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The *Trans*formative Power of Performance Art in Contemporary Managua

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¿No habrá un maricón en alguna esquina

desequilibrando el futuro de su hombre nuevo?

¿Van a dejarnos bordar de pájaros

las banderas de la patria libre?

Pedro Lemebel, "Manifiesto (Hablo por mi diferencia)"

It is an exciting time to be studying the artistic interventions in the form of performance art in Nicaragua. The streets are bustling with *gigantonas,* activist interventions are being planned left and right, spaces are being opened to cultivate artistic experimentation, and performance art is being recognized in mass media as well as in the academy. In the past years, two book-length studies were published on Central American visual art: Pablo Hernández Hernández's *Imagen-palabra: Lugar, sujeción y Mirada en las arte svisuale scentroamericana s*(2012) and Alberto Guevara's *Performance, Theatre, and Society in Contemporary Nicaragua: Spectacles of Gender, Sexuality, and Marginality* (2014). The Biennale for visual arts in Nicaragua 2014 (BAVNIC 2014) selected two performance pieces as winners: "Sólofantasía" by Fredman Barahona (Elya Sinvergüenza), and "La caída" by Alejandro de la Guerra. In this article, I delve into some of the performances that I consider powerful interventions into the public sphere—

cultural texts that bring to the fore the theatricality of the body,[1] that push the limits of gender, and that offer alternative discourses to official and hegemonic ideologies.

I begin with a brief survey of the literature on Central American visual arts, discussing the theoretical arguments that are most convincing and helpful to my own scholarship. Then, I offer close readings of selected performance pieces, some of which I have experienced as a spectator in the flesh, and others I accessed through the mediations of documentation. I have chosen to focus specifically on the recent interventions from the artist Elyla Sinvergüenza due to their focus on gender transgression, my access to the works, and the ways that Elyla's performances emphasize the theatricality of the body.

Pablo Hernández Hernández' publication *Imagen-palabra: Lugar, sujeción y Mirada en las artes visual scentroamericanas* provides a history of visual art production in Central America from the pre-Columbian era to the present day. The focus of the book is the combination of written and visual expression in contemporary Central American visual arts. While the theoretical chapters are not as integrated with the chapters that provide analyses of cultural texts, the interpretations of the works are well-developed and insightful. The last section of the book, for example, delves into the richness of specific socio-historic moments in visual art production in Central America, particularly the foundation of the first Central American Biennale,[2] Ernesto Salmerón's post-revolution artistic interventions in Nicaragua, and Regina José Galindo's performance art on the sexual control and vulnerability of women in Guatemala.

I find several of Hernández' contributions helpful in my own analysis. For example, in his discussion on Salmerón, he argues that visual arts provide and important space in which memory and history can be problematized, activated, and modified. He writes:

> En la medida en que las imágenes del arte tengan o alcancen el estatus de narración, fuente o documento, en esa misma medida podrán ser utilizadas como parte de los materiales que hacen historia (en el

[1] Here, I draw on Diana Taylor's concept of theatricality as an integral part of performance—that which "flaunts its artifice, its constructedness" while making a "scenario alive and compelling" (13). I draw on Judith Butler to

[2] This term, deriving from the Italian for Biennial, has come to be used to refer to large-scale, international art exhibits. In many cases, including the Central American Biennale, prizes are awarded for a variety of categories. The ninth Bienal de ArtesVisuales del Istmo Centroamericano (BAVIC) was celebrated in August of 2014 in Guatemala.

> sentido ideológico), como portadoras de historias (en el sentido narrativo) y de los materiales para la historia (en el sentido científico disciplinar) […] Lo que hemos intentado hacer a partir del análisis de la obra *Auras de Guerra* es mostrar que la dimensión del arte como documento histórico puede ser presentada también de una manera tal que sirva de pretexto para tener acceso a otras formas de relación con el pasado. (133).

I am convinced that visual art does indeed produce a variety of ways of relating to the past as well as intervening in the historical discourse, which he recognizes as different from the past "tal y como sucedió" (133). However, it is interesting that Hernández does not enter into conversation with a range of performance and visual art scholars that have expanded on this concept.

For example, Diana Taylor famously critiqued the rift between archival documents (considered history) and repertoire (ephemeral social practices, considered memory) in *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Indeed, Taylor argues that performance art is a "vital act of transfer" transmitting social knowledge, cultural memory, and identities in the Americas (2). In turn, Joseph Roach argues:

> Performance genealogies draw on the idea of expressive moments and mnemonic reserves, included patterned movements made and remembered by bodies, residual movements retained implicitly in images or words (or in the silences between them), and imaginary movements dreamed in minds not prior to language but constitutive of it. (26).

Of particular interest for those of us concerned with marginalized and subaltern memories that are often made absent in the archive, José Esteban Muñoz argues:

> Performances of memory are necessitated by a dominant culture that projects an "official" history that elides queer lives and the lives of people of color. Many of us take periodic refuge in the past. We need to remember a time before, not as a nostalgic escape, but as a vision of a different time and place that enables a critique of the present. Performances of memory remember, dream, and recite a self and reassert agency in a world that challenges and constantly attempts to snuff out subaltern identities. (92).

Indeed, Alberto Guevara, in *Performance, Theatre, and Society in Contemporary Nicaragua: Spectacles of Gender, Sexuality, and Marginality*, focuses on how performances of marginality in contemporary Nicaragua create space (physically and discursively) for subalternized populations.

Guevara offers his readers a history of popular performance art in Nicaragua, ranging from post-conquest religious *mitotes,* the famous popular colonial street theater performances such as *El Güegüense,* the theater of power under the Somoza dynasty, and pre- and post- revolutionary theater used to promote consciousness and action. Guevara describes in detail the theatricality of the current government and the visual discourses used to promote a populist rhetoric and a feigned solidarity with marginalized populations. Finally, Guevara focuses on examples of performances that disrupt the government's rhetoric, in the cases of the victims of exposure to the deadly pesticide Nemagon—literally performing their demise in the public sphere, and later how transvestite gay performance converts marginality into entertainment in peripheral circuses, creating space for marginalized bodies and intervening in the perception of traditional gender norms.

Unlike Hernández, Guevara draws on and dialogues with performance scholars Roach and Taylor in order to highlight how their theories of performance apply in a Nicaraguan context. He writes:

> In Nicaragua, I would argue, public displays of power and marginality today have become important excavations of and commentaries on a history in its present context. Thus, such performances represent dialogues and renegotiations of transmitted knowledge into alternative presents. These performances become excited and dynamically embodied interactions between social agents and history. It is through performance, moreover, that people, in the process of enacting memories, make visible the links between the embodied acts performed now and the historical, individual, and cultural contexts. (37).

