A Heterotopia of Deviation – Representations of Juchitán

Gendered and Sexed Spaces through Representation
The "Unique" Juchitán de Zaragoza in Documentary Films

By

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Abstract

In this thesis I examine four documentary films made in the 21st century about Juchitán de Zaragoza, a city in the state of Oaxaca, Mexico, with a rich history of representation that has emphasized its alleged matriarchy and "third gender" category, *muxe*. Typically associated with male cross-gender behavior and homosexuality, I problematize the salient use of this category. Building on post-colonial studies and visual anthropology, I examine how the representation of Juchitán constructs it as a space that is Other from the dominant West, based on its seemingly distinct gender and sexuality system. Through the notion of authenticity, and its intersection with ideas about nature, ethnicity, sexuality, and gender, I look into the asymmetry of power between the Other and the dominant culture. Furthermore, I examine how the films represent Juchitán as a place "we" are unable to understand, and thus turn it into what Michel Foucault calls a "heterotopia," or a "heterotopia of deviation." In the latter, Foucault argues for the existence of people whose behavior is outside the norm and this premise enables me to examine the mechanisms of societal order and control refracted through the visibility of the deviant. Thus, I argue, despite the liberatory projects of the films, their representation of Juchitan constructs it as an Other space and, in fact, ends up reinscribing hegemonic notions of gender and sexuality as organizing features of modern society.

Acknowledgements

I could write extensively in this section… I am thankful to my family, to my friends, to the fruit stand outside the station, to the professors that inspired me, and especially thank you Mer for the team spirit. And, thank *you* Hadley, you became my (and Mer's) cricket.

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Introduction

> "Women have their place, men do too, I want to be in the middle, that is my space as a *muxe*, that space is mine." – Felina explains in the 2007 film *Muxes of Juchitan.*

In my thesis I focus on documentary films made about Juchitán de Zaragoza, a small city in the state of Oaxaca, Mexico that since the early 20th century has been represented by Mexican and foreign artists, by the international media, and even by the *Juchitecos*[1] interested in re-claiming their representation and maintaining their culture, as a place that is both "unique" and "exotic." Hidden between the mountains of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, the representations of Juchitán have emphasized its tropical landscape, the syncretism between a Zapoteca culture and Catholic religion, its social order, and traditions. Through film, paintings, photography, popular accounts, poetry, music, and other forms of representation, Juchitán is seen as a place of colorful flowers, where women have immeasurable power, and male homosexuals are visible and socially accepted. Two things have been highlighted with respect to its uniqueness: its alleged matriarchy and the community's recognized "third gender," the *muxe*. Typically associated with male cross-gender behavior and homosexuality, *muxe* is an identity category in Zapoteca language whose representation I discuss in detail in Chapter 1 and problematize throughout my thesis.

Interested in how Juchitán is exoticised and represented as a unique cultural space[2] based on its gender and sexuality system, I examine its representation in four documentary films made in the 21st century by directors coming from different countries, each with a distinct aim. Building on post-colonial studies and visual anthropology, I examine how

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[1] *Juchitecos* designates the people from Juchitán.

[2] Aware of the distinction between space and place Michel de Certeau argues for, where "space is a practiced place" with "mobile elements," and place implies order and arrangement, I use these terms interchangeably because I do not want to fixate a space by calling it a place, neither do I want to ignore the idea that there can be order in an active space. Thus, using space and place as essential equivalents, I am interested in the construction of ideas about, and the relationship between, imagined and real spaces - social and geographic.

Juchitán is produced, through the vehicle of documentaries, as an imagined cultural space in which sexuality and gender are represented with a certain fluidity and heterogeneity that is seemingly absent in the film's reflection, and construction, of what I will call the "dominant" culture, defined as the "West."[3] In particular, I look into how the films create a complex image of Juchitán by presenting the differences and similarities it has with the dominant culture, and yet construct it as an Other space that is different from "ours." In doing so, I explore how the documentaries, through different means, create a critique of the dominant culture and, yet, by representing Juchitan as a unique Other with a seemingly distinct gender and sexual social order, in fact, end up reinscribing hegemonic notions of gender and sexuality as organizing features of modern society.

Since the late 19th century when the Lumière brothers projected moving images for the first time, documentary filmmaking has been subject to ongoing debates about its connection to reality, truth, and the imaginary. Documentary filmmaking has been used and discussed as a tool to raise awareness, promote social change, promote ideologies, etc. My interest in Juchitán started in 2007, in fact, from watching the 2005 documentary *Muxes: Auténticas, intrépidas, buscadoras del peligro[4]* by the Mexican director Alejandra Islas. Through the narrative and visuals I first encountered Juchitán and its people as a place with a seemingly different approach to gender relations and social structures. Although this film presents and challenges the two most common assumptions about Juchitán - that it is a matriarchal society and a gay paradise – it still distinguishes it from the rest of Mexico where men are protagonists, women are subordinate, and a heteronormative Catholic-induced morality coats over and constrains gender and sexuality. Juchitán, a city that is primarily indigenous and

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[3] I use the term "West" guardedly to refer to Mexico, Europe, Canada, and the United States depending on the filmmaker's country of origin but also, on the understanding of the "West" that the people from Juchitán support in their own representation in the films. My understanding of this term is, as Trouillot best puts it, a changing site and a "project" that moves "depending on the claims being made." As such, in my analysis of the films, the West refers to all the places I listed, individually or collectively.

[4] English language title, *Muxes: Authentic, Intrepid Seekers of Danger.*

geographically secluded, remains at the margins of Mexican politics that since the emergence of cultural nationalism following the Revolution of 1910, have favored the *mestizo* Mexican identity, one which is the product of a male conqueror and a submissive Indian woman. My current interest, thus, started with my first encounter with Juchitán through film.

I locate my analysis in the post-colonial effort to examine and counter the impact of colonialism and its on-going processes. Specifically, I examine the establishment of unequal relationships resulting from the construction of a dominant Western culture and an Other through hegemonic discourses and representations. I draw elements from Edward Said's 1978 book *Orientalism*, which discusses the Western tradition of using preconceived imperialistic judgments and assumptions to interpret, imagine, and represent the East.[5] Important for my analysis on the construction of different spaces, I consider Michel-Rolph Trouillot's understanding of how the West has historically constructed itself through representations "as a utopian projection" that contrasts with a "savage" Other, a mechanism through which, he explains, the West legitimizes its power and universalizes its order.[6] I also look at authors like Mary Louise Pratt who have examined the role of representation in perpetuating notions of the dominant group's superiority.[7] As a critique on the difficulties of representation, through my analysis I show how notions of "authenticity," whether attached to a culture or an identity, intersect with notions of the "past," Otherness, and hegemonic discourses of sexuality and gender that result in the marginalization of actual groups of people as power gets allocated within the dominant culture and its normative order. Because my focus is on film, I draw from Trinh T. Minh-Ha's examination on the absence of "authentic" identities in film representations.[8] Furthermore, my analysis builds on the critique to post-

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[5] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

[6] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "Anthropology and the Savage Slot," in *Global Transformations: Anthropology and the Modern World* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 18 and 22.

[7] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992).

[8] Trinh T. Minh-Ha, "No Master Territories," in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (London: Routledge, 2003).

colonial studies from authors like Gareth Griffiths[9] and Rajnarayan Chandavarkar[10] who argue that erasing the essentializing notions of a singular Other, like the indigenous people, and showing their plurality can result in a new type of Othering of an already Othered group. Building on this idea, I look at the representation of Juchitán through the lens of Milica Bakic-Hayden's "nesting orientalisms," which suggests that there are multiple Others and Selves.[11] By using documentary films for my analysis on issues of representation, I also draw from the debates of Film theory and Visual Anthropology that discuss the history of the medium and the development of the documentary genre as an Othering tool. Since documentaries are a powerful genre through which the viewer imagines and experiences Juchitán, throughout my thesis I look into different modes of exotization that enable the dominant culture to imagine and construct itself as the "dominant" self in opposition to Juchitán.

As part of the history of documentary filmmaking, in which the colonial imagination was reflected, created, and further reinforced through representations of distant cultures, an important part of my analysis focuses on how the documentaries not only represent Juchitán but in fact, end up reflecting and reinforcing the social imagination and conditions of the dominant culture. The questions that serve as my guide to read the documentaries are the following: Do the documentaries represent Juchitán as a matriarchy or a gay paradise? Are the documentaries engaging in a type of "salvaging project"? If so, does that mean Juchitán is seen as a place rooted in the past or one that provides an alternative to the dominant understanding of social relations? What sorts of relations of power and value do these documentaries support? How does "otherness" intersect with normative notions of gender and

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[9] Gareth Griffiths, "The Myth of Authenticity," in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (London: Routledge, 2003).

[10] Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, "'The Making of the 'Working Class:' E.P. Thompson and Indian History," in *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial*, ed. Vinayak Chaturvedi (London: Verso, 2000).

[11] Milica Bakic-Hayden, "Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia," *Slavic Review* 54, no. 4 (1995): 917-931.

sexuality? What role is given to the *Juchitecos* in their own representation and what is the effect? How do the films show an interaction between what lies inside of Juchitán and what lies outside? How is Juchitán imagined, both by the characters and the filmmakers, and with what effects?

Structure

In order to answer to these questions I have divided my thesis in four chapters. Chapter 1, "Juchitán (in Mexico): identity, gender, sexuality and its representation," gives an overview of the position Juchitán, perceived as primarily indigenous, has within a Mexican context. Specifically, I look at how Juchitán has been constructed through representations as a place that does not follow the normative gender and sexuality system of the country, particularly in regards to its alleged matriarchy and recognized "third gender." In Chapter 2, "Documentary film: a mediator and a tool of the imaginary and the real" I trace the origin and development of the documentary filmmaking and look at its use in anthropological research as a tool that reflects, constructs, and maintains relationships of unequal power. Importantly, I note how documentary films not only represent a certain "reality" that the filmmaker witnesses, but in doing so they also reflect the filmmaker's social context and ideology. Having established the role of film in creating/re-instating Otherness, in Chapter 3, "Representation and "authenticity:" an Othering effect," I analyze the representation of Juchitán in four documentary films within a post-colonial framework. In particular, I look at how notions of nature, authenticity, and space intersect with the representation of the gender and sexuality system of Juchitán. This intersection, I argue, constructs Juchitán as a different place from the dominant culture and consequently Others it, thus maintaining the power of the dominant culture's normative understandings of gender and sexuality. Chapter 4, "Juchitán as a heterotopia: an Other real space," builds on the discussion of how Juchitán is Othered. In this chapter I look at how the documentaries, in painting a complex image of the community,

represent Juchitán as an Other, unintelligible, place where seemingly incompatible elements come together. Borrowing Foucault's terms, "heterotopia" and "heterotopia of deviation," I examine how the documentaries' representation of Juchitán, despite the filmmakers' intents, re-instate hegemonic notions of gender and culture in which sex and gender are organizing features of an ordered society. And lastly, in the Conclusion I bring my analysis together and discuss the ways in which my study can be taken further as well as the limitations of my approach.

Methods and Research Design

In order to analyze the documentaries and build my argument I conducted a visual analysis of the films and followed the following steps: observation, annotation of shots, interpretation, and communication of my results. In order to do so, I followed what V.F. Perkins calls a "synthetic approach." In his book *Film as Film*, Perkins, like Gibbs, encourages this type of film analysis because it enables the viewer to see how the director creates and organizes material into a "significant form."[12] Perkins states, "in order to comprehend whole meanings, rather those parts of the meaning which are present in verbal synopsis or visual code, attention must be paid to whole content of the shot, sequence and film."[13] Influenced by Perkins, thus, I looked at the way each documentary is constructed into a coherent whole particularly focusing on: editing choices, montage sequences, use of sound and music, cinematography, mise-en-scene, the aesthetic elements of the narrative, and how all of the above construct a "story."

Furthermore, in film theory there are aspects of a film that are often paid attention to, and in my analysis I looked at the following: the aim and message of each film; the reflexivity and positionality of the filmmakers; the perceived relationships between the camera, the

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[12] V.F. Perkins, *Film as Film* (London: Penguin, 1972), 79.
[13] Ibid., 79.

filmed, and the filmmakers; the clues for the "objectivity" or "neutrality" of the films, which can be perceived through tensions in the narrative; the presence or the absence of a voice-over narrator and the role it plays as an all-knowing voice or a non-authoritative support to the plot, the type of data the films provide, the way in which the filmed represent themselves and how the filmmakers represent them through translation choices, for example. Because film is a medium subject to interpretation, I watched the films innumerable times, sometimes with popcorn and some others with a notebook in hand. As part of my visual analysis I not only observed, but also interpreted, felt, and reflexively positioned myself as a viewer whose inevitable biases, and subjective interpretation, are rooted in my Mexican background, my multicultural education, and my familiarity with Juchitán and some of the people who appear in the films.

Films overview

Muxes: auténticas, intrépidas, buscadoras del peligro
(Muxes: authentic, intrepid seekers of danger)

Alejandra Islas Caro / 103´ 2005 / Mexico

From Mexican director Alejandra Islas, this documentary tells the story of 13 *muxes* who openly talk about their role and experiences within the city of Juchitán. The film is divided in short chapters that explore specific inter-related themes: "To Be Born or to Become a Muxe," "Rejection or Acceptance," "*Enagua* (Skirt) Or Pants," "Against Transvestites, There's No One Like Mother," "Careers and Vocations," "Virginity and Marriage," and "Love In The Age Of AIDS." The narrative follows the *muxes'* stories, some of who dress as women and some others as men, through formal and informal interviews with members of the community. A highly aesthetic documentary, with excellent cinematography, and up-beat music, the movie complements the interviews with a vast amount of footage of everyday

activities. Through tensions in the narrative this film provides a contradictory image of a community where *muxes* seem to be accepted and yet discrimination is prevalent.

Juchitán de las locas
(*Juchitan Queer Paradise*)

Patricio Henríquez / 64´/ 2002 / Canada

Chilean director Patricio Henríquez, who has worked and lived in Canada since 1973, tells the story of three *muxes*: Oscar Cazorla, a gay business man, and a father; Angel Santiago Valdivieso who goes by her female name Felina, beautician and hairstylist, and Eli Bartolo, a university professor, activist, and philosopher. Without any intertitles, the film follows certain themes such as: the *muxes* childhood and relationship with their families, the celebrations of Juchitán called *Velas*, the roles and different performance of the *muxes*, emotional relationships and loneliness, discrimination and acceptance of the *muxes* in the community, etc. An aesthetically pleasing film, where local music animates a story, through informal interviews and everyday scenes, this film emphasizes the "native culture" and accepting character of the Zapoteca indigenous culture and paints a portrait of a city that, as the narrator notes, is like "no other" where women and homosexuals seem to be free.

Ramo de Fuego
(*Blossoms of Fire*)

Maureen Gosling and Ellen Osborne / 72´/ 2000 / Mexico and U.S.A.

American directors, Maureen Gosling and Ellen Osborne, focus their attention on the women of Juchitán with the aim to give the people from Juchitán a voice. Presenting a series of nicely composed shots, interviews, and a collage of paintings, poems, local music, and other representations that once idealized Juchitán as a matriarchal society, the film traces the

history of Juchitán and paints an image of a changing present. With an emphasis on the Zapoteca culture, its traditions, a strong political participation, an apparent equality of the sexes, and the community's acceptance to homosexual men and women, the film tells the story of a city that does not only seem to have a sense of cooperation in the community but also appears as one with progressive and independent people.

Muxes of Juchitan

Yorgos Avgeropolous / 72´/ 2007 / Greece

This film follows the story of eight *muxes*, Bibi, Felina, Marsela, Estrella, Camelia, all of whom perform and dress as women, Kika, a beautician who dresses in men's clothes, Andy, a nurse, and Pedro, father to three young boys. This film shows the experiences of the *muxes* in the community and through informal interviews looks into the following themes: "Are we born or do we become," "Acceptance and rejection," "It is work that makes the *muxe*," "There's nothing like a mother," "Skirts and trousers," "The Intrepid who search for danger," "A former matriarchal society," "Gems and perfumes," "The Queens of the Night," "Clara I," "Clara II," "Mayates, Chichifos and other creatures," "Love," "Violence," and "In HIV times." Through an aesthetic narrative, musicalization, and a smooth flow between scenes, this film presents tensions within the community where the *muxes*, nonetheless, seem to be accepted.

