are reworking. Image 225 shows a map of the points we mapped. Each one holds a story full of affection and memories.

Image 225
Red-light District affective trans* memory map



Among the red dots, associated with negative affects, we can mention the corner where Petunia was killed in front of her friends, or the house of Joaquín, the unscrupulous physician responsible for the

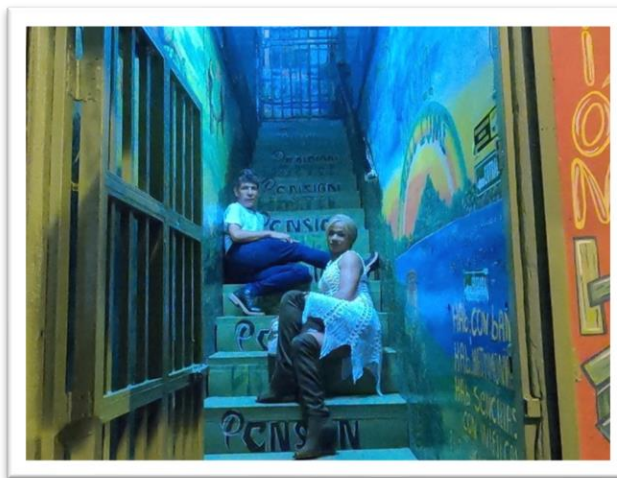
³⁸⁴ Free translation: Yesterday, some homeless people and people who were nearby came up and said "what's going on? What's the activity about?" And where they saw drag queens and transsexuals and lesbians and gays coming in, they said "what is this space?" What is **being integrated** into this Red-light district? Adding a little bit of color.

direct and indirect death of dozens of trans women, whom he injected with materials unsuitable for the human body with the promise of feminizing their figures.

Among the green dots, associated with positive affective memories, are the sex work venues where war survivors lived and worked. The Hotel Maravilla, as well, where they remember their stunts and the collective cleverness they had put together to escape through the balconies and roofs during police raids. The Norma Bar, where they drank and picked up clients, and Alexandra's guest house, known as the factory of the "broken" dolls ("la Fábrica de las mujeres chochas"), where many of them lived and weaved bonds of solidarity with cis sex workers.

Image 226

Kassandra and Maripaz posing in the Red-light District



In the area is also the house where Anayansi used to live, an icon of the trans history of this country, who pushed the limits of tolerance of the conservative inhabitants of San José with her irreverence. In that house Anayansi's body was found, after she was murdered in situations that still remain unclear.

These same streets that POPPOP SJO wants to regenerate, have been home to a trans* community that clings to life with ferocity. In these streets they lived, worked, partied, fallen in love and formed a family. In those streets they met their friends and built an affective community that enabled some of them to survive on this plane, and others to survive in our memory.

Why is it, then, that the entrepreneurs of POPPOP SJO do not talk about these stories? Why is it that in their narrative it seems as if diversity is an innovation they bring to the neighborhood? Perhaps they ignore the history that this group of war survivors have shared with me, but then the question is why didn't they approach them, or the sex workers of La Sala, or the unhoused residents of this area, to learn a little more about the neighborhood they intend to regenerate? The question answers itself. Whether out of ignorance or disinterest, either way ignoring the history of this place is functional for

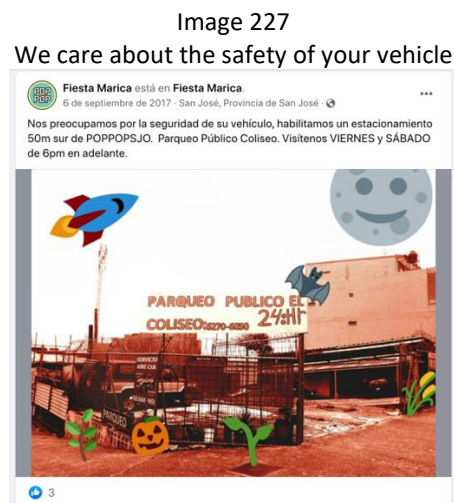
their project. Five centuries have shown us that the destruction of a community's history is a potent weapon of coloniality.

The bodies of trans women, many of them already elderly and bearing the traces of the multiple violence they have faced, are not as hip and attractive as the pretty bodies of gay men or the flamboyant make-up of the drag artists who performed in POPPOP SJO.

Thus the investment in a hip queer urbanity must be seen as a rejection both of purportedly earnest and unfashionable suburbanites and of those other queer subjects that tend to be deemed risks for capital investment and at risk, in need of social intervention (Hanhardt 2013, 17–18).

The bodies and stories of these trans women, of the sex workers and other impoverished inhabitants of the area are produced as an absence, an absence that “prepares the ground for a progressive whitening and straightening of this environment and, as we shall explore next, deserves protection in return (Haritaworn 2015, 81).

The queer regenerator becomes a pioneer, a civilizing agent in this zone of complexity, as Fabiola described it. “The investor becomes the new model citizen who takes care of his own futures, manages his own affairs, and participates in the management of surplus populations” (Haritaworn 2015, 30). While their IX commandment proclaims that "prevention is the way to safety", POPPOP SJO posts make it clear what they mean by safety:



Source: POPPOP Facebook Page,

<https://www.facebook.com/chinamocosmico/photos/a.1713150595368662/1853740151309705/>

Caption: We care about the safety of your vehicle, we have arranged a parking lot 50m south of POPPOPSJO. Coliseo Public Parking. Visit us FRIDAY and SATURDAY from 6pm onwards.

The displacement provoked by queer regeneration is not the disciplinary hygienist control we saw in chapter 4. Here we are faced with another type of hygienism, one that operates from within. This

project recovers an aesthetic of poverty. While talking about improving the area, it tries to camouflage itself in it. It dresses up as precarious, as an inhabitant of the Red-light district. It is a sort of performativity of space, a performativity that stylizes and imitates poverty and decadence. But it is no more than that: a performativity. The owners of POPPOP and their clients do not incarnate poverty, they do not suffer hunger and dispossession, they do not face the class violence of capitalism. As a performative act it is a fiction, a fiction whose effect produces the illusion of a truth. It is a kind of pacified poverty, a costume used for the party. This performative act has an impact on the neighborhood and on the relationships in the space. This costume makes it possible to maintain privileges intact, while at the same time it feeds and intensifies the discursive construction of the decadence of this neighborhood and of those who inhabit it. They, the inhabitants of the Red-light district, on the other hand, could not enter a party in POPPOP, because their aesthetic is not the stylized costume but the crude evidence of inequality. This performativity of space hygienizes poverty, exoticizes it, and becomes one more instrument for the regenerator project.

Hygienism of this sort infiltrates, it mimics decadence but without the poverty, it recovers its aesthetics and turns them into a stylized and pacified costume, exoticized and improved. In perfect alignment with the neoliberal project, the homocitizen devours the aesthetics of the locals and appropriates it with cynicism or insensitivity. Decadence in the POPPOP SJO is a choice on a menu, not an inescapable condition as it is for the inhabitants of this area.

queer regeneration becomes perceptible as the confluence of formerly undesirable bodies with formerly undesirable spaces, whose recovery coincides with and is predicated on the expulsion of racialised populations, whose inhabitation of space can only ever be uncultivated and pathological (Haritaworn 2015, 80).

The rainbow that these entrepreneurs wanted to inject into the Red-light District is the potable and respectable diversity of the good homocitizen. A homonationalist diversity that not only does not question but vindicates the values of the nation, as was proclaimed in a post announcing that POPPOP SJO would represent Costa Rica at the World Pride Madrid: "Viva Costa Rica, Viva España, Viva la Vida!!!"³⁸⁵

In this area, people starve, suffer violence and cold, but they also cultivate life, as Fabiola showed us. In the words of Haritaworn, "queer regeneration often occurs in the spaces between and beyond, where life and death are symbiotic" (Haritaworn 2015, 4). In this case, it seems that, without intending to do so in an organized way, the life of the area won this battle against gentrification.

³⁸⁵ Free translation: Hail Costa Rica, Hail Spain, Hail Life!!!!

POPPOP SJO's urban regeneration project was unsuccessful, and by the end of 2017 they moved to a neighborhood full of bars, where there were no queer bars, although queer people frequented it. We cannot claim this defeat as a triumph for the Red-light District community. Perhaps what failed was the strategy, or perhaps the frontiers that the classist imaginaries of the homocitizen erect are too high for the Red-light District. Whatever the reason, this attempt at queer regeneration has reached a halt. We do not know if or when another will come. In any case, POPPOP SJO brought to the table the ambitions of a group of pioneering champions of neoliberalism who want to bring progress to "backward" or "depressed" areas, and enrich themselves in the process.

Image 228

Meme: Gentrification is cool



Source: kenkenmarqui Instagram

Caption: Gentrification is the coolest thing ever because it attracts cool people with creative ideas and makes our neighborhoods look nice

8.1.2. URBN Escalante: queer design for the trendy gays

URBN is a housing project located in Escalante. Unlike the Red-light district, Escalante is and has been for decades a bourgeois neighborhood. In their insightful analysis of the processes of queer regeneration in Berlin, Jin Haritaworn speaks of "...‘degenerate’ spaces associated with crime, disorder and dysfunction, such as the inner city, the prison and the asylum, which are segregated from ‘respectable’ spaces of ‘proper’ white middle-class life" (Haritaworn 2015, 4). In this sense, Escalante would be one of those respectable spaces.

Carlos Madrigal and Bryan Vargas, researchers of CIUdad: investigaciones urbanas at the Universidad Estatal a Distancia de Costa Rica, report that Escalante was consolidated between the 1920s and 1930s as a private suburb resulting from population growth and the urbanization of coffee plantations and haciendas in the northeastern part of the capital's downtown area (Vargas and Madrigal 2018). For many years it was a residential neighborhood, inhabited by families of the wealthy classes.

I had a connection with this neighborhood from very early in my life, since I lived the first years of my life in a neighboring district, Francisco Peralta, separated only by Central Avenue. In the late 80s, my grandmother used to take me for walks in the area. My memory is of a calm and very quiet neighborhood, whose sobriety inhibited my boisterous childhood energy. Walking through those streets, I felt I had to behave according to its tacit norms.

The neighborhood has changed considerably. The families that inhabited the big houses grew older, and said goodbye to the younger generations who left the family home. Some houses were vacated and turned into offices. The area became even quieter. According to data from the 2011 Census, the Carmen district, where Escalante is located, is the least dense and least populated of the central county, with the largest number of older people and a constant depopulation situation (Vargas and Madrigal 2018).

The boom of Escalante is recent. According to an article in the newspaper *La República*, the change from residential to commercial neighborhood took off in 2010. The remaining neighbors, concerned about the insecurity that empty spaces tend to cause, promoted a project aimed at economic growth through a community association that improved the lighting and roads in the neighborhood (Flores 2017). Quickly, restaurants, bars, artistic and cultural spaces appeared, which today position Escalante as the gastronomic capital in the city.

Todo esto propició la aparición de nuevos restaurantes de tipo artesanal impulsando la gastronomía nacional sofisticada. Estos negocios fueron migrando hacia un concepto más urbano, fusionando sabores de distintos países, lo que enganchó al público millennial que buscaba una opción alternativa a los locales de comida rápida y un lugar de esparcimiento nocturno³⁸⁶ (Flores 2017, para. 19).

Given the neighborhood's history, it would not be accurate to speak of gentrification. However, the strategy deployed here is part of the plans for citizen renewal and neighborhood improvement (Vargas and Madrigal 2018). A determining factor is that most of the families that populated this neighborhood when its streets were silent and lonely, were landowners. This, undoubtedly, is a shield against displacement that others (unhoused residents of the city, passersby and people who used to enjoy its public spaces, like me) did not manage to circumvent. While it is true that in recent years the remaining residents of Escalante have organized themselves to try to discourage the arrival of young people seeking to party in its parks and streets, it is also true that the majority of residents who have left the neighborhood have done so because they have sold or rented their property, increasing their

³⁸⁶ Free translation: All this led to the emergence of new restaurants, promoting sophisticated national gastronomy. These businesses were migrating towards a more urban concept, fusing flavors from different countries, which attracted the millennial public that was looking for an alternative option to fast food restaurants and a place for nightlife.

accumulation of capital, unlike what usually happens to impoverished residents who are displaced from neighborhoods undergoing gentrification (Vargas and Madrigal 2018).

Escalante is a successful example of urban marketing. Data from 2014 indicated that the square meter of land in Escalante was around \$375, and the square meter of residential construction was valued at \$870 (Vargas and Madrigal 2018). In 2017, rents for commercial premises hovered around \$21 per sq. m. (Flores 2017). As of December 2019, when I did my fieldwork at this location, price statistics from the real estate site Encuentra24³⁸⁷, reported an average of \$1557 per square meter among the properties listed in its portfolio. In April 2022 the site reports an average of \$1878 per m2 (meaning an increase of \$321 in a matter of 16 months).

In this context, journal La República described Escalante in 2017 as a "mini-city", a family space that promises unique life experiences. "Escalante está de moda para todas las generaciones: se transformó en un espacio familiar donde las personas pueden pasar tiempo de calidad y sobre todo porque las experiencias de vida que se dan ahí no tiene comparación³⁸⁸" (Flores 2017, para. 9). As we shall see, Escalante's notion of family stretches the boundaries of heteronormativity to include gay and lesbian couples, families and singles, as long as they do not threaten their values.

Most of the bars and restaurants in Escalante are considered gay friendly (I will come back to this in the next section), and it even has a gay bar (Neon) and a queer vegetarian restaurant (El Árbol de Seda), run by the first lesbian couple to get married in Costa Rica, even before the ICH Court's vote, using a legal loophole. The neighborhood's park, Parque Francia, is a popular cruising area for young gay men. Same-sex couples can often be seen there giving sharing affection and bodies that defy gender binarism are a common sight.

Not only does this neighborhood attract gay and lesbian customers to its hipster shops, but also in recent years, gays and lesbians have begun to repopulate the neighborhood. Escalante is home to several of the luxury housing projects that were advertised at Expo Boda Pride LGBT, offering a hip urban lifestyle that appeals to homonormative subjects. As it often happens in the processes of queer regeneration (in this case, perhaps, we should speak of queer reactivation):

it matters little that not all of the newcomers are straight explorers with race and class privileges, including people with transgressive bodies and identities, become residents *the minute they arrive*, while those who have been there longer, first under

³⁸⁷ It is important to clarify that these statistics are not the result of a systematic study, but rather historical data on the properties that this site moves in the real estate market. In that sense, they cannot be taken as official data, although, in the absence of such data, they constitute an important indicator of market dynamics in the area.

³⁸⁸ Free translation: Escalante is fashionable for all generations: it was transformed into a family space where people can spend quality time and especially because the life experiences there are unparalleled.

conditions of confinement, now under conditions of displacement, lose all right to place (Haritaworn 2015, 81).

Robert McRuer states that “tolerance of queer/disabled existence nonetheless emerges as a necessary component of successful heterosexual and able-bodied subjectivities” (McRuer 2006, 24). Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the queer presence in Escalante is tolerated and even encouraged by market strategies that seek gays and lesbians whose purchasing power allows them to afford the high price of an apartment that, more than a house, is a status marker.

Thus, if the square meter in 2019 was around \$1557, in the residential towers that were advertised at Expo Boda Pride, prices skyrocketed. For example, in pre-sale in Alma de Escalante, a 33 square meter studio with the right to parking space was priced at \$159,000 (that is, \$4818 per square meter). In URBN Escalante, a 70 sq. mt. apartment with parking space was priced at \$238,943 (\$3413 per square meter).

These prices, exorbitant and unaffordable for a large part of the queer and trans* populations, are not cashing in on property value but on status. The neighborhood, as Christina Hanhardt concludes after studying “gay enclaves” in San Francisco and New York, also becomes a flag of visibility, where class is fused with sexuality: “‘I am gay’ — it also implies the terms of publicity in the public sphere, including neighborhood, and certain areas understood to be places of gay visibility were granted the same status of those of gay identity” (Hanhardt 2013, 222).

For all of the reasons mentioned above, when analyzing the tensions surrounding the discourses and practices of inclusion in San José, Escalante is a space worth exploring. In addition to the restaurants, bars and public spaces that I will discuss in the next section, I decided to include one of these habitational projects. Among the many housing towers that have proliferated in this area of San José, I chose to analyze URBN Escalante. Several reasons led me to select it: URBN is an extremely visible building. The massive 29-story³⁸⁹ cement block imposes itself on the eye from different points of the city. As pointed out in an article in *El Bombillo Prendido*, a blog of critical reflections on architecture, URBN's tower became the visual focal point at the east end of San José's Central Avenue (*El Bombillo Prendido* 2020). In this sense, it is a building that breaks into the daily life not only of the residents of this neighborhood and surrounding areas, but also of thousands of people who pass through San José on a daily basis.

³⁸⁹ It is important to clarify that San José is a flat city. We have no skyscrapers. Until a few decades ago there were very few tall buildings. URBN is one of the tallest buildings in the country.

Image 229
URBN viewed from San José



On the other hand, among all the real estate developments that were promoted at Expo Boda Pride LGBTI, this is the housing project that best epitomizes queer design. As I pointed out in Chapter 7, certain developments, such as Alma de Escalante, targeted the gay market even though their owners did not even support same-sex marriage. URBN, on the other hand, incorporates queer design comprehensively in its advertising campaigns, in its target market, and even in the staff they hire.

When I arrived in Costa Rica in 2019, URBN was holding "open house" activities and promotional visits for people interested in the project. I contacted their sales office through Facebook messenger to see if it was possible to schedule a visit. They asked me some questions, to identify my profile: where I am from, how old I am, what I do for a living, if I have a partner or children. When I said that I was a queer person temporarily residing in France, they replied that they loved my profile, and that they would assign me to a real estate agent accordingly. Shortly afterwards I was contacted by the agent via whatsapp and we arranged a viewing for September 28, 2019. I was accompanied by Juliana Sánchez Mora, a friend and colleague with whom we shared concerns about inequality and oppressions in the city. Juliana also has a background in real estate, from which she brought important insights to the analysis. We decided not to record the observation, as it could imply complications for the agent who had been appointed to guide our visit. I disclosed with him a little about my thesis and my interest in housing projects that promote inclusion, although I did not give him details about my position. The reflections I present below were constructed together with Juliana, based on the field notes we both took during the visit.

It was a rainy morning. We arrived punctually at the entrance to the building's parking lot, where we had to wait for the agent to coordinate with security personnel to let us in. We got out of the car, walked through several floors of gray parking and arrived at the door to the main elevators. It was an

equally gray space, warmed by the red gloom of neon letters that crowned the entrance to the building: “No somos más grandes que nuestro contexto” (We are not bigger than our context).

Image 230

We are not bigger than our context



The piece is an installation by the conceptual artist Mimian Hsu. I will return to the content of this work at the end of this section. For now, I will only say that while Juliana and I waited for the agent to come and pick us up, we commented that the lights, the dark doors and the exposed concrete finishes made us feel as if we were entering a gay joint. A hip joint, yes, that stylizes simplicity, imitates it, but from a place that safeguards status.

The agent arrived and as soon as we started talking, I understood what they meant in the sales office when they told me that they would assign me to a salesperson according to my profile. The agent was a young, gay guy who happened to have lived in Europe and New York, which gave him a background in the gay culture of the Global North. He greeted us warmly and asked if we wanted a drink before we went upstairs to start the tour. He led us to the lobby, the pedestrian entrance for residents and visitors. There we were given a bottle of craft beer. It is a brand created especially for URBN, available in the lobby for the select inhabitants of that place.

Image 231
URBN lobby



There we were given a bottle of craft beer. It is a brand created especially for URBN, available in the lobby for the select inhabitants of that place. The lobby had a hipster design, similar to Airbnb accommodations in the metropolises of the Global North. A book on display caught my eye. Illuminated by a lamp that highlighted its cover, it welcomed anyone entering through the front door. I asked him about the book, he told me that the whole project is inspired by queer design and invited us up to show us how this materializes in the space.

Beer in hand, we started the tour. Our first stop was at a private movie theater, which can be rented by tenants for private screenings. From there we moved on to the heated pool, available to all tenants without reservation. There is also a private gym in the building. On the way up to the 29th story, we talked about the project. He told me that the profile of the buyers is young people and, he added, there are many homeowners who are gay. He told me that he could not reveal his identity but that the project's owner is a very successful gay businessman, and for that reason he had taken care of the details. I took the opportunity to ask him the same question I asked Alma de Escalante's agent, about how they understood inclusion, if they had specific policies in this regard and how they put it into practice. He repeated again that the owner of the project is gay. He remarked that there are gay items all over the building, and assured me that, should any discrimination situation occur, it would be handled via the community manager, who would manage the situation to ensure an environment free of discrimination based on sexual orientation. However, he assured me that such a situation would not happen, because this project was designed for people like us. People like us meant queer, I guess. He went on to explain that many gay people lived in the building, so if someone wanted to live there, they had to accept diversity.

I have always found the use of these terms curious. A community manager is someone who is hired to manage the relations between neighbors and the relations of that "community" with the outside world. It is not exactly a ruler who was elected by the members of the community, but an expert who is hired to manage aspects of daily life. It made me think once again of the words of the uber driver with which this chapter opens. Also, it seems that they stretch the notion of community too far, since generally, apart from the fact that they live in the same property, the bonds between these people who are managed are weak or non-existent. Furthermore, I find it striking that this "management" function is explicitly celebrated, and that it is voluntarily accepted by the tenants who submit themselves to this community manager.

Moreover, the agent continued, Escalante in general is gay friendly, so gay tenants can go out to restaurants in the neighborhood or to the Parque Francia, where "the LGBT theme" is super accepted. In other words, respect and the guarantee of a life free of discrimination is accessible to the wealthy gay owners of the apartments, and to those who, as good homocitizens, contribute to capitalism by consuming the products of Escalante.

We reached the top floor. The agent explained to me that this is the gem of the project. He said that, in any other project, the top floor is a penthouse, a private space that is sold or rented at a very high price. Here it is different because, he says, in URBN they believe in and prioritize "the commons". So, instead of selling the top floor to a private individual, they decided to use it for common spaces.

The lax use of the notion of the commons to advertise the amenities of this housing project is noteworthy. Here I recalled the sharp reflections of Silvia Federici (2019) in her book *Re-enchanting the world. Feminism and the Politics of the Commons*. Federici analyzes the notion of the commons and the role it has played in the construction of alternatives to the state and the market.

Commons are constituted on the basis of social cooperation, relations of reciprocity, and responsibility for the reproduction of the shared wealth, natural or produced. Respect for other people and openness to heterogeneous experiences provided the rules of cooperation are observed distinguishes them from gated communities that can be committed to racist, exclusionary practices, while fostering solidarity among their members (Federici 2019, 95).

However, this is far from what this agent presented to us like "the commons". The commons in URBN, seemed more like that which Federici describes: "We have commons in fact that are co-opted by the state, others that are closed and 'gated' commons, and still others that are commodity-producing and ultimately controlled by the market" (Federici 2019, 89). The "commons" were amenities available by reservation via an app for the building's exclusive tenants. Most of the facilities are reserved at no additional cost to the \$126 monthly fee paid by tenants. A few, such as the party rooms, carry an additional cost. The first stop was the library.

Images 323
URBN's library



Source: WhatsApp chat with the author, October 5, 2019

Being a library mouse myself, that space certainly dazzled me. Juliana laughed when she saw me gaping. It was certainly a beautiful space, with a large work table, several armchairs with coffee tables for reading, and a couple of work desks that any public university in this country would wish for their libraries. On the left side a huge window illuminated the room, on the right a large collection of books for the common use of the tenants. I tried to take a quick look at the titles. There was a bit of everything, literature, politics, economics, tourism books and books about Costa Rica, mainly in Spanish and English. I caught a glimpse of a biography of Bill Clinton lying around. I took a moving picture, which came out a little blurry, because it seemed to me an example that characterizes the ideological line of that library. An assortment of literature that points to neoliberal normativity, with the United States as its polar star, and the homocitizen as its imaginary client.

We continued down the hallway to the "Monkey Room", a party room with a hipster style, where there is an old Volkswagen van that has been converted into a bar. It is fully equipped with a cooler for drinks and a grill. There are fake plants and plastic monkeys hanging from the ceiling, and a window overlooking Escalante. I must have projected a hipster vibe, myself, because the agent told me: imagine, you could have your wedding here! I probably could not hide the puzzlement on my face, because he immediately corrected himself and said: "Well no, maybe it's too small for a wedding, but for the engagement party, yes. Can you imagine the pictures?"

Images 233
URBN's commons



Source: Whatsapp chat with the author, October 5, 2019

The commons and the community in URBN function like a vertical 'gated' community:

...many 'gated' communities feature common swimming pools, golf courses, libraries, woodworking shops, theaters, and computer rooms. 'Gated' commoners share resources that would be difficult, expensive or impossible for any individual to purchase and enjoy. But these resources are jealously guarded from the use of 'outsiders,' especially those who would be unable to pay the often-hefty fee for buying into the common (Federici 2019, 91).

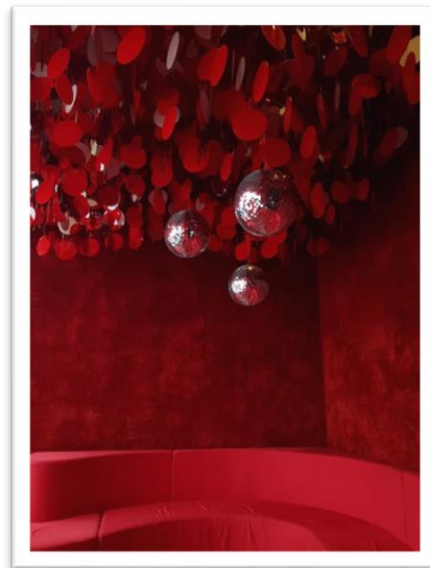
The tour continued. We continue to move forward. On the way he showed us a number of offices and coworking rooms that can be rented for meetings or freelance work. There is also a room for yoga or pilates. Turning around at the end of the long hallway we come to two large rooms, which are also available for booking with the app. Again, the aesthetic reminds me of an Airbnb in the Global North. At the back is an empty gray space with an open terrace with views over the southeast of the city. He explains to me that the plan is to rent that space for a "skybar," open to the general public. He clarifies that the bar would have a separate entrance, and that clients would not be able to enter the residential building, although URBN tenants would have their own VIP entrance from this common floor to the bar. We passed through an indoor park, where tenants can walk their dogs without having to go out into the street. In addition, URBN has a grooming area, which is even larger than some of the rooms in the apartments offered by the company.

Finally, he told us that he still had to show us his favorite part of the project: the Secret Room. In one of the large chambers there is a giant-size reproduction of a Frida Kahlo's painting. The agent

approached the painting, pulled it from the side, and revealed the secret. The painting hides a massive, heavy door, perhaps 40 centimeters thick, which opens the way to a room completely carpeted in red: walls, floor, seats and ceiling. Against the wall is a long red sofa. From the ceiling hangs a ball of mirrors and other decorations, also in red. The agent invites us in and closes the thick door. The feeling of vacuum made me feel a little dizzy.

The agent connected his phone to the bluetooth and played electronic music at a very high volume. Dancing, he told us the room is completely soundproofed. The walls and the door are made with special materials that do not let any sound escape. There, he continued, you can do whatever you want, and the rest of the building will never know. Juliana let out a nervous laugh. I began to feel a little claustrophobic. We stepped outside the room.

Image 234
URBN Secret Room



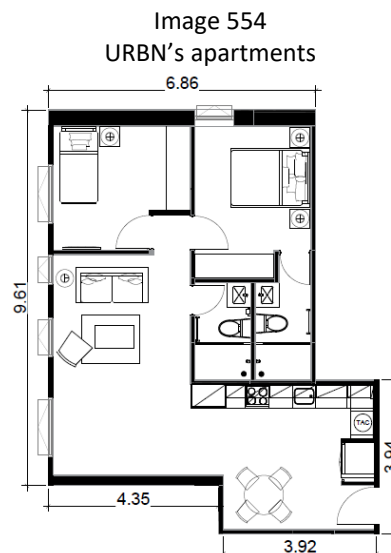
Later, Juliana told me her impressions of the Secret Room. She told me that once again, as at the entrance, she felt like she was inside a gay club. The secret door reminded us of the entrance to most gay saunas in San Jose, located in discreet buildings without signs, which sometimes might even seem abandoned to the bulk of the heterosexual population uninvolved in gay culture. Inside, the room fully draped with red fabrics gave the impression that it was a space designed for group sex. The investment in soundproofing reinforced his feeling. "It was a weird erotic aesthetic," Juliana said, "I kind of liked it and at the same time it creeped me out".

The agent insists that this building offers its tenants the advantage of almost never having to leave. Like in a luxury prison, within its high walls monitored and controlled by cameras and private security, they can lead an urban life and look out over the city without having to face the risks and discomforts that those streets harbor. Everything looks nicer from the top, says the agent. Plus, he adds, the

building is perfect for couples. If you have an argument with your partner and you do not want to see each other, you can come for a walk in the indoor park, or you can go blow off steam in the gym. If your partner wants to go for a drink, they can do it at the sky bar, so they can clear their head, but you still keep an eye on them.

Finishing the tour of "the commons", the feeling we are left with is that of having strolled through a gay-friendly private club. Federici warns: "we must be careful, then, not to craft the discourse on the commons in such a way as to allow a crisis-ridden capitalist class to revive itself, posturing, for instance, as the environmental guardian of the planet" (Federici 2019, 105), or, in this case, as the provider of safety for the homocitizen.

We finally arrived at the apartments. The one he shows us is located on the 28th floor and is one of the largest in the building. With 70m², it has two bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, 1 living room and 1 kitchen.



Source: Email to the author, October 5, 2019

The finishes are simple. Rather, there are almost no finishes. Juliana asked him about some areas that seem unfinished, and he explained that they leave it that way because they want other things to stand out: the common spaces, the views, the amenities. He tried to convince us that this apartment was an excellent investment. He said it could even "pay for itself" while I lived outside of the country, because I could put it up for rent in Airbnb (now the constant evocation of the aesthetics of the place made sense to me). I argued that sounded complicated to manage since involved cleaning and maintenance work that I could not handle from abroad. He told me that that was covered: URBN has an Airbnb agent who manages the apartments of the people who want to rent them on that platform, so all you have to do is pay him for his services, and he manages them on the platform.

The building truly sells a preppy gay lifestyle for the assimilated homocitizen. The sky-high cost does not just buy an apartment, but especially a lifestyle. \$3414 per square meter is the exorbitant price of gay status and lifestyle. As El Bombillo Prendido describes: “El marketing del proyecto habla de un mercado inmobiliario que con tal de vender nos tienta con dulces necesidades inventadas: la exclusividad, lo lujoso definido como un conjunto de áreas sociales extravagantes, el estatus de vivir en ciertos barrios³⁹⁰”.

The guided tour ended at the dining room table in that apartment. What followed was a conversation with the agent, in which several Costa Rican imaginaries were displayed. We talked about the project, the neighborhood of Escalante, the city, politics and the country. I asked him some questions, and he took the opportunity to give me his opinion on other things I did not ask.

The agent only showed us a 70 sqm apartment. He told us that they had a few 30sqm studios available, but he would not show them to me because that did not fit my profile. He mansplained to me that the best investment for me would be a two-bedroom apartment, contemplating a room for a future child. I am not sure what made him think he could give me life advice, but what followed was a display of racist homonormativity flirting with eugenics. He advised me that my partner and I should seize the opportunity of living in France to find a European man who would donate his sperm to get us pregnant. "So that the baby will come out with pretty genes," he added, in case his comment was not clear enough. He then told us that his husband is blonde and blue-eyed, so they were looking for a friend with a white phenotype, blonde and hopefully with light eyes, to donate an egg that, fertilized with his husband's sperm, would be inserted into a surrogate womb. Thus, their son would fulfill the ideal of Costa Rican whiteness. However, he stated they were having a hard time finding a friend with those characteristics willing to donate her genetic material to a gay couple, so he advised me to look for someone in Europe, where whiteness is not as scarce as in Costa Rica.

I was still processing what he had just said, when the agent went on to talk about policies of inclusion and rights for LGBT populations in the country. He said that he was looking forward to equal marriage finally being approved, and assured me that in URBN it was going to be a huge celebration. The agent spoke of the benefits of the government of the PAC Party. He said that we finally had a president who saw us and respected us. His eyes watered when he recalled that year's Pride March, where the president had attended, along with other government authorities, holding a banner that said: “Never again will you walk alone”. In tears, he told us that he felt that accompaniment and embrace. I thought

³⁹⁰ Free translation: The marketing of the project speaks of a real estate market that, in order to sell, tempts us with sweet invented needs: exclusivity, luxury defined as a set of extravagant social areas, the status of living in certain neighborhoods, etc.

about that symbolic act contrasted with the material debt of the state that several of the participants in this study pointed out, and it reaffirmed that safety and support are distributed differentially among LGBTIQ+ populations. A gay man, whitewashed and wealthy like himself, was among the first to receive such protection.

The mansplaining continued. He told us he was convinced that the president was doing everything possible for our population, and that if equal marriage was not yet approved, it was the fault of the feminists who had brought the abortion issue³⁹¹ into the picture. In his opinion, these issues should not be mixed, because Costa Rican society is very Catholic and would never accept abortion, while civil marriage did not interfere with religious beliefs. Although his argument was perhaps too simplistic, he had a point: certainly, homonormative marriage of productive homocitizens like him was much more potable in neoliberal and Catholic Costa Rica than the right of pregnant women and people to decide about their own bodies.

This conversation riddled with racism, misogyny and classism left me a little queasy, so I got up and took a few steps to the window to contemplate the panorama of the city. From there I can see my family's apartment, nestled between office buildings and the towers that are beginning to emerge on all sides. The agent approaches me and says: the city looks nice from up here, doesn't it? I show him my family's apartment, and tell him that I spent an important part of my life there. My heart shrinks thinking that that apartment where I was born, where my brother took his first steps and my grandmother lost her memory, sooner or later will be devoured by the real estate development that produces towers for wealthy or indebted millennials, who seek the status that these projects sell.

³⁹¹ The agent refers to what conservative groups have called "the combo of death", in which they point out the threat posed by abortion, homosexual marriage and "gender ideology" to Costa Rican values and family. The truth is that, beyond lesbian-feminist activists, and to a certain extent trans women, the articulation between LGBTIQ+ movements and feminist movements has not been very strong. This idea of an articulated bloc with a broad agenda is actually a ghost evoked by conservative sectors. Although the government of Carlos Alvarado, under immense pressure from feminist groups, reluctantly signed a technical norm regulating therapeutic abortion, which had been a debt for too long, in reality there was no broad articulation between those fighting for abortion and those fighting for equal marriage.

Image 236

URBN seen from the entrance of my family's appartement



I took advantage of the panoramic view to raise a final concern: the perception of security and its relation to inequality. I asked him if he considered the neighborhood to be safe. I told him that my family has lived in this area for decades, and that we have noticed an increase in poverty and a greater presence of homeless people wandering around looking for food or shelter. His response was emphatic. He said that *that* is not seen in Escalante. *That*, meaning poverty. I insisted again, pointing to the apartment less than 100 meters from URBN, and told him that right there, in front of my family's house, a migrant family had built a cardboard hut in the parking lot of an abandoned office. He told me that the difference was that this was not Escalante, and that the four lane street that divides Escalante from the neighborhoods slightly to the south (Francisco Peralta, La California), made a difference. The homeless do not pass from there, he told me, pointing to the street. He said that, blissfully, Escalante is a "trendy" neighborhood, where police presence is constant, because it is full of pricey bars and restaurants. "And who goes to the expensive restaurants? Us" (referring to the gay elite, I guess). The police, then, clear the streets of undesirable beings, so that we can walk around without stumbling upon poverty and inequality.

Hanhardt draws attention to the "troubling link between the protective measures increasingly at the forefront of both dominant LGBTI political movements and those development strategies that have transformed metropolitan regions so as to protect property values" (Hanhardt 2013, 225). This is exactly what we observed in this project.

Silvia Federici notes that the recovery of the language of the commonplace by the logic of the market has provoked:

...a wide spectrum of commons (ranging from closed residential communities through consumer co-ops to certain kinds of land trusts and housing co-ops) where people share access to common resource fairly and democratically but are indifferent to or even hostile to the interests of 'outsiders' (Federici 2019, 90).

This conversation revealed how narrow the notion of the commons is at URBN. That commitment to the commons that the agent proudly marketed is actually the defense of the privileges of the owners of that tower. What happens outside of it matters little, as long as it does not disturb their comfortable lives.

The agent insisted: "Yes, here, this is a place where you are not going to see homeless people and things like that, ever". The confidence with which he expressed this assertive speech act that promised us streets free of impoverished people reflected his faith in the police. This was one of the clearest examples I recorded in the fieldwork of the highly differentiated way in which the police manage security and violence in the city. The police cares for the good homo-citizens, protects and cleans their streets. They guard the borders of their trendy neighborhood, keeping the vermin outside. The police, here, are hired as guardians of the borders that divide the zone of being and non-being.

People who are excluded from the security and "common" facilities of this project also have clear understanding of where those boundaries are. Talking to a group of trans women at Transvida, I was telling them about this observation exercise. One of them commented: "Muy inclusivo y lo que quieren, pero yo le apuesto a que llegamos un grupo de nosotras y no nos dejan entrar. Para empezar por la ropa. Es mentira, ahí no aceptan chicas trans como nosotras³⁹²".

In the middle of the discussion with the agent, I mentioned that the building downstairs was tagged with graffiti. The officer reacted very expressive and incredulous. He told me that this was not possible. I insisted that it was, that graffiti is one of my passions and that I had just photographed several on that street, including a couple on the walls of the building. He told me that he had not seen them, but that I should not worry because in this neighborhood, that was done by street artists, not by the punks who vandalize downtown San José.

I did not mention to him that the tags were precisely a criticism of URBN. In any case, I was shocked that they were so disconnected from their surroundings that they had not even noticed what the outside walls of their own building were shouting.

³⁹² Free translation: Very inclusive and whatever you want, but I bet a group of us arrive and they don't let us in. For starters because of the clothes. It's a lie, they don't accept trans girls like us there.

Image 237
Tags on URBN walls



Caption: Tag on the left: What an ugly building.
Tag on the right: A city full of expensive buildings is not pretty.

From conversations with neighbors in the street where I grew up, I would say that those walls expressed discomfort in a very polite way. In informal interviews, the common denominator was: "I hate that building! They told me that since it was built, from their homes they no longer see the sky or the horizon, but a concrete massif. It is the first thing they see when they leave their homes, and the last thing they look at when they come in. They told me that this building changed their relationship with the city, and that now they no longer walk as they used to, because every day of their lives they are forced to remember how much they dislike that place.

These tags summarize what El Bombillo Prendido describes in their analysis of this housing project:

Un monumento a la desigualdad y al desinterés por la ciudad... ciertamente URBN deja pensar que su implantación tuvo poco interés por el lugar y por la sociedad. Podemos ver el poco interés por las calles atiborradas de carros, en sus 5 niveles de parqueos. Notamos la negación de un barrio La California que no ofrece el estilo de vida que mercadea el proyecto, cuando muestran únicamente lo *hip & trendy* de barrio Escalante... Podemos entender el poco interés por una ciudad y un planeta donde el agua escasea y la indiferencia hacia muchos habitantes que tenemos la necesidad y el derecho básico a una vivienda digna, accesible, y a una ciudad humana, segura, y saludable³⁹³ (El Bombillo Prendido 2020).

Vertical architecture is often promoted as a form of responsible consumption to address the effects of the climate crisis. In my observation, I did not actually register that this argument being used by

³⁹³ Free translation: A monument to inequality and disinterest in the city... URBN certainly lets us think that its implementation had little interest in the area and society. We can see the little interest in the streets crammed with cars, in its 5 levels of parking. We notice the denial of a La California neighborhood that does not offer the lifestyle marketed by the project, when they show only the hip & trendy Escalante neighborhood... We can understand the little interest for a city and a planet where water is scarce and the indifference towards many inhabitants who have the need and the basic right to a decent, accessible housing, and a humane, safe and healthy city.

URBN to attract clients. Perhaps this is because the agent they assigned to me prioritized the queer theme.

In any case, El Bombillo Rojo addresses the fragility of this discourse of inclusion and commons, or perhaps, more precisely, its plasticity. A vertical housing project that promotes the use of motor vehicles, does not require problematizing the crisis of public transportation in the city. A vertical housing project that promotes the reduction of the carbon footprint internally does not need to problematize the climate devastation caused by the city. A vertical housing project that sells status and opulence does not need to worry about hunger, poverty and inequality. As Federici states:

No common is possible unless we refuse to base our life and our reproduction on the suffering of others, unless we refuse to see ourselves as separate from them. Indeed, if communing has any meaning, it must be the production of ourselves as a common subject (Federici 2019, 110).

Despite its prioritization of "the commons," what is absent in this project is community. Tenants are owners but not neighbors. Technologies mediate the common spaces, which are neither public nor collective, but are arranged through a reservation for individual use. But the commons, Federici affirms, "require a community, the principle being 'no community, no commons'" (Federici 2019, 94). The private gate that guards the entrance to this urban oasis promises security, comfort and status, and prevents any contact with the rest of the city.

Only Escalante is proposed as a sort of trendy backyard, where class guarantees the same system of values on which this housing tower is built. In URBN, community is restricted to the status that marks the dwellers of that building, and the interactions mediated by the consumption of food and recreational products in Escalante. As Valencia points out: "the contemporary idea of the social can be understood as a conglomeration of autonomous individuals who share a determined space and time and who participate actively or passively (and to varying degrees) in a culture of hyperconsumption" (Valencia 2018, 27).