Guevara contests the populist pretentions of the current Nicaraguan government, pointing out how subaltern individuals *perform* their exclusion and the violences done against them in

public spaces. He provides an archive of these interventions that complements the repertoire of the popular memory they construct. Indeed, like Muñoz, Taylor, and Roach, he argues that public performance is an important recourse for agency among disenfranchised social groups. In particular, his analysis of the circus performances of Shayra, a gay transvestite living and performing in the periphery of Managua, resonates deeply with my interpretations of the transgressive performances I develop later on. Guevara argues that in Shayra's circus acts,

> she exaggerates her femininity in her sexually charged performance, and it is through her over-the-top physicalization of gender-role expectations in Nicaraguan society that Shayra enacts a dominant discourse of homosexuality and marginality. Characterized by the theatricalization and physicalization of a sexually explicit normalized ethos of gender relations, her performance counteracts the widespread discursive and ideological notions about homosexuality in public spaces in Nicaragua. The subject of her performance is thus the homosexual citizen who entertains. (121).

In this way, the theatricality of the body in Shayra's performances provides an exaggerated critique of the expectations of femininity[3] as well as conforming to the stereotype of homosexuals as entertaining, effeminate sex objects.

At the same time, Guevara recognizes that Shayra benefits in a certain way from performing these stereotypes, allowing her a space where she is applauded and compensated for her talents (see 122). Guevara even argues the transgressive power of performances like Shayra's, by

> questioning the fixity of sexual categorizations in Nicaragua […] These transgressive transvestite performances are subversive in that they suggest a rethinking of the normalized understanding of heterosexual and homosexual bodies in Nicaraguan culture. Transgressing normative social sexual boundaries also underlines the failure of state institutions to advocate sexual and gender equality and or even defend a safe, non criminalized space in the nation for sexual minorities. (124-125).

[3] I am reminded of Nao Bustamante's performance piece "America, the Beautiful" as another moving example of theatricality of femininity.

I, like Guevara, argue that cultural texts that feature gender transgression promote a critical rethinking of norms and categorizations of gender and sexuality. While it is apparent that individual cultural interventions do not necessarily have the power to revolutionize and radicalize societal perceptions of gender and sexuality, I do believe that we are experiencing a boom of transgressive cultural productions that, collectively, are making *diversidad sexual* and a wider spectrum of gender performances difficult to ignore in contemporary Nicaragua.

While contemporary performances should be considered within the socio-historical contexts of their production, interfacing with recent history and current events, I believe it is fundamental to also consider how they relate to coloniality of power and knowledge. While the contemporary performance scholars that I have cited here do not enter into conversation with these specific theoretical concepts developed by the modernity/coloniality working group, many do recognize the lasting vestiges of colonial dynamics that are remembered through performance. Indeed, the concept of coloniality is a fairly recent contribution to the field of cultural studies (in the early 2000s). However, the intellectual concern with the lasting effects of colonial dynamics in Latin American contexts has a much longer history.

For example, throughout *The Archive and the Repertoire* Taylor traces the influence of colonization and the logic of colonial power differentials in present-day performances by Latino and Latin American artists. Taylor opts to use the term "colonialism", "neo-colonialism", and "internal colonialism" to describe different facets of the persistence of the trauma of conquest, displacement, imposed religious and cultural practices, and exotification. I refer to colonialism as the project of occupying and administrating lands—a project made possible and justified by coloniality. Coloniality, in turn, refers to the cultural logic employed by European colonizers that devalued and dehumanized African and indigenous bodies and knowledges while glorifying European bodies and ideals. In brief, coloniality is both the logic that allowed for Europeans to justify colonization, and also the perduring social hierarchization of races, genders, sexualities, knowledges, and cultural and religious practices that privileges all that is white, European,

masculine, and heterosexual while, devaluing all that is perceived as different (non-white, non-European, non-masculine, non-heterosexual).[4]

I draw parallels here between performance studies and the study of coloniality of power and knowledge in the hopes that they might be combined in other academic projects in the future. For example, in Taylor's analysis of Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña's performances as "The Couple in the Cage",[5] she argues that the artists successfully critiqued "the structures of colonialism" and the neo-colonial commodification of exotic Others (68). I believe that Taylor successfully argues, in other words, that the politics of coloniality persist in American cultures which allow for racially *othered* bodies to be made spectacles—in cages no less—in spaces of material and cultural consumption. However, she does critique the performance for failing to comment on "prevailing structures of sexism or heterosexism" (68).

The concept of the coloniality of gender developed by María Lugones would allow us to see that sexual categorizations (and the way they form social hierarchies) are an intrinsic element of coloniality that operate on the same logic of devaluation based on embodied difference. Lugones complicates Anibal Quijano's concept of the coloniality of power, adding that thinking of race and gender in purely structural and categorical terms repeats in a certain way the violence of coloniality. She draws on theories of intersectionality and intersexuality to show how the construction of racial and gendered categories created a matrix of marginalization whereby different expectations were placed on differently racialized and gendered bodies. She writes:

> [T]he logic of categorial separation distorts what exists at the intersection, such as violence against women of color. Given the construction of the categories, the intersection misconstrues women of color. So, once intersectionality shows us what is missing, we have ahead of us the task of reconceptualizing the logic of

[4] I draw on the scholarship of Aníbal Quijano, Walter Mignolo, Enrique Dussel, María Lugones, and Catherine Walsh –members of the modernity/coloniality working group– in order to define coloniality of knowledge and power.

[5] These performances consisted of touring malls and museums in four different countries wherein Fusco and Gómez-Peña portrayed a couple from a fictional previously uncontacted "tribe" –the Guatinauis– enacting "traditional" tasks in a cage for contemporary spectators. The performance took place in 1992- the 500th anniversary of Columbus' encounter with indigenous Americans.

> the "intersection" so as to avoid separability. It is only when we perceive gender and race as intermeshed or fused that we actually see women of color. (4).

This is to say that certain expectations and prejudices remain hidden in contemporary epistemologies until we analyze the intersections of oppressive forces. Indeed, Taylor asks: "Why was gender construction more difficult to deconstruct than colonialism?" (4). I believe that a convincing answer is that the coloniality of gender is an element of colonial dynamics that is still widely naturalized in our cultural imaginaries. While racial distinctions still profoundly mark embodied experiences, they are more widely recognized as social constructs that have no basis in biology. Nevertheless, sexual dimorphism and pre-determined gender behaviors are still widely accepted and justified culturally and scientifically. If we view the categorization and hierarchization of gender and sexuality as part of coloniality, we can begin to uncover the intersectionality of several coterminous systems of oppression based on perceived difference.

Guevara also describes the lasting effects of the logic of coloniality using Taylor's term "colonialism". He writes:

> The colonial discourse thus has become embedded in public performances of power through everyday actions: social ceremonies, civic displays, and religious celebrations. This discourse of power and resistance, one can argue, persists in Nicaragua today in that power structures of inequality remain the core of political power and the maintenance of that power. (45).

Once again, I believe that Guevara and Taylor's use of "colonialism" is synonymic with "coloniality". However, I do believe that coloniality is a broader concept that can allow us to draw parallels between a variety of oppressive hierarchizing ideologies that are not necessarily solicited in the concept of "colonialism". To study coloniality in its recent iterations in contemporary socio-historical contexts allows us to understand how performances intervene in the here-and-now as well as how they relate to the living memory of ancient violences enacted on marginalized bodies.