Throughout my thesis I will refer to these films by shortened versions of their English titles.

Juchitán (in Mexico): identity, gender, sexuality and representation

Chapter 1

In this chapter I give an overview of the position Juchitán has within the history of the post-revolutionary Mexican identity formation and the country's normative gender and sexuality system. While looking at Juchitán as a city represented as primarily Indigenous, I examine how its representation since the 19th century and in the documentary films I am focusing on depict it as a place with a gender and sexuality system different from the normative one in Mexico and from the idea of a modern society. Thus, I examine how the exotization of Juchitán in the films is gendered and sexualized because they influence and reinforce notions of matriarchy and acceptance of a "third gender."

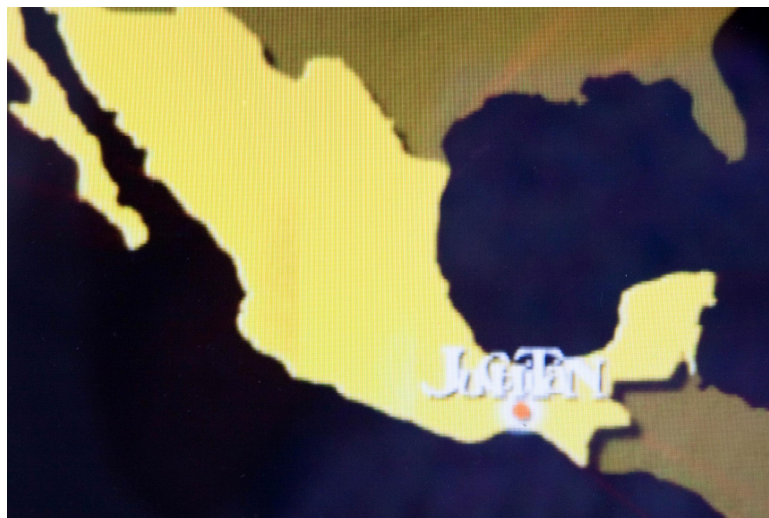## 1.1 A Glimpse of History, Indigenous Groups in Mexico

Figure 1. Map of Mexico. Film Still, 2002 *Queer Paradise*

Juchitán de Zaragoza is located between the mountains of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in the state of Oaxaca. In the region various ethnicities coexist, however the dominant cultural group is the Zapoteca.[14] The Isthmus' region connects the Gulf of Mexico with the Pacific Ocean, reason why, as Marinella Miano Borruso explains, since the last century it has served as a communication passage attracting national and international capital interested in economic development projects.[15] However, as an area strategically isolated within the mountain range, the Isthmus' Zapoteca community, as Carlos Monsiváis notes, is a community united through its history and politics.[16] In the 1970s, for example, the *Juchitecos* formed the Coalición Obrera, Campesina, Estudiantil del Istmo (COCEI), or the Coalition of Workers, Peasants, and Students of the Isthmus, a political organization that stood against the government at the time, and is one of the reasons why Monsiváis explains, "the *Juchitecos* do not allow others, from the outside, to conduct their destiny."[17] As such, despite the rapid process of modernization Juchitán has undergone particularly since the 1990s, it remains a city where the community has maintained a unity and a system of traditions resulting from the syncretism between Catholicism and the Zapoteca culture. As other indigenous communities in Mexico, the Isthmus' Zapoteca community and Juchitán, as a city that is identified by the dominant Mexican culture as primarily indigenous, have remained at the margins of Mexican politics.

With the emergence of cultural nationalism following the Revolution of 1910, the idea of a *mestizo* Mexican identity was favored. Influenced by the liberal idea of progress, Jose Vasconcelos, Minister of Education in the 1920s, articulates in his book *La Raza Cósmica* that the *mestizo* would join the past and present of the country and would lead Mexico into a

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[14] "…A Mesoamerican culture that developed in the V century in the current state of Oaxaca, Mexico… This group still inhabits their land, particularly the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, and speaks their native language, Zapoteca." Diana Escobedo Lastiri, *Entre Comadres*, (San Francisco: Blurb, 2009), 76.

[15] Marinella Miano Borruso, "Genero y Homosexualidad entre los Zapotecos del Istmo de Tehuantepec, el Caso de los Muxe" (paper presented at the Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico City, Mexico, November, 2001).

[16] Carlos Monsiváis, "Crónica de Juchitán," *Cuadernos Políticos* 37 (1983): 46.

[17] Ibid., 46.

united national future.[18] Vasconcelos' vision led him to commission leading national artists such as Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Siqueiros to paint murals on public buildings that emphasized the indigenous roots of the Mexican identity, which distinguished Mexico from the European colonial powers.[19] Built upon the notion of a shared indigineity, the *mestizo* identity emphasized the mixture of races and cultures, the indigenous and the white European. The idea of the *mestizo* model, similar to its development in other Latin American countries, was to create a common identity able to encompass the plurality of the nation – one shared "Mexican identity" with which all groups could identify. Thus, the idea of the *mestizo* as a "modern" identity category had a homogenizing effect. Ambiguous in its definition and focused on the future of the nation, however, the communities that were perceived as the "past" of the country, namely the indigenous, were cast out, as Analisa Taylor puts it, "as a mute collective singular entity."[20]

The Mexican indigenous groups have a history of marginalization only recently addressed. The notion of a homogeneous national identity kept the indigenous communities as a silent group against which the rest of Mexico could be defined. Ana Maria Alonso notes, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's understanding of hegemony as a process through which "power is central to the production of social identities,"[21] helps us think about ethnicity in contexts where uneven power relations develop. In the case of post-revolutionary Mexico, the construction of a modern identity, such as the *mestizo*, fit the idea of progress and thus, established a distinction and a relationship of domination with the groups who seemed to be "more ethnic." The consequences can be read in the 2010 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report:

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[18] José Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race/La Raza Cósmica: A Bilingual Edition,* trans. Didier T. Jaén (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979).

[19] Laura Podalsky, "Patterns of the Primitive, Sergei Eisenstein's Qué Viva México!" in *Mediating two worlds : Cinematic Encounters in the Americas*, ed. John King, Ana Lopez, Manuel Alvarado (London: BFI, 1993), 27.

[20] Analisa Taylor, "Malinche and Mathiarcal Utopia: Gendered Visions of Indigeneity in Mexico." *Signs: journal of Women in Culture and Society* 31, no. 3 (2006): 836.

[21] Laclau, Ernesto and Chantal Mouffe (1982) quoted in Ana Maria Alonso, "'Progress' as Disorder and Dishonor: Discourses of Serrano Resistance," *Critique of Anthropology* 8, no. 1 (1988): 13.

> In Mexico a large number of indigenous *pueblos* [towns or peoples] and communities have managed to preserve their identity and their language. However, they have been characterized to be the group in the population most ignored and marginalized. Their situation is not only due to their differential access to public resources/services, but also to the discrimination and exclusion they have been objected to.[22]

With the socio-economical developments of the country, the notion of what constitutes a Mexican national identity changed over time. Instead of promoting a homogenizing *mestizo* model, with the opening of the markets, the spread of globalization, and the interaction with an international community, the Mexican late post-revolutionary regime put emphasis on Mexico's ethnic diversity and multiculturalism. This development gained particular strength in 1994 when the Zapatista movement, both symbolically and literally, gave a voice to the indigenous groups.[23] Although the government, as Taylor explains, moved away from the *mestizo,* and instead engaged in a discourse of diversity in response to indigenous movements, she further states: "…[This] must be analyzed within the broader context of neoliberal economic policies [that] have subverted indigenous peasants' attempts to implement land reform and have worked to forcibly incorporate indigenous communities into relations of increasing dependence on wage labor and export-oriented agriculture."[24] Although this example is focused on labor, one can see how an emphasis on the plurality of the country does not erase the previously established relationship of unbalanced power based on ethnicity. In fact, building on Alonso's understanding of power and ethnicity, a multiculturalism discourse not only maintains but also continues to construct the subordinate indigenous identity. Within an international context that promotes the preservation of cultural diversity as part of a common human heritage,[25] the multicultural discourse of Mexico has emphasized

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[22] Throughout this thesis, unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. United Nations Development Program (UNDP)*, Informe sobre Desarrollo Humano de los Pueblos Indígenas en México: El reto de la desigualdad de oportunidades*, UNDP Report (October 2010), 6.

[23] The Zapatista movement initiated on the same day, January 1st 1994, as The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) came into effect. As a non-violent revolt against the Mexican state, the Zapatistas demanded human rights and cultural autonomy.

[24] Taylor, "Malinche and Mathiarcal Utopia," 836.

[25] For further reading refer to Mary Taylor, "Intangible Heritage Governance, Cultural Diversity, Ethno-nationalism," *Focaal – European Journal of Anthropology* 55 (2009): 41-58.

cultural differences between indigenous groups. In particular, visible traits such as traditional gowns, music, and articrafts have become part of Mexico's "diversity." The Isthmus' Zapoteca community has been distinguished in this type of multicultural discourse, not only by the colorful gowns of the *tehuanas*[26] but also by its seemingly distinct gender and sexuality systems. Often done through representations, the Isthmus stands as a place where women seem to have more power than in other parts of the country and a third gender category linked to homosexuality, the *muxe,* seems to be accepted.

1.2 Sexuality and Gender

Embedded in the Mexican social imaginary, the gender organization of Mexico is linked to the representation of the *mestizo* identity as resulting from the union between a woman associated with indigeneity and passivity and a man associated with the Hispanic conqueror.[27] As noted earlier in this Chapter, however, ethnicity played an important role in defining identities in Mexico and thus, Alonso argues there were two constructions of masculinity, an indigenous "barbarian" and another one associated with "access to land and membership in a corporate community."[28] While constructions of masculinity are active, the women remained passive and Alonso explains, women "became symbols of an ethnic and sexual purity."[29] Thus, while the masculine is attributed to the *macho*, a virile man and dominator who is an active protagonist of the public and social sphere, the feminine is associated with motherhood and cultural survival who is a passive and subordinated secondary character who belongs to the private sphere. This binary is further reinforced by a Catholic-induced morality that permeates most of Mexico and regulates sexuality. As Michael Winkelman explains, a "good woman is a reflection of the ideal of Mary in the Holy Family—chaste, devout, self-

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[26] *Tehuanas* designates Zapoteca women from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in Mexico.
[27] Taylor, "Malinche and Mathiarcal Utopia," 834.
[28] Ana Maria Alonso, "'Progress' as Disorder and Dishonor: Discourses of Serrano Resistance," *Critique of Anthropology* 8, no. 1 (1988): 15.
[29] Ibid.,15.

sacrificing, and devoted to her family."[30] On the contrary, men's sexuality seems to be less sanctioned and even encouraged as it feeds the masculine role of being a conqueror and a *macho.*[31] Furthermore, the Catholic belief that one man, one woman, and children constitute a family has also privileged normative ideas about sexuality and social relationships. Similar to what Adrienne Rich, pioneer of sexuality studies, called "compulsory heterosexuality,"[32] in Mexico, heterosexual relationships and desires are encouraged and have been legitimized as the "normal" option. Although these examples are specific to Mexico, this normative gender and sexuality system is prevalent in other parts of the world and stands in opposition to places like Juchitán, which falls outside of the norm.

In contrast to the dominant model, Juchitán has been represented as a place that has a different social order in which sexual and gender identities are not bound by the normative binary and instead, display more fluidity and heterogeneity as I will further examine in chapters 3 and 4. One of the differences that Miano Borruso has noted is that in Juchitán the community's functionality is clearly defined by gender: "the house, market, [and] festivities system are areas of action and are predominantly feminine; the field, factory, political representation, intellectual and artistic production, cantinas [establishments where men gather to drink, eat, and socialize amongst themselves], are masculine areas."[33] In this sense, the representation of the *tehuana* has been influenced by the visibility and active engagement of the women in the community, and thus, it has nurtured the idea that Juchitán is a matriarchal society.

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[30] Michael Winkelman, "Cross-Cultural Social-Sexual Adaptations in Fieldwork: Perspectives from Mexican Field Settings," in *Sex, Sexuality, and the Anthropologist*, ed. Fran Markowitz and Michael Ashkenazi (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 79.

[31] For further reading refer to Matthew C. Gutmann, *The Meanings of Macho: Being a Man in Mexico City*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

[32] Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 5, no. 4 (1980): 178.

[33] Marinella Miano Borruso, "Gays tras bambalinas. Historia de la belleza, pasiones e identidades," *Debate Feminista* 9, no. 18 (1998): 1.

While most of the past representations of Juchitán have focused on the myth of matriarchy, the films I am looking at depict an accepted third gender in the community, the *muxes*, in addition to the naturalized binary man and woman that constitutes the normative order. Regardless of their different aims, all four films emphasize how the visibility and roles the *muxes* play within the community are linked to the role and public standing of women. Although the films represent the role of *muxes* mainly associated to the feminine, the films also show how *muxes* are currently involved in the realms of politics, intellectual and artistic production, which makes them fall under both categories "man" and "woman" and yet fit neither. Furthermore, the films emphasize how the homosexual aspect of the *muxes* does not seem to interfere with their visibility and social standing in the community, which has attributed to the idealization of Juchitán as a "gay paradise." These peculiarities that as Miano Borruso states, make Juchitán fall out of the *mestizo* model that permeates most of the country,[34] and as I will examine, make it distinct from the normative order, have fueled the idealized representations of Juchitán as a matriarchal society and a gay paradise.

1.3 "Like the queen-bee, the mother rules in Tehuantepec"

The notion of matriarchy, as Peggy Reeves Sanday explains, did not develop from ethnographic encounters but rather it started being used in the 19th century as a "mirror image of patriarchy."[35] In his 1861 book Das Mutterrecht, J.J. Bachofen defines "mother right" as a primeval social model where the authority and power fell on the mother rather than the father.[36] The equation of the rule of women to a primitive state and the lack of evidence for such structures, led anthropologists such as Robert H. Lowie[37] and David Schneider[38] to reject

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[34] Miano Borruso, "Gays tras bambalinas," 186.

[35] Peggy Reeves Sanday, preface to *Women at the Center: Life in a Modern Matriarchy* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2002), xi.

[36] J. J. Bachofen, *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right: Selected Writings of J.J.Bachofen* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967).

[37] Robert H. Lowie, *Primitive Society* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1921).

Bachofen's ideas. Schneider for example, argued that matrilineal societies existed in legends and myths but had never been observed.[39] Similarly, feminists like Michelle Rosaldo,[40] Louise Lamphere,[41] and Gerder Lerner[42] argued that there has never been a matriarchal society. As anthropologists and feminists started challenging the term they also started substituting it with words such as matrilineal, matrifocal, matristic, matricentric, etc. As Sanday explains, different authors started using such words to describe communities where the power between the sexes was balanced or "linked" instead of "ranked" as Marija Gimbutas[43] and Riane Eisler[44] argued. This type of interaction between the sexes is a central point in the narrative of the 2000 film *Blossoms of Fire*, which focuses on the role women play in Juchitán as a response to the previous and visually reinforced myth of matriarchy.

"Juchitán has been called a matriarchy," the voice over narrator explains setting the tone for a film that, in the narrator's words, aims to "overcome the matriarchal utopia and let the people talk."[45] However, as soon as the camera moves through the flower market the film falls back into the previous pattern of exotizacing Juchitán based on the association of women's presence in the community with the tropical landscape as the narrator compares women with colorful flowers. The exotization of Juchitán since the early 20th century has not only emphasized its seemingly untouched and indigenous landscape but it has also been a gendered and sexualized exotization. Throughout the years both Mexican and foreign artists have emphasized the power, beauty, independence, and public standing of the *tehuanas*. One of the earlier and clearest examples can be found in Sergei Eisenstein's unfinished film *Que viva*

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[38] David M. Schneider, introduction to *Matrilineal Kinship*, ed. David M. Schneider and Kathleen Gough (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), 1-29.
[39] Schneider, David M. (1961) quoted in Sanday, *Women at the Center*, 227.
[40] Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere. Introduction to *Women, Culture, and Society*, ed. Rosaldo and Lamphere (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), 3-15.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Gerder Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).
[43] Marija Gimbutas, *The Gods and goddesses of Old Europe: 7000-3500 B.C.* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974).
[44] Riane Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1987).
[45] *Ramo de Fuego*, directed by Maureen Gosling and Ellen Osborne (2000).