What happens to the people who cannot access this consumption is not the concern of the residents of this place. That is what the police are for, and as the agent pointed out, they keep the streets of that neighborhood clean of indigents and detestable beings, so that customers like us can enjoy ourselves in peace. It is an idea of community that is far from what Federici proposes:

'community' has to be intended not as a gated reality, a grouping of people joined by exclusive interests of religion or ethnicity, but rather as a quality of relations, a principle of cooperation, and of responsibility to each other and to the earth, the forests, the seas, the animals (Federici 2019, 110).

I return to the message of the conceptual piece that greeted us at the entrance of the building: "We are not bigger than our context". I have read this phrase over and over again, trying to think of a kind interpretation, but I always end up agreeing with the critique that El Bombillo Prendido raises:

La ironía también me pareció monumental. Un edificio en un barrio donde la media de altura no sube de los 2–3 niveles; que se observa desde muchos puntos de la ciudad, que me vende la descarada idea de que puedo vivir endeudado en 30 metros cuadrados a cambio de disfrutar de una ciudad a la cual el edificio no le ofrece más que 3 locales comerciales vacíos (y como la asamblea, muchos metros cuadrados de concreto para los artistas graffiteros). Un edificio que nos obliga a verlo por más de 15 minutos cada vez que hagamos el mismo recorrido por la Av. Central. Ese mismo edificio nos dice que no es más grande que el contexto³⁹⁴.

This building is the context. It is the context that draws imaginary borders, that produces inequalities, that displaces some bodies and attracts others, that hierarchizes life, that distributes life chances. A context that imposes itself on us, overpowering like this building, and from which we cannot escape.

Image

No somos más grandes que nuestro contexto



Source: El Bombillo Prendido, https://medium.com/@el_bombillo_prendido/y-el-remate-visual-de-la-avenida-central-446ae289959d

³⁹⁴ Free translation: The irony also seemed monumental to me. A building in a neighborhood where the average height does not go above 2-3 stories; that can be seen from many points of the city, that sells me the shameless idea that I can live indebted in 30 square meters in exchange for enjoying a city to which the building offers no more than 3 empty commercial premises (and like the Congress, many square meters of concrete for graffiti artists). A building that forces us to see it for more than 15 minutes every time we make the same route along Central Avenue. That same building tells us that it is not bigger than its context.

8.2. Right to admission reserved: compulsory able-bodiedness in the safe space

After a *parcour*/interview with Fabiola, I walk back through Morazán Park. There are 3 people sleeping in the park, 2 cops come to bother them. An elderly lady stops me on the sidewalk. She asks me if I am in a hurry. I answer that a bit, but I ask her what happened? I thought she was going to ask me for money or food, but no. She asked me if I could help her with the food. She asked me if I could help her cross the street. She had a cane and walked very slowly. She had particular difficulty going down and up the sidewalks, she needed extra support. I told her I would be happy to help. As I assisted her across the street (a rather difficult crossing for any pedestrian, I might add), we had a brief conversation. I asked her if she lived around the area, she said yes, "all my life". She was returning from an appointment at the social security clinic. She thanked me repeatedly. As she grabbed my arm tightly, she said that if it weren't for people like me, she wouldn't be able to go out anymore. She says it is important for her to get out and walk, because at least she breathes and moves, and that she gets more depressed if she is locked up in the house. She told me that when she was young she walked everywhere. Now everything is different, but she doesn't want to stop going out. I thanked her too, for letting me help, and told her that when I get to her age, I hope to be able to go out walking around the city too. I helped her to cross 3 streets, and then she said: that's it, thank you very much, I can take it from here. We said goodbye. I felt her smile embrace my heart. (Field diary, October 10, 2019).

San José is not an accessible city. It is a terribly ableist city. The city government has invested in some sidewalks, ramps and parking lots, which more than a network of accessible roads is a sort of spatial delimitation of the territory in which the transit of people with disabilities is tolerated. Outside these boundaries, various obstacles cut off the roads.

Image 239
Untraversable sidewalks



There are more spaces adapted for bicycles than for wheelchairs. Even the projects that aim to turn it into a walkable city fail to give accessibility the central place it should have. We are still trapped in a compulsory able-bodiedism, where the notion of the "enjoyable city" is always build for the able-bodied citizen.

Fiona Kumari Campbell defines ableism as

a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produces a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human. Disability then is cast as a diminished state of being human. (Campbell 2001, 44)

The concept is related to disablism, understood as a set of assumptions and practices that promote differential and unequal treatment of people (Campbell 2009, 3). While it is true that overt discrimination against people with disabilities is increasingly frowned upon, and that, on the contrary, inclusion policies often raise the banner of people with disabilities, the truth is that our societies continue to be structurally exclusive for these populations. In this sense, critical disability studies call us to turn the focus, not so much on disability, but rather on the system of domination that produces it as a marker of inferiority that reduces the life chances of those who embody it (Campbell 2009; McRuer 2006; L. Núñez 2020; Ferrari 2020).

In order for ableism to produce disability in this devalued form, it requires the valuation of able-bodiedness as normalcy (Campbell 2009, 5). This process, then, produces a simultaneous effect in which able-bodiedness is presented as the ideal of normality, while disability is presented as its correlative failure. Ableism, thus, produces disabilities as something inherently negative and that, if possible, should be improved, cured or even eliminated (L. Núñez 2020, 65; Campbell 2009, 5).

We find ableism everywhere, in the form of attitudes and values, thoughts and behaviors, structures and spaces. We are part of this system of domination and we are not even aware of it. In dialogue with feminisms and critical queer theory, Robert McRuer proposes the notion of compulsory able-bodiedness to point out the normative character of ableism. As with compulsory heterosexuality (Rich 1980), to which McRuer argues it is connected, compulsory able-bodiedness refers to a system that produces and at the same time covers domination as an apparent choice, where there actually is no choice (8).

Authors such as McRuer (2006) and Ferrari (2020) point out that there is a direct line between the rise of industrial capitalism and the emergence of the category of disability. This should not be read, as we will see below, as the emergence of ableist violence, but of the concept of disability as we know it today, configured by capitalism and reformulated by the neoliberal project.

With industrial capitalism, says McRuer, to have an able body becomes critically important to sell one's labor. "Being able-bodied means being capable of the normal physical exertions required in a particular system of labor" (McRuer 2006, 8). The able body offers its labor force to the machinery of capital accumulation. Those who cannot meet the normative standards, those who have bodies that cannot produce for the system, are then rendered as marginal, unproductive, abnormal, and system-

wastes (Ferrari 2020, 125). As a category, disability consolidates an unbreakable binarism that hierarchizes existence: “la capacidad es sinónimo de productividad, eficacia, eficiencia, y la discapacidad, su contrario³⁹⁵” (Ferrari 2020, 126).

However, authors such as Núñez (2020), Ferrari (2020), and Grech (2015) point out that the conceptual and interpretative frameworks for thinking about disability and ableism produced in the Global North are an important basis, however, they reproduce a view of people with disabilities permeated by Western culture. In this sense, they are insufficient to reflect on the ways in which disabilities are experienced in Abya Yala, which is why they propose a complementary reading of the history of disability as a system of domination, which links it to coloniality.

The authors rescue the important contributions of decolonial studies, and especially of decolonial feminisms, although they point out that these have failed to understand how, in addition to race and gender, the construction of disability is traversed by colonial practices impregnated with Eurocentric power structures (L. Núñez 2020; Ferrari 2020), and it is crossed with biopolitics as well, as authors like David Mitchell (2015) and Jasbir Puar (2017). Like racism, ableism seeks to attribute a rare biological-psychological-cognitive conformation to political inequality (Ferrari 2020, 125).

Ferrari points out that as part of the logic of disciplining, European conquerors used corporal punishment as a way of controlling native peoples in Abya Yala, and especially those individuals who challenged power. These punishments often sought to mark the body as a device for control. Mutilated, the ungovernable body was exposed in order to discipline the rest of the population (Ferrari 2020, 64). At the same time, this body was detached from its community and designated as unproductive and useless within the system of slavery and forced labor, thus thrown into bare life.

Moreover, as with existences beyond gender binarism, there are also records of some pre-Columbian societies where what we call disability today was not a marker of inferiority. Núñez (2020) mentions, for example, that evidence suggests that among some Mayan peoples, unusual bodily traits were actually a marker of status (125). What we call disability today was not interpreted and produced as inferior. Likewise, she refers to records that suggest that in Inca villages, which were organized under an ethic of reciprocity, people with disabilities were integrated into community tasks and received the support of the community in return. Blind people, for example, performed the task of cleaning cotton or threshing corn, and in return they received, like others, the support of community members to sustain their lives (125).

³⁹⁵ Free translation: capacity is synonymous with productivity, effectiveness, efficiency, and disability, its contrary

As with the studies that feed the theory of the coloniality of gender, it is important to take these references with caution so as not to generalize them. The systematic erasure of the history of the peoples of Abya Yala makes it impossible to know whether this was a constant or an exception. However, what is relevant in this erased memory is not so much the function that was assigned to people with disabilities, but the community ethics that brought them together. As Núñez (2020) points out, the relations of production in (some of) these peoples were oriented towards the care and preservation of all forms of life (126). These relations of complementarity with nature and all forms of life were an obstacle to colonial imperialist ambition. To disarticulate them, erase them and replace them with exploitation was one of the main tasks of coloniality (128).

This has led authors such as Ferrari to introduce the concept of coloniality of ability, understood as:

la desarticulación, borramiento y reemplazo por parte del pensamiento moderno/colonial, de la ética comunal de reciprocidad y cooperación propias de la cosmovisión de nuestros pueblos latinoamericanos, y de las lógicas que les corresponden las formas de organización y gestión del trabajo y los recursos para la existencia³⁹⁶ (Ferrari 2020, 125).

Neoliberalism, Núñez argues, produces and reproduces the notion of ideal and docile bodies, able bodies, sustained in the normativity that imposes productivity. But this normativity, although enhanced by the neoliberal project, has its roots anchored socio-historically in the relations of exploitation and domination imposed by coloniality (Núñez 2020, 64-65). The same is true for the category of disability. That is to say, the hegemony of the modern/colonial paradigm and the Eurocentric epistemological position rendered valid a single and isolated way of understanding the multiple existences in which we human beings exist in the world (Ferrari 2020, 124).

With the coloniality of ability established by modernity/coloniality, the bodies and intelligences of people with disabilities are considered incapable of providing the system with the production and accumulation of capital (Ferrari, 2020, 128). As a system of domination and hierarchization of life, then, ableism precedes even the invention of the category disability. However, in dialogue with McRuer, we could say that with the rise of industrial capitalism, able-bodiedness becomes compulsory, in ways that humanity had never seen before. Compulsory able-bodiedness is a system of domination that produces conditions of discrimination, stigma and exclusion for people whose bodies or minds do not meet the standards defined as normal in the capitalist-racist-patriarchal world system.

³⁹⁶ Free translation: the disarticulation, erasure and replacement by modern/colonial thought of the communal ethics of reciprocity and cooperation inherent to the cosmovision of our Latin American peoples, and of the logics that correspond to their forms of organization and management of work and resources for their existence.

With the coloniality of ability, and especially when compulsory able-bodiedness is established around the category of disability, the idea of the incomplete subject is installed, as opposed to the normative ideal of the European-capitalist-capitalist-military-Christian-patriarchal-white-heterosexual-able-bodied man (Grech 2015). In addition, by eroding reciprocal bonds and uprooting the people with disabilities from the community, disability is framed in an individualizing perspective, which holds those who face socio-structural injustice directly responsible for their situation (L. Núñez 2020, 62). In this context, the politics of inclusion endlessly reproduce capitalism and coloniality. They do not seek the development of solidarity bonds, but the adaptation of people with disabilities to the ableist normativity, the expression par excellence of neoliberal inclusion is labor inclusion, which seeks to re-functionalize the body with disabilities while disciplining it through medicalizing and pathologizing approaches (L. Núñez 2020).

The decolonial perspective seeks to denaturalize ability as a normative category and to resist neoliberal inclusion:

El esfuerzo por descolonizar la situación de discapacidad debería orientarse hacia la recuperación de imágenes, principios, representaciones, cosmovisiones de nuestros pueblos latinoamericanos y caribeños, así como valorizar el inmenso potencial de praxis política que nos constituye como pueblos conformados al calor de la historia colonial y la permanente memoria ancestral que sale al encuentro para recordarnos la necesidad de recuperar las prácticas humanizadoras y el equilibrio con todo lo existente, a partir del cuidado y la preservación del ambiente y todas las formas de vida³⁹⁷ (Ferrari 2020, 128).

Inspired by these ideas, in this section I attempt to trace some of the multiple visible expressions of compulsory able-bodiedness in the city. Since there are so many, I will focus especially on those that materialize in the places that many of us consider "safe spaces", in order to put in tension the absences concealed by discourses of inclusion that reproduce, perhaps sometimes without even realizing it, the coloniality of ability.

8.2.1 Barrio Escalante and its multiple borders

With Escalante, the Central American Switzerland has nothing to envy to the trendy neighborhoods of the great metropolises of the Global North. The neighbors who launched the reactivation strategy at the beginning of the 2010s probably did not imagine the commercial success that this urban

³⁹⁷ Free translation: The effort to decolonize the situation of disability should be oriented towards the recovery of images, principles, representations and cosmovisions of our Latin American and Caribbean peoples, as well as to value the immense potential of political praxis that constitute us as peoples shaped in the heat of colonial history and the permanent ancestral memory that comes out to remind us of the need to recover humanizing practices and an equilibrium with everything that exists, based on the care and preservation of the environment and all forms of life.

revitalization project would have. Although, as I mentioned above, Escalante is not exactly an example of gentrification, capital is flowing in large volumes in those streets.

Image 240

This is a home, not a restaurant



Source: Urbanoscopia ARQUIS UCR,

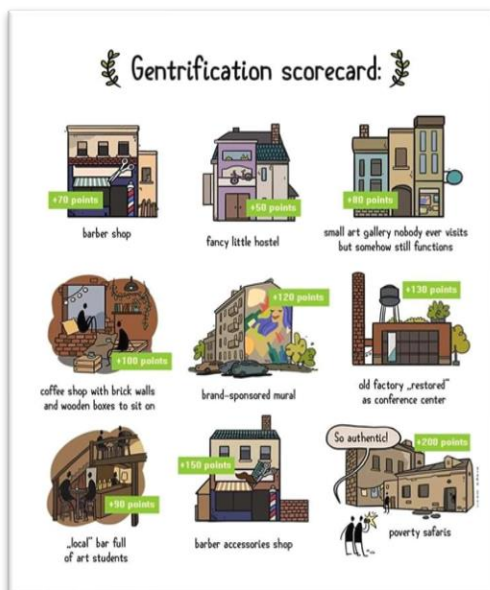
<https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=3950211258341851&set=a.446978708665141>

Caption: A: This again... / B: Good afternoon, could you bring me the menu, please? / A: Sir, I live here, my house is not a restaurant... / Barrio Escalante is more than a commercial neighborhood.

Preserving its bourgeois essence, Escalante offers all the amenities of a gentrified neighborhood and more. Its products and services imitate the aesthetics and prices to those of gentrified neighborhoods in other global cities. In Escalante, today we can find most of the attractions caricatured in images 241 and a few more.

Image 241

Meme: Gentrified scorecard



Source: The Nib Facebook page,

<https://www.facebook.com/NibComics/photos/a.556839287719563/3118172394919560/?type=3>

Image 242

Pictures from barrio Escalante



Among its many restaurants we can also find kindergartens with Christian ideology, a gym, music and dance schools, tattoo studios, macrobiotic shops, yoga and pilates studios, cultural centers, coworking spaces, the French Bookstore, a plaque commemorating the work of a police major, offices of psychologists and medical specialists, and even an Adventist medical center.

Image 243
Escalante's attractions



This neighborhood also has a small park, Parque Francia, that has become a favorite spot for many young people looking for outdoor recreation. The neighbors are not very happy with the way the park is being used, and they have even organized to demand greater control of the area by the police.

Despertar con las paredes de la casa orinadas, con heces en el jardín o con una pareja teniendo relaciones sexuales a escasos metros del patio se ha vuelto una tormentosa pero inevitable constante para habitantes de barrio Escalante, en San José, quienes luego de décadas de residir ahí, sienten ajena su comunidad por el exceso de “fiesta y desorden”, sobre todo en las noches, que se ha dado en los últimos años³⁹⁸ (Céspedes 2022).

As the URBN agent mentioned, in this neighborhood usually the police respond quickly. The neighbors' ideal of security alludes to a certain normality. “Con la excusa de no molestar a los nuevos “clientes” del espacio, aquella ‘diferencia’ que supera ciertos umbrales de lo tolerable, es excluida o acondicionada como servicio³⁹⁹” (Sequera 2014, 69). Escalante is an exclusive and exclusionary neighborhood, a neighborhood that excludes on at least three levels: (1) through its prices, as I describe in the previous section and in chapter 5; (2) through police cleansing that displaces unwanted

³⁹⁸ Free translation: Waking up to urine on the walls of the house, feces in the garden or a couple having sex a few meters from the patio has become a stormy but inevitable constant for residents of the Escalante in San José, who after decades of living there, feel alienated from their community by the excess of "partying and disorder", especially at night, which has occurred in recent years.

³⁹⁹ Free translation: With the excuse of not disturbing the new "clients" of the space, that 'difference' that exceeds certain thresholds of what is tolerable, is excluded or conditioned as a service.

bodies out of the margins of the neighborhood, as described by the URBAN agent in the previous section; and (3) through a compulsory able-bodiedness architecture, which as we will see in dialogue with Alex Vásquez, extends throughout the area.

When I contacted Alex Vásquez, human rights activist for the LGBTQ+ community and people with disabilities, I explained to him the *parcours/interviews* methodology I was doing, and asked him where he wanted us to conduct the interview based on his relationship with the city. Alex chose to do the interview at a library of the University of Costa Rica. His choice was based on the bittersweet combination of two facts: on the one hand, he wanted to show me how much we still need to do to transform in our university to make it accessible for people with disabilities. At the same time, he sadly told me that despite all the physical and human barriers he encounters, the campus remains for him one of the safest places in the city.

In our interview Alex tells me that he wants to leave the country. Maybe not permanently, but he dreams of living in a city where he can have an autonomous life. He tells me about the enormous efforts his family has made to support him. Since the state does not provide proper aids for people with disabilities, he and his family have worked to pay for equipment, structural and technological adaptations that allow him to work and study today. In that sense, he acknowledges that if he manages to leave, he will miss his family very much, however, he recognizes that his family's efforts are not enough, since this city does not have the basic conditions for him to move around and live independently.

Y sin embargo, entiendo que mi familia no me va a lograr dar lo que tal vez estos otros países sí me van a poder dar. Por ejemplo: poder salir de mi casa yo solo. Y llegar de un punto A a un punto B, yo solo. Y además ser socialmente aceptado por lo menos en un nivel mejor que aquí. Y tal vez tener más probabilidades de encontrar a alguien que aquí⁴⁰⁰ (Alex, in discussion with the author, November 9, 2019).

His words moved me with anger and indignation. It seems outrageous to me that a person in a wheelchair is expelled from this country because our cities are not safe spaces for them. In Alex's case, he and his family they have managed to open opportunities (today, Alex lives independently in London, where he is studying a master's degree with a scholarship that recognizes his excellence). But Alex's case is not that of the majority, and he knows it.

This is the context in which our dialogue took place. Alex gave me countless examples of how the state does not respond, and neither does the community. Not even in the trendy neighborhood does Alex

⁴⁰⁰ Free translation: And yet, I understand that my family will not be able to give me what perhaps these other countries will be able to give me. For example: to be able to leave my house by myself. And to get from point A to point B by myself. And also, to be socially accepted at least at a better level than here. And maybe have a better chance of finding someone than here.

feel safe. It was he who put Escalante on the map. We talked about places and services that do not comply with Law 7600 (which, among other things, establishes the obligation to have ramps and adapt the structures to allow access for people in wheelchairs). I asked him which places he could go independently, and he explained to me:

Alex: Es vacilón porque a nivel de restaurantes, generalmente, lo común es que estén adaptados. Es lo común. Te lo puedo decir así, frecuentemente voy a restaurantes y todo bien. Pero me he dado cuenta de que esta zona hipster nueva, verdad, de Barrio Escalante, ¡cero!

Mar: ¿En serio? Yo juraba... Bueno, es que yo no voy ahí porque es un poco caro para mi presupuesto, a pesar de que vivo muy cerca. Pero, yo más bien pensaba que esta gente como con su discruso ahí cool...

Alex: Vieras que no. Ah-ah! Es que de nuevo, es un espacio inclusivo para LGBT+, para otro tipo de comunidades. Pero de nuevo, no para mí⁴⁰¹ (Alex, in discussion with the author, November 9, 2019).

I showed him a digital mapping tool I was using, Experience Fellow, a (unfortunately) proprietary software, which allowed to register geolocalized data points with information such as photos and texts. It also permitted to register a "subjective" scale in which the "experience" at each point was rated on a Likert scale from -2 to 2. I proposed to do a mapping exercise on accessibility at the trendy Escalante neighborhood, to which he responded enthusiastically. I asked him if he would join me, but he told me that given the state of the sidewalks in that neighborhood, it would be quite complicated to get around with his wheelchair. So, we agreed that I would do the mapping exercise, following the guidelines we agreed upon in our interview.

The map was constructed in 3 sessions, on 11/10/19, 11/23/19 and 11/24/19. On 11/29/19 I performed a final check to verify and correct possible errors. The map represents a snapshot of the moment. The pandemic has brought changes to Escalante, although Escalante has continued to grow. It is possible that some of these businesses no longer exist or have changed, and I would like to think that it is possible that some of these businesses have adapted their structures to ensure accessibility.

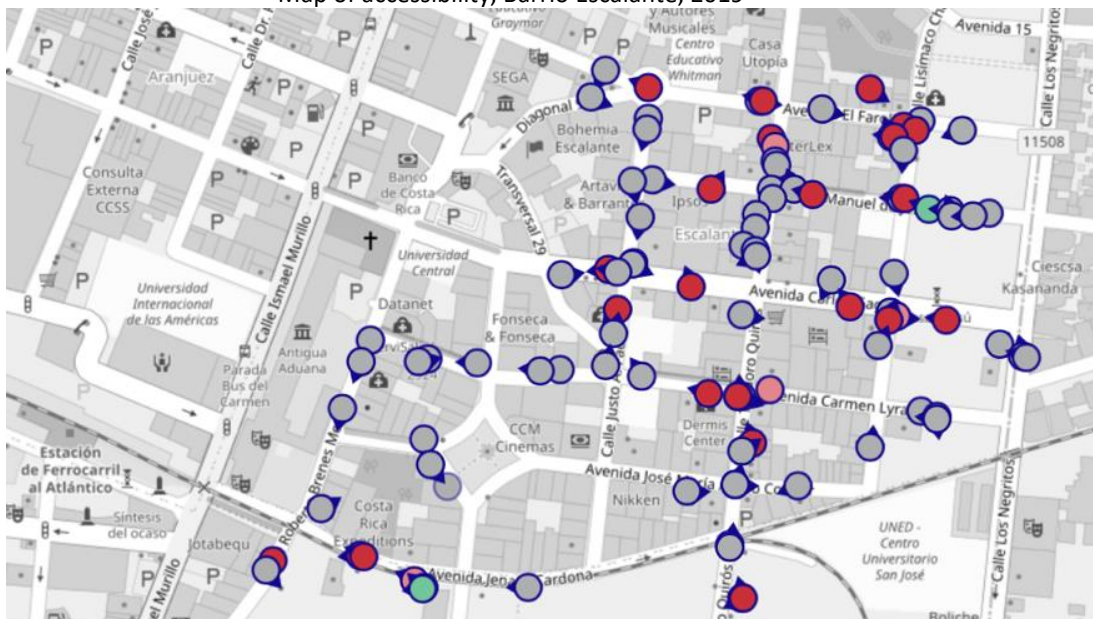
The exercise was simple. Since we did not have the time, authorization and/or resources to enter each of Escalante's businesses, we decided to observe only the entrance and what could be seen from the street. Therefore, this map tells us about the first accessibility barrier, which determines if a person in a wheelchair can even enter the place, and how they can enter, but it does not explore if the

⁴⁰¹ Free translation: Alex: It's a bit of a bummer because at the restaurant level, generally, the common thing is that they are adapted. Usually they are. I can tell you this, I frequently go to restaurants and everything goes fine. But I've realized that this new hipster area, right, Barrio Escalante, zero! / Mar: Really? I could have sworn... Well, I don't go there because it's a bit expensive for my budget, even though I live close by. But, I rather thought that these people, like, with their cool discourse... / Alex: Well, no. Uh-uh! It's just that again, it's an inclusive space for LGBT+, for other types of communities. But again, not for me.

bathrooms and furniture are adapted, nor does it allow us to determine if a person in a wheelchair has access to the whole place, or if access is restricted to only a part of the establishment.

The red dots on the map show those places that, for structural reasons, completely exclude people using wheelchairs. The gray dots represent places that are not properly adapted, where small steps or floors that do not allow rolling are identified. In these places, a person in a wheelchair could perhaps enter but not autonomously. It would require the help of third parties, either by raising the chair or by placing a portable ramp that would allow them to get around the structural barriers. Also in gray are those places where, from the street, it is possible to observe that a person with a wheelchair can pass from the entrance, but access is restricted to one area of the establishment, meaning there are barriers that erect boundaries to pass to other parts of the place. Finally, in green are shown the businesses that at that time allowed independent access for people in wheelchairs.

Image 244
Map of accessibility, Barrio Escalante, 2019



The results of this mapping exercise are overwhelming. I registered a total of 123 data points, including businesses, health facilities, religious and educational establishments. Perhaps the map does not reflect the severity of the situation, as the points overlap due to the small size of the area. Table 5 summarizes the results of this mapping exercise.

Table 5
Accessibility, Barrio Escalante, 2019

Places with major accessibility barriers	37
Places with moderate accessibility barriers	82
Accessible places	4
TOTAL	123

The reality that Alex told me in the interview is visually captured in this map. At the end of 2019, there were very few places where he could enter autonomously and on equal terms with other customers. And even to get to these places, he first had to overcome other accessibility barriers. To begin with, the sidewalks are not accessible. At various points, Escalante's sidewalks are broken, too narrow, uneven or have obstacles or steps that impede the movement of a wheelchair.

Image
Sidewalks in Escalante



Sidewalks in Costa Rica are the responsibility of the owner of the property which they circulate. In other words, they are an extension of private property into the public space. Municipalities are responsible for the proper maintenance of sidewalks. In this case, neither the owners of the expensive buildings nor the municipality seem to care about accessibility.

If Alex manages to get around the barriers of public roads and private transport services, which also have their complications, he arrives at the dots on the map. I will not dwell too much on the red spots that are completely exclusionary for wheelchair users. Image 246 shows some examples of entrances with high steps or multiple steps that a person in a wheelchair cannot to climb.

Image 246
Examples of non-accessible places



Moving on to the gray data points, we find some places that have tried to adapt their spaces to comply with Law 7600, and yet have not followed the indications on measurements, slopes and other aspects that are necessary to ensure independent access. For example, premises that have built ramps that are too steep or too narrow.

Some venues have moderate barriers that would allow access with the support of third parties, whether accompanying persons or venue staff. Image 247, for instance, shows examples of some of these barriers, such as materials that make it difficult to roll, uneven floors, small steps and slopes.

Image 247
Examples of gray data points



Perhaps from the compulsory able-bodiedness we could think that these barriers are small or not very serious, but Alex reminds us that this is the materialization of exclusion. Alex shared an experience he had in a new place that the owners of a restaurant he loves had just opened. Alex wanted to go and try it, but ableism impeded him from doing so:

Abrieron uno nuevo que se llama... Queda super cerca. Ay, no me acuerdo cómo se llama, pero es super nuevo. Llegué y veo una grada, al puro frente, no se puede ingresar. ¡No pude ingresar! Llegué yo, la dueña me vio con toda la cara de pena... Sacaron... Un guachimán sacó una rampa de madera, y le digo yo: amigo, yo no voy a pasar por ahí porque eso está a punto de que se reviente. Además, le digo yo: está bien, yo puedo pasar porque ando en una silla manual, pero además iba ir con una amiga que ya estaba por llegar en una silla de ruedas eléctrica. Esa persona no podía pasar por ahí, se quebraba esa rampa! Le dije yo [a la dueña]: tranquila, yo entiendo. Voy a ir a otro restaurante que quedaba como... por dicha hay muchos en esa zona. Y yo se que ese sí es accesible. "¡Ay qué pena, y no sé qué!" Pero no creo que hayan hecho nada para resolverlo⁴⁰² (Alex, in discussion with the author, November 9, 2019).

⁴⁰² Free translation: They opened a new place called.... It's super close. Oh, I don't remember its name, but it's super new. I got there and I saw a step, at the very front, it's impossible to enter. I couldn't enter! I arrived, the owner saw me with a pitiful face... They took out... A guard in the street pulled out a wooden ramp, and I said to him: buddy, I'm not going to go on that thing because it's about to break. Besides, I told him: okay, say I can go over because I'm in a manual chair, but I was also waiting for a friend who was about to arrive in an electric

Other premises marked in gray have adapted their entrances so that a person in a wheelchair can enter autonomously, but inside the establishment it is possible to observe structural barriers that limit free movement in conditions of autonomy. In this case, we find what collectives of people with disabilities have denounced as "simulated inclusion", a false inclusion in which a space is projected as if it were accessible, when in reality it reproduces the ableist segregation and hierarchization of bodies. Perhaps compulsory able-bodiedness make us think that adapting a section of the commerce is enough. However, this situation is problematic because it establishes a difference in access for people with disabilities. Although the business may argue that it complies with Law 7600, and guarantees accessibility, the truth is that there is a hierarchization in the use of space, which, according to Alex, fissures the discourse of inclusion. An example of this can be seen in image 248, which shows a restaurant where a step and a wall prevent a person in a wheelchair from entering. Next to it, the restaurant has a window that sells take-out food. In this sense, people in wheelchairs cannot enjoy this restaurant autonomously, but they are included as potential customers who may buy their products to take away.

Image 248
Non-accessible entrance and take-out window



In this city, mobility is conceived from the perspective of vehicles, and is trapped in an ableist vision that does not care about people with disabilities. Image 249 shows with cruelty and irony this reality:

wheelchair. That person could not pass through that thing, that ramp would have broken! I told her [the owner]: don't worry, I understand. I'm going to go to another restaurant that was like... because there are many in that area. And I know that one is accessible. "I'm so sorry, and all that"... But I don't think they've done anything to solve it.

Image 249
Accessible parking, exclusionary buildings



The law requires municipalities, public institutions and private establishments to designate parking spaces for people with disabilities. Alex specifies that not only people with disabilities make use of these spaces, but they are also available for pregnant women and older ly people. Not all public and private spaces comply with Law 7600, but this street in Escalante does. In the background, we see a winery that sells imported products, which is completely inaccessible for a person in a wheelchair. I see this image and I think again of the slogan at the entrance of the queer designed tower of this neighborhood: We are not bigger than our context. A phrase that dictates differentiated sentences for every body. What message does Escalante give to people with disabilities? What is the size of their lives if this is their context?

Finally, an example of a green data point. This place, at least from what we can see from the street, seems to guarantee accessibility. I do not know if there are structural barriers inside that limit the movement for people in wheelchairs, and I do not know if there are barriers for other people with disabilities. However, it is one of the few places that does not discriminate from the entrance alone.

Image 250
Example of green data point



Alex points out that the entrance is only the first obstacle. Some places, for example, have ramps but not the space between the furniture for a wheelchair to move around. Others have tables with designs that collide with wheelchairs. Alex believes that there is a generalized perception that minimizes the importance of adapting spaces, as they consider that the population of people with disabilities is very small:

La cuestión es que incluso algo así accesible no está pensado para una población que cada vez crece más, que es la población de personas con discapacidad. Hay un espacio para personas con discapacidad, dos espacios... Y qué pasa si vienen tres personas en silla de ruedas de repente? ¡Ah, no! ¡Eso nunca lo vamos a pensar!⁴⁰³ (Alex, in discussion with the author, November 9, 2019).

This ableist perception highlights the relations of domination that are so normalized in our culture, where it is unthinkable that several customers with disabilities arrive simultaneously at a store. It is a denial of their agency, the impossibility of conceiving their autonomy, and the resistance to recognize them as equals in a space designed by compulsory able-bodiedness.

Furthermore, Alex pointed out that some of those red spots that have steps at the entrance, sometimes have portable ramps that can be taken out and set up when a person using a wheelchair arrives. He found out about this one time when he arrived at a restaurant, saw the steps and was about to turn around, when a staff member came out from inside and told him that they would bring the ramp so that he could enter right away. Alex felt grateful and happy to be able to experience this new place. However, the restaurant did not indicate that there was a ramp, or that it was accessible for people with disabilities. Had the worker not seen it from the inside, Alex might well have left without even knowing that there was a portable ramp in that place.

In this sense, the question arises: why are the ramps not fixed at the entrance? Why are they not part of the space? Why is it something that is kept in the storage room and taken out only when someone asks to enter? Why are these accessibility resources not visible, as the rainbow flags are visible those businesses that call themselves inclusive? It seems that here we hit another boundary of visibility politics. In spaces like Escalante, we find a very specific (and restricted) type of inclusion. It is a space that celebrates the diversity that is compatible with the neoliberal project and its subjects, entrepreneurs of themselves, who contribute to capital. In the age of neoliberal inclusion, an Inclusive business certification such as those provided by the Diverse Chamber of Commerce can even be a marketing device to attract certain target populations. Adaptations, on the other hand, are a constant

⁴⁰³ Free translation: The issue is that even something this accessibility is not designed for a population that is increasingly growing, which is the population of people with disabilities. There is one space for people with disabilities, two spaces.... And what happens if three people in wheelchairs suddenly come? Ah, no, we will never think about that!

reminder that not everyone enjoys the city in the same way. Even more, adaptations may result in the place starting to fill up with bodies that do not comply with the ableist and colonial model of beauty, with subjects that do not adapt to normality. Inclusion, then, is tolerated as long as it does not discomfort or disturb the subjects for whom the space (including its adaptations) is intended. Compulsory able-bodiedness is also that mandate of discretion, that instead of adapting spaces, demands that people with disabilities adapt their needs, their bodies and their practices to the normativity of the coloniality of ability.

8.2.2. Right to admission reserved: who is allowed in a gay bar?

Compulsory ableism imposes barriers not only in Escalante's gay-friendly restaurants, but also in the spaces that champion inclusivity, the gay bars. Gay bars in San Jose are supposed to be "safe spaces" for non-heterosexual populations. This commonsense idea assumes that in a gay bar, queer people can hang out and freely express their gender and sexuality. But what does it really mean for a space to be safe? For whom is it safe? How is that safety constructed? There are several possible approaches to these questions. For example, throughout the fieldwork, trans* and lesbian people told me that they do not feel comfortable in many of the gay bars in the city, which they describe as hypermasculine spaces that do not challenge patriarchal domination. However, in this section I will focus on another way to explore these questions, and, in dialogue with activists Alex Vásquez and Felipe Guzman, I try to answer another one: Who can enter a gay bar?

The idea of the gay bar as a safe space seems to fall back on a notion of safety understood as a space free of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. This is undoubtedly important, but it is a rather contracted version of what constitutes risk and oppression. It thinks of the queer subject as traversed exclusively by the oppression caused by heteronormativity. This single-issue understanding of oppression leads us to propose single-issue solutions to insecurity, which provide protection against homophobia, but neglect other forms of exclusion and violence that many queer people also face.

Trying to problematize this restrictive notion of safety, I asked Alex Vásquez what a safe space would be for him:

Un espacio seguro es un espacio donde se conozca el tema de derechos humanos en general, y específicamente adaptados a mi situación de vida. Entonces, porque de nuevo, puedo ir a un espacio seguro LGBTQ+, sentirme seguro a nivel de mi sexualidad, pero no me siento seguro a nivel de mi discapacidad. He ido a muchos espacios "seguros" LGBTQ+ donde terminan teniendo que alzarme para poder subir gradas. Y

pues, qué tan seguro es, entonces, al final. Aquí, en Costa Rica, me ha costado mucho conseguir...⁴⁰⁴ (Alex, in discussion with the author, November 9, 2019).

Likewise, Alex says that in spaces that are supposed to be safe for people with disabilities, he has encountered rejection because of his sexuality. His experience accounts for the problem that results from the fragmentation and compartmentalization of struggles, even those that adopt a whitewashed version of intersectionality understood as a sum of identities, and not the imbrication of oppressions. Identity politics may distort the focus of intersectionality, leaving out of the picture the indissolubility of oppressions. When Alex suffers discrimination on the street, at the entrance of a gay bar, or in Escalante, he suffers it as a queer person with disabilities. He cannot shake off one category and put it on pause while the other is salient, because as he explains, is not something that can be disassembled. He is a gay person with disabilities, and what he is talking about is not the categories he identifies with, but the violence he suffers for being who he is.

Alex had already made it clear that the street is not a safe place for him. As we saw, he faces a series of barriers that limit his movement, but he also faces other forms of violence. He resents the condescending treatment and pity he encounters when he goes out. He says that strangers often stop him on the street and ask him if they can pray for him. With sorrow, he tells me that he understands their good intentions, but he does not want to be an object of redemption for others. When it is not pity, what he finds is objectification. He describes a number of painful situations he has faced in the public space.

Una vez iba caminando por media calle con mi hermano, él me iba empujando la silla de ruedas, y una señora... En este caso no era católica, era Testigo de Jehová. Y le dijo a mi hermano que algún... Ni siquiera me vio a los ojos. Se refirió siempre a mi hermano. Y esa es otra cosa que siempre pasa. En tiendas y en otras cosas. En tiendas muchas veces asumen y hablan con mis papás o hablan con mis hermanos, o con quien yo ande. Nunca conmigo, porque yo no soy el que vengo a comprar, yo no produzco dinero. Para ellos yo no produzco dinero. Este... Eso es clásico, además. Pero en fin. Esta señora le dijo a mi hermano que algún día Dios le iba a quitar este sufrimiento. Y fue tan impactante para mí, porque, primero, no me habló a mí, no era mi sufrimiento. Era el sufrimiento de mi hermano de tenerme a mí, como cruz, digamos⁴⁰⁵. (Alex, in discussion with the author, November 9, 2019).

⁴⁰⁴ Free translation: A safe space is a space where people know about human rights in general, and specifically adapted to my life situation. Then again, I can go to an LGBT+ safe space, feel safe in terms of my sexuality, but I don't feel safe in terms of my disability. I've been to a lot of LGBT+ "safe" spaces where they end up having to lift me up in order to get upstairs. And well, how safe is it, then, in the end. Here, in Costa Rica, I've had a hard time finding a safe space.

⁴⁰⁵ Free translation: One time I was walking down the street with my brother, he was pushing my wheelchair, and a lady.... In this case she wasn't a Catholic, she was a Jehovah's Witness. And she told my brother that some.... She didn't even look me in the eye. She always referred to my brother. And that's another thing that happens all the time. In stores and in other places. In stores a lot of times they make assumptions, and they talk to my parents or they talk to my brothers, or whoever else that is with me. Never with me, because I'm not the

The level of violence in this episode of objectification left me speechless. Alex reflects on how capitalism and ableism overlap, and in this case are expressed through a Christian morality that sees his existence as a burden to others. The (misguided) perception that a person like Alex does not produce money makes him lose his value for society. He is not even worthy of interlocution, his agency is completely cancelled, to the point that a stranger dared to reduce his existence to a burden of suffering for others, and expressed it right to his face.

Yet, in this enabling city, enclosed spaces do not offer security either. Alex recounts the difficulties he faces when looking for a place for leisure or for a date:

La gente me pregunta que por qué, cuando proponen salir conmigo a algún lugar, yo siempre elijo el mall. O sea, no es porque tampoco me fascina el mall. Me gusta mucho y todo, pero es porque de verdad cumple con la Ley 7600. En gran manera, por lo menos. Porque es un espacio plano, porque puedo empujarme a mí mismo, no necesito que alguien más me lleve. Entonces cuando algún hombre me pide salir con él, que no sucede tantas veces, pero si sucede, prefiero ir a un mall, verdad. Para mí es el mejor espacio, a nivel de discapacidad. A nivel de sexualidad tal vez no tanto. Porque, bueno, no hay mucha sexualidad que explorar en un mall. O bueno, tal vez sí. Tal vez sí⁴⁰⁶. (Alex, in discussion with the author, November 9, 2019).

Alex's field of action is limited by the accessibility barriers that prevent his free and autonomous movement. The perennial debt of the State to ensure compliance with Law 7600, which decrees the obligation to ensure the accessibility of spaces for people with disabilities, and the unwillingness of private companies to comply with this law, limits the autonomy and restricts the world in which people with disabilities can live. Alex is forced to choose between taking a date to a space where his sexuality will not be frowned upon, with the understanding that he will require assistance, either from his date or a third party, or going to a place that, like most spaces, is configured by heteronormativity, but where he could enjoy autonomy. The balance ends up tipping towards the latter, even though it is not Alex's place of preference. That is, his choice is not free, it is not based on where he wants to go, but on where he can go.