Therefore, in my analysis of the case studies below, I pay close attention to the theatricality of the body as well as how the performances contest or uphold elements of coloniality. Specifically, I am interested in the mixing of signs imbued with historical significance in cultural contexts, rearranged through the subjectivity of a performer in order to intervene in their community and society. In some cases, the signs placed on and performed directly by the body are iterations of gendered expectations and policing—phenomena that certainly have recent historical specificities but nonetheless relate to the legacy of coloniality. In other examples, state iconographies are affixed to the body showing the weight of a history that excludes and erases based on embodied differences. In any case, these performances intervene in public spaces and offer alternative presents to the everyday and normative. They transgress the confines of expectations and revel in the discomfort and giddiness produced by breaking free of hegemony.

The case studies that I examine in this chapter are performance pieces that deal directly with gender transgression that were conceived of and executed in the past five years (from 2012 to the present). I have chosen to limit my corpus to the interventions made by the artist Fredman Barahona who goes by the artistic moniker Elyla Sinvergüenza. I focus on Barahona's interventions because they are well-documented, they are transgressive, they are public, and I have been privileged to gain access to the process by which they are conceived and performed. While there are certainly other performance artists that are making important contributions to the artistic and intellectual communities in Managua as well as intervening in Nicaraguan society, some of whom I mention in the following chapter, I believe that Elyla's interventions deserve special attention here. I engage with Elyla Sinvergüenza's performances in chronological order, beginning with "El género no puede caminar" in 2012 along with a few contributions from Barahona's blog, "Trans-horror" in 2013, "Sólo fantasia …" in 2014, and "Se la bailó" also in 2014. Each performance uses the theatricality of the body in order to comment on power dynamics, coloniality, Nicaraguan history, and subalternity. While these performance pieces are largely designed and executed by Fredman Barahona, they are made possible through the work of an artistic community that lends their talents in the production and documentation of his

productions. These artists, such as Jilma Estrada, Guillermo Sáenz, Carlos Ibarra, Grace Gonzalez, Luigi Bridges, and Alvaro Cantillano Roiz, are all active with their own artistic interventions. However, for the purposes of this chapter, I will focus exclusively on Elyla Sinvergüenza's productions.

Barahona's examples of performance art are unique in the way that they "poner el cuerpo".[6] By this I mean that they use the body as the main meaning-maker—they have a direct affective charge and create a relationship with spectators. Secondly, they are largely public interventions that draw from popular and folkloric forms of expression. When drawing from popular folklore, Barahona employs theatricality—exaggerating the everyday in a way that creates a scenario from which we can reflect on social norms. While Elya's performance art is garnering more attention in the academy and in the gallery recently, it still maintains very close ties to popular traditions. The embodied and public nature of Elyla's performance art makes it an ideal site to study gender construction and transgression, especially since it places gender and sexuality at the center of its narratives.

El género no puede caminar

"El género no puede caminar" is a public intervention that Elyla Sinvergüenza performed in two different locations in 2012, documented in two videos and a series of photographs. The performance consists of Elyla Sinvergüenza, bare-chested, attempting to put on shoes that do not fit and to walk. My first exposure to this piece was through Elyla's blog. While this documentation is no longer available to the public, I remember the performance consisting of Elyla trying to walk in the middle of a bustling street in Managua wearing heels that are several

[6] The expression "poner el cuerpo"—literally "to place the body" means to throw oneself into the cause and to assume the risks of corporeal vulnerability. It is at once a feminist practice and theory, stemming from feminist social movements in post-2001 Argentina as described by Bárbara Sutton in her article "Poner el Cuerpo: Women's Embodiment and Political Resistance in Argentina". I use this term to emphasize the body as a tool of political action- it is medium, meaning-maker, and an intervention in body politics. It has also been brought to my attention that this expression was used in the Nicaraguan revolution, similarly meaning to give one's body to the cause.

sizes too small in order to demonstrate the difficulty of transgressing gender norms as well as the difficulty of performing masculine and feminine expectations. Cars and busses pass by in either direction, drawing confused gazes from the public that are echoed in the confusion of gender that is being performed. Elya writes in the decription of the performance:

> La imposibilidad de la construcción de un género en un solo cuerpo es un claro índice de la naturalidad en la manipulación política del gran cuerpo-cultural heteronormativizado, la contrariedad configurada es un espacio a conquistar con el cuerpo propio. ("El género" n.p.).

In this description, Elyla describes a conceptualization of the impossibility of reproducing the hegemonic projects of masculinity and femininity, something that I see as being very similar to Judith Butler's description of the impossibility of hegemonic gender performance. She writes:

> The practice by which gendering occurs, the embodying of norms, is a compulsory practice, a forcible production, but not for that reason fully determining. To the extent that gender is an assignment, it is an assignment which is never quite carried out according to expectation, whose addressee never quite inhabits the ideal s/he is compelled to approximate. (Butler 231).

In this way, Elyla advocates for rejecting the ideal in favor of taking control of our own bodies. Elyla advocates for gender ambivalence and ambiguity in his/her performance. She/he attempts to uncover the inherent diversity in Nicaraguan society and the impossibility of "walking a straight line" and conforming to violent masculinity. In the second video of "El género no puedecaminar", produced by Jilma Estrada, Elyla performs the piece in a very similar way, this time in El Tercer Ojo, a upscale bar in the Zona Hippos in Managua. In this version, Elyla's stumbling is accompanied by rhythmic accompaniment from masked musicians, further theatricalizing the artifice of identification through body features. Also, he interacts with the audience, especially two young men that sit close to him and laugh, offering their shoes which Elyla is still not capable of walking comfortably in.

We can see in Elyla's writing, particularly his/her "Manifiesto Sinvergüenza," Elyla explains how she/he positions him/herself against not only normative, heterosexual masculinity, but also the hegemonic expectations in homosexual culture. Elyla compares normative masculinity with the pressures of a gay identity in the following way:

> Yo no soy la oveja rosada del rebaño, me pintaron de rosa y me sacaron del corral en medio de cerdos y entonces me revolqué en todos lados como cerda o cerdo, pegando contra paredes, encontrando piedras, rostros, drogas, vaginas, penes y anos hasta ver mi lana negra. Soy un disidente gay porque ser gay, duele, cuesta y cansa igual que macho inmerso en su hombría pero cansado de su coraza violenta, porque ya no quiere golpear y no sabe cómo parar. ("Manifiesto" n.p.).

Elyla critiques the violent carapace of masculinity that knows no other way as well as the homonormativity influenced by United Statesian models. He/She continues:

> Mátenme porque prefiero escuchar a Chavela Vargas en vez de Lady Gaga. Mátenme por ser maricon de cantina y de barrio peligroso, mátenme porque no tengo dinero, mátenme porque no quiero ponerme al tanto del mundo gay, mátenme porque de verdad nunca fui fan de Madonna y porque cuando iba a discos gays me perdía entre tanto maquillaje y humo sin saber quién era. ("Manifiesto" n.p.).