Mexico![46] The Russian filmmaker in this film, drawn by the "primitive" aspects of a post-revolutionary Mexico,[47] described the Isthmus as a paradise: "Eden did not exist between the Tigris and Euphrates, but rather here, somewhere between the Gulf of Mexico and Tehuantepec."[48] In his film, Eisenstein celebrates Zapoteca femininity through shots that associate *tehuanas* with flowers and birds. Furthermore, as Laura Podalsky explains, the shots of half naked women resemble Paul Gauguin's paintings of Tahiti, a place constructed in the colonial imaginary as a paradise. Similar to Bachofen's idea of a primitive state where women had the power, Eisenstein described this section of the film as follows:

> Life… the moist, muddy, sleepy tropics. Heavy branches of fruit. Dreamy waters. And the dreamy eyelids of girls. Of girls. Of future mothers. Of the fore-mother. Like the queen-bee, the mother rules in Tehuantepec. The female tribal system has been miraculously preserved here for hundreds of years until our time.[49]

Figure 2. Eisenstein in Mexico. 2000 Blossoms of Fire.

Eisenstein's rooting of the Isthmus in a tribal past and a primal state of nature that has miraculously survived where the "mother" rules the area, contributed to the mythologizing of Juchitán as a matriarchy. Similarly, artists like Diego Rivera, Frida Khalo, Tina Moddoti, and, more recently, Graciela Iturbide and Elena Poniatowska have emphasized Juchitán's colorful eroticism and overpowering independent femininity, all of which depend on and build upon the myth of matriarchy. In an effort to subvert the myth, the narrative of 2000 *Blossoms of Fire* emphasizes the cooperation between the sexes and their equally important role in the community and the household. In this film women are portrayed as hard-working

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[46] *Ramo de Fuego*, directed by Maureen Gosling and Ellen Osborne (2000).
[47] Laura Podalsky, "Patterns of the Primitive," 31.
[48] Sergei Eisenstein quoted in Laura Podalsky, "Patterns of the Primitive," 31.
[49] Ibid.

administrators of the family income, caring mothers, and, amongst other characteristics, as "equal" to men. However, as Taylor notes in her analysis of *Blossoms of Fire* this representation is also problematic because it paints a "liberating portrait of a specific group within Mexico"[50] that may feed on the exceptionality of the place and thus, continue disregarding that "…many of the purportedly matriarchal elements found in Isthmus Zapotec culture can also be found throughout Mexican society… [where] women all over Mexico serve as administrators of family finances and informal networks of community organization."[51] Thus, similar to how the myth of matriarchy establishes that only in the spaces linked to a primal state of nature can women's power be acknowledged – and hence ignored in the so-called patriarchal societies – the representation of an "equality" between the sexes within a visibly indigenous community results in the same misrecognition of women's power in places outside of Juchitán. The history of representing the "out of the ordinary" women of Juchitán not only influenced the approach of 2000 film *Blossoms of Fire* but also has a presence in the other three films that focus on the recognized third gender of the community as it is links to femininity.

1.4 More than two genders/sexes

Gilbert Herdt, in his book *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History*, examines the notion of a "third sex" and a "third gender" by looking into historical and anthropological studies that challenge the idea that there are only two biological sexes, man and woman, and thus only two corresponding genders, male and female. Early colonial travel writing and anthropological explorations recorded throughout the world, and exoticized, various communities with a third sexual/gender category. These encounters influenced and nurtured the colonial idea that these societies were different from the West,

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[50] Taylor, "Malinche and Mathiarcal Utopia," 838.
[51] Ibid., 837.

and only until the 1970s when authors started deconstructing the idea of gender and sex as fixed dualistic features of identity, were some of the colonial first perceptions challenged. A few groups have received great critical attention such as the *kathoeys* from Thailand, the *hijras* from India, the sworn virgins from the Balkans, and the berdaches from North America. Authors who have studied these groups have all emphasized the problem of categorizing these seemingly different identities that veer away from the norm and yet seem embedded in a social order where the dualism of sex and gender are prevalent. In fact, authors like Leonard Zwilling and Michael J. Sweet, in their examination of a "third sex" in India, challenge Herdt's assumption that a third-sex model disrupts sexual dimorphism, and instead state: "The third sex could not exist on its own, but only as it participates in a negation or combination of male and female traits."[52] This categorization problem, thus, is perhaps one of the most salient in the films I am looking at because it influences the way in which the films represent what the community of Juchitán identifies as a "third gender," the *muxe*.

Touching upon the question of categorization, Herdt explains how authors like Sigmund Freud and Alfred Kinsey agreed on the difficulties of categorizing acts and yet were unable to overcome the duality of sex and gender.[53] As Herdt puts it, "society and culture [have an extraordinary power] to lump together things regarded as equal and others apart, marginalizing what is unclassifiable to residual categories, such as the deviant or the hermaphrodite."[54] This marginalization can be seen through the example of the North American Indian "berdache,"[55] a colonial term used to talk about people who kept their male

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[52] Leonard Zwilling and Michael J. Sweet, "The Evolution of Third-sex constructs in ancient India: a study in ambiguity," in *Invented identities: the interplay of gender, religion, and politics in India,* ed. Julia Leslie and Mary McGee (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 123.

[53] Gilbert Herdt, preface to *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History,* ed. Gilbert Herdt (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 15.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Lynn Stephen explains "the word "berdache" is derived from a Persian word meaning 'kept boy' or 'prostitute.'" Lynn Stephen, "Sexualities and Genders in Zapotec Oaxaca," *Latin American Perspectives* 29, no. 2 (2002): 49.

or female genitals but performed as a different gender.[56] According to Herdt, borrowing from George Devereux' study of the Mohave Indians, for the Spanish and Anglo-Americans "berdache were viewed as more than anomalies; they were monsters, freaks of nature, demons, deviants, perverts, sinners, corrupters."[57] While not fitting under the normative male/female, man/woman schema, the multiple gender and sexual roles this group of people played in the community were simply "lumped together" under one singular marginalizing term, the berdache. This example not only shows the problem of categorizing but it also points at something important to understand the development of the *muxe* of Juchitán in its representation, namely that the places where sexual and gender dimorphism is challenged within the community are linked to colonial ideas of non-Western primitive and deviant cultures as they are also connected to indigineity and the origins of the nations. The effect, as I will show throughout my analysis of the films, is that these places are constructed as essentially different from the modern world.

1.5 What is "muxe"?

"The word *muxe* comes from the colonial Spanish word *mujer* (woman), it was pronounced 'mulher,' which in Latin is 'mulier' and that is where the word *muxe* comes from to designate the homosexuals of the Isthmus." A young man explains as we see him walking in what looks like a school in the 2005 film *Authentic, Intrepid Seekers of Danger*. The scene ends and the viewer is transported to a patio where a *muxe* in full Tehuana gown swings on a hammock as she talks to the camera: "*Mampo, muxe, muxe ngola, muxe guiini*, it depends, if he is young, *muxe guiini*, if he is older, *muxe ngola*, or *muxenguio*. *Muxeuna*, like me, I am a

muxe una… I want to be a woman."[58] With introductory scenes that try to show the fluidity of the *muxes'* identities and difficulty of using normative terms such as woman, men, homosexual, straight, this film successfully shows that *muxe* can mean a variety of things and yet is often associated with male homosexuality.

Similarly, at the beginning of the 2007 film *Muxes of Juchitán* three people stroll down the street, by conventional appearances, one is a man, one is a transvestite, and one is a woman. "In this city, Juchitán, we are called *muxes*." the viewer hears one of them identify himself. "*Muxe* is a Zapoteca word to define people with a different sexual preference," the one who looks like a woman explains. "But in other parts of the Republic [Mexico], one can say *maricon, puto, choto, gay… iguana* because they go from stick to stick." – "*mampos, mariposonas, mariposon*" – "*locas*." The three of them explain as they keep on walking. "But here is the only place where it is *lo mas padre* (or the best), we are respected as *muxes*, and we are *muxes*! And we don't care about a thing… it's a magical place."[59]

Although the films show how the *muxes* are considered a third gender in Juchitán, in the films it becomes apparent how being a *muxe* is also synonymous with being a homosexual man. While traditionally, as seen in 2007 *Muxes of Juchitan, muxes* were those who assumed feminine roles in the community, Lynn Stephen suggests that in contemporary Juchitán one can not only see a mixture of the Zapoteca culture and Catholic colonial influence, but also its interaction with "contemporary urban and transnational systems of gender and ideas about sex and sexuality."[60] This can be clearly seen in the way in which the three people in *Muxes of Juchitán* define *muxe* using words that are used elsewhere. In the scene described above, it also becomes apparent that while some *muxes* dress as men and perform as such in the community, some others decide to accentuate their curves, soften their voice, pluck their eyebrows, put make-up on, and perform in both muted and more visible ways. This

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[58] *Muxes, Authentic, Intrepid Seekers of Danger*, directed by Alejandra Islas (2005).
[59] *Muxes of Juchitan*, directed by Yorgos Avgeropolous (2007).
[60] Stephen, "Sexualities and Genders in Zapotec Oaxaca," 56.

inconsistency of performance and fluidity of definitions within a single identity, coupled with Stephen's suggestion about the changes Juchitán has undergone, can be identified later in the film where an older *muxe* explains: "they wear make-up, it's something I never did." Through this scene the viewer learns that cross-dressing has only been a recent development that was not possible during this man's youth. In this sense, 2007 *Muxes of Juchitán*, like 2005 *Authentic, Intrepid Seekers of Danger,* manages to show the development and change of the category *muxe* throughout time.

Dictionary in hand, Zapoteca to Spanish, a *muxe* in the film *Queer Paradise* reads out loud as the camera focuses on the page: "*muxe: el afeminado – Zapotequizacion de la palabra 'mujer'-. // El miedoso, el cobarde*." The subtitle shows the translation "the effeminate – Zapotec slang for 'woman'-. // weakling, coward."[61] Throughout this film, the representation of the *muxe* is deeply embedded in the idea that the *muxe* is a homosexual man. Later in the film, one hears the same *muxe* who held the dictionary tell another man, "you are an incomplete man because you haven't fucked a *puto* (or fag)." This type of representation shows how assigning a "third gender" to the *muxes*, and thus making them fall out of the normative dualism of sexuality and gender, may actually help maintain a normative order through which the men of Juchitán can define their own masculinity in opposition to them. This type of relationship and maintenance of a normative order is also seen in *Muxes of Juchitán* and in 2005 *Authentic, Intrepid Seekers of Danger,* both of which present how the *muxes* engage in complex relationships with "straight" young men: sometimes for love; sometimes to follow the tradition of giving them their first sexual experience and salvaging the virginity of young women until marriage; and some others for money that is exchanged both ways.

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[61] *Juchitan Queer Paradise*, directed by Patricio Henríquez (2002).

"Being *muxe* is synonymous of working, not a synonymous of promiscuity like in other parts." A *muxe* says in 2007 *Muxes of Juchitan*, which is an idea that is emphasized in all four films. Zwilling and Sweet explain that in India, like in other parts of the world where one can find a third category, "same-sex orientation" is not regarded as the determining factor of this third identity, but rather, it is "cross-gender behavior."[62] Similarly, in Juchitán, the films represent the *muxe* as a hard-working person performing roles closely related to the feminine roles in the community. Furthermore, as shown in the films and particularly emphasized in 2000 *Blossoms of Fire*, femininity appears as a positive and productive quality in the community, and thus the relationship between the women, a positive notion of femininity, and *muxes* seems to legitimize the *muxe* category. Because *muxes* are men associated with a positive femininity, in the films one can see what Zwilling and Sweet found in their examination of a third sex in India, namely, that this category only exists as a "negation or combination of male and female traits,"[63] and does not challenge sexual dimorphism. This can be clearly seen in the representation of the *muxes* in 2005 *Authentic, Intrepid Seekers of Danger* where the logo at the start of the film, copied directly from an embroidered clothe carried by the *muxes* in a procession towards the end of the film, depicts a person, half man and half woman. In fact, all four films convey how *muxes* are neither men nor women, but they need both to construct themselves as a *muxe*.

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[62] Zwilling and Sweet, "The Evolution of Third-sex constructs in ancient India," 124.
[63] Ibid., 123.

Figure 3. Half man half woman. Film Still 2005 *Authentic, Intrepid Seekers of Danger*

"We discovered that in the Americas, before the Europeans arrived the concept of gender has more flexibility. In Juchitán there still is the alternative character of genders. A *muxe*, in Zapoteco, is a man with some female characteristics, a person from a third gender." The narrator of 2000 film *Blossoms of Fire* explains, as the film pans over as a photograph of "Piegan Dandy," by Edward Curtis, that depicts an image of a North American Indian whose features and dress are not easily locatable within one gender or sex. When the film shows the image of a North American Indian and says there was gender flexibility prior to the arrival of the Europeans, it also means there was flexibility prior to the arrival of the idea of "civilization." The impact this has on the representation of Juchitán is that the narrator says these prior state can "still" be found in the community. Thus, the representation of the *muxes* appears as a notion of past and, as a pre-conquest characteristic, it also roots Juchitán in a pre-civilized state. This is, thus, the clearest example out of the fours films where the representation of Juchitán as a place that, seemingly, challenges sexual and gender dimorphism through its third category *muxe,* constructs it as a place different from the modern

world, as I will further examine in Chapters 3 and 4, in which the normative order does not include "pre-civilized" flexibility between sexes and genders.

Documentary film: mediating imaginary realities

Chapter 2

In this chapter I look at the development of film as a medium of representation through which, since its origin, the real and the imaginary come together. Specifically, I look at the genre of documentary filmmaking and trace its development through its use in anthropological research and its colonial origin. I examine how through documentary filmmaking one captures "reality" through the materiality of the film and composes stories, thus making it a convincing medium that creates imaginary constructions of places seem "real." In doing so, I emphasize how documentary films also reflect the filmmaker's social context and ideology. Leading to my analysis in Chapters 3 and 4, I show my understanding of documentary filmmaking as a powerful tool that mediates cultures, space, and time, through which imaginary realities of distant places are created and/or re-enforced. Important for my analysis, I see documentary filmmaking as a medium that, although occasionally revealing, it is still part of a tradition of salvaging cultures deemed to be rooted in notions of the past, and thus, constructing Otherness and further establishing unbalanced power relationships.

2.1 The origin

In 1895, the lights went off and the Lumière brothers held in Paris the first public screening of motion pictures. According to the narrations of the event, the audience was

surprised and scared to see "real life" projected on a screen.[64] Most of the films presented by the Lumière brothers, none of them longer than a minute, depicted everyday events framed and selected by the filmmakers and did not include actors or deliberate performances, reasons why they were called "actualities."[65] As the predecessors of what we now call documentary filmmaking, the Lumière actualities had one aim, "to offer the world to the world,"[66] which in its colonial context meant, to bring images of the world to Europeans. The fascination and profitability of recording life events was soon explored by the Lumière's trained cameramen who, since the early 1900 started bringing into France short films from "exotic" lands, like Mexico, India, China, and their colonies. In doing so, they followed the Lumière's vision and brought the world to Europe through illustrations of places already famous in the travel literature at the time.[67] Thus, since its origin, film, like other long-established European forms of representation, was a medium through which the colonial imagination of distant lands would simultaneously create and feed from the images of the exotic, barbaric, and backward civilizations that existed outside the civilized and ordered West.

Although film was introduced as a medium that enabled the reproduction of reality, George Méliès' work soon reflected the reality of his time through fiction. His 1902 film *A Trip to the moon,[68]* considered one of the first science fiction films, uses sophisticated animation and special effects to tell the story of a group of scientists who plan a trip to the moon and upon landing are attacked by the moon inhabitants who want them to leave, in response the scientists try to slaughter the barbaric moon inhabitants, represented with painted bodies and spears, which resembles the racial representations of African people at the time.

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[64] Erik Barnouw, *Documentary, a History of the Non-Fiction Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 7.
[65] Ibid., 8.
[66] "Gabriel Veyre, opérateur Lumière, par Gabriel Veyre" accessed June 4, 2011,
http://www.bibliomonde.net/livre/gabriel-veyre-operateur-lumiere-4594.html
[67] Dina Sherzer, introduction to *Cinema, colonialism, postcolonialism: perspectives from the French and francophone worlds*, ed. Dina Sherzer (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 3; and, Ella Shohat, "Gender and Culture of Empire: Toward a Feminist Ethnography of the Cinema," in *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film*, ed. Matthew Bernstein and Gaylyn Studlar (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1997), 29.
[68] *Le Voyage dans la lune*, directed by George Méliès (1902).