In this line, with pain and anger, Alex shared an experience to illustrate the tensions that being a queer person with a disability entails:

one who comes to buy, I don't produce money. For them I don't produce money. This... This is classic. But anyway. This lady told my brother that someday God was going to take this suffering away from him. And it was so shocking for me, because, first of all, she didn't talk to me, it wasn't my suffering she was referring. It was my brother's suffering of having me as a cross, let's say.

⁴⁰⁶ Free translation: People ask me why, when they invite me to go out, I always choose the mall. I mean, it's not like I love the mall either. I like it a lot and stuff, but it's because it really complies with Law 7600. In a major way, at least. Because it's a flat space, because I can push myself, I don't need someone else to carry me. So when a guy asks me to go out with him, which doesn't happen that often, but it does happen, I'd rather go to a mall, you see. For me it's the best space, regarding disability. Regarding sexuality, maybe not so much. Because, well, there's not a lot of sexuality to explore in a mall. Or well, maybe there is. Maybe there is.

Y es que además, en un bar a veces ya no es algo infraestructural, sino social. Porque me acuerdo que en el 2014, cuando cumplí 18 años, y fui a Venue, cuando era frente a Taco Bell, verdad. Lo que tenían era un montacargas. [Respira hondo] Todo bien, logré subir con el montacargas, en medio de cervezas y cajas. Pero, una vez que llegué ahí, empecé a hacerme ojitos de coqueteo con otro muchacho, y no sé qué, y no sé cuánto. Llegó el muchacho hasta aquí, yo dije: "¡ya la hice! ¡Todo bien!" Y me empezó a hacer así [palmaditas en la cabeza]: "¿Qué hace un niño aquí?" ¡Eso fue lo que me preguntó! Y yo: bueno, primero que todo ¡tengo 18 años! [Sacude la cabeza] ¿Para qué voy a estar yendo a un lugar donde no me voy a sentir cómodo? Porque al final mi sexualidad se interconecta con mi discapacidad en muchos niveles, que son incomprensibles para muchas personas⁴⁰⁷ (Alex, in discussion with the author, November 9, 2019).

Alex's anecdote encapsulates various forms of compulsory able-bodiedness. Venue was a very popular gay club at the time the situation occurred. All bars and clubs are supposed to comply with Law 7600, but we have already seen that this is not enforced. This club tries to get around the liabilities by means of a freight lift. The metaphor is obscene. In order to enter the club, Alex was lifted up along with boxes and bottles, as if he were just another object. Freight lift in Spanish is called "montacargas", literally a lift for loads. Load also has that sense of burden, which is what Alex's presence meant at that moment for that club.

The exclusionary ableism of architecture, which causes a gay guy in a wheelchair to be treated as a load in order to enter a "safe space", meets here with the compulsory able-bodiedness of our culture, where a gay man cannot conceive of the existence of another gay man whose body does not conform to the ableist standards. Compulsory able-bodiedness is a system of domination that produces conditions of discrimination, stigma and exclusion for people whose bodies do not meet the standards defined as normal in the capitalist-racist-patriarchal world system.

McRuer observes that compulsory able-bodiedness refers to a culture that views disability in terms of lack or imperfection. Disability is always assumed as a burden, as something that people deep down would like to change. Questions like "In the end, wouldn't you rather be hearing?", always have a pre-elaborated answer from the able-bodied perspective.

The culture asking such questions assumes in advance that we all agree: able-bodied identities, able bodied perspectives are preferable and what we all, collectively, are aiming for. A system of compulsory able-bodiedness repeatedly demands that people

⁴⁰⁷ Free translation: And also, in a bar sometimes it's no longer something infrastructural, but social. Because I remember in 2014, when I turned 18, and I went to Venue [a gay club], when it was located in front of Taco Bell, right. What they had was a freight lift. [Takes a deep breath] All right, I made it up using the freight lift, in the middle of bottles of beer and boxes. But, once I got up there, I started making eye contact with another guy, and all that. The guy got here, I said: "This is it! All right!" And he started doing this [patting in the head]: "What's a child doing here?", that's what he asked me! And I said: "well, first of all, I'm 18 years old!" [shakes his head] Why am I going to go to a place where I'm not going to feel comfortable? Because in the end my sexuality is interconnected with my disability on many levels, which are incomprehensible to many people.

with disabilities embody for others an affirmative answer to the unspoken question, "Yes, but in the end, wouldn't you rather be more like me?" (McRuer 2006, 9)

We can draw a line between the violence of the religious lady who told Alex's brother that God was going to free him from that burden and the gay club that tells Alex that his space is amongst the loads; between Escalante's restaurant that wanted Alex to enter using a dodgy ramp, and the gay guy who infantilizes him with pats on the head. The line is the system of compulsory able-bodiedness. The line is the coloniality of ability.

Given the daily situations of exclusion that Alex described, I asked him if there was a bar or club where he could feel safe:

Mar: Entonces digamos, hay algún bar LGBTI que vos digás...

Alex: ¡No!

Mar: ¿Ni uno?

Alex: No. Bueno, yo dejé de ir a bares desde el 2015. Es pesado. A nivel de Ley 7600 pues sí habían bares que lo lograban, pero de nuevo, ¿qué iba yo a ir a hacer, rodeado de ese montón de heterosexuales cogiendo entre sí? O sea, mejor, mejor me quedo en mi casa viendo Netflix. U otras cosas, ¡jaja! Y en bares gays me sentía siempre como con, con la inquietud de que, ok, me subieron alzando la silla, porque habían gradas, perfecto. ¿Y si yo me quiero ir en cualquier momento? ¿Y si tiembla? ¿Qué hago? ¿Qué hago, o sea, qué hago? O sea, no, al final era una tensión estar en un bar que de nuevo, mejor me quedaba en mi casa⁴⁰⁸ (Alex, in discussion with the author, November 9, 2019).

He then corrected himself and mentioned La Avispa, a club that, although not his favorite atmosphere, is one place he can enter autonomously and without being treated as a burden. But outside of that, he states that overall, they do not care about ensuring his safety and inclusion. Since the landscape had changed a bit between 2015 and 2019, I proposed him to do another mapping exercise on gay bars and clubs, in a similar line of Escalante's mapping.

Since we already knew that these would be largely inaccessible for Alex, we agreed that I would take care of the journey, guided by the criteria that he considered important to observe. We also agreed to invite our mutual friend Felipe Guzman, activist for LGBTI human rights and for the response to HIV, who we felt could be a key informant on the gay scene and culture in San Jose. We also considered

⁴⁰⁸ Free translation: Mar: So let's see, are there any LGBTI bars that you say...? / Alex: No! / Mar: Not one? / Alex: No. Well, I stopped going to bars since 2015. It's heavy. Regarding the Law 7600, there were bars that did alright, but then again, what was I going to do, surrounded by a bunch of heterosexuals fucking each other? I mean, I'd rather, I'd rather stay at home watching Netflix. Or other things, ha ha! And in gay bars I always felt like with, with the concern that, ok, they lifted up my wheelchair, because there were stairs, perfect. What if I want to leave at any moment? What if there's an earthquake? What do I do? What do I do, I mean, what do I do? I mean, no, in the end it was such a stress to be in a bar that again, it was better to stay at home.

that Felipe could be an important interlocutor, being a sensitive and committed ally to the struggles of people with disabilities.

Felipe accepted the proposal to do a *parcour*/interview through different gay bars and clubs in the city. In this *parcour*/interview, Felipe shared his reflections from his experience as a client of these bars, and as a gay activist as part of the participant observation in those spaces. In addition, along the night I conducted informal interviews with some of his friends we met in the bars and clubs.

The route and stops were defined by Felipe, who selected the spaces that were most popular among his gay circles at the time. We visited 7 venues, which is not the totality, but it is a considerable sample of the gay scene in San Jose. An important consideration was money, as some places charge a cover fee that gives access to an open bar. Since I offered to pay the cover for both us, but my budget was limited, we were only able to include one of these clubs in the tour. Another consideration was time, since the time it took to observe each place, plus the time required for transportation, restricted the number of places we could visit in one night. The *parcour*/interview took place on November 23, 2019. I subsequently visited another site on my own to complement the observation.

In dialogue with Alex and Felipe, we decided on the categories to be observed. We were primarily interested in ableism, but we also shared a concern about the imbrication with systems such as class, race and gender. I brought up a reflection that came up in conversation about the barriers that trans women and trans* people generally encounter in bars. Kerlyn reflects on an experience she had in 2017 at a supposedly "gay-friendly" nightclub:

...son como muy clasistas. Recién antes de echarnos, a un muchacho que se veía medio chusmón, con una novia, no lo dejaron entrar. Y el mae le decía: "¿pero por qué?" Dicen: "porque nos reservamos el derecho de admisión". Y obviamente es porque se veía chusma. Después del muchacho seguíamos nosotras y él nos dijo lo mismo. "Por hoy, no las..." Nos trató en femenino, pero es discriminación igual. "Por hoy no las puedo dejar pasar". O sea, no nos deja pasar por ningún motivo en específico, por discriminación⁴⁰⁹.

Kerlyn clearly points out the complexities of the interweaving of oppressions. In that club it was not enough to be trans*. The space is not "friendly" to just any queer person, because that friendliness is not really determined by sexuality and gender (or not exclusively), but is conditionally determined by class status.

⁴⁰⁹ Free translation: ...they are like really classist. Just before they kicked us out, there was a guy who looked a bit like a riffraff, with his girlfriend, and they wouldn't let him in. And the guy asked him: "but why?" The guard said: "because we reserve the right of admission". And obviously it's because he looked like a riffraff. After the guy, we were next in line and the guard told us the same thing. "For today, you are not allowed...". He treated us with feminine pronouns, but it's discrimination all the same. "For today I can't let you in". In other words, he won't let us in for any specific reason, just because of discrimination.

Taking this in mind, we agreed to observe at least 4 criteria: accessibility, prices, aesthetics of the space and composition of the clientele. We used a voice recorder to document some of our dialogues, and we both took pictures of the spaces with our cell phones. On November 24, Felipe and I had a second interview to go over the aspects that each of us had observed during the night.

Table 6 summarizes the main results of this observation:

Table 6
Observation in gay bars and clubs

Name of bar/club	Location	Accessibility	Price range	Aesthetics	Composition of the clientele
Neon Ice	Escalante	Accessible for wheelchair users, including the bathroom	Average	The decorations depict a homonormative, ableist ideal of beauty. Icons on bathroom door attempts to reflect the diversity of bodies.	White, queer young people, from middle and upper classes.
POPPOP*	La California	Completely inaccessible to wheelchair users.	Average	Stylization of precariousness.	Mostly heterosexual couples, white, heavily intoxicated.
Venue	La California	Completely inaccessible to wheelchair users.	Given the experiences of discrimination that Alex had suffered in the space, we decided not to enter. We observed the entrance from the street, only to find that, now on a new location, they still have no ramp.		
BOMBOM	Steinvorth building	Access ramp. Wooden floor (although not an intentional adaptation, they allow deaf people to feel the music's vibrations). VIP space inaccessible to wheelchair users	Average	Neon lights with feminized sexy words. Attempts to challenge gender binarism, however, it conveys a homonormative vibe.	Mostly cisgender, white, fit and young gay men, from middle and upper classes.
El 13	South of downtown San José	Ground floor accessible for wheelchair users, second floor inaccessible.	Expensive	Kitch. It tries to imitate the aesthetics of the popular classes, but with hipster style.	The night we went there: primarily middle and upper class cisgender gay men. Other events may attract more lesbians or even heterosexual people.
El Castillo [El 14]	South of downtown San José	Accessible for wheelchair users, including the bathroom	Low cost. Offers beer and shot promos	It preserves the working-class aesthetic of the tavern it was before it was taken by a queer public. Plays popular Latin-American music.	Diverse in terms of age, gender, class and race. Mainly queer people.
El Teatro	South of downtown San José	Completely inaccessible to wheelchair users.	Expensive cover for an open bar	Discotheque aesthetics, lots of lights, different atmospheres, stage with a very professional drag show.	Diverse in terms of age and gender. Mostly queer people.
La Avispa	Downtown San José	Accessible. Entrance ramp a little steep.	Low cost. Offers beer and drink promos	Discotheque aesthetics. Celebration of the rainbow flag. Plays popular Latin-American music.	Diverse in terms of age, gender, class and race. Has special events for lesbians and LGBTIQ+ seniors.

In sum, the observation of these bars and clubs allowed us to identify different barriers that restrict access to "safe spaces". On the one hand, we observed that the composition of the clientele at these places was overwhelmingly cis-male. A route through these bars leaves us wondering where are women, trans* people, gender dissidents? Moreover, it is important to ask why is it that those people do not approach these "safe spaces"? What is it about them that attracts gay homonormative clients (Milton, in discussion with the author, November 23, 2019) and repels other ways of living and embodying sexual/gender dissidence?

In this sense, the case of La Avispa deserves a brief mention because it stands out among the rest. La Avispa was recurrently mentioned by several of the participants in our dialogs. Alex referred to it as the only queer bar he had been able to visit to autonomously. It was also mentioned in informal interviews with lesbian feminist activists as a safe space for women. In the visits I conducted, I was able to observe the greatest diversity among its customers: people of various genders, of a very wide age range (as opposed to the young crowds in the other bars and clubs). José and Jacob, and several trans* and lesbian migrants mentioned it as a place they like to go out to. In fact, La Avispa is currently a source of employability for migrants and queer asylum seekers.

Perhaps the difference lies in the fact that La Avispa is a club with a militant history, that has been concerned for decades with creating a safe space for LGBTIQ+ people. La Avispa is an iconic nightclub in Costa Rica, which has been around for more than 40 years. Its owner, Ana Vega, is a respected figure in lesbian and LGBTIQ+ activism. In the 80s and 90s, Vega was concerned with creating a safe space for gay people and especially lesbians, who did not feel as comfortable in hyper-masculine spaces. In times of intense and violent police raids, they devised a system with a light that would turn on when the police arrived, so that people in the dance floor would switch partners, and pretend to be straight couples (Vega, in discussion with the author, August 26, 2021). The relationship with trans* people has been a bit more tense. Some of their security guards have been denounced for transphobic behavior, and have been the protagonists of shameful acts of transphobia in relation to the use of the bathrooms. However, it is important to recognize that Ana Vega has been open to dialogue, she sat down to listen to what we had to say, and has made an important effort to train the club's staff, and take concrete actions to prevent these situations from ever happening again. Today, we can observe trans women enjoying women's nights together with lesbians and non-binary people

Vega has also been concerned with trying to keep prices affordable at the club, and says she does not want the space to become elitist (Vega, in discussion with the author, August 26, 2021). La Avispa is also a point of inter-regional meeting and exchange, like few others in San José. In informal interviews I spoke with people from rural areas who travel from their villages to spend a night at this club. For all

these reasons, La Avispa tends to attract a diverse public in terms of class, gender and race. Without romanticizing the space, as there is clearly much work to be done, this club is an exceptional project in San José, which, despite being a business within the market, seeks to prevent neoliberal logic from absorbing its concern for creating a safe space.

* The case of POPPOP deserves a mention because it condenses a series of exclusionary barriers that exemplify the imbrication of oppressions upon which the privileges of the #EliteGay are sustained. After the failed attempt at queer regeneration in the Red-light District, POPPOP moved to the La California neighborhood, an area full of bars and nightclubs. The space maintains its trashy aesthetics, in that kind of stylization of decadence. Outside and along the foyer leading to the dance floor, the walls and ceiling are completely covered with shredded garbage bags. Inside, a wall lined with kraft paper invites customers to leave their sentiments or advertising. For example, we find the business card of the owner of the place, as well as advertising for Violeta, a feminist beer that uses Marsha P. Johnson's image as its logo.

Image 251
Chaves' business card

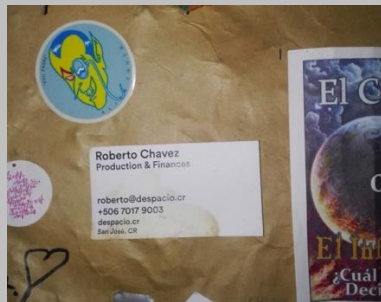


Image 252
Marsha P. Johnson feminist beer



The entrance is completely exclusionary for wheelchair users. There are several stairs leading into the club.

On our way out, Felipe points me to a poster with a logo that looks like that of Chiquita Banana, a brand that was linked for decades to the transnational United Fruit Company. Felipe explains the context: at the beginning, this bar was not called POPPOP. When they moved, Chaves opened this bar under another name: Chikita, and used a logo that imitated the iconography of that brand. However, he faced legal issues over the use of the image, so he was forced to rename the bar like his former regeneration project: POPPOP.

Images 253
Chikita banana



Source: POPPOP Facebook Page

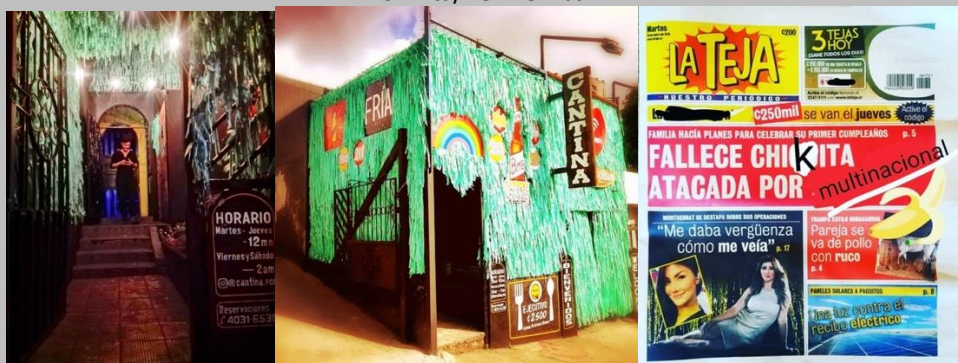
Felipe gets upset when he tells me all this. He says he feels disgust and indignation. I ask him how he interprets the choice of that name, we both agree that it is a humorous allegory to the penis. However, Chikita is not just any name, Chiquita is a signifier that carries a very heavy history in a country that was

a banana republic. The trace of violence and dispossession that transnational corporations like the United Fruit Company have left in this country is something that makes it difficult to swallow an image of Chikita. That Chikita banana is not just any phallus, it is the rapist phallus of coloniality. The United Fruit Company has been accused of complicity with the U.S. imperialist project, that has claimed thousands of lives in Central America. It is a corporation that has been denounced for its practices that are harmful to the environment. It has also been strongly questioned for its disregard for workers' rights, and for taking advantage of the precariousness of rural areas to implement inhumane and exploitative working conditions. It has been an accomplice and executor of practices of persecution and anti-union repression. And furthermore, like I discussed in chapter 2, this company sustained profoundly racist practices in its banana enclaves, where it perpetuated a racial division of labor, and negotiated with the government the importation of Afro-Caribbean and Asian workers to work under conditions that were very close to slavery. In short, it is a name that evokes a heavy necropolitical history.

Felipe tells me that he would like to think that there is some criticism in the choice of this name, or some attempt to satirize power, but he confesses that unfortunately his reading is otherwise. There was no allusion to history at any time, the racist violence was never problematized, nor was there a discourse that commemorated the memory of the resistance that impoverished and racialized workers waged against that transnational monster. The only thing that became visible in their imagery was the phallic metaphor that alluded to the banana. Thus, Felipe interprets that this regrettable choice of name not only made invisible the history of racist violence, but also stylized the image that has caused so much pain and death in the country.

Against this backdrop, the garbage bag decoration that already made me uneasy took on a whole new meaning. Upon entering, I had felt uncomfortable seeing so much plastic and thinking about its environmental footprint. All around the block I noticed little plastic strips coming off the walls, which reminded me of Fabiola's words when she picked up bits of plastic she found on the street, warning me that all of it would end up in the sea. I was also uncomfortable with the garbage bag as a decoration, thinking that it is the material that many people use to build their fragile handmade dwellings in this neighborhood. Now with this contextualization I was also thinking about the bananas in the plantations, covered with plastic to protect them from pests. Once again POPPOP aesthetic imitates precariousness but stylizes it.

Images 254
Chikita/POPPOP bar



Source: POPPOP Facebook Page

When the transnational forced Chaves to change the club's name and stop using its logo, the image on the right was published on the club's Facebook page. It is a satire constructed by superimposing text on a front page of the newspaper Diario Extra (a conservative, misogynist and homophobic tabloid). The new text reads: "Chikita dies attacked by multinational", and squashes the headline of the original news that referred to the death of a girl ("chiquita" means girl in Costa Rica) who was attacked by something

we can no longer read. Once again the trivialization of death and the pain of others, comparing a legal dispute over the use of an image with the tragic death of a little girl.

McRuer invites us to “think, after all, of how many institutions in our culture are showcases for able-bodied performance” (McRuer 2006, 9). The results of these observational exercises lead us to think of gay bars like institutions of able-bodied performances too, where spaces invite and celebrate able-bodieds, while segregating, hiding or outright excluding other bodies. Few queer “safe spaces” guarantee full accessibility in autonomous conditions for wheelchair users. Little has changed since Alex gave up going to bars in 2015. Actually, a lot has changed, but this has not resulted in a concern for building accessible spaces for the diversity of queer corporealities. Some bars and clubs have moved to new neighborhoods, remodeled or expanded their facilities, that is, improved their premises, and yet these improvements reflect the system of compulsory able-bodiedness from which LGBTIQ+ spaces are unable (or unwilling) to escape.

Image 255
Queer disabled access now



Source: Dandy Doodlez art

The case of accessibility is perhaps one of the clearest examples we have in Costa Rica about the limits of transformations by legal means. This is not to say that it is not important to have regulations that dictate minimum guidelines that every building should comply with as a first step to ensure accessibility. However, this law, dating back to 1996 (it is practically the same age as Alex), has not been enforced in many areas of the city. Even today, different businesses and public institutions (including our University of Costa Rica), construct ableist and exclusionary structures, without major

consequences. There are no effective control mechanisms, and big capital easily finds loopholes to circumvent the law. Law 7600, loaded with good intentions, depends on the commitment and sensitivity of those who design, build and finance the buildings.

...cuando entro a un establecimiento y no tienen rampas, tienen gradas, de una vez lo que me dice todo el mundo es: "¡pero pones un recurso de amparo!". Pero, de ser así tengo que poner recursos de amparo todos los días de mi vida, porque todos los días de mi vida me encuentro un establecimiento así. Y eso requiere de recursos económicos que hasta yo, teniendo un padre que es abogado, ni siquiera con eso lo logro. Porque él tiene su propio trabajo, él no va a estar poniendo recursos de amparo a cada establecimiento que yo le diga. Pero, de nuevo, es depositarme la responsabilidad a mí. Porque no, el mismo gobierno no se encarga de ser proactivo en estos casos⁴¹⁰ (Alex, in discussion with the author, November 9, 2019).

Alex claims that people always delegate to him the responsibility of educating the ableist society, and of enforcing the law in the countless businesses that exclude him. As he points out, trying to assert his rights is an exhausting, expensive and re-victimizing exercise, and even if he wanted to do so, he would not have enough time in his life to finish filing appeals for all the places that restrict his agency and autonomy. Alex gives us back that responsibility. Creating safe and accessible spaces for people with disabilities is everyone's responsibility, the state, communities, business owners (especially those who promote themselves as inclusive), and activists (especially those who talk about human rights, equality and inclusion).

Image 256
All Welcome Disabled LGBTQ



Source: Dandy Doodlez art

⁴¹⁰ Free translation: ... whenever I enter a facility and they do not have ramps, they have stairs, immediately what everybody tells me is: "but file an appeal in the grounds of unconstitutionality!". But, if that is the case, I would have to file an appeal every day of my life, because every day of my life I find a facility like that. And that requires economic resources that even I, having a father who is a lawyer, cannot afford. Because he has his own job, he is not going to be filing appeals to every establishment that I tell him to. But, again, it is putting the responsibility on me. Because no, the government itself does not take care of being proactive in these cases.

Talking with Alex, several questions confronted me, my university and my partners in activism: How is it that we do not connect our struggles? How is it that we study, document, analyze and criticize exclusion, but our universities, our publications, our research and our classrooms are still ableist, exclusionary and violent? Why is there no movement in the progressive sectors to support people with disabilities and their struggles? Why is it that we go to a gay bar looking for a safe space, see that there is no ramp, and I do nothing about it? Why is it that this does not mobilize those of us who incarnate able bodies? Just because we, compulsory able-bodied homocitizens do not need a ramp.

There are no safe spaces, because in Alex's words: "aquí el respeto es basado en lástima. En que eres un adefecio médico⁴¹¹". It seems to be a continuity of compulsory able-bodiedness. Perhaps most people would not dare to launch a belittling judgment like that of the Jehovah's Witness lady in the story Alex shared, but somehow the message remains the same: that people with disabilities are a burden, a hindrance, a hassle.

An expansive notion of access, says McRuer, should be at work in the counter globalization movements (McRuer 2006, 4). I return to the contributions of Grech (2015), Núñez (2020) and Ferrari (2020) on the coloniality of capacity. History has shown us that the most powerful way to combat coloniality is the community. Community understood not as a group of people living in a geographical space, much less as that light form that neoliberal normativity has adopted to group and homogenize quite diverse sectors that in reality have few links with each other.

As communitarian psychologist Maritza Montero states: Cuando hablamos de comunidad no nos referimos a grupos homogéneos, pero sí a grupos compuestos por individuos que comparten conocimientos, sentimientos, necesidades, deseos, proyectos, cuya atención beneficiará al colectivo, beneficiando así a sus miembros⁴¹² (Montero 2004, 97).

The notion of community is one of those concepts that have been overused and have become diffuse, even empty. Authors such as Montero (2004) and Krause (2001) analyze the tensions between the different theoretical positions that defend or discard territoriality. The most orthodox positions circumscribe the community to a territory. More postmodern approaches dissociate themselves from the territory, but run the risk of calling any group of people who meet a characteristic or share an identity a community.

⁴¹¹ Free translation: here respect is based on pity. You're a medical hideous case.

⁴¹² Free translation: When we speak of community, we do not refer to homogeneous groups, but to groups composed of individuals who share knowledge, feelings, needs, desires, projects, whose attention will benefit the collective, thus benefiting its members.

However, as Montero rightly points out, community is not something defined by the external eye of the researcher. Rather, the community would be something that reveals itself to the researcher:

La comunidad es, además, un grupo social histórico, que refleja una cultura preexistente al investigador; que posee una cierta organización, cuyos grados varían según el caso, con intereses y necesidades compartidos; que tiene su propia vida, en la cual concurre una pluralidad de vidas provenientes de sus miembros; que desarrolla formas de interrelación frecuentes marcadas por la acción, la afectividad, el conocimiento y la información⁴¹³ (Montero 2004, 100).

Following this logic, in this thesis I understand community as a collectivity that shares aspects such as a common history, interests, needs, problems, expectations. In other words, a collectivity of people who share bonds. There are many types of communities, of course, and some are completely aligned with the neoliberal project (as we will see below what happens with Amon's neighbors). However, my interest is another type of community. In dialogue with the notions of community developed and defended by indigenous peoples in Abya Yala, I speak of the community in the sense of the bonds that sustain life. A community of affection that sustains existence, as Valencia (2019) points out. A community that is woven in the logic of solidarity and re-existence.

Here, again, the claim to the commons becomes important. Spaces, security, knowledge, should be accessible for everyone, and the responsibility to protect them and to tear down the walls that attempt to privatize them must be assumed by all of us. Resistance to the necropolitics that cruelly distribute life chances, the struggle for the defense of life, is necessarily a collective exercise. The dialogues with Alex made clear to me how much we still need to build a community, a community to construct an alternative biopolitics, a community to sustain life.

8.3. Police everywhere, justice nowhere

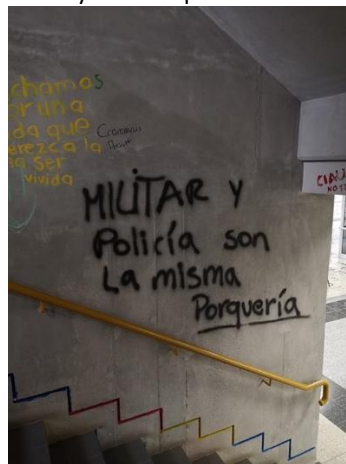
In Costa Rica there is little problematization of the institution of the police. Some social movements, such as the indigenous organizations that are recovering their territories, are aware that the police are not there to take care of them, but rather to protect the interests of capital and the state (Fernández 2022). But in the LGBTIQ+ movements, for example, it is not an issue that has been put on the table as in other latitudes. Those of us who have tried to initiate discussions on the subject have been labeled radical and anti-system. All too often I have seen groups of protesters hugging the police as a way to resolve a moment of tension, and in 2019 I even observed the same students we attended

⁴¹³ Free translation: The community is also a historical social group that reflects a culture that pre-exists the researcher; that has a certain organization, whose degrees vary according to the case, with shared interests and needs; that has its own life, in which a plurality of lives of its members concur; that develops frequent forms of interrelation marked by action, affectivity, knowledge and information.

for the effects of chemical weapons of repression, handing out lunch to the police who were still besieging the building that the students had occupied. They justified this action by saying that this would lower tensions. Something that did not work because a few hours later, those same policemen attacked them again with gas and clubs. I cannot affirm that all social movements are complacent with the police. I remember in that same demonstration a group of girls who managed to move the police cordon to the rhythm of reggaeton, shaking their butts with a force that made the officers sweat and retreat. In street demonstrations a popular slogan says "militar y policía son la misma porquería" (the military and the police are the same crap). However, it seems to be something that does not consolidate into a deep discussion about police violence.

Image 257

Tag: the military and the police are the same crap



Tag in the Faculty of Social Sciences #4, University of Costa Rica

San José is full of police. At the beginning of the fieldwork I began to record the number of police officers I observed and the geolocated point where I saw them. On the fourth day of walking the city I decided to stop, because the amount of information was becoming impossible to manage. I found police presence not only in the streets, but in several of the activities that promote inclusion in the city, where the presence of the uniformed was not only tolerated but, at times, explicitly requested and celebrated. For example, the police were part of the target audience of the ExpoBici, a convention that promoted a cyclable city, organized by the Center for Urban Sustainability. They were also present in the Chepequetas tour that I discussed in Chapter 5. The police even have a beautiful mural by the artist Munguia, a leftist conservative who was hired to embellish the Red-light District with a mural on the walls of the municipal police building.

In the 2019 observations I was particularly surprised to see the presence of police in activities that were labeled feminist, where their presence was seen, without further problematization, as something that granted safety in the space. I thought of the countless stories of police violence and abuse that I have heard from trans war survivors, I thought of the migrant women who run desperately

through the streets of San José trying to save the goods that feed their families, I thought of the many images of police beating women that I have seen in the street, I thought of the officer who three weeks earlier told me, a little embarrassed, that his colleagues had pulled a gun to the head of a deaf person in Puntarenas, because they interpreted that he was disobeying their orders... So many images of violence and police abuse made it impossible for me to swallow the feeling that the police, the police that we have today, can take care of us.

Fabiola reflects:

A veces me han pasado uno que otro chasco con, con ciertos oficiales de la fuerza pública, porque no sé si es porque lo hacen por, por que se trate de una persona como yo, este, trans, una persona, verdad, una persona trans, como yo, y entonces se han tomado la molestia y me han hecho mal... ¿como te digo? Y a veces se me viene la idea: ¡qué pereza!, digo yo. Soy una persona que tengo como 15 años de hacer este trabajo aquí en el área metropolitana, en San José, Costa Rica. La mayoría me conoce. Digo, por qué no se toman la molestia de irle a pedir a una persona que verdaderamente, o sea, que, que, que... Pero yo, que me ven trabajando, y en vez de ayudarme, en vez de... pues no sé, de ser un poquito más considerados, y utilizar un poquito más la lógica, a veces se ponen a: "¡Cédula!" Y yo les he explicado que yo, porque yo soy una persona que aquí lo que ando es la fotocopia de mi cédula, porque yo no puedo andar la cédula porque me costó muchos años para que me la dieran. ¿Ya? Tengo que cuidarla. Se me pierde, o se me quiebra, ¿quién me van a pagar esos daños? ¡Nadie! ... Mae, que digo yo, yo estoy asumiendo la responsabilidad de cada, hasta la de ellos, y sin embargo a veces como que lo hacen por una arbitrariedad, como con ganas de molestar a la gente⁴¹⁴.

Like Fabiola, most of the trans women who work on the streets of San José are clear that the police are not there to protect them. Many report physical and sexual abuse, blackmail, extortion, mockery and constant disrespect for their identity (Fournier 2017). The street is not a safe space for trans women, nor for sex workers, nor for unhoused people, nor for many other populations that do not find in law enforcement an agent of security but rather one of violence.

⁴¹⁴ Free translation: Sometimes I've had a clash or two with, with certain law enforcement officers, because I don't know if it's because they do it for, because it's a person like me, you know, trans, a person, right, a trans person, like me, and then they have bothered me and hassled me... And sometimes the thought comes to my mind: what a bummer!, I say. I am a person who has been doing this work for about 15 years here in the metropolitan area, in San José, Costa Rica. Most people know me. I mean, why don't they go to the trouble of asking a person who really, I mean, who, who, who, who...? But me, they see me working, and instead of helping me, instead of... well, I don't know, to be a little more considerate, and to use a little more logic, sometimes they start to ask me: "ID card!" And I have explained to them that I, because I am a person who carries around a photocopy of my ID card, because I cannot carry around my ID card because it took me many years to get it. You know? I have to take care of it. If I lose it, or if it breaks, who is going to pay for those damages? Nobody! ... Man, what do I say, I am assuming responsibility for everyone, even for them, and yet sometimes it seems that they do it arbitrarily, as if they want to bother people.

Image 258
November 25 March, 2019



Caption: Feeling protected by the POLICE is a privilege of class and race

I would add that it is a cisgender privilege, and one more expression of the coloniality of ability as well. Following the line denounced by this sign, in this section I analyze a project that aims to consolidate an alliance between the police and (some) citizens, in order to manage security in a neighborhood in the capital. Once again, the question that guides these pages would be: a safe neighborhood for whom?

8.3.2. "Plan cuadrante": embodying control in Barrio Amón

Amón is a complex and diverse neighborhood. Originally, like Escalante, it was a neighborhood where the elites built an urban extension for their private residences. Unlike Escalante, the composition of this neighborhood has changed over time. Today, some of the houses of wealthy families persist, testifying to the opulence that once reigned in these streets. However, these beautiful architectural structures now coexist with buildings that house the new tenants of this neighborhood: public institutions, offices, prestigious restaurants, working-class diners, bars, casinos, hotels, low-budget apartment buildings, art galleries, clubs, sex work venues and gay saunas. It is a lively neighborhood, where cars and people circulate night and day.

Sequera notes that the effects of gentrification, gratifying for the middle and upper classes, can be devastating for the working classes. As in Escalante, I would not speak exactly of gentrification in Amón neighborhood either, although it may be closer to it. I would rather say that we can observe is an organized effort by the few remaining heirs of the elite expansion of the city that happened there, in conjunction with new neighbors and businesses who also aspire to "improve the neighborhood" and to "cleanse" it of the undesirable inhabitants that have been populating it over the past decades. Nevertheless, we can identify some of the elements that Sequera signals as effects of gentrification.

For example, Sequera points out that the use of security policies on public space, such as video surveillance, leads to over-regulation and the privatization of public spaces. These are techniques, typical of preventive urbanism in the neoliberal era, feed new forms of displacement and socio-spatial segregation. He speaks of government technologies that prioritize the behaviors of the new middle classes as the only legitimate ones, and affect the free mobility of citizens and the right to the city (Sequera 2013, 30).

I conducted several interviews and observation exercises in this neighborhood, with people who live, work or spend the night in its parks. Amón's streets harbor multiple contrasts. Fabiola, for example, pointed out that she has a spot where she sometimes spends the night, while Paula, from TEOR/TICA noted that Silvestre, the most expensive restaurant in San José, is located in this neighborhood. At the same time, when night falls, its streets are transformed into a trans sex work area, where usually the youngest girls try to make a living. This attracts clients, but also police and men who organize themselves to attack them with insults, cold water pistols, stones, bags of urine, and even BB guns (Fournier 2018). Tensions around these situations are not new, and although attempts have been made to coordinate with the police, the girls still continue to report numerous attacks (Fournier 2017).

Carlos Regueyra Bonilla, neighbor of this neighborhood, who joined me in several observation exercises in the streets and parks surrounding the area, pointed out to me the importance of exploring this neighborhood in order to understand how class, gender and other systems shape power relations in the city. Carlos, who defines himself as a pedestrian in San José, affirms that “en Barrio Amón las contradicciones están ocurriendo en el momento. No como en Escalante, que ya está totalmente tomado por la policía y los pipis. Aquí la tensión está explotando, pues⁴¹⁵” (Carlos, in discussion with the author, October 19, 2019).

If Escalante is promoting itself as the gastronomic capital of San José, Amón intends to position itself as the cultural capital:

⁴¹⁵ Free translation: in Barrio Amón the contradictions are happening right in this moment. Not like in Escalante, which is already totally taken over by the police and the posh people. Here the tension is exploding.

Image 259
Map of cultural venues in Amón



Source: Screenshot from Amón Cultural Facebook page,
<https://www.facebook.com/AmonCultural/photos/1027297784121399>

The neighborhood seeks to attract visitors through a cultural, artistic and gastronomic offer that promises an urban experience. For this, business owners and neighbors considered that security was a fundamental factor to guarantee the consolidation of Amón as a center of cultural attraction (Anonymus informant, in discussion with the author). This is how the *Plan Cuadrante* was consolidated in this neighborhood.

The Plan Cuadrante is a security initiative of the Police Forces which consists of dividing the country into small portions, which are managed by the police and supervised by the citizens. The project promotes constant interactivity between the police and the community and allows for "accountability" through real-time evidence.

Image 260
Plan Cuadrante flyer



Source: Plan Cuadrante's Whatsapp group

Many authors (Spade 2015; Hanhardt 2013; Nair 2014; among others) have pointed out that increased police presence does not necessarily translate into safety for the communities, and that this safety is

not distributed equally among all the inhabitants of a given space. However, this is the path that has been taken in Amón, where a group of neighbors enthusiastically welcomed the pilot plan of Plan Cuadrante. This project employs information and communication technologies as a tool for surveillance. Through a whatsapp group chat, it promotes a close, daily and real-time interaction between communities and the police. The former would fulfill a surveillance function, reporting even the slightest body or behavior they consider suspicious in the space. The police, relieved of their surveillance function in the space, respond to citizens' calls quickly, performing a repressive function that allows them to clean the streets of those undesirable beings that bother respectable neighbors.

This project is not widely known in the country. Perhaps this is because it was still a pilot plan, with the intention of extending it to other areas of the city. I learned of its existence during an interview with an informant who asked to keep their identity confidential, for fear of suffering reprisals in the neighborhood if they found out about their position regarding the project. The subject came up in the middle of an interview talking about security and police abuse in the area. This person had participated in the chat for about five months. During that time, they read with astonishment and concern the interactions between neighbors, merchants and police officers. They expressed their indignation and annoyance with what, in their opinion, has encouraged authoritarian, classist and nearly fascist attitudes in the neighborhood.

This person insisted on the importance of analyzing the content of this chat, and offered to share a copy with me, with the express request that I include it in my analysis of the city. I present the results of this analysis below. In total, I analyzed five months of chat interactions that occurred in the first half of 2019, which correspond to 155 pages of text messages, 542 photographs, 274 audios, 3 PDF documents, and 22 videos. Since I do not have the informed consent of all members of the group chat, for this section I will remove any data that can identify them (such as phone numbers, names and gender), and I will apply filters to the photographs when appropriate. In the same sense, I have decided to use only the free translation of the analyzed texts, as an additional measure to avoid the identification of the persons who emit the messages.

When I started analyzing the material, I was overwhelmed by the number of messages and attachments. However, I soon realized that the interactions are quite homogeneous. The same pattern is repeated over and over again, every single day and night. In practice, the Plan Cuadrante works like this: every day, in the morning and in the evening, two officers report themselves in the group, indicating their names and the schedule in which they will be performing security services in the area under surveillance by the Plan Cuadrante. Every time a neighbor observes a suspicious body or activity, they send a message to the officers via the group chat, indicating the location where they observe the

incident. Very often, they accompany the report with a photograph, audio or video description. Sometimes even sending a photo without a description is enough to file this virtual citizen complaint. The officers on duty register the report almost immediately, and within minutes they move to the location to seize, move or detain the reported subject, as required.

Let's look at a couple of examples: A neighbor attaches a photo of a behavior he considers suspicious:

Image 598
Plan Cuadrante #1



In this case, it seems that what is suspicious is a man leaning against a street sign. Two minutes after the photo was sent, the police replied:

Police officer 1: As soon as the unit is free we will see what is happening.

Reporting neighbor: Thank you very much!

Neighbor 2:: 👍

Neighbor 3:: 🙏🙏🙏

Neighbor 4:: 🙏

Police officer 1: Here we are, the police motorcyclist.

Police officer 2: 2 of us.

Police officer 1: I can't locate him

Police officer 1 then sends the evidence of the search they performed:

Image 262
Plan Cuadrante #2



Police officer 1: Found him!

Reporting neighbor: Thank you very much, I congratulate you for your prompt response! 🙌

Another example: A neighbor sends a photo of two suspects:

Image 263
Plan Cuadrante #3



Police officer 1: We will send the unit right away.

Police officer 2: 1861 will cooperate with you.

Minutes later, a third police officer sends pictures of their intervention:

Images 264
Plan Cuadrante #4



Reporting neighbor: Thank you officers

Police officer 1: He was searched and removed from the scene.