In this way, Elyla critiques classism and the imposition of US cultural figures as representative of the "gay world". She/He recognizes theses impositions as violences through the repetition of "kill me"/"mátenme". At the end of the manifesto, Elyla explains his/her name: a combination of masculine and feminine articles "El" and "La" –he and she– Elyla. She/He writes, "entre el y la enfatizo en la Y como la válvula de escape que penetra, de-construye, dinamita arquetipos, patrones y normativas X-centradas" ("Manifiesto" n.p.). Not only does Elyla wish to point out the dual presence of masculine and feminine traits as integral parts of his/her being, but also to highlight the "and" as an intermediate and complementary space, difficult to attain and/or understand, in which she/he wishes to live. The "and" is lovemaking with the disparate fragments of the self in order to create life.

The space between he and she, él y la, makes me think about the complex relationship between masculinity and femininity. I often consider the relationship between masculine and feminine, and the binaristic way in which we conceptualize that relationship, as part of the legacy of the colonial dynamics and categorizations imposed on the indigenous peoples of the Americas. As Mignolo, Quijano, Lugones, and other theorists in the Modernity/Coloniality working group have argued, coloniality is the darker side of modernity—the two phenomena are intrinsically linked to one another, modernity operating on the cultural logic of coloniality, and coloniality creating the conditions for an unequal and uneven modernity.

Equally, masculinity and femininity are opposite sides to a coin—without masculine impunity, there cannot exist a feminine culture that reacts and mediates said impunity. Without the naturalization of a cultural divide along a binary of gendered cultures, the rites, practices, and traits associated with masculinity or femininity would not necessarily be associated to the possession of a particular genitalia. The space between él y la attempts to recuperate the fissures between monolithic constructs of masculinity and femininity, revealing them as impossible and forced projects.

This space, which Alberto Guevara has called transgressive, with reference to Shayra's circus performances, has the capacity to exaggerated critique of the expectations of femininity as well as conforming to the stereotype of homosexuals as entertaining, effeminate sex objects. This space is also what Marjorie Garber has called "the third" which she describes as, "that which questions binary thinking and introduces crisis—a crisis which is symptomized by *both* the overestimation *and* the underestimation of cross dressing … The 'third' is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a place of possibility." (11). In other words, drag opens a discursive space in which naturalized binaries can be viewed within the context of their own artifice.

However, I am not entirely convinced that this third space can entirely escape the interplay between masculine and feminine signs. Indeed, Nelly Richard has asked how femininity can be constructed if not in opposition to masculinity. She asks:

> ¿es válido que las mujeres construyan identidad sobre la base de que lo "otro" de lo masculino-dominante es lo "propio" de lo femenino? ¿No será que lo "propio" de lo femenino es el producto, tensional y reformulatorio, del cruce de los mecanismos de apropiación/desapropiación contra-apropiación que enfrentan lo dominante y lo dominado en el interior de una cultura cuyos registros de poder (hegemonía) y resistencia (subalternidad) están siempre entrelazados? (21-22).

I agree with Richard—femininity is a negotiation between hegemonic models of corporal expression and resistance to those models. However, femininity cannot divorce itself from the concept of masculinity just as homosexuality cannot divorce itself from the concept of heterosexuality. The categorization of feminine or homosexual is a way of marking difference from a violent and privileged ideal. However, this difference can be transformed into a banner under which to rally—the right to difference and a rejection of the qualities valued by the imagined ideal. In other words, the undesirable qualities according to a patriarchal and heterocentric logic then become considered valuable and attractive from a position of difference.

However, these same undesirable qualities can also be absorbed or transferred to the ideal models. For example, in "Tenderness: A Mediator of Identity and Gender Construction in Politics," Ileana Rodríguez argues that, in the context of the Nicaraguan Revolution, the expectations of an ideal woman –"'who gives everything for others, who suffers when others suffer and who also laughs when others laugh' (*Women* 87) … [were] abducted from the area of compulsive heterosexuality and placed in the security area of male bonding as homosociality" (245). In this way, the complementarity of gender, while unequal, was unraveled by transferring care between the two genders to a homosocial context. Thus, women were equally deprived of care and considered sexual objects.

The division of masculine and feminine characteristics in the creation of expectations for feminine and masculine bodies is a violence that denies the diversity of expression of which we are all capable. The territory of gender is unstable because hegemonic expectations along gender lines constantly change due to cultural interventions. In this way, we see the importance of a

critical approach to our own personal gender performance and the importance to negotiate with the ideals of expression present in our cultural archives.

Trans-Horror

"Trans-Horror" served as my introduction to Nicaraguan performance art in the role of active spectator. I had been in conversation with the artist, Fredman Barahona, shortly after my arrival for my first research trip in 2013. He was friends with some of my friends and fellow members of the ex/centrO working group—we met in informal settings and over the course of several conversations, we realized that we thought in very similar ways about gender and sexuality. Fredman and I shared an appreciation for underground queer hip hop and performance in the US, a complex spirituality informed by indigenous and pagan beliefs that allow access to non-traditional ways of knowing, and an avid interest in queer theory being produced in North and South America. Fredman was and is extremely influential in the ways I have begun to understand the complexities of gender and sexual performance in contemporary Nicaragua. By sharing lived experiences, art that we appreciate, and intellectual conversations, we learned from each other. Admittedly, I have probably learned a great deal more from Fredman than he has learned from me. However, I like to think that our dialogues have been mutually beneficial.

It is due to our friendship that I had the privilege to not only experience the performance of Trans-Horror twice, I was permitted to see the performance as a process beginning with a concept through its execution, reception, and documentation. As a concept, Fredman, now in the artistic mode of Elyla, had a much better idea of what he wanted to achieve than what I could glean from our conversations. I knew that he wanted to comment on the uneasy construction of gender—a theme in his/her work. We spoke of Miss Gay Nicaragua and how the contestants that wowed the judges the most were serving realness—they passed as women, just very glamorous and theatrical women. The amount of work that went into body modification, make-up, costuming, and choreography was striking. The drag performed at Miss Gay Nicaragua, in the National Theater

no less, is a complex, high art. The fact that the participants are in large part, biological men, does indeed intervene in the cultural landscape of Nicaragua in order to show the fluidity of gender and the capacity for some to perform against their socialization with a great deal of finesse and precision.

However, the heightened stakes of the competition are at odds with the everyday performance of gender of the participants. What's more, these performances require a great deal of time, funding, and effort—elements that are not available to all. Indeed, the daily gender performances of many *diversidad sexual* individuals, trying to realize their own personal ideals of outward appearance, often fall short of the type of perfection found in Miss Gay Nicaragua. Fredman wanted to comment on this disconnect, playing with the idea of the crown of achievement. The crown worn by Miss Gay Nicaragua becomes a prop in the performance piece "Trans-Horror". The crown that figures in the piece is a cheap imitation of the tiara given to the winner of the pageant. However, in the performance, Elyla crowns his/herself. This gesture comments not only on the value differential of self-bestowed achievement, but also the material limitations of access to adornments and embellishments. These limitations are echoed in the absence of fine clothing in the performance.