As Dina Sherzer points out, Méliès' film, not explicitly or consciously, "[is] emblematic of the conquering spirit of the time."[69] This is evident through the film's connection to the European expansionism and colonization project, and more specifically through the representation of the superiority of science in comparison to a tribal looking community. Thus, Méliès' work, like the early actualities, shows how film from its earliest stages has been a medium that reflects, creates, and maintains, both through non-fictional and imaginative practices, a certain reality about the filmmaker's social context. This can be seen in Méliès' work where the superiority of Europe and science get established in opposition to the representation of a barbaric and tribal Other. Thus, in the following section and chapters, I will look into how film is a medium through which relationships of difference and unbalanced power are created and maintained.

2.2 Saving the Native from being salvaged

Only three year after the first screening in Paris, Alfred Cort Haddon used film to gather information in an ethnographic expedition for the first time. Building on anthropology's colonial origins and the emerging fascination to "study" and to "know" the people and cultures that lived in distant lands, Haddon was soon followed by Baldwin Spencer, thus becoming the "founding fathers" of ethnographic film.[70] Although photography had been previously used to collect data, and methods to use it objectively and scientifically were developed under the positivist approach of the discipline, film proved to be a challenging tool in the field. Both Haddon and Spencer recorded movement and rituals but, as Alison Griffiths explains, their efforts to control the data were overshadowed by the lack of power they had

over the information they recorded.[71] Furthermore, questions of interpretation and meaning were also raised because film did not allow a perfect positioning of subjects or an objective scientific method, and instead, the records depended on the limitations of the medium that, at the time, was highly flammable, had limited frames, required sunlight or artificial lighting, and could not record sound. These limitations also had an impact on what could and could not be recorded, for example, a ritual that took place during the night could not be recorded unless it was re-enacted during the day, which was problematic because it challenged the understanding of what the record of a "real" event entailed.[72] These limitations and the problems of recording "real" events from the cultures imagined in the colonial world generated a reluctance to use film for ethnographic purposes and, in time, helped to question the role and position of the ethnographer and, invariably, of the discipline.

The end of the colonial era, the socio-political and economic changes in post-war Europe, and the increasing body of work that criticized the colonial origins of the discipline, made anthropology fall into what has been called a "crisis in representation" during the 1960s and 1970s.[73] This crisis called for reflexivity and a new positioning of the researcher, a new approach a to knowledge, that helped redefine ethnographic film, which before had been largely involved in the creation of Otherness through images that emphasized the primitive, natural, eroticized, and uncivilized aspects of distant communities. Supported by other ethnographers, in 1975 Margaret Mead discussed how anthropology became a science of words and how visual records, enabled by technological advances, could be beneficial. In her article, Mead points at some of the problems that explain the neglect of anthropologists to use film, such as the difficulty of the medium, the expenses involved, and the relationships

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[71] Alison Griffiths, "Knowledge and Visuality in Turn-of-the-century Anthropology: The Early Ethnographic Cinema of Alfred Cort Haddon and Walter Baldwin Spencer," *Visual Anthropology Review* 12, no.2 (1996): 18-43.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Faye Ginsburg, "Mediating culture: Indigenous Media, Ethnographic Film, and the Production of Identity," in *Fields of Vision: Essays in Film Studies, Visual Anthropology, and Photography*, ed. Leslie Devereaux and Roger Hillman (California: University of California Press, 1995), 261.

formed in the field. However, she also emphasized the importance of film's "reproducible" and "reanalyzable" character that also allows for the "preservation" of cultures.[74] For Mead, both anthropology and the "fieldworker" seem to have an enormous responsibility and appear somewhat as heroes:

> Anthropology… has both implicitly and explicitly accepted the responsibility of making and preserving records of the vanishing customs and human beings of this earth… The recognition that forms of human behavior still extant will inevitably disappear has been part of our whole scientific and humanistic heritage…This knowledge has provided a dynamic that has sustained the fieldworker taking notes in the cold, cramped fingers in an arctic climate or making his own wet plates under the difficult conditions of a torrid climate.[75]

Mead, although she puts the anthropologist in a position of a hero that, in Franz Boas' words, needs to "salvage" the world of those non-Western civilizations endangered by the modern world, points at something crucial to understand the development of documentary filmmaking, namely, the role of film in recording "reality."

2.3 Whose reality is it?

Authors like Susan Sontag,[76] Walter Benjamin,[77] Siegfried Kracauer,[78] and Roland Barthes[79] examine the relationship between analogue photography, reality, and truth, because as Roland Barthes states, in photography "[one] can never deny that the thing has been there."[80] The similarities of photography and film rely on the materiality of both mediums, on which the light of the "real" world is imprinted on a light-sensitive negative at a specific time, immediately becoming the past. As Judith Keilbach says, "photography connects reality and

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[74] Margaret Mead (1975), "Visual Anthropology in a Discipline of Words," in *Principles of visual anthropology*, ed. Paul Hockings (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2003), 8-9.
[75] Ibid., 3.
[76] Sontag, Susan. *On Photography* (New York: Penguin, 1977).
[77] Walter Benjamin, "Short History of Photography," in *Artforum* 15, no. 6 (1977): 46-51.
[78] Siegfried Kracauer (1927), "Photography," in *The nineteenth-century visual culture reader*, ed. Vanessa R. Schwartz and Jeannene M. Przyblyski (New York: Routledge, 2004).
[79] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).
[80] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 76.

the past,"[81] which is something that Mead seemed to understand when she spoke of "preserving records of the vanishing customs and human beings of this earth."[82] Different from still photography that captures a split second of "reality" and thus, according to Benjamin needs to be contextualized or given a caption in order to extract its meaning,[83] or as Barthes would say, "anchor" its meaning, film is a continuum of images that in capturing movement, has the ability to show processes, change, and through manipulation and methods such as montage, the juxtaposition of different shots, directs the viewer's interpretation. In this sense, the reality that film is able to capture not only is "reproducible" and "reanalyzable" as Mead argued, but is also the result of the combination of the filmmaker's notion of what "truth" and "reality" entail and what is actually "there." In this sense, as Bill Nichols best puts it, "at the heart of documentary is less a *story* and its imaginary world than an *argument* about the historical world."[84]

"You're going into interesting country – strange people – animals and all that – why don't you include in your outfit a camera for making film?"[85] Sir William Mackenzie, in charge of building railroads in Canada in 1913 told Robert J. Flaherty who in 1922 made *Nanook of the North,* one of the first and most acclaimed films in documentary film history. While early ethnographic filmmaking tried to be scientific, and capture "real" events as they happened in time and space, the development of technology enabled documentary filmmakers to start telling stories about the recorded places. Nanook, for example, is the protagonist of a film that shows a romanticized version of the everyday life of the Eskimos who build igloos and engage in hunting practices that were staged for the camera. Flaherty not only looked at "strange people" away from the troubled modern world, but through a romantic realism that

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[81] Judith Keilbach, "Photographs, Symbolic Images, and the Holocaust: On the (Im)Possibility of Depicting Historical Truth," *History and Theory* 47 (2009): 56.
[82] Mead (1975), "Visual Anthropology in a Discipline of Words," 3.
[83] Benjamin, "Short History of Photography," 46-51.
[84] Bill Nichols (1991) quoted in Nick Lacey, *Image and representation: key concepts in media studies*, (New York: Palgrave, 1998), 111.
[85] Barnouw, *Documentary, a History of the Non-Fiction Film*, 49.

emphasizes the hardships of nature and a sense of community, he seems to follow the tradition, even as an outsider of the ethnographic practice, of fixing "native" cultures in a time that belongs to the past and a space that has not been polluted by the effects of modernity. As one of the finest examples of the move from unaltered actualities to a practice of realism in storytelling, which Nichols explains as the union of "objective representations of the historical world and rhetorical overtness [that] convey an argument about the world,"[86] through *Nanook of the North* Flaherty's discontent with modernity and search for a better simpler world comes through. In a way, Flaherty's romantic realism created an Other place away from the troubled West, where the savage Eskimo lived within the type of Thomas More's *utopia,* which Trouillot describes as the "ideal state" and "the prototypical nowhere of European imagination."[87] Thus, this type of approach to documentary filmmaking, where a realism and storytelling mix with what Nichols calls the "*argument*" of the filmmaker, shows how the "reality" that can be captured and communicated is never unaltered.

In contrast to the work of people like Spencer, Mead, and Flaherty, who were in different ways on a quest to salvage the "real" for the benefit of the West, since the 1950s Jean Rouch, ethnographic filmmaker, started questioning the boundary between what was considered reality and the imaginary. Using an anthropological observational style and participatory cinema, a mode of representation where the audience's reactions are included in the film itself, in his 1960 film *Chronique d'un été,*[88] Rouch and sociologist Edgar Morin, with high reflexivity, place "real life" people in different situations and provoke conversations for the camera. At the end of the film, the characters watch themselves and with varying opinions, discuss amongst themselves whether the film discloses "truth" or not, whether their performance was "natural" or "artificial," and whether anything in the film was "real."

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[86] Bill Nichols, *Representing reality: issues and concepts in documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 166.
[87] Trouillot, "Anthropology and the Savage Slot," 14.
[88] *Chronique d'un été*, directed by Jean Rouch, (1960).

Through Rouch and Morin's conversations throughout the film and this last scene, where the discussion takes place, the film challenges the understanding of what is "natural" or "artificial," "reality" or "fiction," and in doing so, it shows the difficulty of trying to locate a clear and definite boundary between seemingly opposing elements. As S. Feld explains, Rouch was influenced by Vertov's "development of a cinema realism in which theory of realism was not confused with 'reality.'"[89] Vertov's understanding on film rested on his theory that "cinema was different from lived reality,"[90] and it was always arranged by the filmmaker. In this sense, Rouch did not aimed to show "reality" but rather "a particular truth of the recorded images and sounds,"[91] *cinéma vérité*. Thus, in his work one can see how through film, larger realities, like people's inability to define what "truth" is, can come through.

Building on his approach, Rouch continued to experiment and found a way to question the position of the subjects and the role of representation in knowledge production. Rouch's 1971 film, *Petit à Petit,* wittily displays the colonial roots of representation when a couple of young African men decide to open a hotel in Niger that will only cater to Europeans. Because neither of them knew anything about their ways of life, the couple of entrepreneurs fly to Paris to study, observe, and measure "them," the Europeans, to know what size of beds they would need, for example. "Excuse me, sir, I am a student from Africa working on my thesis at the university. Would you permit me to measure you?"[92] the audience hears one of the young African entrepreneurs ask an elderly man in Paris, after which he proceeds to measure his skull amongst other parts of his body. Not only is this scene important because it discloses a past where Europeans would travel to African countries to take measurements of "tribal people" as if they were specimens, but it also questioned the idea that there is such a thing as

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[89] Jean Rouch and Steven Feld, *Cine-Ethnography/ Jean Rouch*, ed. Steven Feld (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 232.
[90] Ibid., 13.
[91] Ibid., 98.
[92] *Petit à Petit,* directed by Jean Rouch, (1971).

a savage Other with an inherent difference, a pure child of nature who needs to be understood and preserved. Furthermore, in this film Rouch also challenges the production of knowledge through a different positioning of the subjects, instead of having the white Europeans being the observers in charge of the representation of an "unknown" culture, the roles shift when it is them being observed, which brings to light their long-established monopoly of representing Others.

The crisis in anthropology and the emergence of post-colonial theorists who questioned the effects colonialism had in non-European societies challenged the Boasian salvaging project and led to the quest of finding the "native" voice, its interaction with knowledge production, and its own representation. Currently, the question of representation has largely to do with notions of cultural authenticity, ethics in regards of the power asymmetry in representational practices, the construction of meaning, and whose voice is heard or silenced. With globalization and socio-economical changes, the increase of communication, the expansion of urban areas, and the influx of immigration. The notion of the Other has shifted. Now, it is groups like the indigenous, the aboriginals, and the natives, with a history of being silenced and marginalized, the ones who not only need to be heard but also preserved under multiculturalism discourses and the idea of a common human heritage as I noted in Chapter 1. Although the Other has shifted, one can see, the salvaging project still goes on. An example of preserving a culture and giving a voice to the "native" can be found in the 1972 book *Through Navajo Eyes*, where Sol Worth and John Adair discuss their effort to teach the Navajos how to film in order to capture their own experience and voice. Throughout the preparations, the community leader who negotiates with the filmmakers, Sam Yazzie, asks: "Will making movies do sheep any harm?" The answer was no; "Will making movies do the sheep good?" The answer was also no. "Then why make movies?"[93]

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[93] Ginsburg, "Mediating culture," 262.

If making a movie had nothing to do with sheep, then why would the Navajo be interested in making one? Sam Yazzie's question points at how that particular film was not for their own benefit but rather for the filmmakers. In documentary filmmaking, as a genre that has a colonial past and, as such, was used as a tool for Othering and maintaining a pre-conceived order, one can still see traces of the salvaging project and unbalanced positions of power in which even if the filmmaker's intentions are noble, they are still the ones with the power of representing the Other and thus, fixate identities and cultures. I believe, however, film is a medium through which processes can be captured, such as the processes Rouch was able to show through his films where positions of power, culture, identities, and even notions about "reality" and "truth" are always under construction in a process of adaptation and becoming. Ethnographic filmmakers like Judith and David MacDougall, Dennis O'Rourke, and Rouch have engaged in projects that, as Faye Ginsburg best puts it, do not assume there is a "preexistent and untroubled cultural identity 'out there.' Rather they are about the processes of identity construction. They are not based on some retrieval of an idealized past but to create and assert a position for the present that attempts to accommodate the inconsistencies and contradictions of contemporary life."[94]

The documentary films about Juchitán fall within the history of documentary filmmaking. Although there are differences between the films, and I believe the 2005 *Authentic, intrepid seekers of Danger* attempts to reconcile, as Ginsburg describes, "the inconsistencies and contradictions of contemporary life"[95] through its emphasis on the discrimination the *muxes* face within the community, all four films engage in a type of salvaging project. Through the films, the representation of Juchitán with its visible indigeneity and its seemingly different gender and sexuality system, where femininity is a positive attribute and a "third gender" *muxe* is recognized, constructs it as a place that is

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[94] Ginsburg, "Mediating culture," 265.
[95] Ibid.

different from the idea of the modern world. Thus, through means that I will examine in the following Chapters, the films construct Juchitán as an Other place and consequently establish and maintain the filmmaker's cultural background as the dominant referent against which Juchitán is compared to, resulting in unbalanced power relationships.

The "Authentic:" Representing the Inside and Outside of Juchitán

Chapter 3

In this chapter I look into how the films Other Juchitán and, in doing so, each film supports the idea of the West as the dominant culture belonging to a modern and civilized place. Specifically, I examine what constitutes the space that lies "inside" and "outside" of Juchitán through notions of authenticity. First, I look at how the representation of Juchitán and the *muxes* is linked to ideas of wilderness and nature, which are rooted in the notion of the authentic. As I look at the consequences of this type of representation, I argue that it validates the Othering of Juchitán and the separation of "their" space, from "ours." And second, I look at how the films represent an "inside" and an "outside" of Juchitán through the characters. In particular, I focus on Eli, a *muxe* from Juchitán, and the role he plays in the films, with a particular focus on the 2002 film *Queer Paradise*. My focus on Eli's role as an "insider" but also an "outsider," and his reflections on what lies in the "inside" and the "outside" of Juchitán, helps me to examine the notion of authenticity and question whether the authentic, as a categorical qualifier of identity and culture, can ever be used.

Working within a post-colonial framework, I build on the debate about the reproduction of the imperial project in the colonial world. I focus my discussion on issues of representation, particularly in representing the authentic, and its intersection with hegemonic discourses of gender and sexuality in the films. As I consider the effects of representing and positioning the *muxes* as part of a "different" indigenous group with a "distinct" gender and sexuality system, I build on the debate that challenges the idea that "authentic" identities and

cultures exist. I argue that, through the notion of the authentic, the representation of Juchitán produces and maintains uneven power relations, and legitimates the division between "their" culture as an Other —which is in a different space that, similar to the Other side of a coin, can never be in "our" space.