Another neighbor: Thank you officers

Most reports, such as those described above, do not specify the reasons motivating police intervention. The notion of "suspect" seems rather broad, ambiguous and subjective. Each neighbor has their own standards of what they consider to be a source of insecurity in the community. Very rarely do they clarify what is causing the disturbance, as in the case of the following messages denouncing the consumption of cannabis in the public space:

Reporting Neighbor: Good afternoon, intersection 7th street av11 two men in corner of white building smoking marijuana [sends photo].

Police Officer 1: We are on our way

Reporting Neighbor: Thank you

Police Officer 1: [attaches photo as proof] They were removed from the area and we will file a warrant for drug possession. 🚔👍🚗

Rarely do police officers seize items from suspects, but when they do, officers attach evidence of the criminal act, as shown in these photographs:

Police Officer 1: A motorcycle with two subjects and an element on foot were intercepted on the bridge of the Ministry of Labor, at the moment only marijuana was found.

Images 265
Plan Cuadrante #5



The seizure of sharp objects, presumably used to do criminal acts, were sometimes reported. However, most of the searches do not find any incriminating substances or weapons. Nevertheless, all interventions conclude with the police displacing the suspects and clearing the streets of these undesirable beings that disturb the peace of the residents of Amón. But then, if the police interventions prove that the suspicion of the neighbors was in fact unfounded, what is it that motivates the suspicion then? Analyzing the material, I identified several recurring elements that allow us to identify how the ideas of threat are constructed, who are the people whose presence is threatening, and what solutions are proposed.

The threats:

Reporting neighbor: Good evening. There has been a homeless man in a suspicious attitude on the corner of IMAS for a while now.

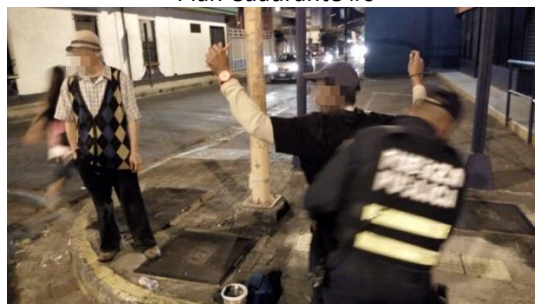
Neighbor 2: 7th street 7th avenue

Police officer 1: We will go check it out

Reporting neighbor: Thank you. He is dressed in black if I am not mistaken.

Police officer 1 sends picture:

Image 266
Plan Cuadrante #6



Police officer 1: Already investigated, they are going to leave the place.

Reporting neighbor: Yes, that's him.

Neighbor 2: Thank you officers, good evening.

The number of reports motivated by the sight of unhoused people in this chat is shocking. Sometimes there are reports of drug use or drug sales, or of people who look like "thugs" that the neighbors fear may commit a robbery in the street. But the vast majority of the complaints have to do with people who rest, wander or sleep in these streets, whose presence is unbearable in the neighborhood. This is undoubtedly the main threat to the residents of this community.

If the sight of the bodies that embody poverty in the city have the potential to provoke that powerful mixture of pity and compassion for the volunteers of Chepe Baths and the Street Games, for the neighbors of Amon what they generate is pure repulsion and fear. The group chat is crammed with photos of people who are homeless. Image 267 collects just a sample of this collection:

Image 267
Collage of reports in Plan Cuadrante



Annoyed by the bodies blighting the city's landscape, neighbors request police intervention on a daily basis. Most interactions follow the same pattern. A neighbor sends a photo, the police take note, go to the site, clean up the area and send a photo of the person who was forced to move, or of the area now cleared of unwanted presences.

Reporting neighbor: [sends photo]

Image 268
Plan Cuadrante #7



Reporting neighbor: Thank you.

Police officer: The unit is on its way

Reporting neighbor: Man smoking pot on 3rd St., 7th and 9th Ave. in front of plantees motel.

Reporting neighbor: Thank you.

Police officer: The unit will take care of these 2 places.

Police officer: [sends photo]

Image 269
Plan Cuadrante #8



Police officer: He's not here anymore, we're going to look for him.

Police officer: What's the pot smoker wearing?

Most of the time photographs are shared without explanation. It is taken for granted that the image alone explains the threatening situation. Occasionally, the complainants justify the reasons for their reports:

Reporting neighbor: And today I had to pressure wash because they poop, like dogs in front of our house, very unpleasant.

Image 270:
Plan Cuadrante #9



In any case, the police always present evidence of their intervention. In the case of unhoused people, not even suspicious behavior is alleged, since it is taken for granted that the presence of these bodies on the streets is something that needs to be addressed. Analyzing these exchanges between neighbors and police, it seems that there is a belief that sleeping on the street constitutes a crime, despite the fact that the Law against Vagrancy, Begging and Abandonment was derogated in 1994, like I commented in Chapter 4, because it was considered that they persecuted individuals rather than the situation they sought to eradicate.

Police officer 1: Elements without occupation taken out of the sector.

Neighbor 1: 👍 thank you

Police officer 1: [sends photo]

Image 271
Plan Cuadrante #10



Neighbor 2: 👍👍

The group chat is packed with scenes of repression of the impoverished, as shown in the following images, where the police do what they call "clean-up" work and displace people who were sleeping on cardboards or under a bridge. Neighbors celebrate the interventions and congratulate them for their work.

Images 272
Plan Cuadrante #11



Police officer 1: Good afternoon, police motorcyclists cleaning water tunnel.

Neighbor 1: Great!

Neighbor 2: Thank you for your vigilance.

Neighbor 3: Excellent work, officers.

Neighbor 4: 👍👍👍👍

Neighbor 5: Thank you officers

Neighbor 6: Thank you

Neighbor 7: Officers, congratulations for this performance!!!! 🍊🍊🍊🍊

From time to time a vague hint of sensitivity towards these people appears. For example, in the following dialogue, a neighbor requests that an "indigent" be removed because he gives a bad impression. Upon arrival, the officers notice that the man is injured, he has an open wound in his leg that makes it difficult for him to walk. The officers try to convince him to go to the hospital, but the man explains that he cannot afford to pay. The officers made him leave the scene anyway. The neighbor who filed the complaint thanks and blesses the officers. Another neighbor commiserates and exclaims, "poor guy!!!"

Reporting neighbor: Indigent 25 meters north of Hotel Don Carlos. Please put him to walk, he gives a very bad image. Thank you!

Reporting neighbor: 25 meters north Hotel Don Carlos.

Police Officer 1: Good morning. G. on duty

Reporting neighbor: Thank you very much, God bless you!

Police Officer 2: [sends photo]

Image 273
Plan Cuadrante #12



Reporting neighbor: Oops!

Neighbor 2: Poor guy!!!

The Plan Cuadrante operates under the logic outlined by Spade:

Many cities have taken up “quality of life” policing strategies that target for arrest people in the sex trade, homeless people, youth, people with disabilities, and people of color as part of efforts to make cities comfortable for white gentrifiers (Spade 2015, 24–25)

The vast majority of the photographs and reports in the chat show male bodies. Very few reports refer to women as threatening, and when they do appear, they usually refer to trans women and sex workers. The complaints against the presence of these populations rather than their displacement demand that they be repressed.

This search for punishment of gender dissidence and sex work is consistent with the Christian values that permeate national imaginaries. In this chat, religion is present as in most of the cultural expressions I have analyzed throughout this study. For example, the word "God" appears 260 times in the time analyzed. That means that god is mentioned an average of 1.8 times a day. "Amen" appears 59 times and "blessings" 48 times. Religious activities such as prayers and processions are promoted in the chat, and exchanges such as the following are frequent:

Officer 1: Good evening Y. on duty until 07:00 hours God willing 🤝👮🤝

(...)

Officer 2: J. on duty until 7 am.

Neighbor: God keep you in his guard and protect you on this night!

Officer2: Amen likewise

(...)

Officer 3: Good morning Officer M. on duty until 7:00 tonight, God willing.

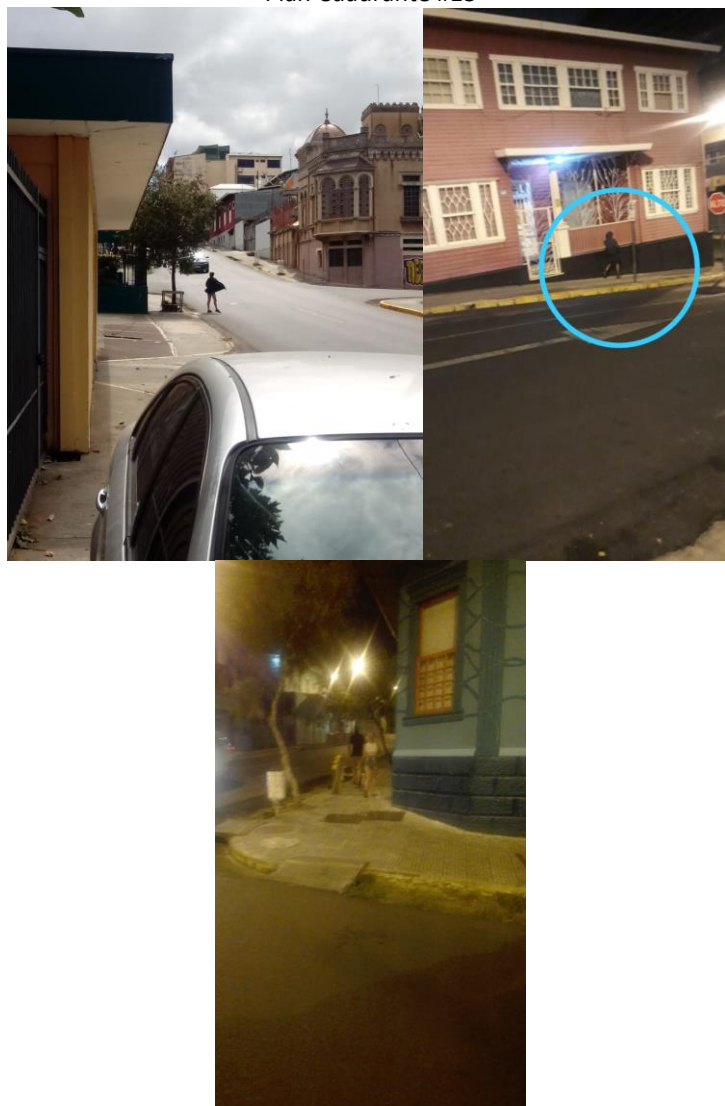
Neighbor 1: Good morning, officer.

Neighbor 2: God be with you, good morning.

Officer 3: Amen

Neighbors and police officers entrust themselves to the Lord. It is not surprising then that the attitude towards trans women and sex workers is more influenced by moralism than by what the law dictates. In Costa Rica, sex work is not criminalized. However, when I have accompanied Transvida's activities that attempt to train the police in order to mitigate the constant abuses against trans women, I found that many officers were not clear about this and insisted that they were complying with the law by arresting people who offer sexual services on the street. This same confusion appears repeatedly in the group chat of the Plan Cuadrante, where neighbors share photos of "suspicious" women. What makes them suspicious in this case is their clothing and their location on street corners, which fire the radar of neighbors and shopkeepers in the area.

Images 274
Plan Cuadrante #13



The persecution of trans* sex workers in this neighborhood is an example of what Spade points out: “power is not simply about certain individuals being targeted for death or exclusion by a ruler, but instead about the creation of norms that distribute vulnerability and security” (Spade 2015, 4). Often, these types of photos are shared without further explanation. The police do not take the opportunity to educate neighbors about what the law dictates regarding sex work. On the contrary, they often heed their call, harassing the girls on the street to clear the area. On a few occasions, the police found a sex worker with a client having sex on the street or in a vehicle (which is actually an offense), and the neighbors celebrated this action with a display of violent comments:

Police officer 1: Good evening, officer S. on duty until 07:00h.

Police officer 1: [sends photo]

Image 275
Plan Cuadrante #14



Neighbor 1: That' s great officers 🙌🙌.

Neighbor 2: Thank you officers 👍

Neighbor 3: 👍👍👍👍

Police officer 1: With pleasure 🙌

Neighbor 4: 👍👍👍

Neighbor 5: It's about time. that man always takes his customers to that spot and it's frightening to even walk by there. thank you very much! 🙌

Neighbor 6: 👍🙌

Neighbor 7: Excellent.

Neighbor 8: 👍🙌

Police officer 1: With pleasure! 🙌

When neighbor 5 complains about "that man", of course, he is not referring to the client seen in the image against the wall, but to the trans woman who appears to be searched by the police. Misgendering is the norm on the part of the neighbors. Police officers often use feminine pronouns.

Perhaps at least that is what the trainings of Transvida have accomplished. In general, neighbors use the term "travesti" to refer to trans women. In Costa Rica, this term is rejected by the majority of trans* population, due to the strong stigmatizing and derogatory implications it still carries. The only two times the word "trans" is mentioned in the chat is to refer to problematic situations. The first, from a neighbor who thanks a lieutenant who announces his retirement and refers to one of his achievements as: "He left us approaches with the trans population to find solutions to the problem of prostitution and muggings on our sidewalks". This sentence implies that prostitution is a problem and establishes a link between the trans population and the muggings on the sidewalks. The second time it is not even used correctly, since the reporting neighbor refers to a "trans man", when in fact he is talking about a trans woman: "Av9 between 5th and 7th streets, a car parked with a trans man and some "riffraff" on that avenue.... I hope you can come around".

In Amon, we find a similar dynamic to the one Bourcier criticizes in Paris:

Les technologies de sécurité sont en plein boom. Là où on légalise le mariage gai et lesbien, on pénalise et on pratique le zoning dans les villes à l'encontre des minorités sexuelles, de genre et racisées, les putes, les trans*, les migrantes, les pauvres. Hidalgo pinkwashed son Paris gay-friendly tout en laissant les maires d'arrondissement passer et appliquer des décrets qui autorisent le harcèlement au quotidien des travailleuses du sexe à Belleville et au Bois. Le nettoyage avait commencé bien avant de la loi pour la pénalisation des clients en 2016 (Bourcier 2017, 65).

Neighbors allege that trans women are rowdy and disturb the peace. The word they use most when they denounce them is "disturbance". Disturbance usually means that a group of trans girls have gathered on a street corner to share laughs and joints to endure the cold and to try to reduce the risks of the street. I have worked for years with the girls in this area, and we have documented hundreds of attacks, violent assaults by unknown men, and police abuse. Grouping together, for them, is a defense mechanism, a safety strategy, something similar to what this group of neighbors and business owners are looking for with their group chat. However, trans women are not welcome in the Plan Cuadrante, just as they are not welcome in the neighborhood.

Because trans people are frequent targets of criminal punishment systems and face severe violence at the hands of police and in prisons every day, investment in such a system for solving safety issues actually stands to increase harm and violence. (Spade 2015, 14–15)

Despite the fact that generations of trans women have been inhabiting these same streets for decades, the neighbors continue to demand their expulsion and decree that they are not part of this community.

Reporting neighbor: Disturbances with transvestites on 3A street between 11th and 9th avenues

Police Officer 1: We will help you right away.

Reporting neighbor: Already reported to the central station. Thank you

Reporting neighbor: [sends photos]

Images 276
Plan Cuadrante #15



Reporting neighbor: Thank you!

Reporting neighbor: [sends photo]

Image 277
Plan Cuadrante #16



Police Officer 1: They were removed from the site.

Reporting neighbor: Thank you

Finally, it is worth mentioning that, although they are not as visible as classism and transphobia, I could identify some expressions of racism in the chat. It might be worth noting the choice of the skin color of the emoticons used. Although it may seem a futile aspect, it is an exercise of self-representation. Of the totality of emoticons used, both by the neighbors and by the police, the vast majority are located in the range of whiteness, or alternatively, they use the yellow that WhatsApp places by default. There are very few people who use slightly darker skin tones.

Certainly, the presence of racialized bodies generated an immediate alert in the chat room neighbors. On one occasion, a neighbor reported seeing a "bum" in the street. He presumes that he carries drugs and indicates that he is heading east. A while later the police sent a photo of an Afro person, with long

dreadlocks, as evidence of the search. The neighbor indicates that this was not the person he reported and describes his clothing so that they can locate him. He adds that he looked very dirty. This episode, one of the few in which the police did not comply, shows that in the eyes of the police, an Afro body with dreadlocks is in itself a reason for suspicion. This racist attitude that links raciality with drugs is present in the Costa Rican imaginary. Despite the fact that throughout the city it is common to cross with the smell of burning cannabis, and that, from what I have observed, the vast majority of the time it was white or mestizo people who were smoking, the police target racialized bodies and immediately search them, because the color of their skin makes them suspicious of carrying drugs.

The panopticon is the solution

The demands of neighbors and merchants when reporting a suspicious person are usually accompanied by phrases such as "Can you collaborate?" or "Can you help us?" Police officers respond quickly, with phrases such as "We will collaborate right away" and "We are here to serve you." The citizens' demands are clear: they ask that the streets of their neighborhood be cleared of those undesirable beings that make them ugly or unsafe. To achieve this goal, the roles in this project are clear. Neighbors and business owners have the duty to exercise a function of constant vigilance. The police have the duty to repress and punish what is considered abnormal.

Everyone is suspicious in this neighborhood. People cannot stop on a corner to think, smoke, rest or cry, because the public space in this neighborhood has been declared the exclusive property of the respectable neighbors who live there and the businesses that revitalize it. Whether the suspects break the law or not is irrelevant, either way they will be displaced so that their presence does not inconvenience the owners of these streets.

Reporting neighbor: [sends photo]

Image 278
Plan Cuadrante #17



Police Officer 1: We are here!

Police Officer 1: [sends photo]

Image 279
Plan Cuadrante #18



Vecino 1: Good morning officers

Police Officer 1: He didn't have anything on him. He was removed from the place.

The privatization of public spaces in Amón involves the active complicity of residents and police. Technologies have made it possible to develop a panopticon that unfolds over the streets of this neighborhood. The angles of the photos reveal that neighbors are watching from everywhere: from the top of their windows, from their moving vehicles, from the sidewalk, from the street, from the door of their homes. While other neighborhoods have invested in installing security cameras that keep evidence of any crime committed in the area, in this neighborhood the panopticon is trying to get ahead of the curve. Their discourse is not one of punishment of crime, but of prevention. The multiple eyes that watch over these streets deal with the risk at an early stage. As soon as they detect a suspicious element, they avidly demand its expulsion from the space. Threats, in this case, are completely attached to the bodies, in such a way that they are indissoluble. They become the same thing: the threat is that body that deviates from normality, and the way to mitigate the risks is to physically expel them from the space. Bodies that become a population, a population that is treated as other despicable populations are treated in the city, as plagues of vermin, rats, inferiorized beings are treated.

Reading the 155 pages of this chat left me with a feeling of unreality. I felt for a moment that I was reading a dystopian novel about Costa Rican authoritarianism empowered by technologies and supported by blue-uniformed heroes. Some conversations made me nauseous and scared, the vast majority caused me a lot of pain.

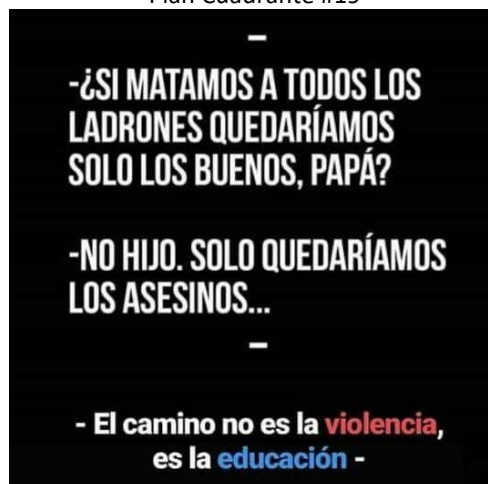
Sequera states:

En este proceso, la ciudad queda a merced de la vigilancia, de la inspección en una búsqueda incesante de la ciudad ideal, donde las leyes gestionen el comportamiento de la ciudadanía bajo dispositivos securitarios, manteniendo el riesgo sobre la población dentro de los límites aceptables para el funcionamiento de la ciudad (Sequera y Janoschka, 2015). Esto es, la biopolítica, entendida como la relación gobierno-población-economía política (Lazzarato, 2000) que a través del espacio

urbano pasa a ser objeto del mecanismo de rédito empresarial produciendo la ciudad y a sus sujetos⁴¹⁶ (Sequera 2014, 71)

There is little dissent within this group, however, sporadically someone tries to call for reflection on the violent ways in which impoverished populations are being stigmatized, or on the danger of seeking to banish the bodies we do not like. For example, someone shared this image problematizing the use of violence to achieve security. The image was lost among the messages, it did not get a single reaction.

Image 280
Plan Cuadrante #19



These rare expressions of dissent were answered with sarcasm and arguments that flirted with social fascism. Below, I present a long fragment that illustrates this. I believe it does not require further analysis, the authoritarian discourse is quite clear:

Neighbor 1: The insecurity in Barrio Amon is already out of control! It seems to me very necessary almost urgent that these people are forbidden to live under a bridge, in my ignorance on the subject I ask, isn't this forbidden? These filthy rats hide there. Today they get into the house by the river, possibly that's where they come from. I passed by there and they even have clothes lying around, it seems like a lot of indulgence to me.

Neighbor 2: It is a municipal issue because it is a public space, which can become a niche for squatters.

Neighbor 1: Doesn't the law empower the Police to prohibit them from being there? It is very necessary to identify the zones that can be niches for criminals and to look for a solution for that. I believe that they already know where to go when they commit a crime or where to wait to see that there is no one, they have to be abandoned spaces, or with little traffic.

⁴¹⁶ Free translation: In this process, the city is at the mercy of surveillance, of inspection in an incessant search for the ideal city, where laws manage the behavior of citizens under securitarian devices, keeping the risk on the population within acceptable limits for the functioning of the city (Sequera and Janoschka, 2015). That is, biopolitics, understood as the government-population-political economy relationship (Lazzarato, 2000) that through the urban space becomes the object of the corporate profit mechanism producing the city and its subjects.

Neighbor 3: 🙄 wow... really, I feel sorry for the situations that happen, but what a disgusting way to refer to people who live in these conditions!

Neighbor 2: If the police could do many things we would be in the happiest country in the world! But we are in CR where nothing is forbidden and everything is free will... it is the Municipality that must watch over the use of a public area.

Neighbor 4: XXXX is in this chat and could answer your question.

Neighbor 1: I know that the adjective is not the best, but if one of these people enters a house and rapes or kills a defenseless person, I wonder if they still see them with those eyes of love? Well, to me it is rat-like what they do and it bothers me a lot because they are not animals whose habitat we are invading. They are people who only do harm to society, who could do good, is very different.

(...)

Neighbor 5: I completely agree, it is enough that a misfortune happens so that these people are no longer seen as "poor". That's why we are the way we are! Enough is enough! Firm hand against these delinquents! The country of the "poor little guy".... Please!

Neighbor 6: Enough with the poor little guy. That's why we are the way we are. We'd better put things in order.

Neighbor 7: I totally agree, what do you mean "poor people"?

Neighbor 1: It has already been enough, we are not talking about people who do what they do by choice but by pure decision, we are not talking about a child in abandonment that if he does not steal a fruit he does not eat, they are grown men that while we work they steal from us, they are rats that while we are resting because we have worked, they steal from us. I believe that no human being in his 5 senses likes this. And here the police have made a great effort (unfortunately outside the law because that is what they are allowed to do), it is really up to us to do something more.

Neighbor 8: I agree, that's enough of this crime.

Neighbor 9: It's enough! Those who think otherwise can open the doors of their homes and give them with love what they ask for. Not me! Give your addresses and pass them on to those who are stealing from our homes.

Neighbor 10: I totally agree!

Neighbor 11: For my part I don't agree with this comment. I have rental businesses, many of them come to put cartons and mattresses in front of my premises, and what they do is disgusting, because they do their physiological needs in the front. More than once I have paid a worker of mine to throw away all their waste!!! The police do nothing about this situation. I have been told that I have to go to the municipality. And this takes time

Anyone is a suspect in this neighborhood, but some are more so than others. Rita Laura Segato (2016) says that race is a sign that is read, and gives as an example that the police in Brazil know how to read racialized people better than anyone else. I would say that race is a sign that is imposed on a body, and that racism is the way we have been taught to read. Like the police in Brazil, the residents of this neighborhood have learned to read the signs on bodies. They are skilled readers of the markers of

oppression. Class, race, gender, sexuality, all imbricated in their bodies, not as identities, but as systems of domination that push them to death.

8.4. Et la rue elle est à qui?

A few months ago, I was walking through Barrio Amón at night on my way home. It had been a tiring day. I had been doing field work in San José since morning. I had walked from the National Park to the Post Office, from the Post Office to Transvida for coffee, from Transvida to Chinatown, from there to the Red-light District, and after a day among hunger, nostalgia and contradictions, I had stopped for tea at a friend's house in Amón, to rest my feet.

The date was November 7, I remember it because I was at the opening of a women's art exhibition at the Botica Solera, and I was quite shocked to find a policeman blocking the entrance, searching with his eyes the bodies of those of us who wanted to enter. The day before, I had gone around the same corner with a trans woman, a war survivor, who shared with me the memories of her adventures and those of her sisters fleeing from the police during the worst times of repression. As the cop scanned the mark of class on my body and my clothes, I thought of her and all her sisters, and I wondered, already knowing the answer, if a woman like her would be allowed to enter that hipsterized gallery that today crowns the streets that were once her realm.

I finished my tea and my friend asked me if I was going to call for a ride. I told him that I wanted to walk and see if I could meet a friend I hadn't managed to see on this trip, and who as far as I remembered, works on those streets. I left his house around 10:30, turned at a corner adorned with a Valet Parking sign at ₡3000, walked up north to the traffic light that goes out to 7th Ave. On the way I crossed paths with trans girls I didn't know, some of them were young, perhaps migrants. We exchanged smiles.

Walking up to the traffic light I saw a tall woman was standing by the corner of the road, she came up to greet him. They seemed to know each other. I took two steps to the side so as not to disturb them, and when I turned my head, I saw another car coming down 7th Avenue. The car stopped, in the middle of the street, blocking the way.

It all happened so fast. They rolled down the windows and four howling machos stuck their heads out to hurl insults and taunts at her. It was a display of transphobia, misogyny, fat-phobia, and despise for sex workers: "Look at his pot-belly!"; "Man, so disgusting!"; "Look, he is horrible!"; "Hit him, go for him, man!"; "Good evening GENTLEMAAN!", and the driver pulled over, as if they were about to get out of the car.

The girl, used to the daily violence, did not even turn her head around. I, on the other hand, felt an uncontrollable rage exploding inside me. I don't even know how many times I have witnessed situations like that one. Countless times. I have listened to the stories of the girls, I have seen the videos of the attacks, we have dodged the cans and other crap thrown at them from moving cars, I have seen them heal their wounds among each other, I have accompanied them to file charges and I have also understood them when they don't want to go to the cops. It was not the first time, and nevertheless, the accumulated indignation, the exhaustion, the recent wounds or simply the stupidity took over me.

I ran uphill with all my strength towards the car, while shouting crazy screams, cursing them and everything that comes out of them. We were lucky. I think I went so crazy that the guys, who had already started to move towards the girl, ran up to the car. could hear where they were yelling at the driver, "Go, go!" as I kept running straight at them. I wanted to be a giant and a black belt in all the martial arts. I wanted to be dynamite and explode straight into their masculinities. I ran several meters behind their car, which fired at me with middle fingers and shouts of: "What's wrong with you?", "Crazy sissy!" "Faggot!"

I slowed down, trying to come to my senses, only to see them stop again at the corner of the Alliance Française, to harass another girl. All over again: running, screaming, stupidity. They took off and this time they drove away screeching tires until they were lost. At that moment I came around. I looked at the dark and lonely street, and I realized that my impulsive rage had just exposed us all. The car could go around the block and catch us from behind. They could return later to avenge on the girls' bodies the crevices of their masculinity. They could have beaten them up without the cops who patrol the Morazán, two blocks away, even lifting a finger, and without the neighbors of this Amón activating the alert in the chat room of the Plan Cuadrante. They would have crushed the girls without anyone doing anything, because that's how it happens, every week, every fucking week.

They didn't come back. I approached the girl who was by the Alliance Française and asked her if she was okay. She told me: "thank you, papi". Embarrassed, I babbled something like: "I'm sorry, amore. It's just that these men... Take care, be safe, well, you know how it is". She answered with a giggle: "Yes, darling. Don't you have a cigarette?" I didn't have one. No cigarette, no umbrella, nothing to offer her. I walked, with the embarrassment and fear that such an outburst leaves. I got home, the girls remained in the street.

When I told my trans sisters what happened, we all agreed that my reaction was really stupid. "I understand, brother, it makes you want to drag those bastards". "But we know how to take care of ourselves and how to move around in the streets. What if the car came back later and found them alone? What if they pull out a gun? Sometimes it's best to ignore them, no matter how angry it makes you feel". I lowered my head and thank my teachers for the lesson. I felt sick to the stomach, my heart ached.

That was on November 7, but it is also every day. And no, it has not been fixed by the police after so many years of complaints, conventions and trainings. And yes, many charges have been filed in the courts. The authorities know it, the Presidential House knows it, the policemen who also abuse them know it, the neighbors who despise them know it, and now, thanks to a video that has gone viral on social media, we all know it too. Today, with pain in our bellies and in our hearts, we all share the video, we write words of concern and affection, we click and dream of a better city. But at night, yesterday, today, tomorrow, the girls return to the same streets, and the guys (the ones in the video, like so many others) return to chase and harass them, without us knowing it, even though we already know. Passive complicity, they call it, comfortable conformism.

What should we do, I have constantly asked myself ever since I met them. Over the years, I have come to understand that this question is misdirected, because we are not the ones who can give them answers, advice or explanations. And then, when the rage does not turn me into an irrational firecracker, I try to reformulate the question and the subject of interlocution, and I ask them: What can we do for you? I know that there are no closed answers, and that we must think more about processes than magic solutions, but in any case what is clear is that they have spent decades building the knowledge that has allowed them to survive the streets, and only with them, listening to their demands, their desires and their lessons, can we break the chain of domination and complicity, and ask ourselves, sincerely and responsibly: What are we going to do?

The text above was a text written from France, a few months after the incident it describes. I wrote it in the field diary, in the heat of a video that went viral on social media, where a group of men in a car drove through the streets of Amón, assaulting and chasing trans girls who were trying to earn their living there. The episode I describe occurred during my fieldwork in 2019 in San José and constitutes

the most deplorable moment I led in this research process. I include it because I believe that in research it is important to also talk about our mistakes, in order to learn from them.

This episode was the tensest moment I experienced during the fieldwork. During the fieldwork, I observed multiple situations that moved me with deep emotions. Many times I came home in tears, or I went to bed sick to my stomach, staring at the ceiling for hours without being able to sleep. But the episode I am describing is the moment in which I felt the most fear and anger in all the fieldwork. The affections overwhelmed me, took me off axis, decentered me from my role as a researcher and shook my ethical/epistemic stance. I defend an affective research, but my affections cannot take precedence over collective security.

I tried to understand why I reacted that way. It was not the first time I had witnessed violence in those streets. For years I have accompanied the girls in their reflections on how to ensure their safety on the streets. I have participated in workshops that they run with the police, I have used my place of privilege to move what I can with the government and authorities, and even, years ago, we organized with the girls a patrol of activists who, under instructions from the girls, guarded the sex work areas trying to prevent attacks by men armed with BB guns. And yet, despite all this, my reaction that night was arbitrary and individualistic.

For several months I kept chewing on the issue. Thanks to the lessons my trans sisters lovingly gave me, I was able to recognize what I did wrong. I also recognize that my despair that night is something that I have been carrying around for several years. A restlessness that is getting heavier and heavier, and that today I am trying to transform into a research question: how can we build safer cities together? How can we build safety with these girls who do not find protection in the police, nor in the neighbors, nor in queer regeneration projects? I do not pretend to provide a single answer, but to point out the path that these same trans women have taught me: safety is something to be constructed with the community, it cannot be erected vertically, but cultivated horizontally. As Hanhardt points out: "...the quest for safety that is collective rather than individualized requires an analysis of who or what constitutes a threat and why, and a recognition that those forces maintain their might by being in flux" (Hanhardt 2013, 31).

Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui says:

¿No te parece un absurdo que la gente busque teorías sobre la comunidad en Marx?
A mí me parece que ahí, en Marx, hay que buscar otras teorías. Pero la teoría sobre la comunidad hay que encontrarla en las prácticas comunitarias de la gente... Pero yo

insisto en que las fuentes no siempre son formulaciones verbales, sino prácticas⁴¹⁷ (Rivera Cusicanqui and Santos 2015, 64).

Following this premise, I do not want to look for answers in books, but rather in the living practices constructed by the people who inhabit this city. Below, I present some efforts through which artists, activists and inhabitants of San José have tried to develop forms of care and safety that are alternatives to the repressive model. These are interventions that take place in the realm of public space. Although they are very different from each other, the common thread with which I try to weave them is the question of how to build safe spaces collectively and autonomously. These interventions are created by the people who experience violence and insecurity in the city on a daily basis. They share the intention of creating safer public spaces for all people, especially for those who are constantly persecuted and harassed in the streets, even in the neighborhoods that are known for their security.

8.4.1. Reclaiming the parks

One afternoon while doing an observation exercise in Morazán Park, I noticed a group of people rehearsing their voguing moves in the central kiosk. Their presence catches the attention of the rest of us in the park. Their bodies, clothes and gestures degraded heteronormativity and bent gender binarism. I observed the reactions of the people passing by. Some look down on them, others pay no attention, but most people seem interested and stop to watch them dance. The dancers do not look like the artists advertised on the posters of POPPOP club. They come from working class backgrounds, maybe there is something about that that connects with the people watching them in the park. The show they offer us does not charge an entrance fee. Their bodies bounce and rub against each other, they throw themselves hard to the floor, they fly and draw invisible shapes to the rhythm of the city. I think of the power of that scene: there, in that same park where Francisco Morazán was executed, where the Chepequetas Costa Rican way of life tour began, where I observed dozens of police officers questioning suspicious subjects, where generations of trans women have fought a war for their lives, a group of strangers offered other strangers a text of movements that defied heteronormativity.

Maybe the choice of space was thoughtful or maybe these folks were rehearsing in the kiosk because they could not afford to rent a studio. In any case, I think that this irruption had the potential of a wider and deeper impact than the queer regeneration of POPPOP or the rainbow flag hanging from the URBN building. These folks were taking the space to do what they love and be who they are, yet

⁴¹⁷ Free translation: Don't you think it is absurd that people look for theories about community in Marx? It seems to me that there, in Marx, one must look for other theories. But the theory about the community must be found in the communitarian practices of the people... But I insist that the sources are not always verbal formulations, but practical ones.

life in the park kept on running. Their presence was somewhat disruptive, but it did not displace anyone. They did not ask for a police escort, rather they certainly took precautions so that they would not be the ones displaced. They did not impose a barrier to entry or restrict their audience to those who could pay. Intentionally or not, they were there occupying the park and reclaiming it as commons.

Image 281
Morazán kiosk



The parks as commons. With Silvia Federici we problematized above the concept of the commons, and we saw an example of how the market appropriates this notion and uses it to sell us privatized and excluding commodities.

...the neoliberal attempt to subordinate every form of life and knowledge to the logic of the market has heightened our awareness of the danger of living in a world where we no longer have access to seas, trees, animals, and our fellow beings except through a cash nexus (Federici 2019, 103).

Forests, seas, community knowledge, are all commons, no doubt about it, but parks? Can we, urban critters, think of parks as part of the commons? Today, San José's parks seem to be a territory in dispute, but not between "urban tribes", like the volunteers of Chepe se baña and The Street Games affirm, but between biopower and the people that resist normativity. The parks are public, but as Federici makes clear, the public is not exactly the commons. The public "...is owned, managed, controlled, and regulated by and for the state, constituting a particular type of private domain" (Federici 2019, 96). Likewise, Jorge Eliécer Martínez defines space as:

el resultado de una interacción de juegos de verdad, poder y saber en el que los sujetos se emplazan y esta interacción es conocida como «gubernamentalidad». Por lo tanto, no habría tanto un espacio público, sino que este sería una forma espacial

inaugurada por unas relaciones de poder que quieren «dar el lugar apropiado» a ciertas interacciones humanas, en el marco de un modelo gubernamental específico, históricamente rastreable que pretende dirigir la vida⁴¹⁸ (Martínez 2010, 95).

The parks, as a public space, belong to the nation-state, therefore, they drag the coloniality within. They are a domain of the biopolitics that manages life in space.

Here I want to think of parks and streets in a different way. Not as public spaces that the state administers and the market capitalizes, but as a space with a potential for the commons. One could think of the parks as common in the form of land, of territory, of a physical space that belongs to everyone, but above all, I believe that their potential as commons lies in the encounters that those spaces harbor. A space that we can share, where we can germinate food, dwellings, leisure, memory, and knowledge.

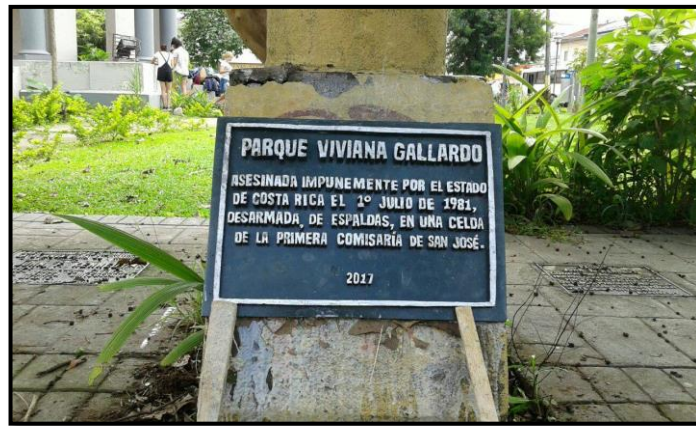
Commons are not things but social relations. This is the reason why some (e.g., Peter Linebaugh) prefer to speak of 'commoning', a term that underscores not the material wealth shared but the sharing itself and the solidarity bonds produced in the process. (Federici 2019, 94).

That is precisely what interests me: the parks, the streets, the "public spaces" reclaimed and occupied for the commons. On the margins of state initiatives for urban activation and private projects to appropriate the city, a number of artists and activists and city dwellers have developed interesting interventions that call for another way of writing history and another way of inhabiting the city.

In 2017 an anonymous group of memory recuperators carried out a clandestine action in a park on the suburbs of San Jose. The park is officially named after John F. Kennedy, as a token of Costa Rican loyalty to U.S. imperialism during the Cold War. Interested in telling the story that the country's governments strive to produce as an absence, this group entered the park and placed a plaque where Kennedy's bust once stood.

⁴¹⁸ Free translation: the result of an interaction of games of truth, power and knowledge in which the subjects are located and this interaction is known as "governmentality". Therefore, there would not so much be a public space, but rather a spatial form inaugurated by power relations that want to "give the appropriate place" to certain human interactions, within the framework of a specific, historically traceable governmental model that aims to direct the life of the people and the environment.

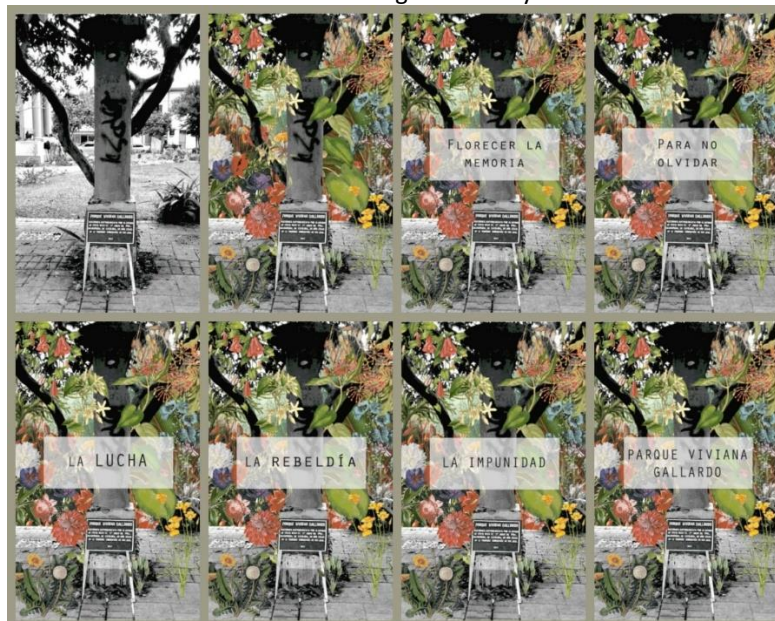
Image 282
Viviana Gallardo Park plaque



Caption: Viviana Gallardo Park. Assassinated with impunity by the Costa Rican State on July 1, 1981, unarmed, from behind, in a cell in the First Police Station in San José. 2017

The plaque renamed the park Viviana Gallardo, and rescued the history of that activist that the State murdered while she was imprisoned in a police station of San José, on July 1, 1981, in a desperate attempt to prevent the proliferation of a revolutionary movement in the country. The plaque was quite professional, it could really fool anyone to thinking it was an official plaque. They glued it with cement in broad daylight, in front of the eyes of passers-by who watched the act like it was an intervention by the municipal government. The authorities soon realized what had happened and rushed to remove the plaque from the site. However, the action transcended in social media and news, and succeeded in reviving the history that the State tries to erase.