To begin the performance, Elyla sits on a chair in nothing but simple underwear, exposing the body as a canvas on which to project gendered signs—"poniendo el cuerpo". To be sure, the absence of breasts and Elyla's full beard mark her/his body as male, but as the performance progresses, he/she begins to strive to transform her/his body to a more ideal version of him/herself. Elyla picks up a roll of packing tape and starts to wrap the tape around the crown of her/his head. This gesture mirrors the practice of *transformista s*and drag queens who tape their heads in order to lift up the skin on their faces and to provide a more secure base for their wigs. However, Elyla does not stop after taping his/her head. The lighting in the room waxes and wanes as an other-worldly extra-diegetic music begins to complement the sounds of tape being ripped from the roll. Elyla looks up and blinks rapidly, as if trying to search for an ideal, confused but determined. Elyla takes a deep breath, shifts in the chair, feels to make sure every

part of her/his crown is covered, then the camera zooms in closer. Elyla continues to wrap tape around his/her crown, somewhat more frantically. She/he closes his/her eyes, pauses, looks up, then brings the tape under his/her chin, quickly drawing the tape straight up her/his face, flattening his/her nose and partially obstructing her/his mouth.

The camera zooms in again, showing Elyla passing the tape up his/her face again, causing more discomfort for both performer and spectator. We begin to see Elyla struggle to breathe, but her/his gaze communicates determination to continue. He/she continues to wrap the tape around her/his face, covering his/her left eye, then the right. Elyla's face is almost entirely wrapped in tape at this point, and he/she continues to wrap her/himself vigorously, searching for the small open spaces to cover up, further restricting his/her breathing. The breath quickens, showing distress. She/he feels all over his/her face, exploring the clear plastic landscape that has replaced flesh. We can see through the tape, but the face is distorted. The camera uses a low-angle shot, then zooms out to show Elyla's shadow on the wall, creating dual figures—one, a figure in peril, the other an undefined shadow following the motions. Elyla cuts the tape, secures it, then feels around on the table next to her/him. Elyla picks up a straight razor cutter, then shifts position, straining to move his/her head from left to right and writhing in the chair. The camera zooms in as Elyla cuts away at the tape covering her/his mouth, breathing heavily through the slits and moving his/her jaw to allow air to flow.

With her/his head still hanging, Elyla picks up the razor again and cuts a slit at his/her right eye, pulling the tape away to form a hole. The room darkens, then saturates again with light, giving the effect that Elyla glows with relief. Elyla picks up the tape again and starts to wrap it around all of her/his body—across the chest, the waist, the midriff as he/she stands. Elyla tapes across her/his legs, then continues to wrap somewhat frantically and haphazardly all around his/her body. Elyla's arms and legs are restricted, allowing only awkward movement as she/he cuts the tape, takes the wig from the table beside him/her, and struggles to put it on. A strap breaks, causing the wig to fall, but Elyla picks it up again, trying to reattach it. It unfastens again and again, prompting a defeated sigh. Elyla finally gets it on, flips it over, and adjusts the wig.

We can't really see his/her eyes, and the surface of the tape is flat and shiny. Only a lip protrudes from the encasing. Elyla takes the crown from the table next to him/her, and pauses with it in front of her/his face. Deliberately, Elyla crowns him/herself, but appears unsure at first, looking down. Then, slowly letting her/his hands down from placing the crown, Elyla's posture shifts, turning to profile the camera with his/her shoulders back, showing confidence. The camera zooms out and Elyla starts stroking her/his hair. We cannot see Elyla's face due to the glare of the light, but the transformation has been realized. Elyla strokes his/her face, then sustains the crown calmly as the camera zooms back in.

There are several key differences between my experience of the performance live and the video of the performance. Firstly, during my experience of the performance, I was holding a reflector trying to provide light for the filming. The fact I was participating in the performance off-screen invested me in the performance more—I fluctuated between being entranced by the transformation taking place, being concerned for Elyla's safety, and doing my job to the best of my ability. Without the extra-diegetic music, the sounds of the tape crackling and Elyla's heavy, belabored breathing were much more striking. Some of this translates to the video, and an other-worldliness is added, but I was struck by the perils and vulnerability of the transgressive body more than the act of transformation. Viewing the video, I reflect on how the camera tells the story just as much as Elyla's movements and actions. The angles, zooming, and lighting mark steps in the transformation and they complement shifts in the narrative.

Another difference between my experience and that of viewing the video is that I know the ultimate outcome of the performance. I know that the transformation will be complete and that Elyla will survive. The video does not call for action in the way that the live performance does, implicating the viewer in the suffering performed by Elyla. However, the communication of pain and discomfort does translate in the video, jarring the viewer. The video is described on Vimeo.com as "A terrorist attack against hetero and homo normative constructions of beauty"—this guides the interpretation toward reflections on body modification and standards of beauty, the pain and discomfort they cause as well as the pleasure they produce. Terror and horror are the

operational words in the paratext of the performance—they allow us to focus on the fear and discomfort produced by our own journeys of gender performance as well as performing those of the performer.

One can draw parallels to Nao Bustamante's performance in Lima in 2002 entitled "America the Beautiful" that commented on standards of beauty and the performance of femininity through taping her body, restricting and shaping it, and exaggerating the process of putting on make-up, covering her face with smudgy blush and gold powder. The key differences for me are the referent of a male body that struggles with gender expression and the multi-media approach taken by Bustamante. In the hour-long performance, Bustamante mixes sound clips, music, performance, singing, and making music with beer bottles. Elyla's intervention is a more direct comment on the plasticity of the body, the fear, and discomfort produced performing gender.

Sólo fantasia …

"Sólo fantasia …" is perhaps the most celebrated of Elyla Sinvergüenza's performance pieces. This is in part due to the exposure it garnered as part of the ninth Biennale for visual arts in Nicaragua in 2014, but also because it is a complex and elaborate intervention that combines commentary on recent Nicaraguan history/memory, gender roles, and folklore. The combination of these various sign systems allows for a wider audience to identify with the performance. It is also a very aesthetically pleasing performance that was carried out in the old city center of Managua—a place of intense memory.

Before I engage with the performance itself, I would like to take a moment to discuss the importance of the setting of "Sólo fantasia …". The old center of Managua is at once a wound in the center of the city as well as a literal and figurative epicenter for public events. It is a wound because it sits on the numerous faults that toppled thousands of homes and buildings on Christmas Eve, taking the lives of an estimated 20,000 Managuans, displacing over 250,000, and

producing a fire that smoldered over 2 weeks following the initial disaster. The center now houses the *Paseo de la memoria* along the once-bustling *avenida Roosevelt.* The now pedestrian street is lined with panels commemorating the old city as well as key figures and events in Nicaraguan history.