3.1 The "Authentic" Other

Central to post-colonial theory is the effort to examine and counter the impact and residual processes of colonialism in the creation of the Other, through hegemonic discourse and representations. Amongst the scholars who pioneered this movement are Franz Fanon, Edward Said, and Homi K. Bhabha. In his influential book *Orientalism*, Said examines how the West imagines and creates the Orient as an Other against which it can construct itself: "…[T]he Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. Yet none of the Orient is merely imaginative. The Orient is an integral part of European *material* civilization and culture."[96] Furthermore, Said argues that not only does Europe holds control over knowledge production about the East, but it does so based on imperialistic assumptions about their uncivilized backwardness and weakness, which enables the West to legitimize its superiority and dominance over its Other. Similarly, authors like Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak[97] and Pratt have examined the role of representation in perpetuating the dominant imperial power; Pratt argues, for example, that this happens when the Other and the dominant culture come into contact developing relationships of uneven power.[98] My examination of the representation of Juchitán in documentary films contributes to these debates by showing how, through representation, western hegemonic discourses of sexuality intersect with notions of Orientalism and the exotic Other. My aim is

[96] Said, *Orientalism*,1-2.
[97] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader,* ed. Laura Chrisman and Patrick Williams (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).
[98] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes,* 4-7.

to show that the idea of the Other does not only have a place in people's imagination, but has an impact on the material world.

One of the main debates of postcolonial theory is the role of representation in the reproduction of the imperial European project within the colonial world itself. Similar to processes and institutions that helped Europeans maintain their power as the center of civilization, such as the anthropological fascination with foreign cultures as I explored in Chapter 2, travel writing, and even the development of modern art, the power asymmetry of the colonial world previously established by European representations of distant lands – often primitive and savage – gets reproduced under the banner of indigeneity. Authors like Diana Brydon, Minh-Ha, Werner Sollors, and Griffiths have examined whether one can think of indigenous groups as the most marginalized and "truly colonized" group.[99] In order to do so, they look into how ethnicity and indigeneity intersect with notions of race, positionality, and identity, which often result on the subordination of groups of people. Furthermore, invested in challenging the discourse that differentiates who is and who is not "ethnic," these authors show that "authentic" identities do not exist.

Building on this debate, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, explain:

> Imperial narratives such as that of anthropology in their project of *naming* and thus *knowing* indigenous groups have imported a notion of aboriginality, of cultural authenticity, which proves difficult to displace. The result is the positioning of the indigenous people as the ultimately marginalized, a concept that reinscribes the binarism of centre/margin, and prevents their engagement with the subtle processes of imperialism by locking them into a logically strategic but ultimately self-defeating essentialism.[100]

As Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin argue, the notion of cultural authenticity is highly embedded in the idea that there are pre-modern cultural identities. Thus, as a result, groups of people who fall under the category of "authentic," for example indigenous groups, become disadvantaged political subjects who are trapped in a position of a single Otherness. In

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[99] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin eds., *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2003), 214.
[100] Ibid.

Mexico for example, as discussed in Chapter 1, the idea of bringing the nation together through the *mestizo* model, instead of achieving the desired unity of a previously fragmented country, resulted in the essentialization of indigenous communities into one single category of the Other, as they seemed rooted in the pre-modern state of the country. Interested in destabilizing the notion of an "authentic" indigenous identity in film, Minh-Ha questions whether one can truly differentiate an "insider" of an "authentic" indigenous community from an "outsider," such as the filmmaker.[101] Building on the critique of representing an "authentic" Other, spatially allocated in a pre-modern space, throughout my analysis I look at how the films simultaneously reify and challenge the notion of the "authentic."

3.2 Nature and the Frontier, the Authentic in a Different Place

A flock of birds, chirping away, freely cruise over the streets of Juchitán. As part of a montage sequence, this scene is followed by an image where *muxes* flamboyantly and cheerfully greet the camera in exuberant outfits and

Figure 4. Party. Film Still, 2002 *Queer Paradise*

make-up. The celebratory music keeps playing as the birds pass over the main square of the city and church.

As part of the start of the 2002 documentary *Queer Paradise,* the film's use of montage to juxtapose images of free flying birds and free moving *muxes,* creates a visual experience in which, just like we perceive birds as part of nature and wilderness, *muxes* too, are perceived as free and untamed. As undistinguishable chirps fill the screen, so do the undistinguishable

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[101] Minh-Ha, "No Master Territories," in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, 217.

muxes, which similar to the berdache category I explored in Chapter 1, makes it seem as if from the start of the film, the wide variety of experiences of the *muxes* will be put in one single category, thus keeping the power of representation in the filmmaker's hand. Furthermore, the link between birds and *muxes* can be explored through the work of William Cronon[102] who discusses how "wilderness" and "nature" are constructed "ideas" that go back hundreds of years in "American and European history."[103] Beautifully put, Cronon explains:

> "Wilderness is the natural, unfallen antithesis of an unnatural civilization that has lost its soul. It is a place of freedom in which we can recover the true selves we have lost to the corrupting influences of our artificial lives… [it combines] the sacred grandeur of the sublime with the primitive simplicity of the frontier."[104]

According to Cronon, the idea of wilderness is linked to the "natural" and helps delineate space because it is seen as a space where "we" – people from the dominant culture or the civilized West – have the freedom to be who "we" are, as opposed to the fake selves "we" are in the "unnatural civilization." In this sense, by representing *muxes*' identities and, more generally, a gay community as free and untamed like birds in the wilderness, the 2002 film *Queer Paradise* represents Juchitán as a place that is Other from "ours" because in Juchitán, like in nature, non-heterosexual people are free to be who they are as opposed to the way people behave in the space of the dominant culture. Furthermore, through the films Juchitán becomes an Other space because it combines what Cronon calls the sublime of nature, that which astounds us, and the frontier, which is what lies between an emergent civilization and the "older simpler, truer world."[105]

A *muxe* in full *Tehuana* gown, with a bright fuschia skirt and shirt, walks on the sidewalk of a street. With a cheery attitude, she crosses an unpaved passage and enters a brick building that has no door. Sitting behind a table the viewer hears her say in Zapoteco, "this

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[102] William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature,* ed. William Cronon (New York: Norton Press, 1996).
[103] Ibid., 70.
[104] Ibid., 80.
[105] Ibid., 76.

one is Eternity and is brand new," as she passes the tap of a knock-off perfume bottle to a woman sitting on the other side of a table. The *muxe* looks for more bottles in the plastic bag she was carrying as she walked, and takes out another one. "This is Chanel 5," she says in Spanish as she passes an entire bottle to her customer. – "Didn't it come in a blue bottle?" The customer asks in Zapoteco. "No, they've already changed, blue is for gentleman and pink is for ladies." The *muxe* responds in Zapoteco.[106]

In this scene, similar to what Cronon calls the outstanding "sublime of nature," that which creates a pleasurable experience and belongs to "nature," the *muxe*'s bright fuschia gown and the poise with which she moves, chin up and a firm pace, creates a feeling that what one sees is beautiful, natural, proud, and traditional. It also seems "natural" for a homosexual man to openly be a *muxe* in women's clothes and to cheerfully walk around what seems like an underdeveloped area. Then the viewer is presented with what Cronon calls the "frontier," the combination between an emergent civilization and an "older simpler, truer world"[107] when one hears the *muxe* speak in Zapoteca and in Spanish as she sells knock-offs of "new" perfumes that come from the "outside" world. Similarly, Cronon's frontier can also be seen in 2000 *Blossoms of Fire* through the film's emphasis on the process of modernization the community has undergone throughout the years, as it looks at the history of the city, while simultaneously showing the pride with which the *Juchitecos* engage with their traditions through scenes of street festivities for example.[108] In this sense, the juxtaposition of the birds and the *muxes*, the emphasis on the traditional aspects of the community as a pre-modern place, and the idea that development and the "outside" world are on their way and yet have not "polluted" the "outstanding" character of Juchitán, are all indications that Juchitán is not like "our" space.

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[106] Film's translation. *Muxes, Authentic, Intrepid Seekers of Danger*, directed by Alejandra Islas (2005).
[107] Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," 76.
[108] *Ramo de Fuego*, directed by Maureen Gosling and Ellen Osborne (2000).

In the films, Juchitán is represented as a place that is Other from "ours," a place where Cronon's frontier becomes apparent through the visible communication between a "traditional" indigenous culture and an "outside" world that is "modern." Thus, in the films one can see what Pratt calls the "contact zone," which she defines as the space in which "people geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict."[109] As Pratt discusses this term in her study of travel writing, she argues that representations result from this type of encounters and it is through these that ideas about space and communities get constructed. Building on Pratt's idea, in the representation of a *muxe* selling perfumes, for example, one can see ideas about space and communities: Juchitán – a place where the "modern" has not erased the "traditional" and a "third gender" is accepted – and the dominant culture – a space where there are new fragrances, knock-off versions, and normative distinctions between the sexes where "blue is for gentleman and pink is for ladies."[110] As previously mentioned, Pratt explains that in the contact zone relationships of uneven power are created through the representations of each culture because they emerge from the encounters, shaped around a preconceived power asymmetry, in which subjects get constructed. Thus, although the films represent Juchitán as having a "third gender" *muxe*, the dominant culture seems to be "dominant" within the community itself as the normative conception of sex noted in the colors of the perfumes is what the *muxe* sells and yet resists.

"This Isthmus is comparable to the painted butterflies that are always *de fiesta,* [feasting and/or partying], sucking honey from roses and flying around with open wings"[111] The narrator in Blossoms of Fire explains as the camera follows a multitude of women in festive

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[109] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 6.
[110] Film's translation. *Muxes, Authentic, Intrepid Seekers of Danger*, directed by Alejandra Islas (2005).
[111] *Ramo de Fuego*, directed by Maureen Gosling and Ellen Osborne (2000).

and luxurious, very colorful, traditional gowns gathering for the *Vela* (a celebration, party, of the community), making it seem as if those women are in fact the butterflies of Juchitán.

In the films, Juchitán is represented as an Other space where *muxes* are linked to birds and women are compared to flowers and butterflies. Because Juchitán becomes the Other where wilderness and nature are interconnected to the community, "our" culture, the West, gets constructed in opposition to Juchitán. Cronon explains, "wilderness is the place where, symbolically at least, we try to withhold our power to dominate."[112] In this sense, because the films present notions of sexuality and gender closely linked to ideas of wilderness and nature, rather than to civilization, they may enable the observer to establish a relationship with Juchitán similar to the one people from the West establish with nature—a relationship in which people want to preserve Juchitán, like people want to preserve nature, rather than dominate it. Even if the representation of Juchitán in the films establishes a relationship of uneven power between the dominant culture and the one in Juchitán, as Pratt would predict, this becomes well disguised by the relationship Cronon finds between humans and nature. Furthermore, whether the filmmakers acknowledge it or not, their documentaries function as salvaging projects, similar to the ones I described in Chapter 1, in which an image of Juchitán is captured for others to see, and similarly, the people from Juchitán in all four films voice their interest in saving their traditions. Because both, the filmmakers and the *Juchitecos,* seem to have the same aim to preserve Juchitán the power of the West each film supports, whether it is Mexico or Europe, gets, even more, disguised.

The preservation of different cultures has become a priority in the contemporary globalized world, especially because of the fear that "authentic" pre-modern identities will disappear, which was a concern, as I explored in Chapter 2, even at the beginning of the 19th century. James Clifford, in his book *Routes: Travel and translation in the Late Twentieth*

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[112] Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," 87.

Century, discusses the function of museums. Borrowing the term "contact zone" from Pratt, Clifford explores how the collection of a museum puts the visitors in contact with a culture, another culture or one's own, and helps to maintain an image of the "us," the culture against which all others are defined.[113] Furthermore, Clifford explains, museums "confront 'others' and exclude the 'inauthentic,'"[114] thus creating imagined communities of well-defined cultural identities that belong to specific spaces. In this sense, the contact between cultures that occurs at a museum, similar to the contact between the dominant culture and the "traditional" aspects of Juchitán visible in the films, creates boundaries and defines the space to which "authentic" identities belong. The idea of the "authentic," thus, gets re-enforced as the "outsiders" and the "insiders" of a place, seemingly from "different" cultures, come into contact.

Even though all four movies represent Juchitán as a place where contact between the "inside" and the "outside" has occurred, and thus the "authentic," as a notion of a "pure" identity would be irrelevant, the representations of Juchitán can be understood as the collection of a museum, through which well-defined cultural identities are created. Thus, the representation of Juchitán reinforces the notion of the authentic because the traces of the "modern" world seem secondary to what remains the most visible attributes of the community: its indigeneity, traditions, and its sexual and gender identities linked to nature. In fact, the authentic is further reinforced by an emphasis of the films, like 2000 *Blossoms of Fire* where the visible traces of the "modern" juxtaposed with more traditional looking elements, for example scenes of children playing video-games immediately followed by a performance event outside the church, help the filmmakers to state that "their" culture and traditions have survived.[115] Furthermore, because wilderness is, in Cronon's words, "the ultimate landscape of authenticity,"[116] the link between Juchitán and nature establishes the

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[113] Clifford, 218.
[114] Ibid.
[115] *Ramo de Fuego*, directed by Maureen Gosling and Ellen Osborne (2000).
[116] Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," 80.

idea that Juchitán is an authentic Other, that belongs to a different space where, as opposed to the space of the civilized world, people are free to be who they are. Consequently, when in 2007 *Muxes of Juchitan,* a *muxe* says "here we [homosexuals] are free as the wind and birds," it is no longer possible for the dominant culture, who stands in opposition to Juchitán, to imagine itself as having such freedom especially because in the "unnatural civilized" world, birds and nature are not that visible.

3.3 "Insiders" and "Outsiders," Sexuality and Gender

In the three films that focus on the *muxes*, the distinction between the "outside" and the "inside" of Juchitán – the separation of the Other space as opposed to "ours" – is influenced by the representation and role that some of the *muxes* play. A few examples are: Felina, a *muxe* who identifies as closer to being a woman and performs as such, appears as an empowered and socially accepted *muxe* who is involved with "outside" projects, such as the awareness campaign on HIV and the publication of a book in Mexico City; Kike, who, although is not directly addressed in the films but I learned from my fieldwork, moved to Juchitán after living in Mexico City for many years, and thus, engages with the *muxe* community both as an insider and an outsider, and brings expressions from the outside such as "*light* relationships;"[117] and lastly Eli, teacher and *muxe,* is the educated voice in these films and makes interesting connections between his experience as a homosexual man in Juchitán and ideas coming from the "outside" that have been prominent in feminist and sexuality studies since the 1980s. Simultaneously playing the role of an "insider" and an "outsider" due to his academic background, Eli brings into question the idea that the "authentic" can be represented and asserted. The distinction between the "outside" and the "inside" of Juchitán, thus, is not as simple as saying that the filmmakers are the outsiders and the characters are the

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[117] "*Relaciones light,*" used in urban Mexican spaces to denote flexibility and lack of commitment with an other person.

insiders, but rather, the characters make visible what Pratt calls the "contact zone," as I examined earlier in this Chapter, because they mediate what lies in the "inside" and the "outside" of Juchitán. Furthermore, as the *muxes* simultaneously place themselves in "insider" and "outsider" roles, through what Pratt calls a process of "transculturation,"[118] which I will further develop in this section, the boundary that marks difference between the Other space and "ours" becomes blurry and problematic.

Since the beginning of the 2002 *Queer Paradise*, Eli defies heteronormative conceptions of sexuality that come from the dominant Western culture through the filmmakers, in which heterosexuality is assumed to be the innate condition of every person. The first theme that the movie deals with is the individual story of each *muxe*. "When did you first realize you were a gay?"[119] The viewer hears the interviewer ask. After each *muxe* presents their story, Eli comes last and answers: "I won't answer that question, would you ask a heterosexual, when did you realize that you were heterosexual?"[120] This confrontational answer immediately establishes the role of Eli as the radical and educated voice of the film who will question heteronormative ideas from the West as he tries to make sense of, and explain, his experience in Juchitán. From this moment on, Eli shows how ideas about sexuality, homosexuality, gender, acceptance, and tolerance differ between the community that lies "outside" of Juchitán and the one that lies "inside," thus simultaneously establishing and challenging the boundary between Juchitán and the dominant culture.