Image 283
The blooming of memory



Source: Screenshots from gif by artist Chabela Lazo
Caption: The blooming of memory / To not forget / The struggle / The rebellion / The impunity / Viviana Gallardo Park

Also in 2017, an intervention was carried out in Parque Francia, in Escalante. This one did not aim to rescue the memory, but to generate tools to make that park a safer space for those who inhabited it. The action was developed by Marga Sequeira, worker in the arts and neighbor of Escalante, whom I interviewed to learn more about this action. Marga states that the intervention was developed in the framework of a workshop with the Catalan artist Núria Güell, in an intense collective dialogue that confronted her head-on with her privileges. As a resident of Escalante, she was part of a Facebook group where neighbors constantly complained about outsiders coming to Francia Park. While this was not an organized group like Plan Cuadrante, neighbors constantly called the police or sought to politely expel beings who did not deserve to be there.

Marga refers that sometimes the neighbors tried to phrase their discomfort with the outsiders in polite and gentle ways. However, what reigned in the background was a hygienist, classist and conservative discourse, which reflected the fact that the neighbors of Escalante considered this public space as an extension of their property. The police presence was very intense in those days, and Marga recalls she even had a couple of tense encounters with the police.

Moved by this, she wanted to devise an intervention within the framework of that workshop, that pursued an ethic of consequences. She explains that this means that the focus of the intervention is not the visibility of the artist, but that the intervention itself may produce an impact on the situation it seeks to put in tension. In this line, she got together with other artists and activists who were also users of the park, and they decided to mobilize the indignation in an intervention in the space.

Their intervention moves away from the human rights activism that makes the law its means and its end. On the contrary, they aimed to play with legality, to mock it a little, and in this mockery try to build tools for collective safety. This is why they decided to carry out an action aimed at the police officers themselves. Although their intervention sought to promote the well-being of the park's users, they camouflaged their project using the aesthetics and language of power. Thus, with the support of architect and gay activist Luis Herra, they designed a metal sign imitating a municipal notice, which they placed in the middle of the park.

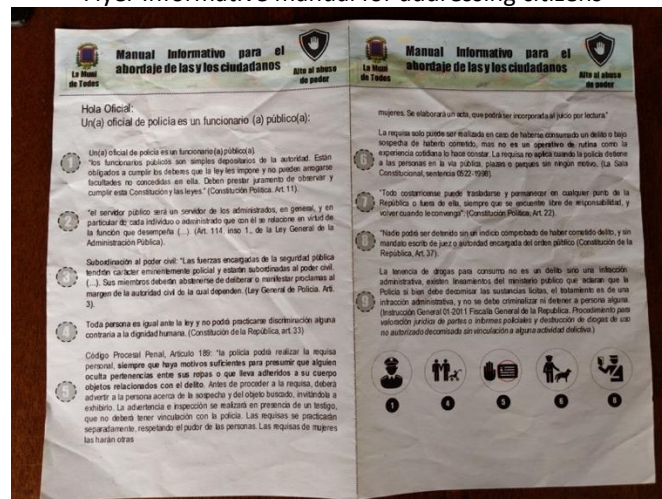
Image 284
Regulations for Police Forces or Municipal Police



Source: Marga Sequeira's personal archive

The sign, endorsed by a so-called "Cantonal Committee for Public Space and Recreation of San José", contained a series of articles and sections of the Law regarding the rights of citizens in matters like police searches or the self-consumption of cannabis. The title directly addressed the police: "Regulations for Police Forces or Municipal Police", and in case there was any doubt, in red it called out: "Police Officer, Remember". This was followed by a series of bullet points dictating the behavior that officers must follow in public spaces. In addition to the sign, they also designed flyers with useful information in case of facing a police search, which they distributed over several days to park users.

Image 285
Flyer Informative manual for addressing citizens



The camouflage of this sign was really successful. Marga indicates that she thought the sign would be removed very quickly, like the plaque in Viviana Gallardo Park. However, it seems that neither authorities nor neighbors realized that it was an infiltrated message. The sign remained in the park for weeks, and Marga reports seeing police officers reading it attentively. It was not until a large contingent of officers visited the park to plan an activity for the International Festival of the Arts that someone realized the hoax they had been hosting and removed the sign from the site.

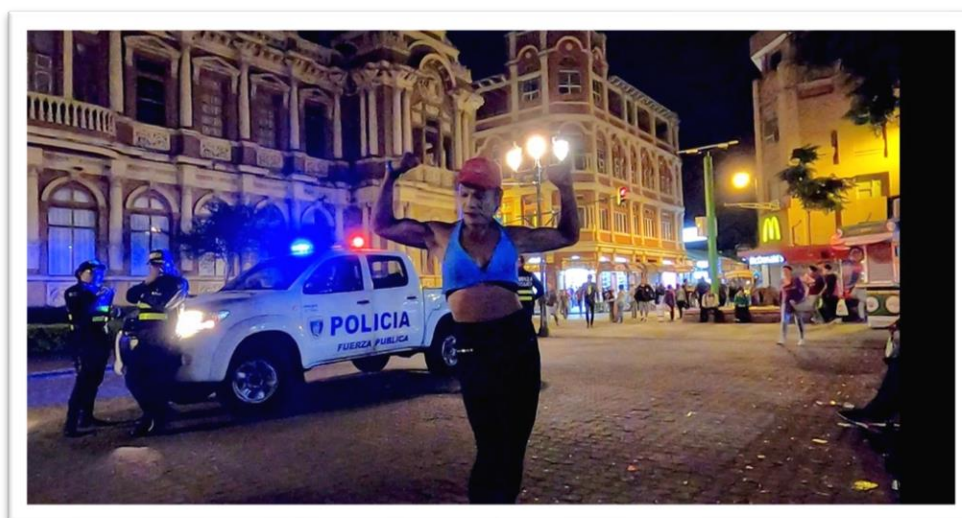
This action aimed to provide tools for the park's users in the face of police repression. Although repression in this park in the middle of the trendy neighborhood is not experienced with the same ferocity as in the dark and lonely streets of the Red-light District or Amón, this action contributes to the alternative and collective construction of safety. The intervention seeks to socialize useful knowledge to counteract police abuse. It also seeks to encourage open discussions in that very space, about the police and about the right of everyone to the city. The intervention has a pedagogical consequence, that even if it does not manage to change the violent forms that are ingrained in the police structure, at least it provides some tools so that those who inevitably face searches can have a littler bit of protection from abuse. Furthermore, the irruption of this element in the public space puts on the table the discussion about police abuse, a discussion unfortunately absent from a great part of the LGBTIQ+ activist spaces, where the police continue to be seen like an ally and as protection.

The intervention of Sequeira and her partners does not point to private and hierarchical ways of building security, like those sought by the homocitizens of URBN or the neighbors of Amón. On the contrary, their commitment is for the commoning of the public space. Their intervention did not seek to restrict the use of the park, nor to sanitize it, nor to monetize it; what they were really looking for was to promote an enjoyable and safe city for all people.

8.4.2. Artisanal safety made of bonds and stones

For the tour in the Red-light District with a group of war survivors, we arranged to meet in downtown San José, in front of the Post Office building. While we were waiting for all the compañeras to arrive, a patrol car invaded the pedestrian street and parked with its bright lights dazzling the night. The war survivors took the opportunity to tell stories and make fun of the police. Fabiola asked me to take a picture of her with the patrol car in the background.

Image 286
Fabiola, stronger than the police



She wanted to look just like that, strong, triumphant, proud of surviving. Her friends also wanted pictures. Laughing with complicity, they got closer and closer, until they ended up leaning their bodies against the patrol car. They laughed uproariously while making sexy poses with the car. People around also laughed. The officers, who had moved to the corner, came running as soon as they noticed them and moved them out of the way, indicating that it is forbidden for civilians to touch a police car. A police car is untouchable, but it can block the middle of a pedestrian street and obstruct the path and view of the civilians who inhabit the city.

The war survivors kept laughing and told me that this was simply unthinkable in the 1970s. They would have been arrested at once, and in the process, they would have been beaten up to teach them a lesson. Now, they said, the cops surely thought the same about them, but they no longer had a free hand to discipline them in the public space without justification.

This brief exchange illustrates the tensions that continue to exist between trans women and the police. They are very clear that the police are not their allies, and that their safety in public space is something they craft among themselves, on the margins or even against the police. I remembered the URBN agent moved to tears by a government that promises "Never again will you walk alone", I thought of the ecstatic gratitude of Amón's neighbors towards the police, I saw these trans women mocking the officers and I wondered: who can feel accompanied by the government? Who can feel protected by the police? It is not Jacob, nor Fabiola, nor the war survivors, nor the contestants of The Street Games, nor the users of Chepe se baña, nor the compañeras of the Feria Pinolera, nor Alex, nor so many other people who are also part of the so-called LGBTIQ+ "community". Advances in the legal arena open paths and alleviate certain forms of oppression. But exclusion continues to push the same populations to their deaths. As Spade points out:

The neoliberal reframing of discrimination and violence that have drastically shifted and undermined strategies of resistance to economic exploitation and state violence produce this narrow law reform agenda that ignores and colludes in the harm and violence faced every day by queer and trans people struggling against racism, ableism, xenophobia, transphobia, homophobia, and poverty (Spade 2015, 46).

Farneda (2012) calls for the development of resistance based on producing the commons as a way of affirming life. To become a biopolitical monster, he says, that instead of administering life, affirms, defends and celebrates it. A proposal like this resonates with the principles of Sumak Kawsay and with the teachings that centuries of anti-colonial resistance reveal to us: security, when it is not a privilege, necessarily relies on collectivity.

Image 287

Tag: More empathy, less cops



Tag in the Faculty of Social Sciences #5, University of Costa Rica

Sitting in Morazán Park, which marks one of the virtual limits of the Plan Cuadrante, I talked with Carlos about police presence and more broadly about safety and security. Carlos tells me about a situation he witnessed a couple of blocks up north. He was walking home after some drinks in a bar. On his way, he passed by a corner near the Alliance Française, a corner that is under constant surveillance by the Plan Cuadrante. He recalls that from a distance he sensed that something tense was going on. On one side of the street, there were 5 men shouting insults and threats against a group of trans women who were on the opposite corner. He says he got scared because the situation looked very intense. He walked slowly but decisively, as if wanting both parties to know that there was witness in the scene.

The men got into a car. Since the streets in the area are one way, he thought the car would go around to harass them again. He looked at the girls and noticed that they were grabbing a bunch of stones, and placing themselves on the corners, hidden behind the buildings. One was saying to the other: "Look, but if the guy drives by too fast, we'll throw at them anyway". They were preparing for self-defense, anticipating one more attack in this never-ending war. Carlos wondered what to do. In the midst of the rush and fear, he felt that he could not be a passive witness of that battle. It was clear to

him that he had very little power to act, and it was also very clear to him that the police were not a solution. So, he quickly made his way down the street where they expected the car to appear, and stood vigilantly on the corner so that he could warn the girls when the guys approached.

Reviewing the dates on which this episode occurred, I believe it could coincide with an interaction in the Plan Cuadrante chat:

Officer 1: In each boarding, guidelines are given to the public order so that peace reigns in the sector 🚓👮

Officer 1: With pleasure...I am taking notes of each one of the reports on the chat and verifying if there are any pending issues 📝🚓👮

Neighbor 1: We just passed 7/7 three sex workers⁴¹⁹ screaming their heads off and throwing themselves at cars. Something happened today with this ruckus

Neighbor 2: Terrible, Mr. XXXX!

Neighbor 2: Thank God officer G. is already helping us.

Neighbor 1: 🙏🙏🙏

Officer 1: I'm already here on 7th Avenue 7th Street.

Neighbor 2: He's Amon T-shirt.

Neighbor 2: 🙏🙏🙏🙏

Officer 1: They are for the moment calm and in the same way we gave them the indications to the public order 🚓👮📝

What this interaction shows is that the watchers of the Plan Cuadrante possibly heard about this confrontation, like they have surely witnessed many other attacks suffered by trans women in those streets. They are uncomfortable with the noise these girls were making, but they did not stop to ask what was going on, why they were screaming and throwing themselves at the cars, and if they needed help. They do not even mention the aggressors. For them, the men who get organized to harass trans sex workers do not constitute a risk. In the end, they actually collaborate with the neighbors' intention to displace trans women from the place. Their demand is for safety, but safety does not mean the same thing for respectable neighbors as it does for trans women.

In 2016, I read a piece published by Daniela Núñez García, a transfeminist, Central American and former sex worker. Daniela published a heartfelt and rabid text problematizing the tensions provoked by citizen and state initiatives to "appropriate" the city. In her article, entitled "Ayer pasé por mi casa y no era mía" (Yesterday I passed by my house and it wasn't mine), Daniela⁴²⁰ reflects on the dynamics

⁴¹⁹ Spanish is a highly gendered language. This is lost when translated into English, but it is important to note that both neighbors and the police officer used masculine nouns and adjectives to refer to trans women.

⁴²⁰ I use her name and not her last name as she requested to be cited.

of displacement provoked by Transitarte, a festival that celebrates art and culture and seeks to attract thousands of people to the city's parks. That year in the National Park, dozens of stands were set up with booths selling handicrafts, artwork and food. The park also hosted concerts with popular bands. Many of us enjoyed the Transitarte. It is one of the most important cultural events in the city. However, Daniela shakes us from the comfort of our privilege, and points out a great absence in these discourses about the city. The Transitarte unfolded over that park that is viewed by many respectable citizens with fear and disgust for being, as Daniela describes, the historical cradle of male sex work and homo-erotic desire. That night, covered with the white awnings of the city hall, and bathed with the portable lights that had been placed throughout the space, the park seemed quite different. That night, respectable citizens could walk through the park without fear of running into some homosexual in tight pants, and without the risk of being branded as a client of gay sex workers.

Mi enojo debe ser principalmente con esta aproximación de la apropiación de los espacios públicos. Porque si hay algo que dejar claro en este texto es que el Parque Nacional no es un espacio público, el Parque Nacional es un espacio público, del que nos apropiamos antes nosotras, del que hicimos nuestras oficinas, y ni hablar de los alrededores del parque, que están repletos de semen⁴²¹ (D. Núñez 2016, para. 16).

Daniela clearly points out the critique that I have been weaving regarding the discourses and practices that promote the "appropriation" of spaces, which are based on the assumption that the space to be occupied is an empty space, or that it is so decadent that it requires an intervention to save it and turn it into an enjoyable space.

creo que tiene que ver con una mierda de Transitarte, que si bien es cierto da pie para la viralización de pequeñas empresas como la que resulta mi cuerpo, que, al igual que nosotros los putos, también necesitan comer, nos dejan un día en el mejor de los casos o un fin de semana de quincena sin poder ejercer nuestros alquileres de la forma libre y anarquista que solemos hacerlo, sin dejar que hagan sus menesteres sobre nosotras nuestros clientes⁴²² (D. Núñez 2016, para. 15).

Daniela recognizes that many of the people who offer their services at the Festival are, like her, working class people trying to manage their living. Her claim is not against them, but against the ways in which this type of interventions are conceived. She claims the hierarchization of bodies, trades and spaces. She claims that hers is not considered a job, and denounces that this type of activities, when

⁴²¹ Free translation: My anger must be mainly with this approach to the appropriation of public spaces. Because if there is something to make clear in this text is that the National Park is not a public space, the National Park is a public space which we appropriated before you, that we made our offices, not to mention the surroundings of the park, which are full of semen.

⁴²² Free translation: I believe this has to do with that Transitarte's bullshit, that while it is true that it gives rise to the viralization of small businesses like my body turns out to be, who, like us whores, also need to eat, they leave us a day, at best, or a fortnight weekend without being able to exercise our rents in the free and anarchist way we usually do, without letting our customers do their business on us.

they are not built with the people who inhabit those spaces, end up reproducing violence and exclusion.

Mi molestia es cómo se piensan las actividades de apropiación del espacio público en San José. Mi molestia son los pacos vigilantes de las que destruimos la normativa masculina, heterosexual y la familia. Mi molestia es que ese término de "apropiación" se me asemeja tantísimo a alguna posibilidad del blanqueamiento demográfico, de higienización, de colonización⁴²³ (D. Núñez 2016, para. 17).

The author points out that this form of hygienist and colonial appropriation scorns bodies that fall outside the norms and ideals of the Costa Rican imaginaries. Sex workers are not consulted or even warned about this type of activities. There is no effort to involve them as part of the projects. The festival is clearly aimed at those who inhabit the zone of being. Daniela denounces the complicity with the police forces, who outside of Transitarte, harass and repress the men who inhabit that park at night. "How can we not hate inclusion when it does not include us?" asks the author, putting in tension the complicity of LGBTIQ+ activism and the discourses of inclusion with this practices of appropriation.

The queer regeneration project in the Red-light District failed as an economic project but not as a political project. Today it is alive in initiatives like the Plan Cuadrante, where the neighbors (surely many allies, and some gay and lesbian people) and the businesses (many of them advertised as "inclusive"), tell on the compañeras who gather at night on the corners to share a joint and a bottle, and at the same time to collectively manage a little bit of security.

In her text, Daniela questions activists, academics and citizens who enjoy these activities without asking what happens in those same spaces when they are not overflowing with euphoric visitors celebrating the appropriation of the city's public spaces. "Yo sólo me pregunto: Si se apropian de un lugar, ¿hay que desapropiar a alguien/alguienes del mismo?"⁴²⁴ (D. Núñez 2016, para. 25).

The question with which she closes her article has accompanied me from the moment I read it. As a participant in this type of activities and as a researcher of life in the city, I receive this question as an ethical/epistemic question. Denaturalizing differences is a basic principle in the ecology of knowledge, and this denunciation that Daniela throws at us is an important contribution to reflect on San José. Like the author, I do not believe that the answer is to stop doing this type of activities, but it is certainly necessary to transform the forms and discourses that produce them. When "urban activation" is constructed from the logic of colonial appropriation and rescue, it will inevitably result in violence,

⁴²³ Free translation: My discomfort is how the activities of appropriation of public space in San José are thought of. My discomfort are the police officers surveilling those of us who destroy masculine, heterosexual norms and the family. My discomfort is that this term "appropriation" is so similar to a possibility of demographic whitening, of higienization and colonization.

⁴²⁴ Free translation: I just wonder: If you appropriate a place, do you need to be displace others from it?

because its mechanisms are those of displacement, hygienism and repression. When we take over a park without dialoguing with the communities that inhabit it, the slogan of a "city for everyone" falters. It becomes clear that this "everyone" refers in reality only to the subjects that are considered respectable, those who inhabit the zone of being.

Many of these calls to "appropriate spaces", when they come from the state or the market, as Federici points out, are carried out in a way that is regulated, controlled, where the populations are managed. Commons are something else, Federici insists, they cannot be created at the expense of the well-being of other people, nor can they rest on new forms of colonization (Federici 2019, 96).

In my dialogue with Carlos, some of these reflections came together again. We discussed what people like him and me, who are not sex workers, but who share their claim that these streets and parks are also theirs, could do. Following the episode in which Carlos tried to break with the role of a passive witness and with the authoritarian demands of his neighbors, he says he began to notice something he had never perceived before in the public space. Perhaps it was already there, but he did not have the context to interpret it. On the corners on some of these streets of Amón, you can see little piles of stones. It is not an intervention of urban conceptual art, although we could say that it is the staging of a history of street knowledge that has allowed the survival of this community. It is a defense strategy, the materialization of collective planning in the face of risk.

When gay and lesbian activists told me that there is no trans movement in Costa Rica because their living conditions were so adverse that they had no possibility of organizing, perhaps they were thinking precisely of these conditions of risk and violence. And yet, here was the visible trace of their powerful life-sustaining organization. A pile of stones in a corner, piercing a hole in the absence with which authorities of all sorts have tried to erase their history of resistance.

Undoubtedly, these trans women were and continue to be victims of some of the cruelest practices of securitarian power in Costa Rica, of the rabid fury of toxic masculinities and the butchering dispossession of neoliberal capitalism. However, they are not passive victims. They are war survivors, generations after generations of tireless warriors. Their greatest victory is their re-existence. Today they honor their dead and proudly celebrate the survival of their lineage that palpitates in their bodies. They smile with complicity when they remember the mechanisms they devised together to face so much necropower. Humor, irreverence, cleverness, self-defense and sorority: the fibers that weave the webs of these street families.

If the respectful neighbors have the Plan Cuadrante, trans women have the same stones that for decades have saved the lives of their ancestors. They also have group chats and use virtual tools where

they warn their compañeras of the license plates of vehicles and also of the police cars that attack them. The difference is that when they share a photo of an aggressor, the police do not run to remove him from the area. Rather, they are the ones who are constantly displaced. The stones, then, are an artisanal defense mechanism, an artisanal trench, a monument to the San José that we do not see, to the Costa Rica that does not want to see itself in a mirror, to machismo and transphobic violence, to class violence, to the culture of violence that paints the nights of this great Cultural Amón.

Image 631

My friends take care of me, not the police.



Source: Twitter, <https://twitter.com/gabrielintica/status/1159297585762492416/photo/1>

The knowledge that this community of trans women have built in the streets of San José is their most precious common. This knowledge, without a doubt, is what keeps them alive. Despite they have been stripped of so many things, despite the efforts to erase them, to expel them and displace them, they have managed to preserve their history and memory. Necropower has not been able to rob them of this incarnated knowledge, which they pass on to their daughters and sisters, so that they too can build a community that sustains life.

Like Carlos, other neighbors and visitors may want to take the side of trans women. Carlos tells me that he would like to meet them, let them know that he is an ally, and let them tell him how he can support them. He is clear that he cannot provide them with any answers, but he can respond to their demands. His perspective points to something that is often difficult for us to understand in middle-class activism and in academia. The answers must be constructed with the communities, since they are the ones who hold the knowledge that have allowed them to survive the coloniality of knowledge and power. The response trans women need is not to increase the police, as the police are often complicit and part of the violence they face. The answer lies in the community. Community is understood not in the way that disciplines define it, but rather in the sense taught to us by indigenous

peoples, communitarian feminists, and transfeminisms, community as an affective bond that sustains the ethics of life.

Coloniality sought to dismantle other possible worlds and their traces, including reciprocity:

la reciprocidad como relación social básica y la comunidad como forma de organización y de gestión del trabajo y de los recursos, así como de marco de una existencia social global, fueron los elementos centrales de la vida social en el territorio que ocupa hoy América Latina, antes del período colonial⁴²⁵ (Ferrari 2020, 126).

Carlos' concerns are interwoven with Marga's, Daniela's and those of the collective of memory recuperators. In some way, too, they are intertwined with those of the group that rehearsed their voguing moves in the kiosk of the capital's park, or those of Fabiola when she cleans the streets of debris:

A veces la gente, con tal de salir del problema vienen y tiran digamos, un montón de escombros, vidrios rotos, o alambres de púas, o cosas que cortan. Y, pero no piensan, no piensan en un discapacitado, en una persona que es no vidente, en una persona que tiene imposibilidades de caminar, entonces vengo yo y de mi propio sale, y las recojo y la pongo en un lugar donde no represente peligro⁴²⁶ (Fabiola, in discussion with the author, October 10, 2019).

Among their actions, uncoordinated but aligned, we can read a question for the city. More than a question, perhaps it is a demand and an invitation. A demand that proclaims the city for everyone, an invitation to build it as a safe space among all and for all.

Rather than devising a system to take turns to use the space we reclaim, it would seem that the task is to devise how to encounter each other, how to recognize each other and how to articulate our resistance. Álvaro Sevilla points out the importance of recovering the everyday experience of the city, in order to develop a new biopolitics that does not serve power but liberation:

...recuperar la reproducción de las relaciones sociales como centro privilegiado de su reflexión y punto de aplicación de la biopolítica de la planificación urbana, pero ahora inscribiéndola en coordenadas emancipadoras y no disciplinarias o de control⁴²⁷ (Sevilla Buitrago 2010, 46)

⁴²⁵ Free translation: Reciprocity as a basic social relationship and the community as a form of organization and management of work and resources, as well as a framework for an overall social existence, were the central elements of social life in the territory now occupied by Latin America before the colonial period.

⁴²⁶ Free translation: Sometimes people, in order to get out of the problem, come and throw, let's say, a lot of debris, broken glass, or barbed wire, or sharp things. And, but they don't think, they don't think about a person with disabilities, about a person who is blind, about a person who is unable to walk, so I come and I take them out, and I pick them up and put them in a place where they do not represent a danger.

⁴²⁷ Free translation: to recover the reproduction of social relations as the privileged center of its reflection and the point of application of the biopolitics of urban planning, but now inscribing it in emancipatory coordinates and not disciplinary or control coordinates.

A biopolitics of this sort is one that sustains existence. It does not establish physical and imaginary borders that separate spaces and exclude those who capitalism and coloniality have marked as useless. In the interview with Alex Vásquez we discussed the ways in which systems of domination neutralize our struggles. I wondered why ableism does not move us as much as homophobia? Why are we willing to scratch a restaurant where they kick out a lesbian couple for kissing, but we have no problem paying \$20 to enter a gay bar where a person in a wheelchair would not get past the entrance. Alex told me that activism is full of individualistic people, who want to pull for their own cause, but do not look at the cause of others.

This chapter gathers a series of situations where the safety of a group prevails over that of others. This is what Alex pointed out in our conversation. After reviewing several projects that promote a proprietary version of security, I have no doubt that the alternative way out is the one Hanhardt points out:

I argue that the quest for safety that is collective rather than individualized requires an analysis of who or what constitutes a threat and why, and a recognition that those forces maintain their might by being in flux. And among the most transformative visions are those driven less by a fixed goal of safety than by the admittedly abstract concept of freedom (Hanhardt 2013, 30).

The answers do not pre-exist us. We may not be "*bigger than our context*", but there are people struggling to keep the context from devouring them. There are also people struggling to make that context safe and habitable, to dismantle that lethal normativity that pushes so many people towards death. Like the efforts described in these pages, there will surely be many others trying to build safe spaces in the city. The challenge, open and without signposting, is how to put in dialogue our concerns and our demands, our fears, our dreams and our experiences, in a historicized and plural dialogue that manages to escape the dialectic of inclusion/exclusion.

Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui reminds us:

la pulsión comunitaria, la apuesta por la solidaridad, la reciprocidad, no son privativos de los grupos indígenas. Hay movimientos de mujeres, de abajo, que son coherentes en ese terreno. Entonces son culturas homólogas que tienen que enfrentarse con esta otra episteme, con la cual tienen que convivir creativamente⁴²⁸ (Rivera Cusicanqui and Santos 2015, 93).

Countless times throughout the process of this study I have asked myself what to do. What to do in the face of so much pain, so much injustice, so much violence and so much impotence? What to do

⁴²⁸ Free translation: the communitarian drive, the commitment to solidarity, reciprocity, are not exclusive to indigenous groups. There are women's movements, from below, that are coherent in this field. So they are homologous cultures that have to confront this other episteme, with which they have to coexist creatively.

with hunger, with hygienism, with exclusion? This research does not seek to give answers, because I do not think that is my place. I reject the colonial pretension of dictating lessons, and I prefer instead to listen to what others have been doing and thinking in order to re-exist. I have no answers, but if I have learned anything from trans women, from the LGBTI community in exile, from the courageous people who have given me immense lessons of humanity in the context of this work, it is that the way is through the collective path. I have no doubt that today a person like me can write these pages, thanks to a collective of trans women who opened with their bodies the paths so that today trans people can live with a little more dignity. They sustained their existence through bonds of deep solidarity. Solidarity like the one that moves the people in exile every time they share food so that no one goes to bed without eating. Their survival is a collective triumph. Each life that the community sustains, revitalizes and strengthens the community. In the face of capitalist voracity, in the face of lethal patriarchy, in the face of murderous racism, in the face of compulsory ableism, in the face of state and international coloniality, in the face of the seduction of the neoliberal project that seeks to privatize everything, in the face of police abuse, in the face of necropolitics, in the face of the comfortable complicity of our privileges, resistance is conjugated in the first-person plural. The community is the path.

9. Conclusions

9.1. Reflections on the research process

When I set out to investigate inclusion in the city of San José, I had a vague idea of the path to follow. A series of data, reflections and memories were tangled in my head that I did not know how to unravel. During the first years of my doctorate, when someone asked me what my thesis was about, I felt great anguish because I could not explain it. What made sense in my head did not seem to make sense to others. When I mentioned the type of projects I would analyze, I received puzzled looks. Some fellow scholars thought it was too broad, they found it strange that it included projects with progressive and conservative approaches to inclusion on the same plane, and even, in the midst of the Manichean polarization that has grown in the country, some people considered that any [self-]criticism of progressive inclusion projects reinforced conservative and anti-rights positions. I wanted to move away from that sort of assessments. If I included very diverse projects it was not to establish an evaluation in terms of good and bad, but to try to show the complex and diverse cartography of power in which inclusion is conjugated in San José. My main concern throughout this work was to map and trace the fibers of power that connect such diverse projects. That is, I wanted to show that, although apparently different, there are continuities and similarities in these projects, and that what binds them together is power, the coloniality of power.

Building this map of power was a complex process. It required intense inductive work, many dialogues, reading, study, revisions, U-turns and reformulations. In this sense, I would like to begin the conclusions with some considerations about the research process, which are in no way intended to become prescriptions or a manual, but which I believe can provide reflections for further studies on inclusion, the coloniality of power, re-existence and the city.

9.1.1. On the methodological

This work required a methodological apparatus that could withstand the complications involved in the study of power in the relationships that are interwoven in a city. I needed an inductive methodology that would not precondition my listening, that would allow the occurrence of emergences and contradictions, that would not seek to explain reality with theories but to stress theories with reality and vice versa. This study required a methodology that would allow to resist epistemic violence and the hierarchization of knowledge, that facilitated a plural dialogue between authors and participants, between theories and knowledge from the Global North and the South. I was looking for a methodological apparatus that would be flexible enough to work with objects in constant transformation, like spaces and relationships in the city, and that would allow working from a position

of respect for and with subjects whose adverse material conditions destabilize any schedule, interview guide or fieldwork planning.

All this led me to combine a series of techniques and methodological strategies that allowed me to approach the discourses and practices of inclusion in the city in different ways. The study was built in a coming and going between ethnography and discourse analysis. I highlight the richness of combining the analysis of formal texts with the analysis of everyday communications, the analysis of publications in social media, with the testimonies of the people affected by oppressions. I do not intend to pose them like a recipe. This study is a particular approach to the discourses of inclusion in a Central American city, and to the way in which power crosses them and nests in them.

The ethnographic process opens the doors to a library of living knowledge that escapes, resists or is dismissed by the coloniality of knowledge. Through informal interviews I was able to understand complex dynamics that do not appear in books, reports or the Costa Rican mass media. Some of the most relevant emergences in this study arose from spontaneous dialogues and informal interviews with people I met on the street. Embodied street knowledge opened up questions and lines of exploration that I had not originally considered. This study sought to subvert the vertical order and to push towards a horizontal plane. In this sense, the informal interviews that I conducted in the streets and parks of the city, the dialogues with people who work as cab and uber drivers, and even the cries expressed on the walls of San José broadened the panorama of this study and allowed me to find other ways to understand reality.

The parkour-interviews turned out to be particularly fertile. Go-along interviews shake off, to some extent, the artificiality of the interview situation and allow us to get closer to the everyday life of the interviewees. In this case, I wanted the participants to guide the journey through the city. I had some broad themes or questions, but I tried to keep quiet and listen to what each participant wanted to emphasize in this transit through the city. At times, tensions occurred beyond what was being said, in the looks of the passers-by, in the police surveillance, in the barriers imposed by an ableist environment, which cut the route and forced us to change our pace or our course.

The parkour-interview integrates sensory experiences into the research that are often absent in more aseptic approaches. Often, when traversing an area, the smells awakened a memory, an idea or an anecdote. Similarly, looking at the signs, the tags on the walls, the garbage, the sidewalks, the dynamics on the streets and in the parks, generated a chain of reflections that we might not have arisen in an interview in a clean and isolated location. It might not have been the same if I had conducted my observation alone on those same streets either. The city unfolded a myriad of stimuli in front of us, and it was the participants who pointed out to me where to direct my attention. In this

sense, I would say that the parkour-interview facilitates participatory research, dialogue and the recognition of knowledge on a horizontal plane, as well as the development of affects.

The ethnographic process produced a voluminous and diverse assortment of data and materials. The analysis of these materials was also a challenge. I sought to escape a fragmented and whitewashed version of intersectionality that understands oppressions as the sum of identity labels that can be exchanged like putting on a T-shirt. In this sense, focusing on power, on relationships, on its mechanisms, on apparatuses (*dispositifs*), allowed me to draw those lines that connect the various analyzed projects. In this sense, the Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) was a suitable methodological device to approach the object of this study.

FDA pursues to unveil the power relations through the analysis of discourses and apparatuses (*dispositifs*). It pays attention both to discursive and non-discursive practices and to the manifestations where knowledge of discursive practices is materialized. It is interested in what is said and what is not said, in what we can observe and in what is produced as an absence. It is specially interested in studying what can be said in a given time and space. Rather than establishing truth, FDA seeks to understand the conditions under which truth is produced through the entanglement of relationships.

FDA allowed me to identify how discourse strands on inclusion intertwine and get knotted together in the city. The analysis of declarations and regulations, images, official and informal communications, complemented with ethnographic observation and contrasted with the reflections gathered in the interviews with participants, allowed me to identify discursive planes and positions beyond the explicit postures with which these projects claim to intervene in the city. FDA turned out to be an adequate methodology for the analysis of power, whose flexibility allows adapting the techniques to the object of study, testing, and transforming the techniques and strategies for collecting information so that they adjust to the reality we are analyzing, and not the other way around. In this sense, it truly worked like a toolbox.

Throughout the process, flexibility was a fundamental aspect. Some of the informal interviews occurred in the context of observation exercises, others took me by surprise while I was on walking or waiting in the public space. As much as possible, I tried to seize these moments as learning opportunities, and included reflections from these brief encounters that were not originally part of my fieldwork plan. I tend to have a rather structured way of working. However, after years of working in the city with people who strive to survive every day, I have learned that flexibility opens portals that are not visible on our roadmaps, and that it is important to be prepared to let that roadmap get wet, torn or lost in the field from time to time.

Fabiola says that Red Light District is a place where light and shadow coexist, not as opposites but as forces that mobilize life. She says that the same thing happens inside us, in the city, on the planet and in the universe, and that living consists of navigating between the waters of these forces, taking care not to get shipwrecked on a shore. I like to think that this metaphor is also applicable to research. Fabiola's invitation is to navigate, to flow through a sea of contradictions, to come and go, without rigidly clinging to a structure and without getting lost in the chaos. An invitation to embrace uncertainty, to keep the questions open and to let the paths and currents of knowledge emerge.

Finally, this research process leads me to a reflection that is both methodological and ethical, a reflection on the way we construct, validate and in some cases appropriate knowledge. If we recognize that the university is part of the network of the colonality of power, the methods with which we approach the study of oppressions are never neutral techniques. This collaborative research experience broadened my perspectives and allowed me to diversify and deepen my analysis. Discussions with participants invited me to challenge and question theories and concepts, to recognize their limits and to look for ways to expand or adapt them to our contexts. But also, the dialogues with the participants confronted me with the power relations in our own research processes and provided important elements to problematize them. The dialogues with the participants enabled a dialogic research that seeks to break with the vertical forms of conducting research, in which the researcher occupies the position of expert, and explores the object of study (subjects included) from a superior plane.

Although this is an academic study, and therefore inscribed within logics that inevitably reproduce epistemic violence, I have tried to take care of the relationships I establish with the participants, and to treat their knowledge with respect. Rather than attempting to explain their situations through theories, what I sought was to foster a *sentipensante* dialogue in the key of *pluriversality*, which does not hierarchize the voices of the authors over those of the participants.

This research experience has not been like others in which I have been involved. It is my thesis, and therefore, it has involved a lot of hard work on my part in planning, conceiving the project, establishing contacts, collecting the information, analysis, exhausting writing, etc. In short, the usual solitary process involved in writing a thesis. But also, this has been a collective process in many ways. In addition to the participants, a number of strangers who shared their feelings with me, this process has been accompanied by colleagues from the spheres of academia and activism, who have engaged at different levels. This has also been a process of knowledge exchange, which has allowed me to expand my perspectives, identify problematic knots, reformulate my planning and explore fields such as film and cartography as possible means for the circulation of the results of this project. In those

encounters, in transdisciplinary and plural dialogues, some of the lines and results of this work germinated. It has been a collaborative process that undoubtedly invites me to continue exploring the possibilities of collaborative research and relationships of collaboration and solidarity in the field of research.

After several months of fieldwork, and many more of analysis, writing and dialogues, I can conclude that a participatory and ethnographic approach enriches and deepens the analyses from the FDA, while at the same time, it favors the problematization of power relations not only in the city, but also in the field of knowledge production itself. Studying the city by entering it, living it, walking its streets and talking to its inhabitants, opens up a very fertile epistemological field. It is in these dialogues that the traces of biopower arise, both in its more overt forms and in its less visible, less explicit, but no less violent forms.

9.1.2. Activism, academic knowledge and coloniality

In my field diary I find scattered pages with reflections on the tense relations between activism, academic knowledge and coloniality, and how this impacted my research process. I begin with the last issue, coloniality. This study seeks to show how coloniality continues to shape our relationships, even those that claim for inclusion. But coloniality is not only present in the object of study, it inevitably traverses the research process itself. When I arrived in Costa Rica in 2019 to conduct fieldwork, I thought I would face difficulties to access certain projects and spaces that I wanted to analyze. However, I was surprised by the ease with which doors opened for me in some spaces that I presumed to be wary or closed, such as Chepe se baña, the Street Games, or URBN. In most cases, it only took an e-mail for the owners or organizers of these projects to grant me an interview and authorize me to conduct an observation. It was sufficient to mention that I was doing a PhD at a French university for them to open their doors to me, assign a volunteer or staff member to attend me, and even dispose of the objectified bodies of the projects' users without asking them if consented to participate in my research. I highlight these situations as a reflection of the coloniality so deeply rooted in Costa Rican culture, which continues to open its doors to those who come from the Global North, while closing those same doors to some of the inhabitants of this city.

The fact that access was easier than I expected does not mean that this research process in those spaces was easy. I had to take some considerations into account. It entailed an exercise of performativity so as not to disturb the environment too much in conservative spaces. I moderated my own speech, I thought very carefully about what to say and how to say it, I took care of the forms of writing and even the way I dressed. Even my gender was a consideration. I was concerned that the gender dissidence I embody might be problematic or raise suspicions in religious or conservative

spaces. In practice, what happened is that the people in charge of these projects assumed my gender based on my name, my voice or my expression, and automatically treated me as a cis hetero woman or, primarily, a cis hetero man. And although it was clear that my performativity and gender expression did not fit with the ideal of man or woman in the Costa Rican imaginary, it is possible that once again the fact that I was a doctoral student coming from a French university had an influence. That is to say, although my way of dressing, my gestures, my way of being in the world were dissonant within the collectivity of men and women who implemented these projects, somehow it seemed to be accepted taking into consideration that I came from France. These situations reminded me of this meme of Ken and Ken, where the joke is not only the coloniality in James' discourse, but also, sadly, the reception that this type of approach has in certain circles in Abya Yala.

Image

Meme: Post-identity queer malinche curse

-Hola soy James, soy francés y vengo a darles una charla sobre postcolonialismo y nuevas burguesías indígenas desde una perspectiva post identitaria queer.



Source: Facebook Page Ken y Ken Mariquitas de bien, 04/25/2019

Caption : Hi I'm James, I'm French and I come to give a lecture on postcolonialism and new indigenous bourgeoisies from a post identitary queer perspective.

However, what I found most difficult to manage were my own affections. The pain, the sadness, the indignation, the rage, the impotence before the violent situations I witnessed, trying to keep my composure in the face of injustice, and my privileges blowing up in my face over and over again. As I recount in Chapter 5 and Chapter 8, even today I still wonder what to do as a researcher when you observe situations of injustice and violence. My anxieties are similar to those I read in ethnographic studies that work with people who suffer violence and oppression (Sandoval 2007, Bourgois 2003, Rojas 2013) to cite a couple of examples of studies developed in Costa Rica). I find important considerations on affectivity and reflexivity in these studies that more than answers provide me with tools to build roads. I believe that militant research (Vélez-Galeano 2018; Acua 2015; Ramírez de Castillo 2015) is also a possible path (not the only one, of course), a way of acting from the position

that I inevitably occupy as a researcher who is sensitive to the problems faced by the participants, but at the same time outside of them.

I spent long hours observing the city, watching the interactions from a park bench, counting and even photographing police officers who were searching the city's inhabitants, and never, at any time, was I approached by the police in the way they approach populations that have been doomed to bare life. All this speaks again of coloniality in the everyday life of this city. When the war survivors made jokes, convinced that they would not be let into one of these fine queer-designed towers, they were pointing out precisely these differences that impose hierarchies and distribute life chances in unequal ways. This study has confronted me with my privileges and also with my contradictions. It has entailed an exercise of critical reflection in which many times, despite my dissident or critical positions, I have recognized myself as part of the sectors that inevitably benefit from the economy of privileges that sustains neoliberal inclusion. In this sense, it has been fundamental to maintain the clarity that the rainbow that covers me does not cover all of us. "There are bodies that weigh more than others", Jacob said emphatically in an interview, and its class, race, compulsory able-bodiedness, and gender oppressions that put on the weight.

I have no doubt that my privileges weighed heavily in this process. My surname in a foreign language, my clothes, my skin color, my academic degree, my accent, in short, a series of markers that made the leaders of these projects recognize me as a person closer to them than to the populations they work with. My privileges opened for me doors that are closed in the face of the participants in this research. All this conflicts me to this day. There is no point in denying it or pretending that it does not play a part. In this profoundly unequal country, the coloniality of power continues to permeate the ways in which knowledge is hierarchized, produced, accessed and legitimized.