The center has recently also been the target of governmental campaigns to decorate the *rotondas*-traffic circles—and avenues to promote living well *(vivir bonito)*. It still houses government buildings and streets are lined with the first lady's, "La Chayo's", "trees of life"—giant metal trees with swirled branches painted vibrantly golden yellow and covered in light bulbs. These more professionally designed trees have replaced the Christmas trees that dotted the *rotondas* of the city in years past.

The center is also becoming an important space for Nicaragua's *diversidad sexual.* In the 80s, the abandoned national cathedral became a popular cruising spot and center for organization among gay men. Now, the center houses the longest-run gay nightclub Tabú, and gay-friendly bars such as el Caramanchel. Needless to say, Managua's old center is a precarious and complicated space where communities, discourses, and memories are sedimented on top of one another in daring arrays.

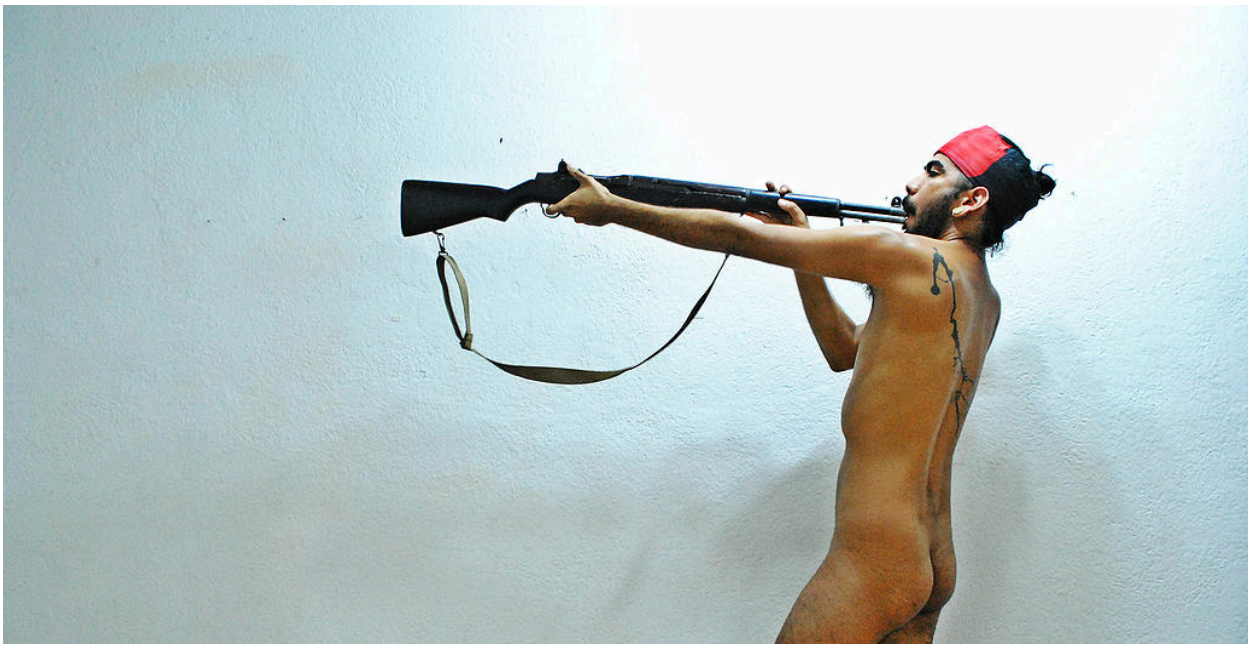
The topic of memory is not a new one in either Nicaraguan visual arts or in Elyla Sinvergüenza's œuvre. Ernesto Salmerón gained international attention with his project "Auras de Guerra", in which he documented the July 19th celebration of the triumph of the Sandinista Revolution in the Plaza de la República over the course of several years beginning in 1996. Salmerón, through photography, documented and interfaced with the event. In 2006, Salmerón carved out a Somoza-era graffiti of Sandino from the wall of a neighborhood in León and transported it to the National Palace where it was guarded by both Sandinista and Contra ex-combatants (see Hernández 123). Later that year, he transported this graffiti to various art expositions in a decommissioned military truck that was donated to the Sandinista government in 1983, but had since been re-painted, re-purposed, and re-named "El Gringo de la Centroamericana" (Hernández 123). By presenting a documentation of the commemoration of the

Revolution when the FSLN was out of power, then re-framing objects and signs from the revolutionary past, Salmerón contested the official histories of Daniel Ortega´s FSLN.

Elyla Sinvergüenza took up the topic of the memory of the Revolution in 2012 through a photo shoot and an exposition entitled "Revolución de la memoria". In his/her blog post on the piece, Elyla displays a photograph in which he/she wears a red and black bandana on his head to represent the influence of Sandinista ideology on the national memory and holds a rifle out in front of him with the barrel in his/her mouth. Beneath the photo, he/she asks:

> ¿Dónde está nuestra revolución sexual? ¿Qué paso con todas los guerrilleros en lucha por una nueva estructura de estado político que también buscaban una revolución de corporeidad y sexualidad? ¿En qué revolución estamos? ¿Qué paso con esa lucha? ¿Cuál es esa historia? ("Revolución").

With these questions Elyla affirms that the revolution was not just "a man's affair", "cosa de hombres." Instead of projecting violence toward other bodies, Elyla shows how the masculine-centric memory of the Revolution threatens to eliminate him/her as a subject. At the same time, Elyla shows that her/his own revolution is fought on the territory of his/her own body.



Fredman Barahona. *Revolución de la Memoria* (2012). Fotoperformance. Foto: Soso Rodriguez.

In "Sólo fantasia …", Elyla not only comments on how the Revolution is (or is not) embodied, she/he incorporates symbols that resonate with a much vaster portion of Nicaragua's history—from the colonial to the present. "Sólo fantasia …" consists of an intervention in public space, not sanctioned by the national Police, in which Elyla Sinvergüenza walks from the Rotonda Hugo Chávez to the iconic Concha Acústica[7] (cross)dressed in a costume that references 1) all of the iconographies used by recent Nicaraguan governments, and 2) folkloric and indigenous traditions. Elyla describes the work as a "[p]ieza de *arte de performance* que inicia con la creación de un traje de fantasía utilizando referentes de la estética política de los gobiernos de Nicaragua, iniciando con la dinastía Somocista hasta el período de gobierno actual" (in Núñez Moya, n.p.).

On the base of the dress one can make out the green of military fatigues with bullet shells and rank insignias, symbolizing the foundational character that armed struggle has played in the

[7] It is interesting that the Concha Acústica has since been torn down- purportedly because it suffered damages in the earthquakes of April 2014.

formation of the modern Nicaraguan State. It brings to mind the US military intervention, the establishment of the National Guard in Nicaragua, the military dictatorship of the Somoza dynasty, and the guerrilla war fought against it. The next layer includes the silhouette of Sandino on red cloth, evoking the colors of the FSLN, the triumph of the revolution, and the establishment of a Sandinista government founded on the ideals of Augusto César Sandino.