Although Eli questions the heteronormativity of the filmmaker's question, he is actually the only "insider" who responds in a confrontational way. When the filmmakers ask other *muxes* the same question, they all answered what the filmmakers expected, letting the viewer know that within Juchitán the dominant, and normative, notions of gender and sexuality are prevalent. Felina, for example, explains that she knew she was a *muxe* since she was a child.

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[118] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 6.
[119] *Juchitan Queer Paradise*, directed by Patricio Henríquez (2002).
[120] Ibid.

Interestingly, Felina's father who is also in the scene when she tells her story, describes his child as "*el otro*," (the other) a half man and half woman.[121] This description, thus, shows how the category *muxe* is deeply embedded in the man/woman dichotomy, as I noted in Chapter 1. Furthermore, at this point, the viewer is able to see how within Juchitán, people's understanding of sex and gender is informed by normative conceptions of a two-sex system still rooted within a heteronormative discourse, as Eli is the only one who addresses the assumptions that the interviewer's question carries. Hence, Eli stands as an insider who seems to understand his experience in the community from a critical standpoint linked to the developments in sexuality and gender understandings coming from the outside.

"Where should the dividing line between outsider and insider stop? How should it be defined?"[122] Minh-Ha asks in *No Master Territories*. Interested in showing how questions of authenticity regarding indigenous people need to be further contested, Minh-Ha examines the representation of the "authentic" "insiders" and "outsiders" in film. She explains, "the moment the insider steps out from the inside, she is no longer a mere insider (and vice versa). She necessarily looks in from the outside while also looking out from the inside."[123] In this sense, there are no absolute identities belonging only to one space. As such, one can understand the position of Eli as someone who, although he was born in Juchitán and is an insider, he has become an outsider because of his academic preparation as a teacher of young children and adults. Hence, as Minh-Ha would argue, Eli has no longer a fixed identity that can be called an "authentic" insider, but is rather the result of the contact between two cultures, and as Pratt would argue, the result of the contact zone, through which Eli thus becomes a bridge between the inside and the outside of his cultural "reality."

Throughout *Queer Paradise*, Eli, as a voice of authority, seems to understand his surroundings through an outsider's perspective. In one of the thematic section of the film, two

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[121] *Juchitan Queer Paradise*, directed by Patricio Henríquez (2002).
[122] Minh-Ha, "No Master Territories," in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, 217.
[123] Ibid., 217.

figures of authority, separately, discuss the roles the *muxes* play in the community. While the first one to speak is Hector Matus, the mayor of Juchitán, the second one is Eli. Presented in his classroom environment, the scene shows Eli teaching young adults the importance of tolerance and the role parents have in teaching their children to be tolerant or not. As the camera follows the action, Eli teaches his students that it is not right for parents to impose their religion, politics, and to prescribe genders onto their children. In this scene, Eli notes that most people think there are only three types of sexuality, gay, straight, and bisexual, and further explains that there are "more sexualities" than these three. It is interesting that Eli needs to teach this lesson even in Juchitán, a place where a "third gender" is recognized and there seems to be visible fluidity of sexual and gender identities. The fact that Eli brings into the community ideas about sexuality that come from international academic and social movements that recognize multiple sexual identities suggests that the term "*muxe,*" and the understandings of sexuality and gender in Juchitán, are part of a cultural order not so different from "ours." Eli's interest in sexuality and gender studies becomes evident in the 2007 film *Muxes of Juchitán* during which he is candidate for a Phd on the theme of homosexual teachers in primary schools.

In many of the scenes described throughout this Chapter one can see what Pratt calls "transculturation," a term that, she explains, has been used by ethnographers "to describe how subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture."[124] Building on her examination of travel writing Pratt argues that transculturation happens in the contact zone and it is not a one-way process as it is often discussed, but rather, two-ways. In other words, Pratt is interested in revealing how both the "metropolitan culture" and the subordinate groups represent and create themselves through their relation, and in relation, to each other. In this sense, through the representation

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[124] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 6.

of Juchitán one can see how the contact between the dominant culture and Juchitán constructed each other through a relationship of difference and uneven power, where the dominant culture's notions of gender and sexuality remain the "dominant." Thus, this relationship, established through contact and a process of transculturation, results in, and is further built upon, representations that delineate space and communities as well-defined entities where Juchitán becomes the Other. This does not mean, however, that there is in "fact" a difference between the dominant culture and the Other as one can see through the lesson Eli needs to teach not only to his students in Juchitán, but also to an audience.

In 2002 *Queer Paradise* Eli is represented as an educated man with authority in the classroom, a radical voice, and the community's acceptance; Eli is someone who drinks, pays for sex, and has a body as realistic as every other man with a few extra pounds. In one of the summaries of the film I found online, the Australian Centre for the Moving Image refers to Eli as follows: "Eli is a high school teacher from a wealthy landowning family who openly admits to be paying for sex."[125] Although this description is somewhat superficial and exoticizing as it aims to create interest in the film, it does point at how the film represents Eli. Through this example one can see that the exotization of the Other does not necessarily have to be done through colorful displays and an emphasis on the backwardness of the Other, but rather, it can also be done by showing seemingly contradictory elements, such as a wealthy gay teacher who pays for sex. Thus, part of the films' exotization of Juchitán happens when elements that are not allowed or imagined to come together within the dominant culture's idea of social order do.

Regardless of the possible exotization, though Eli the viewer learns that what lies "inside" and "outside" of Juchitan is not completely different because both spaces have normative notions of sexuality and gender. Furthermore, as Eli simultaneously functions as an

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[125] "Juchitan Queer Paradise," Accessed March 25, 2011.
http://www.acmi.net.au/EB83E9E8C6584538A9722A5A48396AE7.aspx

"insider" and an "outsider," the idea that there is an "authentic" identity is challenged especially through scenes like the one in which he teaches a lesson on "sexualities" to both the *Juchitecos* and the audience.[126] As Minh-Ha best explains: "Whether she turns the inside out or the outside in, she is, like the two sides of a coin, the same impure, both-in-one insider/outsider. For there can hardly be such a thing as an essential inside that can be homogeneously represented by all insiders; an authentic insider in there, an absolute reality out there, or an incorrupted representative who cannot be questioned by another incorrupted representative."[127] In this sense, both distinction between an insider and an outsider is irrelevant because both are corrupted by their interaction with each other, as it can be seen through Eli. Thus, the distinction the film constructs between the space of the Other and that of the dominant culture is based on the representation by Western filmmakers of a community that happens to be indigenous, has ample visibility of male homosexuality, and functions under a seemingly "unique" social order where contradictions, or rather, what the Western understanding of contradictions are, merge.

3.4 Authenticity and the two sides of the same coin

Film is a powerful medium of representation for Othering cultures because, as I noted earlier in this Chapter and in Chapter 2, it feeds from, and further establishes, relationships of uneven power as it also delineates space and constructs difference between cultures. Representation thus, needs to be carefully dealt with because, as Gupta and Ferguson best put it in the book *Culture Power Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology*, places are not "naturally disconnected" but are rather "hierarchically interconnected."[128] For example, the

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[126] *Juchitan Queer Paradise*, directed by Patricio Henríquez (2002).
[127] Minh-Ha, "No Master Territories," in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, 218.
[128] Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, "Beyond Culture: Space, Identity and the Politics of Difference," in *Culture Power Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology*, ed. Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 35.

separation of the *muxes'* Other space from "ours" through its representation, does not bring about the social change that the films may want to promote because, as Gupta and Ferguson explain, this division does not allow us to rethink "difference *through* connection."[129] Perhaps if in the films there were no links between wilderness, nature, and *muxes*, it would be easier to think of the difference between Juchitán's culture and "ours" through connections. However, the space of the *muxes* is strongly Othered because, as Cronon notes, ideas of wilderness and nature have a long history of establishing difference and are "something profoundly Other than yourself."[130] Although Cronon bases his argument on a Euro-American identity, the dominant Mexican culture too falls within a "modern" identity that, despite – and because of – its multiculturalism discourse establishes a relationship of difference and an attitude of preservation with its indigenous communities. The consequence is that in the films, as well as in other representations that embed ideas of wilderness and nature in the community they speak about, there are power relations that get established, but most importantly, are dangerously disguised.

Furthermore, the acceptance and visibility of *muxes*, represented as a group of homosexual men, make Juchitán a "unique" place, and thus, the institutions, conditions, and ideological standing of the dominant culture stand in opposition to the characteristics that make Juchitán "unique." This can be further understood through Said's work, he argues that the Orient is not only an idea, but has an actual material impact because it legitimizes the dominance and superiority of the West, and thus, the Othering of Juchitán also has consequences. As discussed in Chapter 1, in Mexico like in other countries, the indigenous communities have a history of marginalization from the political, cultural, and socio-economical life. While it is true that their Othering has spurred a sense of "preservation," this preservation benefits the dominant culture because it functions as a mode of control and

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[129] Gupta and Ferguson, "Beyond Culture," 35.
[130] Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," 70.

appropriation. For example, Mexico appropriates, and constructs, the image of "its" indigenous communities to emphasize "its" multiculturalism. Not only do more tourists want to visit countries that have "aboriginals," or "authentic Mayas," but the Othering and preservation of these pre-modern communities that need to be kept away from the contamination of the modern world also stops them from contaminating it, which means they do not disrupt the homogeneous notion of social order that maintains, and depends on, well-defined categories and identities.

For Minh-Ha, the world has "ethnocentric classifications," which means that it is "completely catalogued," and it fits all identities and groups who are "different" into a "one-place-fits-all 'other' category" in order to keep order, control, and avoid any threats.[131] Building on Minh-Ha's critique, the role of Eli in 2002 *Queer Paradise* proves that establishing a single homogenizing category of the "authentic" Other is not possible because in the films he acts both as an "insider" and an "outsider," and also shows how the "inside" of Juchitán and the "outside" are not utterly different. Thus, Minh-Ha would suggest that the Othering of Juchitán as a space that is not like the West because of its seemingly different social order and identities, is a construction that maintains the dominant culture's social order and control over its own homogenizing catalogue. This means that by emphasizing the "unique" character of Juchitán and positioning the *muxes* as "authentic" Others, the films actually prevent the possibility for the dominant culture to imagine and construct itself as a space where a social order with more tolerance, visibility of gender fluidity, and other characteristics found in Juchitán, could exist.

In *The Myth of authenticity*, Griffiths explains that as a response to colonial representations and a history that attempted to erase indigenous group's differences, indigenous groups have engaged in an effort of self-assertion, including the assertion of their

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[131] Minh-Ha, "No Master Territories," in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, 215- 217. And Trinh Minh-ha, "The Totalizing Quest of Meaning," in *Theorizing Documentary,* ed. Michael Renov (London: Routledge, 1993), 90.

locality and their difference.[132] Griffiths' work helps to understand the process in which the *muxes*, who have some control over their representation as "*muxes* of Juchitán" in the documentaries, are also engaging in a process of reassertion of "their" space that may in fact further establish their Otherness and their Other space. In this process Pratt would argue that the *muxes* reassertion and appropriation of the dominant culture's own terms, such as their own "uniqueness" and Otherness, is the result of a two-way transculturation that delineates space and communities in the same way the films do.[133] Furthermore, similar to Griffiths' examination of the erasure of essentializing notions of indigenous groups, Chandavarkar takes it further and notes how this can result in the reproduction of the imperial project within the colonial world. As part of his critique on subaltern studies, Chandavarkar notes that the effort to get rid of the "universalizing categories of colonial discourse" has over-emphasized the difference and pluralities of the subaltern.[134] In this sense, the representation of Juchitán, by the films and the *Juchitecos,* as a place where there is a "third gender" linked to a positive notion of femininity and, as I will explore in Chapter 4, its syncretism between Catholicism and Zapoteca culture, differentiates it from other indigenous Mexican communities thus emphasizing the difference and plurality within the category of the "Other." This has undesirable effects, as Chandavarkar would argue, because the emphasis on the "culturally specific character" of Juchitán reinstates the myth of its "exceptional" character. And thus, it reproduces the imperial project within the colonial world itself because it creates Juchitán as a "unique" and ultimate Other who does not quite fit in the "Other indigenous" category of Mexico, and much less in the dominant Mexican culture.[135] In other words, Juchitan becomes the Other of the Other.

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[132] Gareth Griffiths, "The Myth of Authenticity," in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (London: Routledge, 2003), 238.
[133] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 6.
[134] Chandavarkar, "'The Making of the 'Working Class,'" 66.
[135] Chandavarkar, "'The Making of the 'Working Class,'" 66.

Although the consequences of reasserting the plurality of the Other can result in the reinstatement of the colonial discourse, it is worth noting the position the dominant culture takes in this equation. Following the work of Said, authors like Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin have suggested that Orientalism in fact homogenized and essentialized the West as much as it essentialized and aimed to erase the differences of the all-encompassing category East.[136] In this sense, Minh-Ha's examination of the "authentic" is important because she clearly states that the Other, but also the dominant West, are not homogeneous categories and there is not such a thing as an "absolute reality out there."[137] Keeping this in mind, when Juchitán is Othered in the films, not only as an indigenous place, but as "unique" and "exceptional," thus becoming the Other of the Other, the dominant culture gets reinstated as the homogeneous and essential space that stands in complete opposition to the "unique" Juchitán. For example, in 2000 *Blossoms of Fire* a self-identified lesbian says "in the US, logically, is different, it's the first world so [lesbians] are not accepted."[138] Another example can be seen in 2007 *Muxes of Juchitan* when Eli suggests he could not be a teacher outside of Juchitán when he explains that in the state of Aguacalientes for example, in the public swimming pools there used to be signs that read "*no se aceptan perros ni homosexuales*" (Dogs and homosexuals are not allowed).[139] Through these examples one can see how the dominant culture, which in the case of these two films is the United States and Mexico, is essentialized as a place that, although it might be developed, is intolerant.

The "insider" and the "outsider," like the Other and the dominant, may be, as Minh-Ha suggests "like the two sides of a coin, the same impure, both-in-one insider/outsider."[140] Building on Minh-Ha's idea of the coin, Griffiths and Chandavarkar would suggest that there are coins within the coin, which is similar to what Bakic-Hayden argues through the term

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[136] Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin eds., *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*.
[137] Minh-Ha, "No Master Territories," in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, 218.
[138] *Ramo de Fuego*, directed by Maureen Gosling and Ellen Osborne (2000).
[139] *Muxes of Juchitan*, directed by Yorgos Avgeropolous (2007).
[140] Minh-Ha, "No Master Territories," in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, 218.

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"nesting orientalisms." In her examination of former Yugoslavia, Bakic-Hayden suggests there are multiple Others because regions throughout the world tend to view other cultures, in close proximity to them yet slightly more South or East, as backward or conservative.[141] In this sense, just like Juchitán is the Other of an already Othered indigenous community in Mexico, through the films one can also see there are multiple Selves, multiple Wests. Mexico for example, is the Self when Eli speaks about the impossibility of teaching as a gay professor outside of Juchitán, but in the example where a self-identified lesbian talks about the developed world, the West she refers to is the United States. Thus, the West, as Trouillot best puts it, "has [no] fixed content, nor is it an unchanging site;"[142] in fact, in the example presented above, Trouillot would argue that it is not that Mexico and the United States have something in common, but their position as the West depends "on who else is being excluded,"[143] namely, Juchitán. Even though Mexico can be the West for a place like Juchitán, in other contexts it is in fact the Other for a West like the United States. Thus, the example of Mexico, who can be both the Self and the Other, shows how Minh-Ha was right in pointing out that both sides of the coin are the same impure "insider/outsider." What must be made clear though, is that both "impure" sides belong to the same coin and thus, heads and tails will always, invariably, face different directions – while the Other stays at the bottom, the West is the one that looks up and maintains its power as the referent, which I will further examine in Chapter 4.

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[141] Bakic-Hayden, "Nesting Orientalisms," 917-931.
[142] Trouillot, "Anthropology and the Savage Slot," 2.
[143] Ibid.

Juchitán as a heterotopia: an Other real space

Chapter 4

> Strange Juchitan. How is it that women here enjoy so much freedom when just a few miles away they are submissive? Why is the native culture so vibrant here where everywhere else regional values are rejected? What explains this unique respect to all types of [sexual] diversity?[144]

Michel Foucault, in his piece *Of Other Spaces* develops the concept of "heterotopia" and defines it as "a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which… all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted."[145] Through this term Foucault was interested in showing how the previously conceived notion of the "utopia" – a perfected place with no real site – had a space in reality through places like a garden, for example, where plants from all over the world can be grouped together. If one thinks of the example of the garden, one can then understand what Foucault meant by saying a heterotopia is like a mirror where the image you see (imagine a garden with plants from all over the world) does not exist (because it would be impossible in "reality" for a garden like that to "naturally" grow), but it makes you create an imagined reality of the place it speaks about (the biodiversity of the world). In this sense, a heterotopia is a place that has a real site but it is, like the reflection of a mirror, also an idea.