This brings me to a consideration of the other points in the subtitle of this section, the link between activism and the university as a center of knowledge production. If in the conservative projects my privileges opened the door for me, what made the deep dialogues with the participants possible was my previous involvement as an activist in social movements. This work would not be the same without the contributions of the participants, and these contributions were only possible within a framework of trust and respect that is not easy to develop from the rigid approaches and narrow time frames of academic research.

Prior to this study, I had been working with and accompanying the struggles of trans women in San José for several years. I had participated for years in LGBTIQ+ organizations where I met some of the participants or the people who put me in contact with them, and I had even been involved in projects of "inclusion" with NGOs and state institutions. Therefore, I was familiar with some of the tensions

firsthand. At the same time, I had lived several years in downtown San José, I had walked its streets countless times, I knew the Red-Light District and the trendy neighborhoods, I had spent many hours in the city's parks and bars, I had engaged in rich dialogues with strangers, some of whom became my friends. San José was no stranger to me, nor was I a stranger to the city, despite the inevitable effects of my experience of academic migration to the Global North.

My activist experience facilitated bonds of trust that are fundamental for this kind of research. Whether it was because we knew each other from before, or because we had a friend in common, we were able to create an atmosphere of trust in which participants shared with me their reflections, their memories and their knowledge. Often, important insights arose outside the interviews, in informal and close spaces that I shared with the participants, as reflected in this entry in my field diary:

Transvida

I stopped by to buy a loaf of bread with guava and cream cheese. I always like to bring something to eat when I go to Transvida. For me it's like visiting the family house, the family home.

The girls greet me with hugs at the door. In the back, some of them are meeting with officials from the Ombudsperson's Office. I stayed by the entrance, talking with Fabiola, Thalia and Cassandra. We talked about life, the city, Fabiola's work, the environment, police harassment, machismo and transphobia, about Costa Rica, about being a migrant, about being brave, about being consistent, about what the commons are, about fighting for everyone, about resisting commodification, about greenwashing, double standards, about the comforts of some at the expense of the lives of others. We talked about intersectionality of oppressions and privileges. Intense dialogues, life lessons, knowledge that I receive with respect and gratitude.

The vibe was dense this afternoon. Something had happened. I didn't know what, but the girls were sad and tired. Still, it's always nice to talk with them. We listened to each other for a while and said goodbye until next week.

(Field diary, October 8, 2019)

I have tried to treat this knowledge with great respect. Regarding the conversations that took place outside of the interviews, I always asked if I could refer to or quote from them. But beyond the quotes, these exchanges opened my gaze, my perspectives, my ways of understanding the city and life in it. Spending time with the participants, getting involved in their activities, supporting their projects, sharing with them beyond just extracting their words, allowed the emergence of powerful reflections.

This project was developed from a critical, militant position, explicitly committed to the generation of knowledge susceptible of providing inputs for the struggles against oppressions and injustice. My background as an activist and inhabitant of San José also opened doors for me and, above all, led me to immense ethical reflections on the ways of doing research and working with the people who live in

this city. Clearly, doing activism is not the same as doing research. However, activism, without a doubt, marks my way of doing research, my way of approaching people and my way of dialoguing. I do not mean to say that this is the only or the best way to study this type of problems. However, in the face of the pressures that push our universities towards the commodification of education, the hierarchization of knowledge and the overvaluation of research that generates products for the market, in the face of ascetic and colonial hygienism that discredits participatory and horizontal approaches, in the face of epistemic extractivism and the neoliberal university, this work seeks to defend that the link between activism and university is not only possible but valuable, and that it opens up fertile epistemological fields.

In this sense, this research process allows me to conclude that building bridges between activism and research is a way, not the only one but a very fruitful one, to decolonize our universities and the knowledge that is produced and legitimized there. To break the complicity with the coloniality of knowledge and power we need to get closer to the people and communities, problematize the privileges granted to us by the academic world, stop doing research on the populations and start working with them.

9.1.3. On the ethical/epistemological and theoretical dialogues

When I commented on my thesis in academic spaces in Costa Rica, I was often questioned about the use of a participatory methodology in a thesis that was inscribed in the domain of philosophy. I did not want to take these comments too seriously, as I tend to distrust all frontiers, including disciplinary ones. Moreover, this is not the first research in the field of philosophy that is built on dialogues with participants. My work is inspired by a long and prolific tradition of reflection in the key of pluriversality, in which philosophy is constructed with people. As Enrique Dussel points out:

Philosophy does not imply an isolated process of theoretical production, but instead one that involves a commitment to the world surrounding us. The pretension of such absolute autonomy is what characterizes the efforts of a certain school of Anglo-Saxon analytical philosophy... The Frankfurt School, French existentialism, phenomenology, etc., all argued that a philosophy without historical commitment (that is, one that is isolated from specific philosophical, cultural, economic, and political moments within their historical contexts) is impossible (Dussel 2013, 15-16).

However, philosophy in Costa Rica is still today such a colonial field, in which, as Dussel warns, the knowledge produced in the Global North (even those about the Global South) is considered superior, valid, universal. In this operation, says Dussel, we become merely commentators of philosophical works (Dussel 2013, 15). We devalue the thinking, reflections, research and philosophy that is

developed in our own context, and we consider that it would be more appropriate to seek explanations for our problems in the great authors.

This thesis is a pluriversal and transdisciplinary exercise, which, within the rigid academic nomenclatures, is inscribed in the domain of philosophy. However, I did not want to do colonial philosophy, I did not want to reflect about reality in soliloquy, from an expert position that only discusses with expert authors. This research is nourished by a long trajectory of participatory research, which has been particularly strong in Abya Yala, and which has undoubtedly determined the way in which I engage with the university, with the communities and with knowledge.

In this sense, this study sought to bring diverse knowledge into dialogue, without hierarchizing it. I did not always achieve this, but it always marked my course. The perspective of pluriversality was fundamental. This is a study that does not aspire to impose a truth, but rather to question the truths that are imposed on us and to understand how they are produced and how they impact our everyday life. For this, it was important to read theories and research developed in the Global North, which offer us reflections, questions, perspectives and experiences that enrich the analysis and also provide us with tools to think about the problems of our own realities. But also, the theories of the Global South, the epistemologies of the South, decolonial studies, the knowledge and cosmovisions of peoples of Abya Yala bring up complex reflections on power and biopolitics, and stress in multiple planes oppressions that are not experienced in the same way in any body and in any place. To this plural dialogue, in which biopolitics meets Sumak Kawsay, in which the power apparatuses are read in a decolonial key, we add the voices of embodied knowledge, of people who re-exist and rethink power, oppression and the struggles to sustain life in this little piece of Central America.

Los saberes descoloniales necesitan formularse atendiendo a los problemas complejos de nuestras subjetividades, que exigen, no solo, o no tanto, transformar de manera profunda las relaciones sociales, económicas, políticas, culturales, inter-subjetivas que los latinoamericanos mantenemos con los actuales y/o futuros centros coloniales del poder, sino transformarnos a nosotros mismos respecto a los ideales y jerarquías que hemos sostenido y sostenemos. Solo desde este lugar es posible una real descolonización de las vidas en los distintos planos⁴²⁹ (Farneda 2012, 109).

In the Global South we have been reading the North for centuries, but the North rarely looks at what is being produced in the South. Scientific discourses have been describing and writing about communities for centuries, but seldom do we listen to what communities have to say. The theories

⁴²⁹ Free translation: Decolonial knowledge needs to be formulated in response to the complex problems of our subjectivities, which demand not only, or not so much, a profound transformation of the social, economic, political, cultural and inter-subjective relations that Latin Americans maintain with the current and/or future colonial centers of power, but also a transformation of ourselves with respect to the ideals and hierarchies that we have upheld and continue to uphold. Only from this place is a real decolonization of lives possible on the different levels.

with which we explain our realities were predominantly created from vertical and colonial models of knowledge. It is no surprise, then, that our research is often fraught with epistemic violence, and that our theories, even those produced in the Global South, fail to break with the coloniality of power.

In the street, I found profound reflections from people who did not have access to formal education, reflections that I cannot find in the texts produced in the colonial university. I receive them with great respect and I never cease to wonder about all that we are missing when we engage in intra-university or inter-university dialogues between academics and experts who theorize from vertical positions.

In the academic world, too, inclusion is often decorative, simulated or illustrative. In this sense, I believe that it was appropriate to bring such diverse theories, concepts and knowledges into dialogue in this commitment to *pluriversality*. I have read, taken up and applied academic knowledge, but at the same time and with the same attention, I have listened to what the people have to say about their realities, about their daily lives and about the theories that seek to explain them.

After the fleeting and dense dialogues we held in the city, several people expressed their gratitude for my humility. As I discussed in Chapter 4, this feedback generates in me a discomfort with the academic research and with the violence that usually clothes our ways of generating knowledge. The feedback they gave me led me to think about the historical debt we have with the populations we work with, and the importance of continuing to push for a model of university and research that investigates with people and not on them.

After this research process, I continue to think it is not possible to conduct research 100% free of epistemic violence, and precisely for this reason it is essential to give centrality to the ethical discussion about the implications of our research. We need to ask ourselves about the possible effects of our approaches and look for ways to mitigate epistemic violence and compensate the people involved.

Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui says that

El discurso postcolonial en América del Norte no sólo es una economía de ideas, también es una economía de salarios, comodidades y privilegios, así como una certificadora de valores, a través de la concesión de títulos, becas, maestrías, invitaciones a la docencia y oportunidades de publicación⁴³⁰ (Rivera Cusicanqui 2010, 65–66).

As scholars, we are inevitably part of this economy. It is a difficult contradiction to embrace. I try to confront it directly and honestly, assuming a responsibility to care for and compensate the people and

⁴³⁰ Free translation: Postcolonial discourse in North America is not only an economy of ideas, it is also an economy of wages, comforts and privileges, as well as a certifier of values, through the awarding of titles, scholarships, master's degrees, teaching invitations and publication opportunities.

populations whose knowledge sustains the lives we live. Breaking epistemic violence begins by resisting the colonial temptation of objectification, by treating with respect the knowledge that is shared with us, by recognizing subjects as capable of reflecting on their realities, and by working with and for communities.

Compensating involves returning the results of the research in formats accessible to the participants and the people involved in the process. The two videos resulting from this thesis are part of this. These videos were produced in response to an express request from two participants, Jacob and Fabiola, who asked me to edit an audiovisual narrative in which their voices, their stories, their work and their reflections could circulate, raise awareness and inspire others. The videos themselves are part of the conclusions of this work, as they synthesize embodied reflections on power, inclusion, re-existence and the commons.

Fabiola, Madre Tierra: <https://youtu.be/Hty9Onb67IY>

Todo el mundo me va a decir Jacob: <https://youtu.be/RWN44D6mQMI>

These videos were created through a participatory process as well, in which we tried to work with a horizontal methodology. In the editing process, we received the support of Amanda Murillo, a social communicator who enthusiastically joined the team. Jacob and Fabiola shared their *sentipensares* in front of the camera. I made an initial script proposal for the editing, and Amanda edited a first cut. Jacob and Fabiola commented on the images and content, suggested modifications and validated the final version of the videos. These videos, of course, do not solve the tensions of epistemic violence, but they try to meet a demand for this study to generate products that can be useful for the participants. Fabiola and Jacob affirm that they want to spread a message. A message that is more than words, it is an incarnated reflection, a narrative that tells a story of resistance, that reveals the multiple forms of violence and oppression they face, but at the same time, shows counter-normative ways of weaving life in the city. Translating this narrative into an audiovisual format makes it easier for Jacob and Fabiola to disseminate their reflections, which are too often ignored, inferiorized or silenced in the city.

Alongside the videos, I developed other forms of compensation. I tend to think that, more than products, we have to think of compensation in terms of processes that transcend academic times. Following the metaphor of involvement proposed by Martinez (2011), I became involved in different kinds of tasks supporting the actions of the participants and their collectives. Especially in the context of the pandemic, as I point out in Chapter 6, I sought to support collectives in their communitarian efforts to sustain life.

Epistemologies of the South and the knowledge of the communities of Abya Yala point to the importance of reciprocity to build alternative biopolitics, biopolitics that sustain life and the commons. This is not only a theoretical conclusion, but a methodological provocation for future research. My involvement continues to this day, and will continue after this thesis, in an exercise of ecology of knowledges that attempts to support their struggles, transforming the results of this study into academic and non-academic products, and into ethical/epistemic reflections on our ways of doing research.

On epistemic extractivism and the economy of privilege it generates, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui says:

...creo que tenemos la responsabilidad colectiva de no contribuir al remozamiento de esta dominación. Al participar de estos foros y prestarnos al intercambio de ideas pudiéramos estar brindando, sin quererlo, armas al enemigo⁴³¹ (Rivera Cusicanqui 2010, 64).

I take this call as part of a path towards less violent forms of research. A decolonial research process has a commitment to the defense of the commons, to the safeguarding of the commons, to resisting the privatization of knowledge and to generating tools to help keep it alive, without uprooting it from its territory-body-land.

9.2. Cartography of inclusion, exclusion and re-existence

Based on the reflections presented above, I wanted to close this thesis with a cartographic exercise on inclusion in the city of San José. If the videos seek to show the voices, bodies and *sentipensares* from the re-existence of two of the participants, this map aims at a macro panorama of the dialectic of inclusion/exclusion. Image 300 captures most of the projects and situations that I analyzed. Taking this map as a basis, I seek to point out the tensions, power relations and mechanisms in which power is produced and oppressions are intertwined.

⁴³¹ Free translation: I believe that we have a collective responsibility not to contribute to the further entrenchment of this domination. By participating in these forums and lending ourselves to the exchange of ideas, we could be unwittingly providing weapons to the enemy.

Image 300
Cartography of inclusion, exclusion and re-existence in San José



Symbology

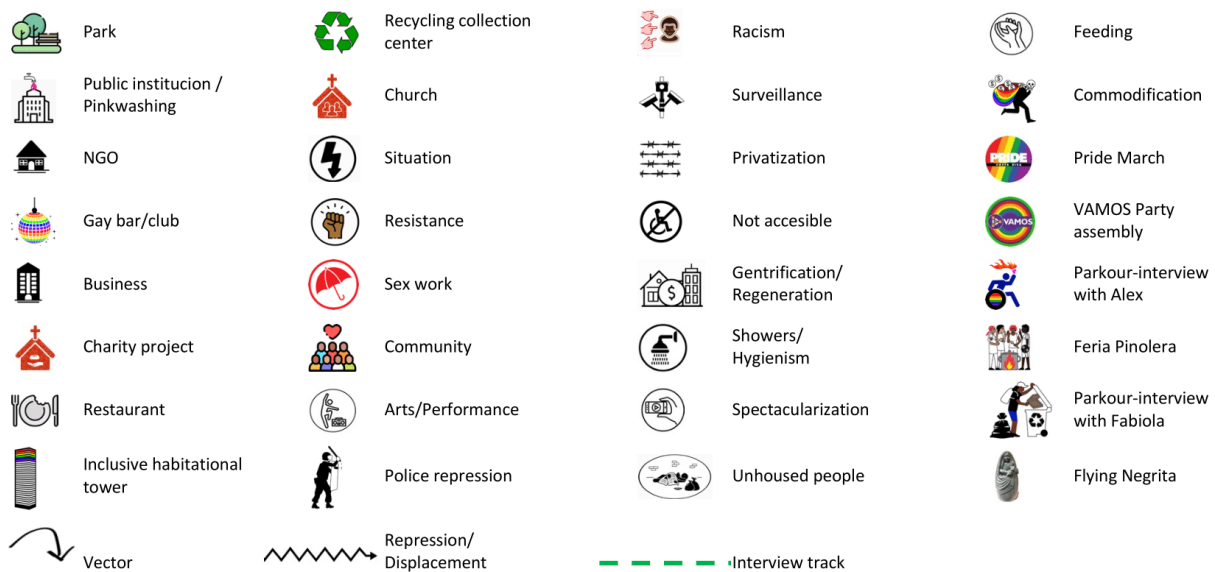


Image 300 shows a cartography that condenses the main results of this study. It could be said that this map, entitled Cartography of inclusion, exclusion and re-existence, is a map of power. Tracing the invisible lines of power on this map has not been an easy task. Fragmentation is part of coloniality. It is no coincidence that it is difficult for us to identify how a queer regeneration project like POPPOP resembles a hygienist project with Christian morals like Chepe se baña, how a fancy and inclusive housing project like URBN resembles a project of surveillance and control like Plan Cuadrante, or how a project that claims to rescue ancestral cuisine like Sikwa resembles the dismantling of the sex workers' association La Sala. Biopower works in a diffuse way through our relationships. It is not always a vertical and coercive exercise of authority. As this map shows us, power is imbricated in our actions, and sometimes it is necessary to break down the discourses in order to find the place where the roots of oppressions are imbricated. And if locating the connections of power is difficult, it seems even more difficult to find the other lines, the ones that join the paths of resistance. This map is an effort to locate on a cartographic representation the main results of this research. It is a map that shows the dialectic of inclusion/exclusion in the city of San José, and the multiple tensions it provokes. The map allows us to locate in space the different projects and situations analyzed. It allows us to visualize power relations and dynamics that produce inequalities. It allows us to see proximities, similarities and continuities, as well as dissidence and forms of resistance. Taking the map as a guide, in the following pages, I would like to develop some conclusions, in the light of the analysis traversed by the critique of national imaginaries and the coloniality of power.

9.2.1. The city as an assembly of power apparatuses

Space, as Costa Rican philosopher Luis Adrián Mora points out, has always been a fundamental element in the development of colonial domination (Mora 2010, 6). Space is not only an arena of conflict, but is also part of that which is disputed. Moreover, space itself can be configured as a technology of power. Mora analyzes the dynamics surrounding space during the conquest period, and discusses the discursive constructions used by the Spanish conquistadors to make of space one more tool in the processes of domination. The invasion, occupation and control of territories in Abya Yala was the fundamental strategy of conquest. In order to control the territories, exploit and extract their riches (including human and non-human animals), it was necessary to produce a narrative that rendered these territories as spaces that could be appropriated (Mora 2010, 6). In this line, we can identify different discursive operations that create the conditions for domination. For a territory to be presented as "available", it is necessary to characterize it as unoccupied, vacant, free. It is not exactly a desert territory, because its raw resources are recognized. Nor is it an uninhabited territory, because its indigenous inhabitants are presented as part of these exploitable resources. What makes these territories available for the conquistadors is the fact that they have no owner.

Mora states:

poblar un territorio es hacerlo existir dentro de la dinámica de conquista. Esta constitución espacial se basa principalmente y de manera paradójica en la pre-existencia de una "población". En realidad, para que haya "poblamiento" español, lo cual significa asentamiento duradero, imperio de la ley, cobro de impuestos, ordenamiento espacial, etc., debe haber mano de obra indígena disponible⁴³² (Mora 2010, 7).

The relationship of many of the native peoples of Abya Yala with the land was shaped by cosmovisions that understood the land and the elements of nature as living entities, and therefore, the relationship with the land was not posed in terms of ownership and property. Yet, regardless of their worldview, the Spanish conquistadors would not have recognized the rights of these peoples over the territories, as this would have implied major complications for appropriation. Here we find another discursive operation, in which the native peoples are produced as inferior beings, incapable of administrating the territory adequately. Even after the powers of the Church and the Crown were forced to acknowledge the indigenous people as beings with souls, they were portrayed as savages, uncivilized and irrational, closer to the beasts than to the humans that crossed the Atlantic. This inferiorization

⁴³² Free translation: To populate a territory is to make it exist within the dynamics of conquest. This spatial constitution is based mainly and paradoxically on the pre-existence of a "population". In reality, for there to be Spanish "poblamiento", which means lasting settlement, rule of law, tax collection, spatial organization, etc., there must be available indigenous labor.

of the native peoples justified the intervention of the conquistadors, who sought to organize, administer and put these unoccupied lands into production.

Five centuries later, these discursive operations continue to permeate the dynamics of appropriation of urban and rural spaces in Costa Rica and Abya Yala. Coloniality weaves a line of continuity between the idea of conquering, possessing, populating a territory, and the discourses that today advocate for the recovery, rescue or appropriation of the city. The methods and terms have changed, but the fundamental operation continues to be the idea that certain groups should intervene in spaces to improve them, to transform them, to make them inhabitable and enjoyable for the citizens who deserve them, and with this, to transform them into productive spaces for capital.

In San José, projects that fall along the progressive-conservative spectrum resort to this discursive operation to justify their actions. This brings to mind the words of Jin Haritaworn when analyzing the coloniality of both gentrification and anti-gentrification discourses, which repeat “the colonial logic of an exotic and transgressive contact zone whose violent and dangerous excesses must be cleared out and civilized”(Haritaworn 2015, 75).

Some of the analyzed projects resort to arguments that allude to the common good, that defend the right to the city or that demand a city for everyone. These statements, once again, repeat the colonial logic. The notion of "common good" promoted by these projects, as we have seen, in reality does not include all of the city's inhabitants. “Everyone” in phrases such as “a city for everyone”, is a synecdoche that illustrates quite well the process of inferiorization, dehumanization and hierarchization of life inherent to coloniality. The right to the city, in reality, is not for everyone. What the synecdoche "everyone" names is a restricted collectivity of “good citizens”. At the same time, this synecdoche draws a line, a border that delineates a normal curve in the city and produces those who are outside this line as something different from that "everyone", different from the collectivity of humans who deserve the city.

Inclusion and integration are frequently sustained by the dispossession and exclusion of others. This is what Bader Sawaia calls the dialectic of inclusion/exclusion. Take the case of rainbow inclusion, the inclusion promoted by LGBTIQ+ organizations, activists, politicians and entrepreneurs. I believe this is a clear example of this dialectic. In Costa Rica, as in France and in many other countries, LGBTIQ+ organizations (which despite their vast acronym focus mainly on rights for the gay and lesbian population) have promoted the idea that inclusion comes through the creation of laws and regulations. The fight for the right to marriage and property rights is coupled with the idea that violence, exclusion and discrimination is something that can be eradicated by legal and judicial means. As a correlate, in the city, an inclusive space is commonly understood as a place free of discrimination

for these populations, understanding discrimination in an individualistic and vertical sense. This unidimensional version of inclusion diverts attention from other structural forms of discrimination, exclusion and violence. It is functional to biopower, as it generates an illusion of inclusion that is easily marketable.

Throughout this study we have seen examples of how the oppressions of race, class, gender and ableism are reproduced in spaces that are promoted as inclusive without further problematization. Yet this unidimensional version of inclusion is not unique to LGBTIQ+ projects. I would say that it is the constant in all projects, which focus on a fragmented vision of exclusion or oppression. This fragmented vision is what makes inclusion compatible with the neoliberal project. Neoliberal inclusion does not touch the bases of oppressions, since its intention is not the transformation or subversion of the domination systems but the integration of certain subpopulations for biopolitical management.

In this line, it is worth recalling the scheme of the biopolitical triangle proposed by Sam Bourcier (2017) which I discussed in Chapter 3, since it allows us to elucidate the complexity in which power relations become entangled when they are hooked on the vertices of the triangle. Bourcier notes the position occupied by LG equality politics within the biopolitical triangle. LG equality politics ignore security technologies and disciplinary mechanisms. These politics have succeeded in incorporating the gay or lesbian subject into the law. They have become a population that, as such, is the object of management and is often complicit in security technologies as well.

Power exists as long as it is exercised, as long as it is put into action (Foucault 1982). This study sought to approach inclusion projects from this perspective, analyzing the way in which they configure power relations. In San José, we see state institutions, political parties and police forces participating in the management of populations. We see charitable or hygienist organizations such as the Street Games and Chepe se baña conducting the actions of unhoused people and, at the same time, generating data that enhance the technologies for population management. We see organized collectivities such as Plan Cuadrante reinventing the panopticon, disciplinary mechanisms and combining them with technologies of security. But at the same time, and entangled in the same biopolitical triangle, we see homocitizens stuck at the apex of the population, unconcerned about the violence and exclusion suffered by other subpopulations, or even taking an active part in the processes of exclusion and displacement.

I have argued that inclusion discourses and practices take the "good Costa Rican" citizen as their subject, and that they are traversed by national imaginaries. In other words, the road to inclusion runs through the adoption of a normativity that responds to the international context, yes, but also to national imaginaries about being Costa Rican. These imaginaries are imposed as a condition for being

a subject of inclusion, and at the same time, they are reinforced and nourished by the practices of inclusion. Inclusion implies a passage of becoming a population, and in that sense, consciously or unconsciously, subjecting to population management.

Inclusion operates in Costa Rica knotted with coloniality. Therefore, in order to analyze the ways in which power operates in inclusion projects, it has been necessary to resort to theoretical frameworks both in the field of biopolitics and in the field of decolonial studies and feminisms of Abya Yala. The dialogues with people who are not part of the nation or who threaten it (racialized people, migrants, sex workers, unhoused residents of the city, impoverished trans women, queer people with disabilities) were also fundamental for understanding the cruelty and violence that palpitate in the city.

I would say that the city, more than a stage, is a territory in dispute, and although the authorities and the inhabitants of the zone of being sought to proclaim it as their own, this study also permitted us to learn about collective actions and projects that contest power and seek to develop alternative biopolitics in the city to sustain life. As discussed in Chapter 1, according to Foucault (2001) the power apparatuses are an assembly of discourses, institutions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic proportions, architectural planning, structures in space, which are arranged for the control and/or management of the population. Looking at the map that gathers the various projects analyzed, I am inclined to conclude, following Agamben (2006) that the neoliberal city is an assemblage of power apparatuses, where life and death are administered through technologies that manage bodies and spaces (70). It is in these spaces, but also in the subjects that inhabit them and the relationships they sustain, where the power apparatuses are enacted. Crossed by production, reproduction and consumption, the management of bodies, life and relationships in the city is driven by neoliberal normativity. I highlight the metaphor of assemblage because I find it particularly insightful. After observing power/knowledge discourses operate in actions, bodies and objects in the public space, and by paying attention to the relations between them, the case of the city of San José allows us to see that disciplinary apparatuses coexist with security apparatuses, and that different technologies of power operate simultaneously, by different means, to maintain neoliberal normativity.

9.2.2. Power beyond the Law

As discussed in Part III, seeking inclusion by means of incorporation into the Law entails a number of pitfalls. Similarly, analyzing power only in the realm of law can be misleading. For example, Costa Rica has a relatively progressive legislation on the rights of LGBTIQ+ people, a law that punishes racist discrimination, and a law that seeks to guarantee accessibility for people with disabilities in public and

private spaces. However, the dialogues with the participants show us the violence and oppression that continue to exist in the city despite these laws. For this reason, I set out to analyze power beyond the Law and the institutional framework of the government. I proposed to analyze the discourses and practices of inclusion in San José from a critical perspective, placing special emphasis on power relations, on the way in which power mechanisms operate and are assembled in the city. I was especially interested in analyzing the ways in which the apparatuses organize, regulate or administer life, bodies, spaces, relationships, risks, security, and how these apparatuses also administer death, how they distribute life chances, how they push certain subjects into the abyss, sometimes even in the name of the common good.

The mechanisms of power, as we have seen, are not always explicit at first glance. At times, when we break down the discourses of what is presented as an inclusive project or space, we find that they are enmeshed in a dialectic of inclusion/exclusion (Sawaia 1999), where both nourish each other, and one is not possible without the other.

Power is not something that is held but something that is exercised (Foucault 2002). To study it we need to observe the structures but also, and with special attention, we need to examine relationships and daily practices. Power is neither univocal nor unidirectional, and it does not always present itself in the same forms. It is not, as Foucault (2002) warned, restricted to a vertical exercise in which some groups exercise power from a superior plane way over those who are oppressed. Looking at the map above, it seems evident that power is rather a field of forces, with vectors pushing in different directions, in simultaneous ways, sometimes coordinated, sometimes untidily, sometimes opposed. The map shows us a graphic representation of the diffuse character of power.

In this sense, I stress the importance of studying power beyond the traditional and legitimized mechanisms in which we know it. It is not a matter of discarding the study of laws, regulations, institutional actions and repressive forces, but of the importance of complementing these analyses with the study of everyday life, spaces and relationships. In other words, it is important to analyze the discourses that laws, governmental institutions and law enforcement agents produce, but it is also important to analyze what they do not say, what they produce as an absence.

An example of this can be found in the case of Law 7600. Passed in 1996, it stipulates that premises and public spaces receiving public must be adapted to ensure accessibility for people with disabilities. However, as we observed with Alex, the law is hardly enforced. People who are wheelchair users are excluded from public spaces and commercial establishments (including many that promote themselves as inclusive). Their vital field is restricted in the city, even in the era of human rights and inclusive Costa Rica.

Another example of the opacity of power in the law is the case of the law against Vagrancy, Mendicity and Abandonment. Repealed in 1994, this law was used for decades to repress the presence of trans women and sex workers in the public space. However, as the war survivors explain, the repeal of the law did not end the persecution, punishment and police abuses. In other words, the repeal of the law did not end the relations of power. The necropower that sought to crush their existence transformed its mechanisms. Discipline and punishment gave way to biopower. The local government, police forces and health authorities joined forces to implement the hygienist management of the population in the city, and thus gave continuity to the persecution and displacement of trans women.

As Spade notes:

power is not simply about certain individuals being targeted for death or exclusion by a ruler, but instead about the creation of norms that distribute vulnerability and security. (Spade 2015, 4)

The vectors that displace undesirable bodies (those of subpopulations like trans women, sex workers and unhoused residents) do not come only from formally institutionalized authorities. Today, almost two decades after the repeal of the Law, trans women who are sex workers continue to be displaced and persecuted in the public space, now with the help of organized neighbors. As we saw with Plan Cuadrante, neighbors and business owners who strive to place themselves on a higher rung in the hierarchy of life, ally with the authorities to sanitize and privatize public spaces in their neighborhoods. NGOs are not far behind, as in the successful case of *Chepe se baña*, which processes the bodies that show evidence of poverty, and returns them to the streets stylized and perfumed, so that their presence does not bother so much the owners of the city.

Studying laws and regulations allows us to analyze power at one level. Dialoguing with people who are left out of the promises of inclusion, walking the city with them, observing with them the structures, the dynamics, the barriers, the relationships, made possible other levels of analysis that escape the scope of the Law. Although perhaps less explicit, there, in the actions and relationships, the mechanisms of power also operate.

This research attempts to provide empirical evidence on the importance of studying the multiple dimensions of power and the way in which they interweave. This, of course, has already been said by various authors from traditions such as Foucauldian, decolonial, feminist and critical race, queer and trans* studies. Yet, despite these important contributions, we continue to find numerous studies in the colonial universities that focus exclusively on laws and official statistics, and measure inclusion, discrimination or violence as if they were discrete variables. These studies tend to revolve around universal subjects, as if all queer people faced the violence of heteronormativity in the same way, or all impoverished people suffered class violence in the same way. If I had proceeded from a vertical

perspective of power to study inclusion in San José, I would probably have achieved to problematize part of the discourses, but I would have left out power relations that are established on a daily basis in the city, even within those projects whose agenda is inclusion. In this sense, I argue that the analysis of the scope of the Law is important but insufficient, and that establishing conclusions about inclusion, power or violence exclusively from the discursive plane of the Law can lead us to great misunderstandings that exacerbate the conditions of exclusion or vulnerability for many people who embody the imbrication of oppressions.

Finally, these reflections on the Law, power and the methodologies for studying it also seek to give something back to social movements and collectives that resist violence or push for social transformations. The discourse of a law may be full of nice words, it may promise security, inclusion and equality, and yet, in practice, its application may be far from what it promises. The Law is an apparatus of the Nation-State, and it is important to recognize it as such, as a mechanism that serves control and reinforces the management of the population. Inscribed within the coloniality of power, the Law inevitably reproduces oppression, exclusion and violence towards the bodies where the failure of normativity is made evident, towards those subjects who live outside the zone of being. In this sense, I do not seek to dictate prescriptions or delegitimize the struggles of collectives that seek to transform or create laws, but I hope that the results of this study can be an invitation to distrust the discourse of the Law, to turn our gaze towards the interstices that are not covered by the laws and to work with those who inhabit these spaces to expand the mechanisms of struggle so that the pursue of inclusion of some does not provoke dispossession or exclusion for others.

9.2.3. Biopolitics and inclusion

Recognizing the limits of the domain of Law, this study set out to trace the ways in which biopower operates in an area that, within the dichotomous thinking that characterizes Western modernity, is often thought of as essentially good: inclusion.

As the map above shows, this thesis encompassed projects of a very diverse nature. Perhaps, at first glance, it is not so easy to glimpse the lines that bind these projects, perhaps, even, some might seem as essentially different, or radically opposed. However, what I am trying to show is that all these initiatives, which are inscribed in one way or another in the discourses of inclusion, are threaded together within the neoliberal project.

A few years ago, a friend who is a cis/heterosexual woman came to me with a question. She wanted to understand why the practices we call pinkwashing were a "bad" thing. Her question was genuine. She works in a powerful multinational company where sexual diversity is celebrated and branded every June. She thought it was a laudable thing for the company to do, but wanted to understand why someone

like me, who embodies gender dissidence, looked with suspicion at such discourses of inclusion. We had an open dialogue and shared questions. I tried to take the discussion out of the good/bad dichotomy, and put in tension the discourses of inclusion, pointing out the people who are left out of them. I recognized the important for LGBTIQ+ workers in her company to have campaigns that combat discrimination and encourage respect and inclusion. But at the same time, I raised my concerns about how visibility politics can be recuperated for the exercise of power. Who are these discourses excluding, who are they forgetting, who are they erasing? We also talked about how painting themselves in rainbow colors generates profits for these companies and how it allows them to position their companies as inclusive and respectful of human rights, despite their active participation in the dynamics of exclusion, dispossession, extractivism and displacement of certain populations. At the end of a long debate in which we both learned and shared insights, my friend told me that she still had many doubts. I invited her to embrace those doubts and to turn them into questions and concerns to accompany her daily practices, including her workspace.

I embraced her doubts as well. This was not the only time someone asked me why I hold a critical position towards certain discourses and practices of inclusion directed at LGBTIQ+ populations. I know this is a complex position to understand. It is a complex position to hold too. It involves the analysis of power on multiple levels and in its relational form. Coloniality has been tremendously potent in its ways of imbricating power, but also in its capacity to entangle it in such a way that it is difficult for us to even recognize it. The questions my friend asked me have accompanied me for years and undoubtedly run through this thesis in the form of research questions.

It is difficult to escape this good/bad dichotomy, which reminds me of militaristic discourses. It is even more difficult when there are conservative groups with privileged positions that use this rhetoric to exert pressure to safeguard the bases of domination. They point at us as "evil" and "threats" and often the reaction from our part is to reverse the discourse, positioning ourselves as the good ones and pointing at them as bad ones. As I discussed in Chapter 6, in the times of neoliberal inclusion, the rainbow has been used to draw a bright border that separates two sides in heated polarization. It is a Manichean line that dazzles the perception and impedes us from seeing other diversities, other forms of violence and exclusion, other populations that have been historically oppressed. Those who oppose rainbow inclusion are often labeled as regressive, conservatives, or haters. Those who embrace discourses of rainbow inclusion are automatically labeled as progressives. And these are cast as the only two possible positions.

I wanted to move away from this dichotomy and approach very diverse projects within the "progressive- conservative" spectrum, with the only requirement that they promoted, to some extent, a discourse of inclusion. My intention with this was neither to classify them as progressive or conservative, nor to contrast them as essentially different, but rather to try to identify the similarities and continuities in projects that, outwardly, are based on different ideological foundations. I have tried to be careful not to single out "good guys" and "bad guys" in this analysis, despite the often

outrageous and violent situations I observed. Rather, I sought to highlight the complexity of these projects. This complexity makes binary categorization impossible.

In concluding the analysis of such diverse projects, I would like to emphasize that the criticisms I am raising are not against specific individuals but rather against the power relations that their actions produce and reproduce. In many of the projects I met enthusiastic people eager to transform the world, as well as workers with a thirst for equality, activists, entrepreneurs, officials of the humanitarian industry radiant with the desire for a better society. However, we are all trapped in the matrix of domination. In other words, it is not a matter of stating that there are some bad apples, some greedy apples, some authoritarian apples, but of pointing out that the systems of domination that produce us as subjects generate dynamics of authoritarianism, dispossession, and inequality, and that, when we do not problematize them, these dynamics permeate our practices, even those that are based on good intentions. By this, I do not mean to say that we are victims of our context, and that we are therefore exempt from responsibility for our actions. Oppression, violence, domination generate an economy of goods, experiences, privileges and commodities for some, and of pain and death for others. This is simply unjust and recognizing the structural conditions that cause inequality does not exempt those who profit from it from responsibility.

Making this clarification, in the following pages I would like to draw some concluding remarks about the way in which [bio/necro]power operates in the discourses and practices of inclusion in the city of San José. These reflections are flexible and are not intended to establish a discourse of truth, but rather a critical path for approaching projects that promote inclusion. For this, I propose a loose categorization of the kinds of projects analyzed, the discourses they uphold, the ways in which the mechanisms of power operate and the practices of subjectification they produce. These categories should not be read as immovable structures, but as a tool that helps to understand the way in which power relations are configured in these projects and in the city of San José. In this sense, their boundaries are permeable and malleable, and perhaps some of these projects are embedded in more than one category.

9.2.3.1. Characterization of the projects

The following is a characterization of the main forms of organization that I was able to identify in the different projects. I do not mean to suggest a normative nomenclature. Rather, I seek to locate the format in which the relationships and actions of these projects are organized and/or managed, which constitutes a first level of analysis for understanding the way in which power operates.

Projects in NGOs format:

As I discussed in Chapter 6, NGOization is a phenomenon that has taken deep roots in Costa Rica and Abya Yala (Falquet 2020). There are hundreds, if not thousands of NGOs in Costa Rica. In the city of San José, I identified associations, foundations, and religious groups that are constituted as non-profit organizations. They develop actions, interventions or services within the framework of the inclusion of "vulnerable" populations in the city. In general terms, in this kind of projects I observed a vertical structure, with centralized leaderships that make decisions and define the objectives and work methodologies, and a pyramid of officials and/or volunteers who follow the instructions of the management. Their vocabulary is usually influenced by technical *human-rightism* promoted by international cooperation.

Very diverse initiatives are organized as NGOs. From the giant Hivos, which finances projects carried out by small human rights organizations in the city, to the hygienist project Chepe se baña, which aims to conduct the actions of unhoused people without them realizing that they are being managed, or the Christian charity project the Street Games, that seeks to teach Christian values through the management of hunger and guilt of unhoused people. The "other" Sala is an NGO that aims to abolish sex work, and usurped the name of the historical organization La Sala in order to access funds from international cooperation. In the field of the arts there is also TEOR/ética, a foundation that channels international funds for the promotion of art and culture, while at the same time trying to promote respectful coexistence in Barrio Amón. Chepequetas, which organizes the walking tours of San José, is formally an NGO that works for the right to a walkable city, although in practice some of their projects (including the walking tours) are lucrative services that are closer to human-rightism entrepreneurship. Even the Pride March is a foundation that claims to be a non-profit organization (although the budget for the Pride 2022 closing concert alone was \$500,000). In short, there are many projects that follow this organizational model.

I am interested in highlighting the organizational model followed by the different projects since it is a first approach to understand the way in which power relations function, both within the organizations as well as with their target populations, with the State and with other inhabitants of the city. In the case of NGOs, as discussed in Chapter 6, the way in which relationships are configured perpetuates dependency and reproduces colonial logics of control and domination. NGOs tend to operate with hierarchical and formal structures and follow organizational models that resemble corporate management models.

There are organizations (such as La Sala or Transvida) that are organized under the NGO model dictated by international cooperation. In this sense, they are not exempt from vertical practices, tensions and relations of power and dependence. Their agendas are inevitably influenced by the lines of international cooperation. However, there is one factor that differentiates them from projects such as those mentioned above: they are, above all, community-based organizations, formed, run and lead by people who embody oppressions, and come together to fight to transform the situations they face. In this sense, the relationships they establish with the people who participate in their activities or use their services are somewhat more horizontal. This is even reflected in language. The term most frequently used in both La Sala and Transvida to refer to the people they work with is "compañera", versus terms such as users, beneficiaries or target populations that are frequent in NGOs. For this reason, I will return later to these organizations as community projects. Instead, among the NGOs, I am considering those organizations that, from a place of expertise or moral authority, develop interventions in the spaces and/or on the bodies of people, who they have targeted as vulnerable, excluded or in need of assistance. That is to say, something that characterizes them is that place of exteriority, expertise or superiority in relation to their "target populations".

Entrepreneurship projects:

Entrepreneurship projects are characterized by adopting business logics. It is not that NGOs or other projects do not generate income. In fact, some of them move large capitals. However, such projects claim to be non-profit associations, whose objectives revolve around the common good. Entrepreneurship projects, on the other hand, operate as businesses and explicitly seek to make a profit.

Some projects are relatively small, like Sikwa or POPPOP, others are large, solid companies, like the Diverse Chamber of Commerce. Some, like the ones mentioned above, operate relatively steadily over time. Gay bars and clubs can also fit into this category, as well as gay-friendly restaurants and bars in Escalante neighborhood, or housing projects that promote themselves as inclusive, such as URBN and Alma de Escalante. Others, although they operate only once a year, move enormous capital, such as Expo Boda Pride LGBT. In this line I also locate the Pride March, which although they publicly claim to be a non-profit NGO, has raised significant criticism from LGBTIQ+ people who claim that the owners of the Pride March make money out of our struggles and our existence (Muñoz 2022). There are also projects that we could identify as hybrids, as is the case of Chepequetas. Chepequetas is an NGO that promotes the right to a walkable and enjoyable city for everyone. However, along with these actions

and their human rights vocabulary, it also develops a commercial activities, such as the walking tour in which I carried out the observation described in Chapter 5.