The choice of including the silhouette of Sandino is an apt one that lends itself to further reflection. Indeed, one of the most striking monuments in Managua's landscape is the statue of the silhouette of Sandino presiding over the city atop the Loma de Tiscapa—the place where liberal President José Santos Zelaya López built a fort to protect the city, later where Sandino would be captured by the National Guard under the command of Anastasio Somoza García, where Somoza would then construct "el Búnker" and a military complex used for training and torture. In this place saturated with overlapping memories, the silhouette is an odd choice for a monument. Franz Galich in his novel *Y te diré quién eres (Mariposa traicionera)* describes the dynamics of presence/absence and memory/oblivion of the monument in the following way:

> a Pancho Rana se le ocurrió que no se podía estar totalmente claro si las alas del ave nocturna (la bandera nica) querían envolver la sombra-estatua-escultura de lámina acerada antioxidante, para protegerla o para ocultarla de la memoria: contra el olvido o para olvidarla (61).

This passage beautifully describes the interplay between national symbols and how their interpretation can drastically change from different perspectives.

I believe this layer of Elyla's dress simply and elegantly incorporates these tensions into the fabric of his/her performance. The next layer up, moving chronologically toward the present, features the dove of peace in used by the Unión Nacional Opositora headed by Violeta Barrios de Chamorro. Doña Violeta campaigned on a message of peace, reconciliation, and democracy—she promised to put an end to the war between Sandinista and Contra brothers and sisters. The fact that the dove sits at Elyla's waist can be interpreted a comment on Doña Violeta's vocal support for the "family values" that were lost during the revolutionary period—such as traditional marital

and gender roles. Indeed, Violeta Barrios writes about this in her memoir *Dreams of the Heart,* saying that during the revolution the youth rebelled against the patterns taught to them by their parents:

> The girls also rebelled against the ladylike image that had been imposed upon them by their mothers. They too donned army fatigues and combat boots. I suppose they saw it as a symbol of their equality with the men. Unfortunately many excellent family values were thrown overboard as well. (194).

We could interpret Barrios' family values as synonymous to the heterocentric, monogamous, nuclear family.

The bodice of the dress is a pastiche of iconography used by the current Ortega-Murrillo government—the supposed revived legacy of the FSLN. Among the images used are Murrillo's trees of life, bright gems referring to the copious amounts of rings and necklaces that Murrillo typically sports, the bright pink, yellow, and blue used in posters throughout the city, and the indigenist disk/spiral that appears on posters and features prominently in the Rotonda Hugo Chavez. The gaudiness of the currently government's iconography can be read as a comment on frivolous spending and ostentation from a government the purported is of and for the people. Literally dressing his/herself in all of these state iconographies, Elyla Sinvergüenza converts her/his body into a repository of memories of conflict between competing national visual cultures. By combining them, Elyla shows that they haven't simply replaced one another chronologically, they have become superimposed—always taking the form of fantasies of homogeneity and covering up the heterogeneous reality of the diversity of the population.

"Sólo fantasia …" also recuperates the transgressive nature of Nicaraguan indigenous and folk culture, evidenced by the style of cross-dressing and the mask elaborated by Elyla. These two elements reference the Baile de las Negras—an indigenous cultural practice that has a strong traditional presence in the Monimbó neighborhood in Masaya. Katherine Borland, in her extensive study *Unmasking Class, Gender, and Sexuality in Nicaraguan Festival,* suggest that the cross-dressing performed in the Baile de las Negras serves as a form of social control exerted by

masculine authorities over women (see 105). She also argues that it is a recent phenomenon that the dance has acquired a special significance with respect to the representation of non-heterosexual sexualities (see 126). However, the artist responsible for the creation of the character Elyla Sinvergüenza, Fredman Barahona, is also a student of Nicaraguan folklore. Barahona studied anthropology at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua (UNAN) and wrote a thesis on the Baile de las Negras. Barahona considers that the dance is representative of the indigenous worldview of gender and sexuality that differs from Western concepts. The artist Elyla considers cross-dressing to be a cultural heritage that promotes the "y" between "El" and "La".

Fredman Barahona. "Sólo Fantasía ..." (2014). Performance, objeto, videoperformance. Foto: Oscar Duarte.

Fredman Barahona. “Sólo Fantasía ...” (2014). Performance, objeto, videoperformance. Foto: Oscar Duarte.

In addition, he/she considers transvestism as an important political act that contests the normalization of the gender binary, what I consider to be a foundational element of the coloniality of gender. Elyla writes, “los roles de género no son estáticos, y que el ser hombre y el ser mujer pasa por una construcción cultural que no implica la petrificación” (in Núñez Moya, n.p.). In this way, the performance “Sólo fantasia” attempts to question and refute the exclusions and violences present in the public sphere. The intervention draws attention to a coded body, an amalgam of national and gendered signifiers, in a space used by successive governments to impose their own iconographies. In turn, he/she incorporates a recognizable tradition of mixing masculine and feminine signs, but removes the mask only to reveal a second layer of transvestism, denying the reductive categorization of man-dressed-as-woman in favor of a constantly multiple subject.

Se la bailó

The last example I engage with in this chapter is also Elyla Sinvergüenza's most recent performance (as of the writing of this dissertation). While I did not have the opportunity to participate in this performance as a spectator, I was given the opportunity to view the documentation of the performance—a video shot by Alvaro CantillanoRoiz, edited by Luigi Bridges, and with the help of Carlos Ibarra as a technical assistant. In this particular performance, ElylaSinvergüenza joins a troupe of street artists performing the folk characters *la gigantona*and *el enanocabezón*.

The *gigantona* and *el enano cabezón* are folk characters that hark back to Nicaragua's colonial past. They are represented by street performers throughout the country, but have an especially strong tradition in León. Salvador Muñoz writes about the origins of these two characters in *Cuentos, mitos, y leyendas de Nicaragua:*

> El indio esculpió la gigantona, queriendo de esta manera representar a la mujer española, de una manera burlesca, satírica, que a pesar de su belleza, de su estatura y sobre todo de su color blanco, ellos, los indios la hacen bailar al son de los tambores y la detienen cuando el coplero declama. Por este motivo el indio se siente superior a la española ya que la hacen bailar al son que le toquen, el indio se representó en el enano cabezón, pequeño de estatura pero grande de cerebro. (34).

In this way, the *gigantona* is an exaggeration of European women's stature and whiteness. She is not only controlled by indigenous rhythms, making her sway wildly and stop at the beat of a drum, it is also apparent that a mestizo or indigenous performer—usually a man—is underneath the dress, controlling her movements. In this way, we could consider the *gigantona*as a form of drag that has been passed down and altered since colonial times. She theatricalizes the embodied difference of European women, or at least the perception of them, and comments on towering power and privilege of whiteness. At the same time, the performance of the *gigantona*asserts a mestizo/indigenous power by controlling the representation of whiteness.