As I examined in Chapter 2, since its origin at the turn of the century, film has been a powerful medium of expression through which the records of "reality" on the materiality of film get combined with pre-conceived ideas from the filmmakers. The result of it, as I

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[144] *Juchitan Queer Paradise*, directed by Patricio Henríquez (2002).
[145] Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16 (1986): 4.

examined in Chapter 3, is that through documentary films notions of authentic cultures and identities get reinforced, resulting in the delineation of space through which relationships of uneven power get established. Building on my analysis, in this chapter I argue that through the films, Juchitán becomes a heterotopia and thus, through its representation, the audience is not only able to create an imagined reality of Juchitán, but because a heterotopia functions as a mirror one can also see the reflection of the dominant culture. In this sense, similar to how I argued in Chapter 3 that despite there being only one coin, the two sides will invariably remain separated, the mirror's reflection and the Self depend on each other and yet stand in opposition of each other. Through the notion of heterotopia I examine how the films' representation of Juchitán, as a place where gender and sexuality are seemingly fluid and heterogeneous, make it into a place that is different from the dominant culture, despite its similarities, with an "incomprehensible" social order that not only reflects but also legitimizes "our" own normative social order. Thus, by turning Juchitán into a heterotopia, where a "third gender" exists and women are recognized members of the public, the films, despite their liberatory projects, end up re-instating hegemonic notions of gender and culture because the dominant culture gets re-instated as the Self standing in front of the mirror without whom the reflection of the Other, Juchitán, cannot exist.

4.1 The dominant and the Other, "our" inability to understand

Where can a group of male homosexuals dressed in colorful women's indigenous gowns be found sitting at a Catholic church attending mass with other men, women, and children?

Figure 5. Church. Film Still, Blossoms of Juchitán

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The answer, in Juchitan, is shown in the three films that focus on the *muxes* through similar scenes in which the *muxes,* some dressed as women and some dressed as men, are attending mass at the *Iglesia de San Vicente Ferrer*, the Church of the community's Saint. In 2005 *Authentic, Intrepid Seekers of Danger*, and 2007 *Muxes of Juchitan*, a priest is interviewed and explains that he, differently from the other priests in the community, accepts everyone and gives communion to all. Furthermore, he states: "In the indigenous cultures there is more tolerance; tolerance is a higher state of humanity in which one is able to understand one another and tolerate everyone just the way they are."[146] As I mentioned in Chapter 1, Catholicism in Mexico has had an impact on the incorporation of normative notions of sexuality and gender into the social order. As it can be seen through the *Juchiteca* priest, the reason why it is possible for *muxes* to be at the church in Juchitán is because of their Zapoteca accepting "indigeneity," one that through a process of syncretism also combines Catholicism within its traditions.

Foucault explains that heterotopias are places that "are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about."[147] When the films present the scene at the church I mention above and the interviews with the "tolerant" and "accepting" priest, Juchitan can thus, be understood as a heterotopia because it reflects and speaks about a variety of sites and yet it is "completely different" from them. Although the entirety of Mexico went through a process of colonization and cultural syncretism, through which Catholicism and indigenous cultures merged, as the priest signals, the "indigeneity" of Juchitán is what makes it tolerant towards the *muxes* as opposed to the places where "indigeneity" is not a characteristic of other Catholic contexts. In these representations, tolerance towards the *muxes* seems to be an attribute of the prevalent Zapoteca culture. However, when the priest explains in some of his colleagues do not accept the *muxes,* it shows how Juchitán is still part of a Mexican context

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[146] *Muxes of Juchitan,* DVD, directed by Yorgos Avgeropolous (2007).
[147] Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 24.

where Catholicism plays an important role on regulating social behavior as Eli points out in 2007 *Muxes of Juchitan.*[148] In this sense, the representation of Juchitán as a heterotopia not only reflects and speaks about a variety of sites, but it also contains them, such as a Catholic and a Zapoteca culture, an indigenous community and Mexican syncretism, and a culture of acceptance and one of intolerance. However, this does not mean that Juchitán is like any of the places it contains. Instead, it is the fact that Juchitán contains and reflects all of these sites, merging them into one whole, what it makes it stand as an "absolutely different" place and thus, importantly, its difference is in reference to every site it contains.

Differing from previous representations discussed in Chapter 1, the four documentary films, instead of providing an organized hegemonic discourse of Otherness, create a more complex understanding of Juchitán's "uniqueness." In all four films, despite the narratives' different aims and means, the *Juchitecos* take part in their own representation and seem to define themselves as members of a communal space that can simultaneously be: traditional, progressive, tolerant, violent, etc. For example, an important theme that two of the films focus on is the lack of safety of the *muxes.* "When I was 11 years old, many things happened, I can't talk about them."[149] The audience hears a *muxe* explain with tearful eyes in 2005 *Authentic, Intrepid Seekers of Danger.* In the same film, another *muxe* explains, "I have a difficult time forgetting and forgiving… people approached me… and I felt guilty because I realized I liked those caresses."[150] Similarly in 2007 *Muxes of Juchitan,* a *muxe* talks about how someone tried to abuse him when he was 12 years old, after which Estrella, a *muxe* scared by the spread of HIV yet aware that she needs to get checked explains, "three years ago, *el tipo* (derogatory of "man") used to rape me."[151] Through scenes like these, these two films, in contrast to the earlier films, create the most complex image of Juchitan, showing the similarities – such as

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[148] *Muxes of Juchitan*, DVD, directed by Yorgos Avgeropolous (2007).
[149] *Muxes, Authentic, Intrepid Seekers of Danger*, directed by Alejandra Islas (2005).
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.

the unsafe environment for the *muxes* – and differences – such as the sense of safety of being a male homosexual in a community that recognizes them as a "third gender" – between "their" space and the dominant culture. By presenting the incompatible, yet simultaneous, safe and unsafe environment the *muxes* experience, differently from the "modern homosexual," within a community that recognizes them through a "third gender" category, Juchitán becomes an Other place that is not like the West. Thus, even though the films provide a complex image of the community, they turn Juchitán into a heterotopia, that, in Foucault's words, is "…capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible."[152]

The creation of an imaginary cultural space of the Other through film ends up reflecting an image, like Foucault's mirror, of the conditions and ideological standing of the dominant culture as I examined in Chapter 2. For example, in the 2002 film *Queer Paradise*, the concluding scene has a narrated reflection about the "impossibility of understanding"[153] what makes Juchitán a place "like no other"[154] where women are free, not submissive, and where is a "unique respect to all types of [sexual] diversity."[155] The impossibility of the filmmaker, and the viewer, to understand what makes Juchitán such a "unique" Other is reflected in Foucault's preface to *The Order of Things* in which he contemplates Jorge Luis Borges' essay "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins." In Borges' essay, animals in a Chinese Encyclopedia are divided into:

> "(a) belonging to the emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies."[156]

In the preface, Foucault explains that his book is in fact the result of his encounter with

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[152] Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 25.
[153] Foucault, preface to *The Order of Things* (New York : Vintage Books, 1994), XV.
[154] *Juchitan Queer Paradise*, directed by Patricio Henríquez (2002).
[155] Ibid.
[156] Jorge Luis Borges (1942) *The Analytical Language of John Wilkins,* quoted in Foucault, preface to *The Order of Things*, XV.

Borges' piece. Fascinated with this passage, Foucault finds that the "exotic charm of another system of thought" demonstrates "the limitation of our own [and] the stark impossibility of thinking that."[157] Foucault further explains he does not refer to the impossibility of thinking about "fabulous" animals that "reside solely in the realm of imagination,"[158] but rather, to their juxtaposition with the real animals. What he finds is that, instead of a "disorder" of the "*incongruous*," it is one in which the "inappropriate" comes together, "fragments of a large number of possible orders…without law or geometry."[159] Evident in his choice of word, "inappropriate," Foucault explains that places like the ones described in Borges' work are heterotopias, which, differently from the "consoling" utopias that lie in an "untroubled region in which they are able to unfold," the heterotopias "are disturbing," and somewhat inappropriate, because they break the syntax.[160] Although Foucault refers to language in this discussion, it is relevant because the incomprehensibility of Juchitán, as a place that breaks the arrangement of an "appropriate" social order turns it into a "disorder" that does not belong to "our" methods of classification, and thus, becomes Othered.

Although 2002 *Queer Paradise* is the only film that blatantly poses the impossibility to understand the social order of Juchitán, the narratives of the other three films also make visible their intent to understand its order. The 2000 film *Blossoms of Fire,* for example, on various occasions looks at the history of Juchitán in order to understand the "equality of the sexes,"[161] 2005 *Authentic, Intrepid Seekers of Danger,* interviews women, men, and *muxes* from different generations to try to understand the notions of gender and sexuality in the community, and similarly, 2007 *Muxes of Juchitán,* in its effort to understand why Juchitán functions in such a seemingly different manner, interviews two leading Mexican academics whose work has largely focused on Juchitán. Despite of these attempts, the films, instead of

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[157] Foucault, preface to *The Order of Things*, XV.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Ibid., XVII.
[160] Ibid., XVIII.
[161] *Ramo de Fuego*, directed by Maureen Gosling and Ellen Osborne (2000).

providing the viewer with an answer, end up reinforcing the "exotic charm" of Juchitán, for example, through the scenes in which myths about pregnancy are disclosed. In 2007 *Muxes of Juchitán,* there is a scene where an older woman, as she feels the shape of a pregnant woman's belly, explains that girls are on the right side and boys are on the left, thus implying that if a baby who was on the right during the pregnancy comes out as a boy, then he would be a *muxe*. Similarly, in 2002 *Queer Paradise,* Eli explains there is a myth that when babies are born facing up they are straight, and when they are facing down are homosexual. In this sense, through scenes that aim to represent and understand Juchitán's order, the films continue to construct it as a place that is Other from "ours." Thus, the representation of Juchitán in the films, as a place "we" cannot understand, reflect and establish the dominant culture as an imaginary place, as the Self who stands in front of the mirror, against which the social order of Juchitán, and its corresponding organizing features of society, particularly gender and sexuality, are compared.

4.2 Gender and Sexuality in Juchitán, a heterotopia of deviation

With the rise of modernity, Foucault identified the emergence of a new form of control of criminality[162] and sexuality in which sex, like crime, became the object of scientific disciplines. Interested in the emergence of the deviant individual, one who needs to be corrected, classified, normalized, and excluded, Foucault argues that sexuality is discursively controlled by the scientific bodies but also by the subjects who internalize the norms.[163] In his later work on space, Foucault develops the concept of "heterotopia of deviation" perhaps building upon his earlier ideas on heterotopia and the exclusion of the deviant. "Heterotopias of deviation" are, to Foucault, the places where individuals whose behavior is outside the

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[162] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish : the birth of the prison* (New York : Vintage Books, 1979).
[163] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Vol. 1, An Introduction* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

norm are sent.[164] Examples for this type of spaces are "rest homes and psychiatric hospitals, and of course prisons."[165] Although the examples Foucault provides are institutionalized mechanisms of control, I argue that, through the documentary films Juchitán becomes a heterotopia of deviation, where people whose behavior is outside the norm exist.

Although Foucault has received immeasurable critical attention, his work on space has not been sufficiently contextualized within his larger body of work. Benjamin Genocchio notes that "many of the so called 'new theorists of social space' have used and extended the term [heterotopia] to reveal the possibility of socially constructed counter-sites embodying a form of 'resistance' to our increasingly surveyed, segregated and simulated socio-spatial order… [and yet] provide little critical engagement with Foucault's texts..."[166] Genocchio's remark not only shows how the term heterotopia has been used in isolation, but it also shows how little attention theorists have given to the concept of "heterotopia of deviation" as this concept does not necessarily involve ideas or forms of "resistance." This concept, I believe, needs to be contextualized within Foucault's examination of power and the control of the deviant individual; particularly in regards to sexuality because of its importance in creating subjects, monitoring behavior, and mediating everyday human relationships.

It is daytime and the curtains are closed, there are two naked bodies on a bed, and all you can hear is their breath. The eye of a religious figure is then portrayed in an extreme close-up, as if watching the sexual act, thus setting a controversial tone for a film in which Juchitán is represented as having a community where sexuality and the church are not apart. Somewhat distant and shaky,
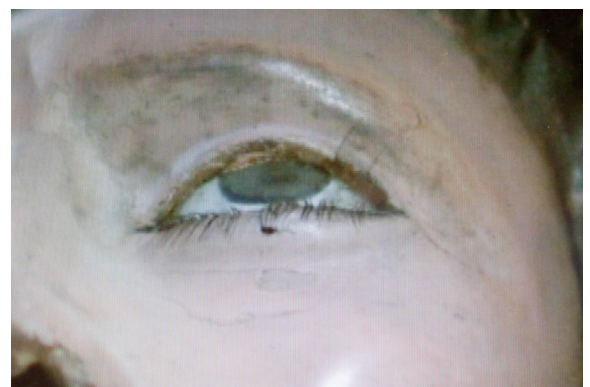
Figure 6. Watching. Film still, 2002 Queer Paradise

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[164] Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 25.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Benjamin Genocchio, "Discourse, Discontinuity, Difference: The Question of 'Other' Spaces," in *Postmodern Cities and Spaces*, ed. Sophie Watson and Katherine Gibson (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995), 36.

the handheld camera stands in front of what now becomes visible, a man performing oral sex on another man. The viewer is then transported to a blue sky with white clouds, followed by a Catholic statue staring back as a voice-over narrator tells the following legend:

> In Juchitán someone told me a legend. According to this legend, God gave one of his assistants, Vicente Ferrer, a bag full of queers. Then, God asked Vicente to scatter the homosexuals across the Americas. Vicente began his journey in the south and headed north. He left one queer in Colombia, dropped a few in Central America, and went on his way. Everything was going well, but when he got to Juchitán, Vicente fell and his bag tore open spilling the contents.[167]

Upon a dramatic end to the narration, celebratory music starts and with it, so does the 2002 film *Queer Paradise,* which presents Juchitán in the way it was presented throughout the 20th century: a "unique" place, or as the narrator best puts it, a place "like no other."[168] As the myth above presents and, as I examined in the earlier section of this Chapter, in Juchitán seemingly opposing elements come together, such as Catholicism and homosexuality. What is important to note in this representation of Juchitán, however, is that the filmmaker's translation/interpretation/presentation of this myth makes Juchitán an anomaly where everything stopped "going well."

Heterotopias of deviation contain deviant individuals in a "different" space, which can be thought of as a type of exclusion, which simultaneously renders them invisible and visible. By locating deviants in a place out of "our" space they can no longer be seen in "our" space, but their identification as deviants and their excluded localization makes them visible and necessarily somewhere else, helping to maintain the "purity" of "our" space. In this sense, when the films represent Juchitán as a place "we" cannot understand, its social order, primarily linked to a seemingly fluid and heterogeneous gender and sexuality system – in which there is an accepted "third gender" and women have an important role in the community – consequentially falls outside the norm. Although all four films do not intend to portray Juchitán as a place of deviant individuals, by making visible its "abnormal" order

[167] Film's translation. *Juchitan Queer Paradise*, directed by Patricio Henríquez (2002).
[168] *Juchitan Queer Paradise*, directed by Patricio Henríquez (2002).

against which the dominant culture defines itself as the norm, the films establish an insoluble distance between the dominant culture and the Other based on normative notions of gender and sexuality, such as the gender dichotomy man/woman, as organizing features of society.