The internal functioning of this type of project is vertical and hierarchical. Its employees receive salaries for carrying out positions with clear functions. As companies, their owners make the decisions. Relations with the populations are mediated by the laws of the market. Competition drives their growth and determines how they relate to other organizations. If NGOs speak of beneficiary populations, entrepreneurship projects speak of clients, whom they seek to attract with marketing strategies.

In all cases, what characterizes this type of projects is that they capitalize and commercialize diversity, culture, history, security, or resistance. In other words, they market inclusion. Inclusion is promoted as a product, available to those who can afford it. They are for-profit organizations. In order to be included, it is necessary to invest capital. Inclusion and security are then commodities to be bought, and are restricted to those who have consumption capacity.

Equality politics projects:

In Costa Rica, discourses of inclusion have gained ground in progressive institutional politics. As mentioned in Chapter 6, the governments of the Acción Ciudadana Party leveraged social polarization to exploit an inclusive discourse that sought to attract voters who were angered or frightened by the actions of religious political groups that, allied with right-wing parties, had managed to hinder the advancement of the rights of LGBTIQ+ people.

Around the 2014 election, inclusion starts to become a synonym of rights for LGBTIQ+ people in Costa Rica, in a discursive movement that simultaneously casts aside other populations that in the past had been associated with the notion of inclusion (impoverished youth, people with disabilities) and others that have been historically ignored or excluded (Afro people, indigenous people, migrants). This, it is important to say, is not the exclusive work of the Acción Ciudadana Party, but this party, with the passive complicity of unidimensional LGBTIQ+ organizations, had an active participation in this narrowing of the notion of inclusion⁴³³.

⁴³³ Although it is not within the scope of this study, it is important to mention that the 2022 elections marked the resounding defeat of the Acción Ciudadana Party, which did not win a single seat in Congress and came in at the bottom of the presidential race. The accumulated discontent against the government of Carlos Alvarado was recovered by the neoliberal candidate Rodrigo Chaves, who managed to win the presidency with a new and unknown party. Two months after assuming the presidency, Chaves has already eliminated the figure of

The Acción Ciudadana Party approved a series of decrees, rules and regulations in public institutions, and orchestrated the strategy that finally achieved the legalization of equal marriage and the name change for trans* people, which activists had been pushing for a long time. Likewise, in this line we find the VAMOS party, a political organization that makes inclusion its flag, its program and its agenda. VAMOS promotes a slightly broader notion of inclusion than the Acción Ciudadana party. However, their proposal is also very much focused on the rights of LGBTIQ+ people, leaving out the struggles for redistribution, the fight against racism or coloniality. Thus, for example, for VAMOS it was not contradictory to hold their assemblies in the queer regeneration venue POPPOP. On the contrary, they welcome such initiatives, as their actions are framed within neoliberal inclusion.

What characterizes this type of project is that they are committed to transformation by means of representative democracy. In other words, they seek to occupy positions of power in the government in order to promote change from there. Internally, their relations are vertical, responding to the hierarchies inherent to political parties. They promote public debate and make use of political communication and propaganda to mobilize support for their projects. They may establish relations to a greater or lesser extent with their militants and the populations for whose rights they advocate, for example through consultative processes or validation of public policies. But these relationships are always inscribed in the logic of representation, which restricts free, horizontal and direct participation, especially for those whose knowledge and *sentipensares* are inferiorized by the discourses of knowledge/power in institutional politics.

Their focus is on the recognition and protection of rights. They are committed to transformation based on normative mechanisms: laws, regulations, penal sanctions. They seek to guarantee rights by expanding what is permitted by law and to grant security by expanding what is prohibited. Consistent with colonial law, oppressions or discriminations are considered from a unidimensional perspective. In this sense, their project of inclusion legitimizes the colonial Nation-State and its technologies of power, and thereby inevitably intensifies oppressions within the imbrication of social relations of power.

Social cleansing projects:

When I think of social cleansing, inclusion is the last thing that comes to my mind. I think, instead, of extermination, of necropolitics, of the violence of gore capitalism (Mbembe 2013; Valencia 2018).

Commissioner of the Presidential House for LGBTI issues, and his government rescinded contracts and commitments previously acquired with organizations such as Transvida, leaving them in a condition of great vulnerability. It seems that this new government is determined to put an end to LGBTIQ+ inclusion policies.

However, the fieldwork led me to some initiatives that openly demanded spaces cleared of undesirable beings as a way of guaranteeing the right to the city for citizens who deserve it. Although they do not resort to direct murder and extermination, these projects are the most tangible form in which necropower operates in San José. Exclusion, disciplining, displacement, criminalization are the mechanisms that allow good citizens to live the lives they live in the neighborhoods they inhabit.

In a certain way, Chepe se baña's hygienism aligns with these projects, insofar as it seeks to intervene the bodies that spoil the city so that they do not disturb the urban landscape of the good citizens. Yet, this hygienist project, although it objectifies unhoused people, does not aim to make them disappear, but to push them into a certain normativity. The projects that I place in this category tend to use more repressive mechanisms. For example, the cleaning policies of the Municipality of San José, which persecute, punish and displace people who are unhoused, sex workers, trans women, drug users, migrants, informal vendors, among other subpopulations identified as undesirable in the public space. In this category I also place the Plan Cuadrante, where neighbors and police work together to expel undesirable bodies from Amón neighborhood, in the name of the well-being of the neighbors.

It is in this type of project that the violence of the inclusion/exclusion dialectic becomes most visible and clear. From my perspective, I would say these projects are purely exclusionary. However, those who promote them use the rhetoric of the right to the city for everyone. Their discourses use the language of inclusion, and those who celebrate and defend these types of projects seem to be convinced that their actions contribute to the common good.

We can identify two types of actors in these projects: the authorities and civil society. The authorities exercise power through traditional mechanisms of repression. Organized groups of "good citizens" establish different types of relationships with the populations. Based on the position a person occupies within the imbrication of social relations of power, they may be recognized as peers or as inferior. They establish strategic alliances with their peers to protect their privileges and individual freedoms, which should not be confused with solidarity. Likewise, they establish strategic alliances with the authorities. With the subpopulations they consider inferior, they establish relationships of violence, subjugation and domination.

Inclusion in these projects is based on the idea of safe and enjoyable spaces for the citizens who deserve the city. This logic implies that those beings whose existence disturbs the establishment must be removed from the space. These beings are not part of the recipients of the "common good". In order to displace them under a discourse of the right to the city, it is first necessary to carry out an operation that inferiorizes them and strips them of any position that suggests them as subjects of rights.

The inclusive city, in this logic, is a project of class, of race, of domination. In order for good citizens to enjoy the city, it is necessary to exclude the bare life. Or, thought in terms of Grosfoguel, for the inhabitants of the zone of being to be able to enjoy the city, the citizens of the zone of not being have to be wiped out.

Community based or re-existence projects:

In analyzing the diversity of projects described above, all of which aim in some way towards inclusion in the city, we find a notion of inclusion that is restrictive, an inclusion where conditions and restrictions apply. As summarized by Jacob:

A mí lo único que medio me gusta de Costa Rica es el “reconocimiento” a la comunidad LGTB. Y lo digo entre comillas, porque también ahí hay clases. Porque no es lo mismo un gay pobre negro, misquito, indígena, emigrante, y lo que sea, que un gay de clase, de dinero y todo eso⁴³⁴ (Jacob, in discussion with the author, November 26, 2019).

The dialogue with the participants is a methodological attempt to understand the scope, limitations, contradictions and diffuse zones of the discourses on inclusion in San José. With Jacob, with José, with Fabiola, with Alex, with the war survivors, with several strangers I met in the streets, we unveiled other sides of the discourses of inclusion. Their embodied reflections speak to us of the hierarchies that these discourses harbor, of the power relations that traverse, shape and feed the dialectic of inclusion/exclusion. Listening to their experiences, walking with them around the city, it was possible to find what is absent in statistics, laws, projects, books and academic articles. Their words are not mere examples that illustrate our theories. Their knowledge nourishes the analysis and gives us a broad and diverse perspective on the ways in which power operates in the city.

The aforementioned projects of inclusion are not developed without tensions. The exercise of power also generates resistance (Foucault 1982), and this is something we can also observe in the city. Spaces, laws, social conventions, normativities, social relations, surveillance, segregation, discipline, order, privileges, opulence, inequality, collide with the feelings and needs of bodies, the rebellious subjects, their irreverence, their solidarity as a form of re-existence.

In dialogue with the participants, I identified some projects that operate with logics that differ from those mentioned above. Within this category I identify a diversity of community-based projects that seek to generate alternative narratives or collectivize strategies of resistance to the violence of

⁴³⁴ Free translation: The only thing I half like about Costa Rica is the "recognition" of the LGBT community. And I say that in quotation marks, because there are also classes there. Because it is not the same a poor gay black man, misquito, indigenous, migrant, and whatever, than a high class gay man with money and all that.

coloniality and the neoliberal project. Some of these collectives are associations, work with funds from international cooperation or the State, and operate as NGOs, like Transvida or La Sala. This undoubtedly creates pressures and forces negotiations in which coloniality inevitably plays a role. These organizations try to work within these contradictions, without losing the objective of their actions, which is the struggle to improve the living conditions of their populations. What differentiates them from NGOs such as Chepe se baña is that they are grassroots organizations, composed of and led by people who embody the oppressions they are fighting against.

Other projects, such as the Feria Pinolera or MESART, are collectives with more horizontal structures that work on autonomous basis. This does not mean that there are no hierarchies within their organizations, but, at least for now, they sustain an effort to build relationships based on horizontality and plurality. In this sense, they distance themselves from the competitive relations imposed by the market and the neoliberal models that promote one-dimensional inclusion. Instead, they seek to weave bonds based on solidarity, both with their populations and with other oppressed people.

It is worth mentioning that, although they are not projects sustained over time, this study also mapped actions that were developed by collectives or individuals in the public space, that sought in some way to contest power, resist oppression and/or expand the limits of the notion of inclusion. In this sense, the dissident actions in the Pride March, the intervention that provided advice in the case of facing police repression in Parque Francia, or even David's improvised rap that tells his story of resistance as a racialized and psychiatrized person, all contribute to problematize the hegemonic notion of inclusion. As described in Chapter 2, there is also a fertile production of audiovisual and artistic projects that strive to communicate counter-narratives to national imaginaries and promote a critical reading that celebrates diversities in Costa Rica. On another level, Fabiola's life project is not strictly speaking a community project, but the way in which she links her life with that of other beings and commits herself to collective care, reciprocity and the defense of the commons, is an ethical and political project that invites us to build another biopolitics that contests power and defends life.

Not all the projects and actions that I identify as community based or re-existence are conceived within the discourse of inclusion. Some do recover the term, others criticize, confront or discard it, and others seek alternative narratives. What they share in general is the resistance to neoliberal and colonial inclusion. In the words of Daniela Núñez:

No quiero palmadas en la espalda diciendo que me aceptan por ser puto, como si fuese tan fácil, como si a las que somos putos nos resultara tan fácil, como la colonización del pensamiento homosexual que cree que el paso a paso de la inclusión

es sólo un par de lágrimas al salir del closet y después de ahí, con visto bueno, ser incluida en las conversaciones, en algunas, siempre algunas⁴³⁵ (Núñez 2016, para. 7).

As dissidents of the hegemonic notion of inclusion promoted by the neoliberal project, community-based projects' challenge is rather to sustain life, and to transform the conditions that produce exclusion, dispossession and oppressions. They do this through the organization and collectivization of their knowledge and *sentipensares*.

9.2.3.2. Discursive positions

In addition to locating in space the different types of projects analyzed in this thesis, the map above enables another level of analysis, another layer that outlines continuities between different projects. Namely, the discursive lines that sustain these projects, or in FDA's terms, the discursive planes and discursive positions from which the different inclusion projects are shaped. Although I try to point out that all of them are somehow inserted within the macro discourses of neoliberal inclusion, there are nuances that bring closer or distance their argumentative strands and their mechanisms of action.

Foucauldian Discourse Analysis points out the importance of identifying power relations, the ways in which power mechanisms function and the power apparatuses that organize these relations. In this sense, it is important to identify the discourses that sustain these projects because it facilitates the understanding of how power operates through their actions. In the following pages, I describe the main discursive positions that I was able to identify:

Human-rightism:

Human-rightism, understood as defined in Chapter 6, as the trend in activism that adopts an agenda defined by international cooperation and the hegemonic tendencies of social movements in the Global North (Vásquez 2012), is a broad discursive position from which different inclusion projects operate. From equality politics projects to NGOs, the doctrine of human rights has become the argumentative rhetoric that justifies different interventions in the city. *Human-rightism* is versatile, as a discursive framework it encompasses work with people with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ people, migrants, racialized people, women, citizens, etc. It is a discursive position that springs from a universalist perspective, which establishes a normative framework with standards that are supposed be guaranteed for all

⁴³⁵ Free translation: I don't want pats on the back saying I'm accepted for being a puto [sex worker], as if it were so easy, as if those of us who are putos had it easy, like the colonization of homosexual thinking that believes that the path of inclusion is just a couple of tears when coming out of the closet and then from there, with a green light, being included in conversations, in some, always some, conversations.

people. Inclusion, from this perspective, consists of adapting laws, spaces and social relations to the minimum standards established by national and international regulations.

We find this discursive position, in the first place, in state institutions and in the politics of projects such as the VAMOS party. The notion of sexual citizenship is framed in this discourse, insofar as it claims equal rights and equal duties for all people. We also find it in NGOs such as Chepequetas, which defends the right to the city. We even find it, albeit strained, in the reflections of some of the participants, when they claim that in Costa Rica human rights that are written on paper are not respected:

Yo siempre he dicho que lo que da [Costa Rica] es estadía, pero en defensa de derechos humanos... En promoción y defensa de derechos humanos deja mucho que desear. Deja mucho que desear desde el Estado, y obviamente no hay algo que vele por... porque sos persona y tenés derechos universales, que al venir a la nueva Costa Rica o a la Suiza centroamericana de Costa Rica, te lo pisotean, y te pisotean como persona...⁴³⁶ (Jacob, in discussion with the author, November 26, 2019).

The fundamental mechanism of the *human-rightism* discourse is the Law. The Law defines which behaviors and actions are permitted and which are prohibited. It outlines the field of action for populations. It establishes sanctions for those who deviate from the established norms. In this sense, *human-rightism* resorts to two main lines of action for inclusion: recognition and punitivism. On the one hand, it seeks to include in the laws the rights of historically oppressed populations, as in the case of equal marriage and the right to a name change for trans* people.

On the other hand, it calls for the establishment of sanctions for discrimination and violence faced by oppressed populations. In both cases, statistics constitute a fundamental tool, as they support the demands for recognition in the Law. Likewise, visibility politics are a resource frequently used from this discursive position. A good part of the resources for projects advocating for human rights come from international cooperation, and this, in turn, constitutes a way, sometimes subtle, sometimes tense, in which the Global North perpetuates its cultural and material domination over the Souths of the world.

States, through their institutions, are supposed to create the conditions and ensure respect for the human rights of all people. However, the dialogues with the participants of this study point out the great problem of the universalist aspiration of the human rights discursive position, especially when it becomes monothematic, unidimensional and fragmented, and leaves aside the way in which the

⁴³⁶ Free translation: I have always said that what [Costa Rica] gives is a stay, but regarding the protection of human rights.... In the promotion and protection of human rights, it leaves much to be desired. The State leaves much to be desired, and obviously there is no institution that watches over... because you are a person and you have universal rights, and when you come to the new Costa Rica or to the Central American Switzerland of Costa Rica, they step on you, and they trample on you as a person...

oppressions of race, class, gender, among others, condition access to human rights. Inclusion is not a universal, even if that is how we want to frame it.

Les demandes d'inclusion et d'incorporation dans la nation ou d'intégration républicaine des gais et des lesbiennes institutionnel·le·s qui n'ont aucune légitimité représentative les mettent en position de demander à être reconnu·e·s par les institutions qui produisent les inégalités et les discriminations qu'ils·elles prétendent combattre (Bourcier 2017, 42).

The problematic knot of this discourse is what Bourcier points out in the quote above. State institutions are relied upon to ensure respect and inclusion, when these same institutions have historically reproduced oppression and exclusion. As I pointed out in Chapter 6, I do not mean that struggles in the field of institutional politics and the Law should be abandoned, but these struggles need to be articulated from a perspective that contemplates the interlocking of oppressions, so that they do not end up becoming mechanisms through which power is exercised over subpopulations.

The *human-rightism* discursive position cannot escape the coloniality of power. As mentioned above, its mechanisms are determined by the normative structures of the Nation-State. Moreover, this discourse revolves around the notion of the human, a subject that, when posed as universal, ends up concealing the power relations that escape the sphere of the Law or that act through it. When the mechanisms for transformation are proposed exclusively in the field of the Law, inclusion is caught in the coloniality of power, and from there it inevitably reproduces violence and oppression.

Commodification:

Commodification refers to the process of transforming something into a product to be sold in the market. It is a practice or a set of practices that produces commodities. Not only objects are turned into products for commercial purposes. The scope of commodification has succeeded in recovering knowledge, identities, cultural heritage, spaces, nature and common goods, and transforming them into products with a price on the market. In this line, even collective struggles are often engulfed by the market, in a powerful double movement that neutralizes them and at the same time privatizes them.

In neoliberal capitalism, commodification is presented as a natural flow of the market. However, the process of transforming the common into a commodity requires a discursive framework to support and justify it. Throughout this study we find several examples of projects that operate from the discursive position of commodification. One example is Sikwa, which despite its efforts to uphold a rhetoric of respect and rescue of ancestral culture, appropriates the knowledge of native peoples,

uproots them from the cultures that have kept them alive, processes them with a white Western aesthetic, and sells them to white and mestizo customers at high prices, with little compensation to the communities or support for their struggles for land, life and freedom. All this happens under a discourse that manages to present the white Sikwa entrepreneurs as defenders of the ancestral culture.

The discursive position of commodification does not always openly defend extractivism. Frequently, such practices are produced as an absence, in the same way that the constant denunciations of aggressions issued from the indigenous territories in resistance are absent from Sikwa's social media. While producing this absence, this discourse operates by presenting the market as a mechanism that enhances struggles and cultures through massification processes and visibility policies.

I found clear examples of commodification as a discursive position held by gay (and some straight) entrepreneurs, who have managed to incorporate Costa Rica into the giant international diversity market. Expo Boda Pride LGBTI with its display of fine products and services for the diverse wedding industry, URBN selling at exorbitant prices the status of a mainstream gay lifestyle, Alma de Escalante promoting its project as inclusive despite the fact that its owners oppose the rights of gay and lesbian people, in short, a very varied offer of commodities aimed at what the CCDCR identifies as an unattended sector of the market.

As I discuss in Chapter 7, the liberating potential of dissent from normativity is neutralized by the market, which in turn imposes new normativities. They sell us a massified way of being gay, lesbian or trans*, and a series of accessories and goods that we can buy to legitimize and demonstrate identity. Pride March is a paradigmatic example in which a group of entrepreneurs had the vision to privatize a social mobilization and turn it into a business that unfolds in the public space. Its owners make the decisions and receive the profits on behalf of a collectivity that includes many people who are still waiting for their material conditions to get better.

Inclusion as commodification is based on neoliberal normativity. Power relations are mediated by capital. Power is exercised through the mechanisms of racist, ableist, patriarchal capitalism. Productivity and consumption capacity hierarchize life and determine access to neoliberal inclusion. Those who do not achieve or do not want to conform to neoliberal normativity are therefore pushed to exclusion, and at the same time are held responsible for the dispossession they face. Their embodied reflections show us that despite the explosion of the diversity industry, historically oppressed populations continue to be produced as bare life and pushed to death, even by some homocitizens who have recently been incorporated into the zone of being.

Hygienism:

As discussed in Chapter 4, projects operating from the discursive position of hygienism seek to adapt spaces and the bodies that inhabit them to a normativity that responds to capitalist productivity. Inclusion, from this hygienist position, requires intervention from a position of power, either to adapt the bodies to the normativity, or to clean the spaces so that the subjects who adopt this normativity can enjoy the city.

Hygienism takes various forms in the city. From the social cleansing policies deployed by the Municipality, to the organized neighbors of Plan Cuadrante who want the streets clean of undesirable beings, or the charity of Chepe se baña that stylizes the impoverished bodies in the city, the discursive position of hygienism is a potent combination of disciplinary and biopolitical practices that impose a certain aesthetic and a certain moral that define who is allowed to exist in the public space. In short, hygienist discourse clearly draws the limits of the normal curve.

Likewise, queer regeneration projects such as POPPOP can operate from a hygienist discursive position. This project does not intervene directly on bodies, but seeks to transform spaces, to "improve" them through economic reactivation and the "injection of color". In POPPOP we find a performativity that stylizes poverty, a performativity of space, whose design imitates what is considered decadent in the Red-Light District. But the aesthetics of poverty in this space are not threatening or disgusting, for it is merely a masquerade. Their "safe space" was free of threatening or undesirable beings who could not pay the prices of this bar. The subjects who inhabited this space did not embody the dispossession or class violence faced by the locals in the area, they kept their privileges intact. However, their act is not innocuous. As I discuss in Chapter 8, this performativity of space has effects on the Red-Light District and its inhabitants. As a performative act, it creates a fiction whose effect produces the illusion of a truth that transforms the neighborhood and the relationships in the space. This discursive position hygienizes private and public space and also produces a hygienized aesthetic of poverty, which, freed from class oppression, becomes an exoticizing element in the regeneration project.

Hygienist discourses configure power relations in the public space. When hygienist discourses come from the authorities, it is easier to observe the power relations. In the case of San José, we see how municipal authorities use strategies such as criminalization, pathologization and stigmatization of certain populations to control them, expel them or incarcerate them. The case of Plan Cuadrante is a bit more complex, as it involves civilians denouncing other civilians who do not meet the standards of

normality. In both cases, the relations are clearly antagonistic, where certain populations are displaced in the name of the common good.

Beyond antagonism, the case of *Chepe se baña* provides important elements to reflect on the diffuse forms that power can take from this discursive position. Whereas in the cases described above power is exercised by explicitly coercive or vertical means, in *Chepe se baña* it works under the logic of subtle management. The project strives to convince users to undergo a series of body interventions following a protocol with clear standards of how the outcome should look. The project claims that it does not force anyone to undergo the interventions. However, during observation and informal interviews I was able to identify tensions between users who were reluctant to cut their hair, change their clothes or be photographed, and the volunteers who tried to convince them to do so. Technologies, and especially social media, are a fundamental tool for this project, which seeks to disseminate images that evidence the tangible results of the project to attract donations. Likewise, there is an explicit interest in generating data and statistics on unhoused people, which are a fundamental tool for biopower.

As indicated by *Chepe se baña*'s director, these interventions are an objective themselves, offering a momentary dose of dignity as a direct benefit. But they also have another objective that is not made explicit to users, which consists of guiding their actions over a period of time to prevent them from using drugs for a while. This second objective seeks a subtle but directed exercise of power, an example of biopolitics in which *Chepe se baña*'s experts manage the bodies of the unhoused people in a given space and time.

The hygienist discursive position operates both through disciplinary and security apparatuses. They surveil and punish dissidence, they enforce normativity, but they also administer life, manage bodies, conduct them in subtle ways. In sum, hygienism is a discourse that produces relations and mechanisms of power within the framework of biopolitics.

Security:

Security is another major discourse shared by several of the analyzed projects. It is a discursive position that complements well with the hygienist discourses. Security is presented as a necessary condition for inclusion. In other words, in order for certain populations to enjoy their rights in the city, it is necessary to guarantee that they can do so safely. From this discursive position, business owners, neighbors, activists and authorities articulate a series practices, interventions, relationships in the city.

As in hygienist discourses, in the discursive position of security we find instruments characteristic of disciplinary apparatuses (such as prohibition and prescription), as well as instruments characteristic of security apparatuses (such as statistics and the management of risks and fears). Projects that work from this discursive position also use disciplinary mechanisms of power, such as the legitimate use of force by police and private security officers, the privatization of spaces, surveillance and control. For example, municipal authorities made use of the Law against Vagrancy, Mendicity and Abandonment to punish and discipline trans women in the 1970s and 1980s. Subsequently, in a biopolitical turn that made use of health statistics, trans* bodies in public space were subjected to severe scrutiny and were produced as a threat to the health of the entire population.

However, these are not the only mechanisms, nor should we reduce security discourses to state devices for control. Fear also mobilizes citizens, who accept or even request the implementation of repressive measures in the name of security. In security apparatuses, Foucault (2009) notes, risk management is a way of driving the actions of populations. Fear becomes a key element, which can be turned into a powerful technology of power.

The case of Plan Cuadrante is a complex example of how power operates from this discursive position. Security apparatuses do not necessarily prescribe what is obligatory or prohibited, they channel actions in other ways. Today in Costa Rica neither "vagrancy" nor sex work is prohibited by law. However, in Amon, neighbors try to prevent these behaviors and the permanence in the public space of those who perform them. This group of neighbors has internalized a set of norms about bodies and behavior in the city, a set of norms that is not dictated by the law, but that determines the risks and life chances of those who "freely" follow or deviate from the normal curve. This normativity, struck by class, race and morality, defines which bodies are allowed to inhabit and circulate in this neighborhood, and who is to be exiled. The residents of the Amón seek to make the streets of this neighborhood a safe space, in a project that privatizes public space. Mobilized by an amalgam of hygienism and security, police repression serves as a coercive mechanism in this case. But in addition to that, neighbors, business owners, and "good citizens", are recruited by the police authorities as civil patrols. The police attend to the demands of expulsion of the bodies that are rendered as abnormal, but it is the neighbors who point out who the suspects are. In other words, it is not the authorities who signal the undesirables, but the citizens, who have learned and incorporated the practice of identifying those who deviate from the normal curve. What is considered dangerous is not precisely the infringement of the law, not even the conducts because, as Chapter 8 shows, suspects are sometimes just standing or sitting in a corner. What is considered dangerous is the body itself, the abject body that incarnates the failure of normativity. Security and discipline complement each other.

Rather than safety, these discourses produce securitarian practices, which stigmatize, criminalize, displace and repress historically oppressed populations.

The role of technologies in power relations is worth mentioning. The 200 pages of exchanges and discussions in the Plan Cuadrante chat are not a passive reproduction of contents. In these discussions we find practices of signification and subjectification, arguments and persuasive resources, expressions of normativity that construct certain subjects as threats, calls to action and suggestions of possible solutions. In other words, technologies facilitate not only a means of surveillance, but also a space for discursive production, which in turn produces power relations.

Another key instrument within the security apparatus is statistics. In this regard, it is significant that statistics on unhoused residents in San José are produced and managed by charity projects, such as Street Games, Chepe se baña and other Christian organizations that work with this population. There is an explicit interest in both projects in collecting data on the people they work with. Foucault (2009) says that normalization in the security apparatus consists in bringing the most unfavorable distributions of the curves of normality in line with the most favorable ones. In this sense, this project makes use of data management as part of its biopolitical project of inclusion.

As in hygienism, the biopolitical normativity that operates from the discursive position of security is aligned with capitalism. There is no mention of food security, along the lines of what collectives such as MESART and the Pinolera Fair are trying to secure, nor of collective forms of security such as those invented in the streets by trans women who are sex workers. Security is rather a very dynamic economy within the neoliberal project.

Consider, for example, the notion of "safe space", so deeply rooted in the discourse of LGBTIQ+ populations. Unlike the Plan Cuadrante or the social cleansing policies of the Municipality, where repressive instruments are privileged, in the projects promoted as "safe spaces", coercion is not the mechanism of power. Normativity is produced by other means. Inclusion, from this discursive position, is constructed through the logic of privatization. "Safe spaces" in San José are the gay-friendly restaurants in Escalante, the gay bars and clubs, the luxury housing towers such as URBN, spaces where prices guarantee class homogeneity, and access barriers protect the space from bodies that do not comply with the ableist homonormativity and the duty of productivity.

No one imposes homonormativity in these spaces, and yet those who wish to access that promise of security must embrace it. In this way, homocitizens, as productive subjects, have managed to be incorporated within the promise of protection offered by projects that work from a security discursive position, while trans*, lesbian, gay, queer people who embody the imbrication of other oppressions

are rather marked as threats to security. Speaking about the politics of visibility that have been absorbed by the market, Hanhardt (2013) points out that security was intended by and for a sector of the population that conforms to capitalist normativity. This operation causes, simultaneously and as a direct effect, for other deviant subjects to be stigmatized as sub-populations. In Handhardt's words: "The thing to be protected was, by extension, a specific gay identity that reflected the race, gender, and class dynamics of the city itself" (222).

For a space to be safe for "good citizens", it must be free of those who have been identified as a threat. The way in which security is understood in these discourses fosters the exclusion of certain populations. This places us in the terrain of the dialectic of inclusion/exclusion. The imbrication of systemic oppressions such as class, race, gender, ableism determine the position in which a subject is caught in the matrix of power relations. Thus, security discourses end up erecting informal borders, which are even guarded by public security forces. Whether explicitly as in the Plan Cuadrante, or indirectly as in restaurants, bars and clubs, this notion of security comes overly close to the securitarian discourses of nation-states, which so often justify the necropolitics that annihilate undesirable populations.

Rescue:

This discursive position revolves around the idea that in the city there are spaces, subjects and/or populations that need to be rescued. The logic of rescue is quite vertical. Urban activation projects, such as Chepequetas, seek to rescue the city for everyone. Regeneration projects such as POPPOP seek to rescue an area portrayed as decaying through economic activation that "improves spaces". Projects like Chepe se baña and the Street Games seek to rescue unhoused residents of the city, churches seek to rescue sex workers, parents of the *No to gender ideology- United for the family movement* seek to rescue children from gender ideology, and so on. The common denominator is that external actors, from a position of knowledge/power, present themselves as the saviors of a situation that they themselves point out as problematic.

In order for projects to operate from a discursive position of rescue, it is first necessary to decree what is to be rescued as something that is degraded, decadent, vulnerable, lost or in need. It is a discursive operation that creates realities. Spaces, subjects, bodies, the economy, culture, all are susceptible to being singled out as objects of rescue. In this sense, we can identify different mechanisms such as objectification in the charitable projects (Chapters 4 and 5), cultural appropriation in projects such as Sikwa (Chapter 5), de-qualification of locals and dehistoricization of spaces in queer regeneration

project POPPOP (Chapter 8). These mechanisms shape power relations. The exercise of power from the discursive position of rescue is presented as aid, as assistance, as salvation, as humanitarian work. This makes it more difficult to identify the hierarchies, the ways in which power is exercised and oppressions are perpetuated, as opposed to other discourses that resort to repressive mechanisms, where it is easier to visualize them. Thus, for example, it is probably difficult to sustain an adverse position in relation to a project that seeks to rescue the cultural heritage of indigenous peoples, or a project that provides food and basic services for unhoused people. However, the discursive position of rescue is easily articulated with others, such as hygienism, security and commodification, configuring potent mechanisms of power.

In this sense, it was important to delve into the actions developed by the projects from this discursive position, in order to understand the way in which power operates. The case of the Street Games is a key example. Its organizers and volunteers argue that the project intends to nourish the body and soul of people who have been trapped by drugs in the street. Objectification operates on several levels. Unhoused people are portrayed as having no agency, requiring divine intervention mediated by religious volunteers to save their bodies and souls. In this rescue process, they are again objectified as a product of entertainment, putting them to compete in complex games and broadcasting everything for the amusement of others. Once again, they are objectified as a vehicle through which volunteers can obtain a precious prize. Therefore, they are photographed in moments of great vulnerability, for the spectacularization of suffering seems to be an important resource in this economy of misery.

Observing this project led me to reflect on the versatility with which power can be exercised from the discursive position of rescue. What allows this project to put hungry and impoverished people in competition for a plate of food, push them to tears with a rhetoric of guilt, and generate an economy of entertainment and prizes through the spectacularization of poverty, is the objectification of this subpopulation. It is true that no one is forcing the unhoused people to participate in these contests. They are there by "free will". But as discussed in Chapter 3, within the security apparatus "free-choice" is the disguise of a mechanism of control. What forces these people to submit to these interventions are their material conditions, the structural dispossession and the hunger that squeezes their entrails.

The relations produced by the discursive position of rescue are quite vertical. Sometimes it employs mechanisms characteristic of disciplinary apparatuses, although they operate more frequently from security apparatuses. In different forms and levels, these projects seek to pacify, devour or incorporate the objectified subjects and the commons, in a normativity that propels an economy of affections and capital. This economy has no interest in transforming the situations that push these people to the bare life. On the contrary, the discursive position of rescue reinforces hierarchies, feeds them and feeds on

them. The rescue is never carried out on a horizontal, collective, or communitarian level. The objectified beings that are rescued will never be the same as those who rescued them. The rescuers seek to conduct the actions of the rescued, but as illustrated by the analysis of *Chepe se baña* in Chapter 4, rescuer/rescued are quite crystallized positions, and it is not easy to trade places.

The discourses characterized above probably do not exhaust the ways in which power is configured in the inclusion projects in the city of San José, but they constitute the main discursive positions that I identified. Visualizing the projects on the map shows us tensions, fluxes, vectors. These fluxes are mechanisms and relations of power, actions that unfold from discursive positions that draw proximities, continuities, ruptures and discrepancies. The map allows us to understand that there are similarities between projects that could be considered ideologically opposed, as is the case of projects of religious organizations and projects of gay entrepreneurship. Parallel to their ideological positions, we find similarities when analyzing the ways in which power operates. Power, as Foucault notes, is fluid and relational. For this reason, rather than analyzing fixed structures, I focused on the actions and discourses that produce them, on the way they are characterized and the ways in which they are argued, on the interactions and relationships that occur between this array of projects and the different populations that inhabit the city of San José.

9.2.3.3. Subjectification and power relations

This section contains another layer of analysis. Like the previous ones, it is not intended as a typology but as a tool for reading the processes and effects of subjectification that occur around and within the inclusion projects in San José. Arribas-Allyon and Walkerdine (2008) propose subjectification as one of the dimensions that the FDA should take into account. By subjectification they mean the material/signifying practices in which subjects are made up (91-92). Throughout this study it was important to move the focus of attention between material and signifying practices, and on the gray zones and junctions where these meet, knot or condense.

One of the pitfalls of visibility politics that focus exclusively on identity is that they conceal the material gaps and inequalities that can exist between two people who share the same identity. In this sense, when I speak of "subjects" I am not talking about persons or identities, nor about labels that define essentialist categories, but about positions in power relations. This study allowed me to go beyond the Manichean division posed by official discourses on inclusion, to understand that what produces us as subjects are not only the identity constructs, but also, and with a special biopolitical potency, the material conditions that sustain our lives.

I return to some of the questions that have mobilized this study: Who can rescue a territory? From whom are they rescuing that space? For whom are they recovering it? Who is displaced, expelled or subjugated when a group proposes to appropriate a territory? These questions are concerned with the positions in power relations, and the actions that produce processes of subjectification. The preceding pages refer to some of these material and signifying practices that produce the subjects who are involved in power relations in the city. Following this line, I would like to delve into the dimension of subjectification that I was able to identify throughout this study. This dimension refers to positions within a complex web of social relations. I propose, therefore, to understand these subjects not as fixed or finished categories, nor mutually exclusive or unique, but as a configuration of material/signifying practices, which are in turn the result of historical processes, and which produce us as subjects.

The regenerator subject

Philosopher Luis Adrián Mora says that “el sujeto conquistador es aquél que ‘crea’ poblaciones, que ‘funda’ lugares, en suma, es aquél que *posee* literalmente el territorio⁴³⁷” (Mora 2010, 6). If the conquering subject possessed the territory during the colonial invasion, in the neoliberal era we find a new subject that appropriates spaces, rescues them, activates them, in short, regenerates them. A regenerator subject intervenes in a territory in order to improve it. In this configuration, the territory does not appear empty or non-existent, it is not something to be created or founded, but a space that has degenerated, a degraded space. The regenerator subject has a sharp gaze that allows him to see beyond this degeneration and observe the economic potential that lies beneath the layer of precarity and see a market opportunity where others only see chaos and decadence.

The regenerator subject is neither homogeneous nor static. Its practices use different resources to rescue and regenerate spaces. Whether it is a hygienist project, a queer design enterprise or a human rights approach to urbanism, what characterizes this configuration of interventionist practices and power relations is that the regenerator subject seeks to take advantage of the situation of misery and degradation. It is a process that perpetuates the long history of coloniality. Land on these spaces has lost value on the market, and is available at relatively low prices for the regenerators. On the other hand, the inhabitants, devalued, inferiorized or rendered invisible, are more easily displaced, pacified or co-opted.

⁴³⁷ Free translation: “the conquering subject is the one who ‘creates’ populations, who ‘founds’ places, in short, is the one who literally possesses the territory”

Although it is no longer socially or legally acceptable to enslave, exploit and annihilate groups that are depicted as inferior or contemptible, tensions in space continue to provoke power relations in which certain subpopulations are displaced, criminalized, dispossessed, pacified, civilized or pushed to death. Frequently, the people who inhabit the spaces to be rescued, recovered or appropriated are absent in the discourse of these projects. On other occasions, they appear objectified, as beings without agency or valuable knowledge who need to be driven towards normality.

The project of the regenerator subject is economic and biopolitical. In economic grounds, they seek to monetize the areas portrayed as depressed and to dynamize the flow of capital in them. But this operation is not only mercantile. Or, rather, it is an example of how the market produces subjects and configures power relations. It is a class project, a project of and for the middle and upper classes, who position themselves as the legitimate subjects to inhabit and enjoy these recovered territories.

The biopolitical dimension of this subject's actions produces normativities in the urban space, which outline how the population should be and behave in the regenerated space. These normativities are crossed by national imaginaries. That is, in one way or another they reproduce the ideals of whiteness (racism), equality (denial of dispossession and inequalities), democracy and peace (denial of structural violence), and the values inherited from Christian ideology (conservative morality). Whether based on the idea of an empty, deserted and wasted place, or on the idea of a place occupied by beings that provoke pity, disgust or contempt, the interventions of the regenerator subject on spaces and on those bodies are justified. In terms of position in the imbrication of power relations, the regenerator subject embodies class privileges and markers that confer epistemic authority and enable a material appropriation of spaces. In this sense, the actions of the regenerating subject and the type of relations they establish are traversed by coloniality.

The entrepreneur subject:

The configuration of the entrepreneurial subject is quite close to that of the regenerator subject. I would say that sometimes they overlap. However, not every entrepreneurial subject seeks to regenerate spaces, nor does every regenerator operate on the basis of entrepreneurialism. Some projects of the entrepreneurial subjects have proved to be very successful, and have founded big companies, chambers or brands positioned in the market of inclusion. Their interventions do not pursue the transformation of space, as we clearly see in the regenerator subject, although sometimes their projects involve spatial transformations. For example, the entrepreneurs of the CCDCR explicitly stated that their interest is not the urban space or the dynamics that develop therein, but they focus

exclusively on commerce. In the case of Sikwa, although they stylize the knowledge that they appropriate from the indigenous communities, they do not express an interest in regenerating spaces in the city either. On the contrary, their restaurant is located in a very active commercial zone, where homogeneity of class and race is already guaranteed by the prices and the dynamics of surveillance discussed in Chapter 8. Chapter 7 also analyzes several of the actions, discourses and projects of the entrepreneurial subject, with special emphasis on gay entrepreneurship.

Like the regenerator subject, the actions and projects of the entrepreneurial subject reproduce neoliberal normativity, which is enforced through consumption. Their actions produce power relations in which they also reproduce national imaginaries and systems of domination. For example, many of the projects of entrepreneurs exclude people with disabilities, impoverished people, or even women, transgender people and gender dissidents, who do not feel welcome in these spaces. The entrepreneurial subject is configured around the commodification of knowledge, culture and history. In other words, it converts the commons into commodities and in the process neutralizes their potential for dissident and contesting normativities.

The charitable subject:

Beyond the entrepreneurs of inclusion, who have become experts in the management of diversity, among the various projects I found people who are not engaged in the discourse of commoditization, but rather get involved in the position of volunteers. Much could be discussed about desire and the emotional, social and spiritual reward that people get in return for their work, but what interests me is to point out that volunteers do not receive a monetary payment for their involvement in these projects. The charitable subject does not intervene the city and the bodies that inhabit it seeking to generate money. The motivations are different, and the position in power relations is also different from the position the entrepreneur subject.

When I approached projects like Chepe se baña or the Street Games, I had certain expectations or preconceptions about what I was going to encounter. I thought I would find more homogeneity, perhaps, and that the people carrying out the basic tasks would somehow replicate the discourse of the leaders of these projects. However, despite being highly vertical organizations, talking with volunteers in these projects dislocated my preconceptions. Some had personal or family histories that motivated them to work in this type of projects. Others stated that this was their form of spirituality or healing. What seemed to be a common thread among the different volunteers was a great enthusiasm and pleasure in the idea of helping others.