José Blandino Raudez. “La Gigantona y el Enano Cabezón”.

The *gigantona* can be seen as performing a repertoire—rhythms and rites that have been passed down over the past 500 years—allowing the sexual ideal of the European woman to be remembered in different ways. Perhaps the *gigantona* is a way to laugh at the tall and white standards of beauty. Perhaps she represents the gaudy women of the oligarchy, weighed down by ostentatious jewelry and accessories and unable to peer down to the reality below her. Or, maybe the *gigantona* takes on a religious connotation. After all, it is most common to see the *gigantona* performed in December leading up to the religious festivals celebrating the Virgin Mary—*la purísima*. In this way, perhaps she is a mockery of the Virgin Mary. Or, more likely, she is a popular version of the Virgin Mary belonging to the people as opposed to the church’s figures

kept under lock and key except for church-sanctioned events. Quite possibly, *la gigantona* has been all of these things for different populations throughout history. What we can say with certainty is that she has remained a meaningful representation enough so to survive as a ritual to the present day.

As mentioned above, *la gigantona* is always accompanied by the *enano cabezón*, an exaggeration of indigenous/mestizo stature and perhaps a comment on his intelligence disproportionate to his size. However, the *enano cabezón*'s arms flop on his sides, just as the *gigantona*'s, depriving him of direct agency. Both characters are also mute, given words only by a third figure that is perhaps the most important meaning-maker of the performance—the *coplero*. The *coplero* accompanies the *gigantona* and the *enano cabezón*, directing the drummers and interspersing each burst of dancing with folk verses—extemporaneously reciting riming couplets that can comment on current events, the relationship between the two figures, or making jokes about the audience. While this type of performance traditionally takes place during December in preparation for the festival *La Purísima,* it has become a common sight in Managua and other cities in Nicaragua year-round.

Elyla Sinvergüenza's performance, "Se la bailó", comments on an additional figure that has appeared as part of *gigantona* performances in Managua within the past ten years—the *loca*. The *loca*is a transvestite, not necessarily homosexuals, that dons provocative clothing such as a short, frilly skirt and dances between interventions from the *gigantona* and the *enano cabezón*. In the few performances I have seen with this additional figure, the *loca* singles out masculine men in order to provoke them, shaking their behind up against spectators and fliting aggressively. Elyla Sinvergüenza performs this role in "Se la bailó", commenting on how the *loca* has become an additional folk figure becoming part of the everyday. Elyla writes in the description of the performance:

> [U]n "travesti" […] se une a la gigantona en una parodia de género para generar entretenimiento todas las noches en los barrios de Managua. Se postula entonces como una practica de travestismo cotidiana como estrategia económica de sobrevivencia que estorba al folkclorismo nacional. Es entonces que decido utilizar mi

> cuerpo para integrarme a la gigantona y salir en las noches a bailar con ella como un acto vivencial y de ruptura que refleja mis propias luchas. ("Se la bailó").

In this way, Elyla comments on how the *gigantona*has become a survival strategy in two ways. Firstly, it provides necessary income for poverty-stricken performers who ask for money in exchange for entertainment. Secondly, it provides a (safe?) space in which marginalized Others can survive. The loud drumming and exaggerated scenario created by the *gigantona*imposes representations of marginality in the public sphere, demanding the attention of those that come into contact with her.

Seeing an imitation of la *gigantona* produces giddiness and evokes memories. The recognition of la *gigantona* is pleasurable, and Elyla's innovative take on a classic allows us to see this traditional performance in a new light with other significations. Elyla dances beside and apart from la *gigantona.* Instead of being covered by a towering costume and mask, his body is visible and marked with both masculine and feminine signs—"poniendo el cuerpo". In contrast to the representations of *locas* that I have seen in other performances of the *gigantona*, Elyla makes no effort to hide some of his/her masculine features, such as her/his full beard.

In the street, the *coplero* invites spectators into the performative space, asking them to join in in the transgressive scenario. He yells, "¡Aquí la tienen bailando, bailando aquí en el centro, si quieren saludarla, señores, pueden pasar para adentro!" The interpolation with the audience is direct, but aesthetic. It breaks down the division between exaggerated folk figures and the audience that surrounds them, asking them to relate with the figures as they would the rest of their community. While it may appear a simple invitation, I believe it is a powerful intervention, breaking down the barriers between performer and spectator, passive public and theatrical performer.

Instead of remaining in the street as typical *gigantona* performances do, Elyla's troupe enters popular bars in order to interpolate more directly with audiences. However, much like other *locas,* Elyla wears a frilly skirt and dances provocatively. While the *gigantona* interfaces

with her complementary character, the *enano cabezón,* Elyla interfaces directly with viewers. Their giddiness and discomfort are both clear in the recording of his/her performance. Masculine men crack half-smiles as Elyla feverishly shakes his/her behind at them and against them. Other men remain expressionless, refusing to recognize that they are being interpolated. One woman laughs joyfully at the transgression of norms. Elyla throws him/herself at spectators, but maintains a facial expression of complete seriousness. The *coplero* demands space for Elyla in the bar, yelling "¡que se aparten un poquito que la loca viene a bailar!" The confrontational nature of Elyla's *loca* comments on the verve it requires to carve out social space for otherness. At the same time, the performance comments on how folklore has been a space in which exaggeration and gender transgression can be celebrated, much in the way that Guevara argues that the peripheral circuses provide spaces where difference can be celebrated and rewarded.

At the end of the video, Elyla sits, exhausted, on the bumper of a truck as children chase the *enano cabezón*down the street, playing with him. She/he looks off into the distance, sweaty, uncertain, and perhaps slightly fearful. This is the alternative present that Elyla offers through his/her performance. A present that imposes an alternative to the hegemonic public space, if just for a moment, in the uncertain hopes that an alternative will be created through repeated performatic interventions.

Elyla Sinvergüenza. “Se la bailó”.

Conclusion

Elyla Sinvergüenza’s public interventions made through performance art intervene in the public memory and in public space in order to present alternatives to the hegemonic ways in which gender, sexuality, and memory are considered. By “poniendo el cuerpo”, Elyla draws specific attention to how the body makes meaning in everyday contexts through creating scenarios in which the body is theatricalized. Through exaggeration, Elyla highlights the processes by which norms are internalized and projected through our everyday transvestism—how our bodies are always performing gender and how we have the capacity to modify our bodies in ways that reflect our internal diversity.

As I mentioned earlier, while single performances certainly do not have the capacity to revolutionize the way that gender and sexuality are considered on a societal level, the consistent public interventions from several performers using several mediums of expression can

realistically alter hegemonies and carve out spaces where difference is celebrated. It is an exciting time to appreciate performance art in Nicaragua, to be involved in performances as active spectators, and to imagine alternative presents with artists such as Elyla Sinvergüenza. Let us explore, without shame, the space between él and la.

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