If there is such a thing as a charitable subject configuration, I would say that it is characterized by that: by the interest in helping others. This generates non-monetary but powerful benefits. However, this help is not exactly the communitarian support that the organizers of the Feria Pinolera weave collectively, nor the care for the commons that Fabiola does on a daily basis, nor the transmission of knowledge among war survivors and trans sex workers. The difference lies in the position of the charitable subject, which is always differentiated and vertical. The charitable subject helps others in need. On the way, whether they recognize it or not, they are helping themselves, but their position always marks a difference, a hierarchy of knowledge/power that obstructs or hinders the horizontal flow of knowledge, collective learning and plural dialogue. The positions are quite distinct: the charitable subject actively helps, the others are recipients of the help. The volunteer's voice may not weigh as much as that of the leaders of the project, but it certainly weighs more than that of the people they are trying to help. We saw this in clearly Chapter 5 with Elena, who had to insist tenaciously for her experience to be recognized as valid knowledge that enables her to accompany her peers as a volunteer. This is not necessarily the volunteers' will but an inevitable result of the power relations in which they are inserted.

The actions of the charitable subject do not question or shake the power apparatuses. Charity does not challenge power either in material or relational terms. On the contrary, it reproduces hierarchies and systems of domination. I would say that in some cases it even reinforces them, it creates a barrier made up of good intentions around the bases where inequalities are produced and sustained.

What further complicates the analysis of power is that it is more difficult to question the actions and relationships of the charitable subject than, to give an example, the commodification of inclusion. That is to say, from dissident and critical positions, it is easier to question and oppose projects that openly sustain exclusionary, discriminatory or violent proposals. Charitable projects, however, are loaded with good intentions and subjects who will surely consciously manifest their opposition to oppression. In this sense, after analyzing a series of projects, discourses and configurations of subjectification, I consider that the forces that are articulated around charity are very powerful, and in the Costa Rican context, with the inheritance of imaginaries of peace, democracy, equality and Christian values, it is especially difficult to promote a critical reading of the ways in which charitable inclusion operates as a technology of power that sustains the status quo.

The "good Costa Rican" subject:

The idea of a "good Costa Rican" subject is perhaps too broad, but it encompasses a series of material and signifying practices that are configured around national imaginaries. The "good Costa Rican" subject is a good neighbor, a good citizen who reproduces race, class, patriarchy, the able body and the rigid gender binary with docility. The "good Costa Rican" subject is convinced of his or her exceptionality, and this puts him or her in a position of superiority vis-à-vis others within and outside the country's borders.

The "good Costa Rican" claims to defend peace and democracy, but does not tolerate difference. The "good Costa Rican" subject claims not to be racist, but has no qualms about pointing to Nicaraguans as the culprits of all the country's problems. The "good Costa Rican" defends the ideal of equality, but in practice seeks homogeneity. We can observe this in the various actions that seek to displace or eradicate the presence of people who do not fit within the normativity, such as unhoused people or sex workers.

A tight intertwining of class, race and gender that produces this subject. These are also imbued with the heritage of Christian morality. However, throughout Part III it was possible to observe how the neoliberal project has managed to bend the limits of this morality to include, not without tensions, some citizens who defraud the mandate of cisheteronormativity, but compensate by assimilating their political, productive and consumption practices to a homonormativity that is not only potable but also lucrative for the neoliberal project. We find, then, homocitizens and homopoliticians among the "good Costa Rican" subjects. This can hardly be read as a rupture, but rather as a power strategy, which devours expressions and movements that may have attempted to be disruptive, and soon recruits them into its ranks to reproduce a rainbow version of the same neoliberal normativity.

The "good Costa Rican" subject is not particularly solidary. I would rather say that they tend to act in an individualistic and solitary manner. Their actions are not explicitly violent, as they have incorporated the imaginary of peace in their discourse. This does not mean that their practices do not exercise violence, but rather that the ways in which they exercise power are less visible to the naked eye. However, as the dialogues with participants such as Jacob, José, Alex or Nubia demonstrated, the practices that configure the "good Costa Rican" subject can be profoundly violent for those people and populations that do not meet the standards of Costa Rican coloniality.

Pacified rather than peaceful, the "good Costa Rican" shows docility and even complicity in the face of authoritarianism. If during the colonial period we saw the Criollos of this province striving to demonstrate with declarations, bodies and military actions their loyalty to the Spanish Crown (Chapter

2), today we see the "good Costa Rican" subject aligning with the police for the control of the streets and parks of the city (Chapter 8). Neighbors get organized to take care of the neighborhoods they inhabit as if the streets were an extension of their property. They fulfill the function of surveillance, which is traversed by the hierarchization of life, a product of coloniality. It is this hierarchization that trains their gaze and allows them to identify the people who are not good Costa Ricans, whose existence must be repressed in the name of the common good.

The "good Costa Rican" subject reproduces the nation, defends neoliberal normativity and imposes it on others. It is the heir of centuries of coloniality. The heir and the guardian. In their actions, national imaginaries palpitate, reinvent and strengthen themselves in a spiral that perpetuates oppression, violence and exclusion through a discourse of peace, democracy and equality.

An array of other subjects, a reactive multiplicity

When we speak of material and signifying practices that produce subjects, we are speaking of relations. It is in connection with others that our subjectivity emerges. It is also in these relationships that we can trace power. In this sense, the different configurations of subjects described above strive to position themselves in front of (or, often, above of) other people, groups or subpopulations, from a binary position in the logic of us and them. As Bourcier (2017) points out, many gay and lesbian activists have fought vigorously to be recognized as citizens, submitting to biopolitical normativity, that with its great plasticity creates homo and lesbo-normativities on a par with heteronormativity. They have become a population; they are the object of biopolitical management. Bourcier calls this a "multiplicité inerte", an inert multiplicity.

Whether it is because of their corporeality, lifestyle, nationality, material conditions of existence or practices, there are people who are singled out as problematic, threatening, undesirable, or as beings in need of rescue or restoration. Sometimes, as evidenced by a dialogue in the Plan Cuadrante chat, they are not even considered subjects, but inferior beings who do not deserve the slightest respect. In San José, we can find a number of people whose lives are devalued through these power relations: racialized people, impoverished people, sex workers, people with disabilities, to name a few. All too often, the aforementioned subjects deny these peoples subjectivity through processes of objectification that inferiorize their opinions, reflections, knowledge and affections. In short, in these power relations, some people are produced as residuals, as semi-humans or inhumans, as Grosfoguel (2012) puts it, who inhabit the zone of non-being, where life is not worth the same as the life of the inhabitants of the zone of being.

However, this research process led me down paths where I was able to dialogue with some of those subjects labeled as undesirable and unproductive, as menacing to the nation. These dialogs reaffirmed that they do not experience oppressions in a passive way. These other subjects resist incorporation, resist being codified by the law, resist becoming a population that, as Bourcier explains, functions as a productive force. Another form of multiplicity, a "multiplicité reactive", says Bourcier, stands in resistance to the politics of equality, assimilation and, I would say, to neoliberal inclusion.

ils ne sont pas la somme d'individus qui composent la population au sens biopolitique du terme. ils sont des collectifs engagés dans la résistance au biopouvoir en fabriquant (entre autres) des formes de production et de reproduction sociales différentes (Bourcier 2017, 69).

As part of this effort to resist biopower and necropolitics that discard and degrade the existence of these people, I have tried to get close to them, to listen to them, to learn with them, to get to know their *sentipensares*, their fears and their anger, and to treat with great respect the knowledge that they share with me. Without this knowledge, this work would not be possible. This has implied an arduous work of research, listening and dialogue. I met a reactive multiplicity that resists to be managed by biopower, that rebels against the commodification of their lives and the privatization of the commons, that invents forms of resistance against the technologies of security which impose migratory policies and borders that restrict the circulation of migrants, but also of other people (like unhoused people, sex workers, trans women) in the city.

These reactive multiplicities do not aspire to be assimilated as "good Costa Rican" citizens, to be subjected and administered within the biopolitical triangle. What they aspire is to push the vertices of that triangle, to stress them, to make them tremble. They also seek to confront not one but all these vertices of power simultaneously, because they understand that unidimensional approaches and projects that hierarchize oppressions and resistances do not undermine power, but sometimes even fuel it.

In this process I have tried to be careful with the ways of naming the participants, the people, the collectives and the groups signaled as subpopulations, and I have tried to respect, as much as possible, the self-determination of the people who nurture the reflections of this study. When Fabiola asks me not to name her as a homeless person, but to name her as a person in a condition of freedom, what she is explaining transcends beyond identity politics.

Porque hay muchas personas que verdaderamente, yo lo he notado entre mi población, las personas que andamos aquí, que muchas gentes nos dicen a nosotrxs, personas en condición de calle, personas sin techo, o personas indigentes, personas,

este, ambulatorias, pero yo me siento muy orgullosa por pertenecer a ese gremio⁴³⁸
(Fabiola, in discussion with the author, October 10, 2019).

With her reflections that reject a certain label, reinforce a position and defend a way of being in the world, Fabiola talks about biopower and domination, about inclusion/exclusion in the city, about self-determination and coloniality, about her own experience of resistance against those who try to strip her of her agency, deny her *sentipensares* and impose on her a way of life that is contrary to her worldview.

For this reason, in the face of the vectors of power that deny their subjectivity, I insist on naming this multiplicities of people as subjects. Minoritized subjects, neglected subjects, oppressed but not defeated subjects, subjects in resistance, subjects in re-existence, subjects in rebellion, subjects in struggle, people weaving solidarity collectively. A multiplicity of subjects that I would find difficult to group under a category, because their vital force lies in the confluence of difference and plurality. I prefer to think of them as a great diverse collectivity that exploits and overflows the label of "other" with which their existence is minorized in the coloniality of power. More than a methodological decision, the decision on how to name the participants was an ethical/epistemological stance that seeks an operation contrary to the objectification that these people encounter on a daily basis in the street. In the face of these relations that annul them, throughout this study I have tried to recognize them as subjects, as people with agency within this map of power.

9.4. Imaginaries, coloniality, re-existence and the commons

City of bugs, bugs of the city

San José is a crude city, as if made of wood cut with an axe, still warm but cracked, humid, with its corners rotting and sprouting in sharp and appetizing buds that no one knows what they are or how they could have grown in such a place. A city of wood, a city that came from life and, although it is now dead, it keeps the memory of the tree that it once was, the memory of its roots banished centuries ago or lost deep inland. We walk through it like ants, like insects. An alien hive, squatted, lost, controlled, full of bugs that come and go, that were not from this place but now they are, they are, we are. We are the city. With that increasingly human smell of shit. With the living scandal of a hundred thousand stories that collide and overflow. With the rumbling of guts that roar more and more synchronized every day. With the bodies, our bodies, filling up with bread, rain and coffee, with the leering looks of lascivious men and the haughty looks of cops who hide their names and their corrupt fists. Fists that break everything, that broke earlier a woman's tool to sustain her life, hers and that of her people. A lady who tried to sell me a cable that doesn't work and a tired smile. An anonymous woman, and anonymous crowd, anonymous but alive, running,

⁴³⁸ Free translation: Because there are many people who truly, I have noticed it among my population, the people who are here, many people call us, people in street conditions, homeless people, or indigent people, ambulatory people, but I feel very proud to belong to this guild.

breathing, arranging life before death, dreaming of other internal and external journeys, of the path that a morsel travels from the palate to the blood, the blood that we hope not to leave spilled in the street. A piece of wood cut without care, without much eagerness or thought, without much affection, almost with reluctance. That is the city we inhabit.

A city for everyone, urban planners say with enthusiasm, for all citizens to whom they grant their humanity carnet. Bugs are not citizens, even if they inhabit the city. Bodies, insect-bodies and sometimes not even that... there are bugs that good intentions only want to fumigate. Debris bugs, landscape bugs, figures, data and quotas of bugs, punching bags bugs, bugs for charitable redemption, bugs that feed the tourism of cruelty.

They tell us that this city has always been dead. They tell us that it must be rescued. They don't realize that they are the ones who lost their way. They come wanting to give lessons in civility, hipsterism, first-worldism and humanity etiquette. They want to civilize us. They want to domesticate us. They want to teach us what is leisure and public space, what is beautiful, what is common, what is freedom, what is life, what is to be desired. They tell us and dictate to us how to inhabit the city, how to be citizens, how to create a city. As if they could not see that we have been here for ages, opening channels to this mutilated trunk, cultivating fungus, breaking its inflections, moistening its dry riverbeds with every fluid at our disposal. This city is ours. It always has been. We are the city.

(Field diary, December 4, 2019)

The analysis of the power that the map outlines brings me back to my initial hypotheses. After a long process of observation, plural dialogues, critical discourse analysis and reflexivity, I come to the conclusion that both hypotheses are tenable. The first hypothesis stated: *that both conservative and progressive projects of inclusion in San José, share the rhetoric of "rescue", which implies the intervention on bodies and spaces, wrought by social imaginaries on national identity*. Certainly, it is possible to identify the rhetoric of rescue explicitly in many of the discourses that support the analyzed projects. Likewise, FDA also made it possible to trace the rhetoric of rescue that lies implicit in the practices and power relations. As described above, this was not the only discursive position identified in the projects, although it is perhaps one of the most comprehensive. In this sense, I would nuance this hypothesis by saying that what all the inclusion projects share, beyond rescue, is neoliberal normativity. Neoliberal normativity contains the discursive position of rescue, but also hygienism, commodification and security. In the name of neoliberal inclusion, all kinds of interventions on bodies and spaces are justified, which, as we have seen, range from the most subtle forms of management to the most violent forms of repression.

The imaginaries of whiteness, democracy, peace, homogeneity and religious values, produce us as subjects and as collectivity, they shape normativity and influence the way we relate to each other. National imaginaries are consistent with neoliberal normativity. They reinforce structural oppressions

and the imbrication of these oppressions on bodies and life. National imaginaries undoubtedly shape the ways in which power is exercised.

The second hypothesis stated: *that the notion of inclusion in Costa Rica reproduces the coloniality of power*. Throughout this study I have tried to establish dialogues between theories, thoughts and knowledge from the Global North and the South, as well as dialogues with inhabitants of the city of San José. In these dialogues, coloniality has surfaced time and again. In a country that aspires to the Global North, with a population that strives to whitewash itself, that looks down on its neighbors and that believes itself blessed by God and the Virgin, inclusion cannot escape coloniality.

Looking at the map of power, it becomes evident that the fiber linking all these projects is coloniality in its various forms. The coloniality of power, of knowledge, of gender, of capacity, entangle the different projects, uphold them, configure them, produce them. The different cases analyzed throughout this thesis allow us to confirm that biopower is not only exercised in the actions of the government and the authorities, but that it lives in the bonds, in the relationships, in the daily social interactions. The panopticon is more diffuse than ever. But this diffusion does not translate into fissures or attenuation of its domains, but rather into a sort of multiplication and intensification. Next to the edible panopticon that Preciado (2013) warned us about, in which we voluntarily swallow control, and the portable panopticon that now shapes our ways of bonding and seeing the world, I found a multiplicity of micro-panopticons that watch over the city. I found an army of “good Costa Rican” subjects transformed into the eyes of the forces of order, and charitable volunteers, homopoliticians, NGO officials, entrepreneurs and businessmen turned into machines that clean, order, domesticate and embellish bodies and spaces to guarantee productivity and the accumulation of capital.

Biopower inhabits us and sometimes we are not even aware of the function we are playing within governmentality. Perhaps this is a conclusion that can offer insights for the projects of resistance. While power is configured in the key of coloniality, resistance urgently needs to be articulated in decolonial fronts, not only as a response or contestation, but as a path, as multiple paths that renounce colonial violence and commit to other biopolitics, decolonial biopolitics that sustains, produce and celebrate life. This study is a [self-]critical and reflexive effort to understand the implications of the material and signifying practices that produce us as subjects, and to understand the different ways in which we participate in these power relations, with the intention that this will somehow provide tools to transform the ways in which we reproduce domination and oppression.

Those who strive to preserve structural violence, those who profit from necropolitics, those who feed on oppressions, have managed to articulate themselves in a great project that threatens to devour

everything: the neoliberal project. People who re-exist harbor an indomitable vital force, profoundly transformative, but often disarticulated, disconnected from others.

Silvia Federici affirms:

...the left has not posed the question on how to bring together the many proliferating commons that are being defended, developed, and fought for, so that they can form a cohesive whole and provide a foundation for a new mode of production (Federici 2019, 108).

A new mode of production is too great an ambition for the fabric weaved in this thesis. However, embracing the path of decoloniality and *pluriversality*, I would think that sharing knowledges on the defense of the common and resistance, is a way to strengthen the struggles for justice and liberation. This is not something new, nor is it something I invented. It is something I have learned in dialogue with people who ignite re-existence. Sharing the commons we have guarded, nurtured, reclaimed or invented can have effects on the materiality of existence.

Ochy Curiel (2022) says the common cannot be subordinated to identity politics. We need, she says, decolonial projects of liberation, projects of decolonial liberation, where we can meet and articulate ourselves. We also need, she warns, to analyze the social relations of class, race, power relations also in the common. The common needs a critique of anthropocentrism, she continues. It is not possible to think the common outside the earth. This, says Curiel, is fundamental to build a project of liberation. I would say that these are the paths to build liberation projects, in plural and articulated in a network.

As Fabiola reflects, there is a potential for healing in the care of the commons, in the possibility of generating well-being for other beings, human and non-human:

Porque mi trabajo es un, para un bien común. no solamente me estoy beneficiando yo, en mantener la mente ocupada, para saber manejar mis debilidades, que vivo en el mundo del hombre... sino también, estoy generando también, este, supliendo otras necesidades, porque yo me estoy viendo beneficiada con este trabajo que hago humildemente, de reciclaje. Estoy generando también empleo, trabajo. Hasta el mismo gobierno de la República come de mi trabajo. Pero no tengo que pagarle la puya a él, eso sí. Él más bien tiene que pagarme a mí. Él y muchos Estados... Porque yo estoy asumiendo la responsabilidad que toda la raza humana tenemos y yo la estoy asumiendo. ⁴³⁹ (Fabiola, in discussion with the author, October 10, 2019).

⁴³⁹ Free translation: Because my work is for a common good. I am not only benefiting myself, in keeping my mind busy, in learning how to handle my weaknesses, because I live in the world of man... but also, I am also generating, supplying other needs, because I am benefiting from this work that I am doing humbly, recycling. I am also generating employment, work. Even the government of the Republic eats from my work. But I don't have to repay them, of course. They have to compensate me. They and many other States.... Because I am assuming the responsibility that the whole human race has, and I am assuming it

Fabiola speaks of a different biopolitics, one that opposes the colonial logic of domination, the economy of oppressions that produces privileges at the cost of dispossession and the politics of death and devastation. Her proposal is based on reciprocity and the defense of the commons.

Says Silvia Federici:

The challenge that we face in this context is not how to multiply commons initiatives but how to place at the center of our organizing the collective reappropriation of the wealth we have produced and the abolition of social hierarchies and inequalities. Only by responding to these imperatives can we rebuild communities and ensure that commons are not created at the expense of the well-being of the other people and do not rest on new forms of colonization (Federici 2019, 96).

This study does not pretend to dictate answers, because I do not believe that is my place. What I have tried, instead, is to draw a map of oppression and resistances, of some oppressions and some resistances in the city. A map is a navigational tool, a tool that allows us to trace routes and paths, to record memory, to visualize positions, to identify spaces, to point out contradictions, borders and gaps. A map shows us existing paths and allows us to imagine other possible routes to be invented.

Profundidad⁴⁴⁰

Jorge Debravo (poeta costarricense)

He aprendido a mirar de una manera más viva:
como si mis abuelos por mi sangre miraran;
como si los futuros habitantes
alzaran mis pestañas.

Yo no miro la piel sino lo que en la piel
es fuego y esperanza.
Lo que aún en los muertos
sigue nutriendo razas.
Lo que es vida y es sangre
tras la inmovilidad de las estatuas.

⁴⁴⁰ Free translation: Depth, by Jorge Debravo (Costa Rican poet). I have learned to look in a more vivid way: / as if my grandparents were looking through my blood; / as if the future inhabitants / lifted my eyelashes / I do not look at the skin but at what in the skin / is fire and hope. / What even in the dead / continues to nourish races. / What is life and is blood / behind the immobility of the statues.

ANEXES

Annex 1

Summary of field work San José, Costa Rica, 2019

Participatory observation:

Collective/Activity	Description	Area	Date	Subject
Expobici - Centro para la Sostenibilidad Urbana	Bicycle fair for urban activation. Shops, NGOs, Bike Police.	Downtown San José (Clínica Bíblica parking)	09/21/19	A city for bikers and pedestrians. Observed: Gentrification, police control, class violence.
Urbn Escalante*	Visit to queer design habitational program for potential buyers	Barrio Escalante	09/28/19	Queer lifestyle, trendy neighborhood. Observed: Queer regeneration, pinkwashing, homonationalism.
Alma de Escalante owned by former presidential candidate, Álvarez Desanti	Habitational project, advertised for same-sex couples.	Barrio Escalante	10/01/19	Trendy neighborhood. Observed: The use of Equal Marriage as a marketing strategy.
Chepe se baña	Project that installs portable showers and barber shops for unhoused residents of the city.	Parroquia de Guadalupe	10/06/19	Tour around the project's facilities. Detailed description of its functioning. Observed: Hygienism, class violence
Chepe de a pie	Exhibition based on artists' experiences of walking in the city. Hosted by Café Rojo	Barrio Amón	10/18/19	Artists' views on what the city is and what it should be, alternative lifestyles. Observed: Class violence, racism, ableism.
Chepequetas Coffee city tour	Walking tour around San José, coffee tasting, local products.	San José downtown	10/19/19	Security, street harassment, a walkable city, tastes of the city. Observed: Hunger, marketing of city experience, gentrification, police control.
Los juegos de la calle (hosted by Watts)	Games tournament for unhoused residents of the Red-light district. Organized in teams, participants compete in physical games,	Red-light district, downtown San José	10/19/19	Tour around the games arena. Detailed description of the project's

	with a Christian teaching. First team to win, first team to eat. Volunteers compete in a photo contest. Ends with a Christian cult.			functioning, values, and objectives. Observed: Hunger, class violence, spectacularization of suffering and charity.
Concebir la diversidad sexual desde adentro, hosted by IRCA Casa Abierta	Forum on rights for LGBTI migrants in Costa Rica, addressed to NGOs that work with migrants and refugees.	Hotel Trypp Sabana, San José downtown	10/29/19	Institutional violence against LGBTIQ people and migrants. Observed: Sexism, sex-work abolitionism, heteronormativity and cisnormativity in NGOs for migrants.
Nuestros ojos no pueden parar de parpadear	Art exhibition created by female artists.	Botica Solera, Red-light district	11/07/19	Women's views on the city. Observed: police control, class violence.
Workshop on the protocol for hormonal treatment in public hospitals, hosted by Defensoría de Habitantes	Endocrinologists, psychiatrists and epidemiologist, explain the protocol for hormonal therapy in public hospitals, and respond to trans activists questions and complains	Defensoría de Habitantes	11/19/19	Trans rights Observed: transphobia, cisplaining, class violence, pathologization of trans identities.
International day against violence against women	Night march, organized by autonomous feminists.	San José	11/25/19	Gender, race, class, migration, abortion, rural and indigenous women's rights. Observed: refugees united, intersectionality, protests against police violence, fundamentalist Christian attacks.
Fortalezas y alianzas, por una integración LGBTIQ, en desplazamiento forzado-Costa Rica, hosted by IRCA Casa Abierta	Presentation of a qualitative research project on LGBTIQ migrants in Costa Rica.	U la Salle, West of San José	11/27/19	Living conditions of LGBTIQ migrants in Costa Rica Observed: cisplaining, white homonormativity, sexism.
Presentation of UNDP policy for trans inclusion in Costa Rica	Workshop for validation of a policy for trans inclusion in Costa Rica. Designed by sociology students, funded by UNDP		11/21/19	Situation of trans people in Costa Rica, barriers to access rights for trans people. Observed: cisplaining, revictimization, class

				violence, academic extractivism.
Transvida's house	Participated in different activities and informal coffee afternoons with trans women.	South of San José	One a week from 09/22/19 to 12/06/19	Observed: trans women's dialogs and reflections on: class violence, police violence, institutional, sexism, work, leisure, solidarity, sustainability.
Parque Morazán	Park in Barrio Amón, meeting point and leisure place for different groups, couples, and residents of the neighborhood.	Barrio Amón, downtown San José	10/10/19 10/19/19 11/29/19	Some sessions were held with the participation of Carlos Regueyra, resident of Barrio Amón Observed: quotidian interactions (morning, afternoon and night), leisure, cruising, racial diversity, police control and civil practices of resistance.
Barrio Escalante	Trendy neighborhood, said to be a safe and inclusive space. Restaurants, bars, alternative shops and a park used mainly by non-resident youth.	Barrio Escalante	10/31/19 11/23/19 11/24/19 11/29/19	Observed: Quotidian interactions (morning, afternoon and night), prices, accessibility, aesthetics, racial diversity, ableism, gentrification, police control.
San José (Sur)	Working class neighborhood, sex-work area. Transvida's house is located here.	South of San José	10/08/19 10/11/19 11/09/19 11/10/19 11/22/19	Observed: Police control, aesthetics, prices, sex-work dynamics, drug use and trafficking, unhoused residents.
San José (centro)		San José downtown	10/07/19 10/11/19 10/29/19 11/07/19 12/01/19	Observed: quotidian interactions (morning, afternoon and night), unhoused residents, hunger, leisure, violence, racial diversity, police control and civil practices of resistance.
Feria Pinolera	Feminist initiative of solidary economy	Downtown San José	03/06/22 12/04/21 12/19/21 11/07/21 10/17/21 09/19/21	Observed: Community organization of women and trans* refugee claimants. Community of affection to sustain life. Resistance to neoliberalism from the commons.

			04/11/21	
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Semi-structured interviews:

Person	Collective/Institution	Date	Subject
Julio César Calvo	Cámara de Comercio Diversa (LGBT Chamber of Commerce)	10/07/19	LGBT Chamber of Commerce activities, (diversity management, marketing, training for enterprises, gay tourism). Their views on <i>inclusion</i> , rights and violence in Costa Rica.
Miguel López Paula Piedra	TEOR/ética (arts and cultural project)	10/14/19	TEOR/ética's alliances with trans sex workers in the neighborhood Barrio Amón. Their views on <i>inclusion</i> , police violence, and neighbors organizing against sex-workers and unhoused residents.
Nubia Ordoñez	President of Asociación La Sala (sex workers and former sex workers association)	11/08/19	History of La Sala and sex-workers organization in San José. Intersections with other struggles. Their views on inclusion, police violence, abolitionist violence, the "red light district", impoverishment and sex-workers rights. Tensions with fundamentalist churches.
Alex Vásquez	Human rights activist for the LGBTQ+ community and people with disabilities.	11/09/19	Intersections of disabilities, sex orientation and gender. His views on <i>inclusion</i> in the city, in "safe spaces", and gay bars.
Jacob Ellis	MESART (collective for nicaraguan refugees rights), trans activist for afro-nicaraguan and indigenous rights.	11/26/19	Documented for video: His experience as a trans refugee in Costa Rica. Class violence, racism, transphobia.
Nelson Acevedo	MESART, gay Nicaraguan refugee	11/26/19	His experience as a gay refugee in Costa Rica, coming from a rural community.
Verónica	Colombian refugee	11/05/19	Her experience as refugee in Costa Rica, being a young woman. Xenophobia. Her views on Costa Rican identity and coloniality, <i>inclusion</i> , class violence, and sexism.
Iris González	Nicaraguan asylum seekers, Red de Mujeres Pinoleras	11/07/21	She shared the history of the creation of the Red de Mujeres Pinoleras and of their initiative of solidarity economy, the Feria Pinoleras.
Iris González / Jacob Ellis	Nicaraguan asylum seekers, Red de Mujeres Pinoleras	11/07/21	Dialogical reflections on the experience of the Pinolera Fair as a form of re-existence and feminist organization.
Marga Sequeira	Worker in the arts	04/17/22	She shared her experience of an intervention against police repression in the public space of Parque Francia
Transvida collective	Grassroots organization of and for trans women	04/15/21	Reflections on power in NPIC and international cooperation.

Parcour-interviews:

Participants talk while walking around the city, following their own path, that finishes with a meal in a place of their choice.

Person	Collective/Institution	Area	Date	Subject
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Fabiola	Trans woman, environmental activist, migrant, “in condition of freedom ⁴⁴¹ ”	San José downtown (Parque Nacional – Morazán) San José south to downtown (Transvida – Central Park, Red light district)	10/10/19 11/22/19	Documented for video: her work as environmental activist, cleaning the city that is her home. Intersections of gender, class, age and race. Her views on <i>inclusion</i> , Costa Rican politics, the city, police violence, trans organizations.
José Zambrano	Honduran refugee, gay & HIV activist	San José downtown (Plaza de la Cultura, Parque de la Merced, Central Park, Café Granier)	10/21/19	Intersections of class, sexual orientation and nationality. His experience being a gay and HIV activist in San José. His views on inclusion in Costa Rica and tensions with Central America.
Jacob Ellis	MESART (collective for nicaraguan refugees rights), trans activist for afro-nicaraguan and indigenous rights.	San José downtown (Plaza de la Cultura, Avenida Central, Spoon Restaurant)	10/30/19	Intersections of race, class, gender and sexual orientation. Xenophobia, aporophobia, and Costa Rican culture. His experience as a trans refugee in Costa Rica.
Kassandra	“Former war fighter ⁴⁴² ”	Red light district, San José downtown	11/06/19	Documented for video: mapping and reconstruction of the history of the Red light district in the eyes of trans women who were sex-workers during the 70s, 80s and 90s. Tensions in the area, relationships with cis sex-workers, pension owners and clients, trans sorority, police violence, resistance strategies. Comparison with today’s situation for trans women in the city.
Trans warriors (Kassandra, Fabiola, Maybol, Maripaz, Juana)	Transvida (trans grassroots organization)	Red light district, San José downtown	11/09/19	
Felipe Guzmán	Activist for LGBTI human rights and for the response to HIV	LGBTIQ in San José	11/23/19	Mapping LGBTIQ bars in San José: intersections of class, gender and race. Compulsory ablebodiedness, homonationalism, homonormativity, misogyny, coloniality, pinkwashing. His views on the notions of safe space, inclusion, queer regeneration and pride.

Informal interviews:

Person	Collective/Institution	Area	Date	Subject
Street vendor	-	University of Costa Rica	09/17/19	Class, his views on Costa Rica’s economic situation, taxes, impoverishment, protests and strikes.

⁴⁴¹ Fabiola rejects the labels *homeless*, *dispossessed*, or any other terms used in Spanish to name unhoused residents of the city. She demanded to be characterized as a person in condition of freedom (en condición de libertad), playing with the expression “en condición de calle” (in street condition), commonly used in Costa Rica.

⁴⁴² Kassandra identifies herself as a veteran trans woman, but she doesn’t want to be labeled that way. She asked to be characterized as a former war fighter, in reference to the resistance she and her sisters led during the decades of the 70’s, 80’s and 90’s, when the police repression against trans women was at its worst in San José.

Uber driver	-	San José	10/29/19	His views on gentrification and upper-class habitational projects in San José.
Rap de David	Internal migrant (from the Caribbean coast to San José), unhoused resident of the city	San José	10/29/19	Freestyle rap: class, racism, hunger.
Esteban	Volunteer, Chepe se baña (organization that gives showers and cleaning facilities to unhoused residents of the city)	Guadalupe's Catholic Church	10/06/19	Insights of all organizations that work with unhoused residents of the city of San José. Detailed description on Chepe se baña's functioning.
Mauricio Villalobos	Director, Chepe se baña	Guadalupe's Catholic Church	10/06/19	Description on Chepe se baña's mission, vision and functioning.
Javier Vindas	Coordinator of pshycological dispositive, Chepe se baña	Guadalupe's Catholic Church	10/06/19	Detailed description on the functioning of Chepe se baña's "psychological dispositive"
Anonymous user/volunteer	Chepe se baña	Guadalupe's Catholic Church	10/06/19	Her experience as a former user of Chepe se baña's services, and the process of becoming a volunteer.
Anonymous volunteer 1	Watts/Los juegos de la Calle (christian that holds a tournament for unhoused residents of the city)	Red light district	10/19/19	Brief description on the functioning of Los Juegos de la Calle. His views on the causes of people living in the streets.
Anonymous volunteer 2	Watts/Los juegos de la Calle	Red light district	10/19/19	Detailed description on the functioning of Los Juegos de la Calle.

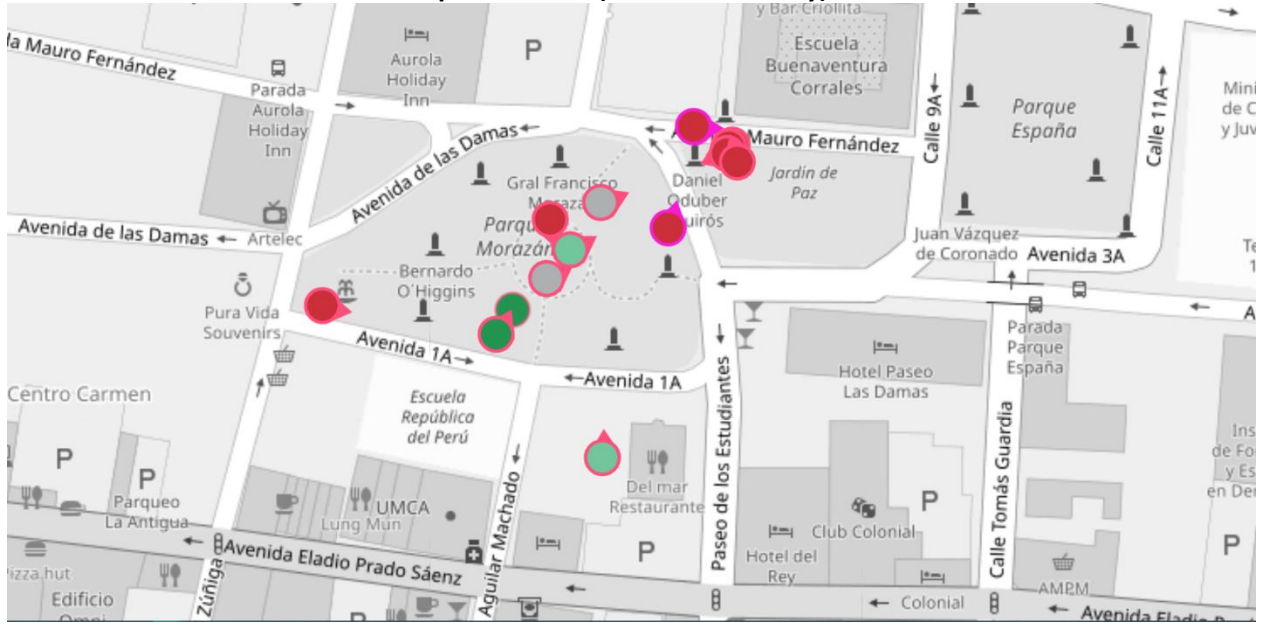
Other materials:

- Proyecto Cuadrante, Barrio Amón, Whatsapp Chat: A participant who asked to remain anonymous facilitated a copy of the whatsapp of Proyecto Cuadrante, a pilot project in which neighbors of Barrio Amon coordinate with local police, to report suspicious activities in the neighborhood. They report sex-workers, unhoused residents, trans women, drug users, and suspicious looking strangers that dwell in the neighborhood. The police check the report and they proceed to search, chase or detain the suspects, and they send pictures of their effective actions to the neighbors.
- Expo-Boda Pride: Nana, a participant who asked to remain anonymous shared her reflections, pictures and videos documented when she worked as a clerk in Expo-Boda Pride, a wedding fair for same-sex couples.

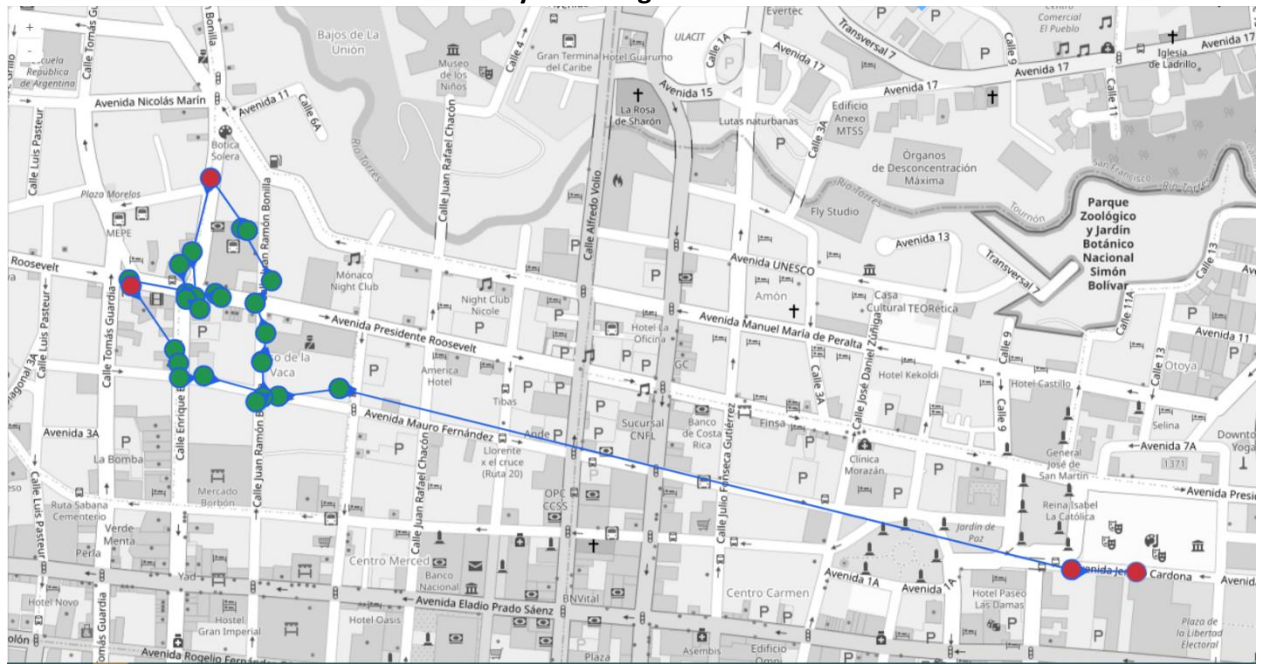
Cartography:

Some of the observation sessions and parcou-interviews were registered with a qualitative mapping tool (Experience Fellow). Each geolocalized data point can contain notes, photos, video, audio and an affective qualification of the experience. The following are examples of the raw maps, that condense valuable information for the analysis.

Parque Morazán (nocturnal activity)



Collective reconstruction of trans women's history in Red-light District



Anexx 2

David's Rap

Je m'appelle David
My name is Maison Killa
Estoy aquí en el centro
me denoto con ingenio
tengo talento
no tengo miedo
Voy rápido en el juego
como un maldito cerdo o mutante
No tengo miedo.
Voy de la selva
Me desciendo como un cerdo
Me salgo de todo el estilo.
La gente me desprecia,
habla feo,
humilla.
Denota
no tienen consciencia
no tienen cultura.
Yo estoy aquí matizando con mi compa.
No estamos fumando droga
ni nada.
Solo estamos dando el buen ejemplo.
Mi amigo me ha apoyado con dinero.
Me ha dado un billete de mil.
Él no sabe que es una gran bendición para mí.
Que me pueda ir para mi país,
para mi provincia.
Estoy feliz.
Tengo mucha amistad con el compadre.
No me denoto a consciencia.
No tengo miedo.
Me engendro como un cerdo
aquí en el árbol,
fumando yerba con talento.
Toledo es un pato.
Lil Quil es otro pato.
No me importa nada.
Solo tengo talento.
Hablo como un cerdo.
He ganado medallas.
Me recuerdo en el tiempo del psiquiátrico.
Dos meses de destrucción.
Un poco feo,
comiendo pan y agua.
Llorando,

hablando solo...
a consciencia.
Pero un día tomé una decisión
y me escapé.
Me brinqué una malla de 3 metros
y me denoté.
Estoy aquí con mi amigo
en el free,
hablando sí.
He cantado como mil horas
y no me importa a mí.
Es lo que me gusta,
lo que me encanta,
una batalla.
Tengo agallas, huevos y toda la vara.
No tengo la cara tatuada ni cortada.
Nadie me hace daño
porque tengo mucho talento.
Ego aquí mentiendo.
Ya voy a terminar con un buen fin
En sí, con un buen ejemplo para mí.
No me importa.
Hay millones de personas,
negros, blancos, chinos
hablando arabeo, hebreo, estilo fatardo.
Yo estoy aquí en el nido como Nardo,
como tanto.
Estoy como Wiz fumando yerba.
No me importa,
como Ronaldinho en la selva.
Tengo talento,
ego.
Qué buena grabadora,
qué buen estilo,
qué bueno todo.
Ya termino mi compadre,
mi amigo.
Qué tal lo hago?
Tengo talento?
Estoy en el lado?
No me importa nada.
Puedo hablar en francés, fresh.
Police in helicopter
are searching marihuana.
No importa nada.

Me denoto como un loco.
Puedo hablar en ruso,
aquí como estilo, es mucho.
Estoy aquí como un maldito negro
hablando patuá, hebreo, arameo, en fin,
como una girafa
como un mutante
como un cerdo
como una tortuga ninja
como Mario Bros en el nintendo.
No tengo nada.
Me denoto con talento.
Mi amigo,
soy un campeón.
No soy un ladrón.
No tengo miedo
Estoy aquí en el phone.

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