Foucault explains all heterotopias have a use:

> The last trait of heterotopias is that they have a function in relation to all the space that remains. This function unfolds between two extreme poles. Either their role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory… Or else, on the contrary, their role is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled. This latter type would be the heterotopia, not of illusion, but of compensation…[169]

As a concept that Foucault used to substitute the disappearing "crisis heterotopias,"[170] the heterotopia of deviation seems to have a distinct use that complements its illusory or compensational uses. When Foucault lists examples of heterotopias of deviation such as jails and psychiatric hospitals, all of them are "modern" institutionalized places with a function of control and containment. Building on this idea, I see two functions of turning Juchitán into a non-institutionalized heterotopia of deviation in the films. First, in the 2000 film *Blossoms of Fire*, and 2002 *Queer Paradise* the function is one of "compensation," because both films present Juchitán as an alternative to the dominant order where the sexes are not "equal" and homosexuals are not as visible or accepted as they are in Juchitán, thus offering a space that neutralizes "our" "ill constructed" one. The second function, I see it in the 2005 *Authentic, Intrepid Seekers of Danger* and 2007 *Muxes of Juchitan,* and is a function of *confrontation –* which is something Foucault may have addressed if he had envisioned the existence of a heterotopia of deviation in a non-institutionalized setting, without an infrastructure or policing bodies. The reason I call *confrontation* is because the latter films, more explicitly than the others, confront the dominant culture with its own powerful regulatory mechanisms that

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[169] Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 27.

[170] "In the so-called primitive societies, there is a certain form of heterotopia that I would call crisis heterotopias, i.e., there are privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis: adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women. the elderly, etc." In Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 24.

control sexuality and gender, such as the gender/sexuality dimorphism I discussed in Chapter 1 and 3 from which the "third gender" of Juchitán seems to be unable to escape. As stated earlier, then, all four films whether they are compensatory by providing a counterbalance to the dominant culture, or confront it with the power of its own regulatory mechanisms, by Othering Juchitán as a heterotopia of deviation the films make the dominant culture's gender and sexuality system the controlling norm, the Self in front of the mirror, in which instead of facing its own disorder, by looking at an Other disorderly place, it maintains the illusion of its own order.

As Ralph Pordzik discusses the concept of heterotopia in fiction writing, he explains: "heterotopia represents the place where a wide range of discourses—in Foucault's terms, the "real places" of life within a culture—can be negotiated and tested against the backdrop of the strictly hierarchized closed-system model that usually informs our notion of the static uniformity of utopian dystopian societies."[171] Building on the idea that the backdrop, as the Self or the dominant Western culture, is a closed system with hierarchies that imagines "static uniformity" in its creation of imagined utopias and dystopias, the films compare Juchitán against the backdrop of the Western culture, and because Juchitán shows a visible fluidity and heterogeneity of sexualities and gender, it is Othered for it cannot even be imagined. Furthermore, through the *confrontation* function of the representation of Juchitán, the dominant culture encounters an image of itself and its regulatory mechanisms of gender and sexuality. For example, in 2007 *Muxes of Juchitan,* Felina, a *muxe* explains, "women have their place, men do too, I want to be in the middle, that is my space as a *muxe*, that space is mine."[172] As one can see, the dualism of men/women prevails in Juchitán and yet, Felina notes there are people who lie somewhere in the middle that should also be given a space and rightful recognition as a *muxe* sometimes has. Thus, through the films the dominant culture

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[171] Ralph Pordzik, *The Quest for Postcolonial Utopia: A Comparative Introduction to the Utopian Novel in the New English Literatures* (New York: Peter Land Publishing, 2001), 5.

[172] *Muxes of Juchitan*, directed by Yorgos Avgeropolous (2007).

encounters its own mechanisms of regulating gender and sexuality within a system that does not seem to be as uniform and static as it is "meant" to be under such regulations, and hence, it shows that the dominant culture, in needing a regulatory system, must also have the fluidity it finds in the Other where the regulations do not work. However, because the fluidity and heterogeneity of gender and sexuality constitute an order "we" are unable to understand, and that "disorder" belongs to a space – seemingly pre-modern – that is Other from ours, the films re-instate the "rightfulness" of regulatory and normative notions of sexuality and gender because they maintain an order, seemingly uniform and static, that belongs to, and is needed to define, "our" civilized and modern space.

Halfway into the 2002 film *Queer Paradise* it is daytime and the curtains are closed. Indeed, it is the same bedroom from the opening scene only this time it is clear who the people are, there is a man lying down with his face covered as Eli, the *muxe* whose role I discusses in Chapter 3, unbuttons his shirt. The camera, hesitant, stays at the frame of the door, until Eli, with his free hand invites the camera and thus, the viewer in to see.

This revealing scene, during which the "secret" of the film is disclosed, in fact shows how everything stopped "going well" like the myth at the start of the film states. The scene is shot in a highly intimate manner as the camera, and thus the viewer, literally stands steps away from the two naked bodies; one of these bodies lies as an empty object, motionless, on the bed, seemingly intoxicated, and thus the viewer gets the impression of being the one in control as the lying body does not seem to have any of his own; because this scene is visually flat and has a more "realistic" feel, the elements of fantasy that the representation and imagination of a sexual act often has in the dominant culture are absent. Thus, this scene, for an audience who belongs to the dominant culture and is looking for the paradise the title of the film claims, appears almost "sad" – Eli's sexuality does not seem intimate, there seems to be no emotions involved, and the sexual act does not comply with the "illusion" the dominant

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culture expects from sex. This scene, thus, legitimizes placing Juchitán in a different space where "we" get to keep "our" control, "our" illusions, "our" intimacy, and "our" fantasies, differently from "them," where their incomprehensible social order does not even fit within "our" perception of paradise.

Regardless of what 2002 *Queer Paradise* aims to present, even in its title, through this scene the viewer is told that the male homosexual community has not found a "paradise." In this sense, it is not that the films, by turning Juchitán into a heterotopia of deviation, create a space where everyone is allowed to be who they really are, as opposed to the way people are in what Cronon calls the "unnatural civilized" world, as I examined in Chapter 3. Instead, through the films Juchitán becomes a place where, like the institutionalized places Foucault describes as heterotopias of deviation, people's behavior within the community are under constant surveillance. To understand how this happens in the films, in his book *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault uses Jeremy Bentham's "Panopticon," a prison's design in which one body can watch over every prisoner while remaining unseen, in order to examine the disciplinary power of modern societies.[173] In his examination Foucault argues, like he does in *The History of Sexuality*, that subjects internalize the norms of "right" behavior and thus, he would argue that within Juchitán, as a heterotopia of deviation where *muxes* are seemingly "free" to be who they are, their sexuality is, too, discursively controlled.[174] Thus, by representing Juchitán as a heterotopia of deviation, the films sustain the dominant culture's perception of "right" and "appropriate" behavior. Furthermore, when something is in disorder it is easy to point at the regulations and organizing features that are being broken, but when something is ordered it is more difficult to see that there are in fact regulations that maintain such order. Thus, representing Juchitán as a non-institutionalized heterotopia of deviation, as an "anomaly" where the sack of San Vicente Ferrer broke and spilled out homosexuals, the "dominant"

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[173] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 195-209.
[174] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 3-13.

methods of control and containment of sexuality and gender are kept invisible within the dominant culture, like the police in the Panopticon, despite their presence, because their function does maintain the order that is not found in that Other disorderly space.

Importantly, by turning Juchitán into a heterotopia of deviation the dominant culture becomes the main referent against which everything else is contrasted. Whatever lies in that Other space it is only in reference to "us," like there is something in the mirror in front of which "we" stand, just like there is another side of the same coin in which "our" side is the one looking up. Because the "I" and the "us" is always the referent, it becomes a matter of where the power lies because even if the roles between the two spaces were to change, the conditions would be the same, the coin will always have two sides, the Other will never be the "I," and the mirror's reflection is not what gives it its form. The differences between one side of the coin and the other might not in fact be too different, but the power of the "referent" to determine the image of the reflection remains in all cases. In this sense, even though the films have good intentions, the representation of Juchitán gets its referent from the dominant culture because, as I examined earlier, normative notions of gender and sexuality are prevalent within Juchitán, and yet, like I argued in Chapter 3, "our" power to dominate is well disguised. Similar to how Said conceived the Orient as necessary for the West to construct itself as the one in power, and Pratt identified how Europe constructed itself by coming into contact with people from distant lands, the dominant culture too, needs places like Juchitán, places trapped in ideas of disorder and pre-modern states, in order to establish itself as the norm. The fact that these processes are happening through gender and sexuality points at their extraordinary regulatory power, a point not lost on Foucault. In his examination of sexuality, Foucault argues that sexuality is a powerful mode of control in modern societies because people internalize norms and thus, each individual exerts society's control upon him/herself.[175] In this

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[175] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 17-35.

sense, one could argue that in Juchitán people have not internalized the norms of modern society, at least not fully, and thus, through its representation as a heterotopia of deviation, as a place that is unintelligible, one can see how modern societies seem to depend on well-defined categories and normative notions of sexuality and gender to maintain a "dominant," "intelligible," and "orderly" society.

In the concluding lines of 2005 *Queer Paradise*, the narrator says:

> … their open-mindedness is completely natural for them and they are always surprised to hear that else where, even in the so-called developed countries, gays must still fight for their rights. When you think about it it's really a shame that San Vicente Ferrer dropped his bag of queers in Juchitán because it deprived so many countries of the rightful God given share.[176]

In this sense, instead of existing as a place that involves a form of "resistance," Juchitán, as a heterotopia of deviation, is a place where the deviant individuals, those who, according to Foucault, need to be corrected, classified, normalized, and excluded, exist. By situating a seemingly fluid and heterogeneous system of gender and sexuality onto an Other space, the films stop the possibility for the dominant culture to have, as the quote above says, its "rightful share." Furthermore, the *muxes* can only be "accepted" as *muxes* within that space, for elsewhere, outside of Juchitán, they would be cataloged and identified as transvestites, homosexuals, fags, gays, deviants, etc. Also, women, as I examined in Chapter 1, as powerful and public members of the community can only be situated in that Other space that "allows" their public participation in the society. In this sense, Juchitán as a heterotopia of deviation is a place of exclusion where deviants are simultaneously invisible from "our" space and visible in order to keep them elsewhere and have control over the social order from which "we" look at them from.

If "visibility is a trap,"[177] as Foucault explains, then Foucault would argue that it is through the films' visibility of the *muxes* and the women within Juchitán, as well as the

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[176] *Juchitan Queer Paradise*, directed by Patricio Henríquez (2002).
[177] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 200.

construction of the visibility of Juchitán in the films, that the "modern" society can exercise its regulatory and controlling systems of power and knowledge. Therefore, the films' representation of Juchitán as a place where sexuality and gender are fluid and heterogeneous, establish an actual spatial distinction between that Other unintelligible space, with a visible disorder, and "ours." Furthermore, the establishment of this distance based on an unalterable difference disguises the fluidity and heterogeneity of sexuality and gender that exists within the dominant culture where the norms for proper behavior have been internalized more fully. It appears that the reason why the difference between the dominant culture and Juchitan is so easily and powerfully established is based on the representation of Juchitán's visible indigeneity and traditions that root it in a pre-modern state. It is the distance Juchitán seems to have with modernity and the owners of knowledge production that explains why *Juchitecos* cannot monitor themselves. Thus, as Foucault argues, where sex is a "'police' matter" it does not mean that there is "repression of disorder, but [rather] an ordered maximization of collective and individual forces."[178] Thus, Juchitán, through the compensatory function of the heterotopia of deviation, provides an opposite image against which the Self can define itself, and it is disorderly, the dominant culture is not. Furthermore, because this disorder is not really repressed, as Foucault would argue, and instead is made visible and excluded, then the *confrontation* function of the heterotopia of deviation maximizes the "collective and individual forces"[179] of the normative mechanisms of sexuality and gender, like man/woman dichotomy, that the dominant culture is confronted with. In this process, because norms are internalized, *confrontation* also works to keep the dominant culture's regulatory mechanisms invisible in its space, particularly because they are only visible in places like Juchitán where there seems to be a disorder. Thus, despite their intentions, the films reinstate hegemonic notions of gender and sexuality while the idea of a modern society seems to depend on gender

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[178] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 24-25.
[179] Ibid.

and sex to organize itself - it is through gender and sex that norms are effectively internalized and, thus, help maintain a modern social order and a clear taxonomy needed for a peaceful living in an intelligible place.

Conclusion

> This is Juchitán, Juchitán de Zaragoza for the historians and politicians, for the Nahuatl, Ixtaxochitlan, Juchitán of the flowers, Juchitán de San Vicente for the Catholic, Juchitán of the "drag queens," Muxetlan for others, and for the *gringos* and other foreigners, Juchitán –The Queer paradise.
> – Eli cheerfully explains in 2005 *Muxes, Authentic, Intrepid Seekers of Danger*

Through my thesis I examined how four documentary films made during the 21st century construct Juchitán as a place that is Other from "ours," the dominant Western world, based on its seemingly distinct gender and sexuality system. With an emphasis on the positive status of women and the community's recognized "third gender," the *muxe*, the films construct a complex image of Juchitán that results in its Othering. Through the notion of the authentic, I examined how the films' representation of Juchitán link gender and sexual identities to ideas about nature, wilderness, and notions of the past, thus rooting Juchitán in a pre-modern state, which make it morally worthy of benevolent preservation and results in the separation of their space and "ours." In doing so, I examined the relationships of uneven power that develop from the contact between the dominant culture and Juchitán and note that even within Juchitán, normative notions of gender and sexuality are prevalent. As Eli nicely points out, Juchitán can be called many names that carry with them a variety of meanings that depend on the onlooker, and as such, throughout my thesis I worked with the premise that there are multiple Others and multiple Selves. Furthermore, because the films represent "our" inability to understand a place like Juchitán, where seemingly incompatible elements come together, something Eli's quote also suggests, I examined how the films turn Juchitán into a heterotopia, which Foucault defines as a real place that is "absolutely different" from all the sites it contains and reflects. Because the exotization of Juchitán is gendered and sexualized, I

argued that through the films, Juchitán, in fact, becomes a heterotopia of deviation, which Foucault explains as a place where people who fall outside the norm are situated. Thus, because Juchitán seems to have an "inappropriate" disorder, one that breaks the logic of "our" system of thought and make seemingly incompatible things combine, it creates the illusion that "our" space could never be like Juchitán. And, normative notions of gender and sexuality, as well as well-defined categories, are established as the "right" ones because they are able to maintain a modern and intelligible order, as opposed to places like Juchitán. As such, through the films, the West is established as the norm, and, regardless of the filmmakers' intentions, the films reinstate hegemonic notions of gender and sexuality as organizing features of modern society.

Perhaps the most interesting idea is that illusions have a material impact in the world. As it can be seen through my analysis of the films, and as authors like Said and Trouillot have emphasized, the West constructs itself, legitimizes its power, and universalizes its social order, in opposition to places that are imagined as savage, pre-modern, and disorderly. It is important, however, to note that the West has an ongoing ambivalent relationship with modernity that feeds from the visibility of the unequal human relationships it seems to encourage. In Chapter 1, for example, I noted how Flaherty created the world of the savage Eskimo as a utopia, an ideal place away from the discontents of civilization. In this sense, ideas about places constructed and imagined as closer to nature, the primitive, and even the savage, are not divorced from the idea of utopia or paradise. Thus, although I argued in Chapter 4 that Juchitán stands as a disorderly place because, as Foucault would argue, it breaks the "syntax" of "appropriate" thinking by combining incompatible elements, I see how it also reflects the filmmakers' quest, particularly from the 2002 *Queer Paradise* and 2000 *Blossoms of fire*, to find a paradise where sexuality and gender are less policed. In fact, it would have made an interesting study to focus on the perception of notions of paradise within

and outside of Juchitán. As one can see through Eli's quote at the beginning of this section, the perception of paradise depends on the level of disenchantment with modernity the onlooker has. Perhaps it is also the recognition of the universalizing power of modern society what keeps this paradise – the illusion of its existence – away from the pollution of modernity consequently rooting such places, like Juchitán, in the primitive, the savage, and the disorderly. This is why my focus on the disorder of Juchitán, which Foucault would term "inappropriate," is important because it builds on the understanding that the very mechanisms of liberation, such as representation and the imagining of ideal places, are precisely the same as those through which norms get reinstated.

Furthermore, through a long-established European history of representing Other places, processes of colonization and marginalization of groups can go unquestioned, and with them, so do the homogenizing projects of categorization. Thus, it is through these processes that, as Herdt would argue, multiple identities are "lumped together" marking whatever falls outside the norm as the "unclassifiable" and thus, legitimizing its marginalization. While two of the films I focused on more successfully show the fluidity and heterogeneity within one single category, *muxe,* like 2005 *Authentic, intrepid seekers of danger* and 2007 *Muxes of Juchitan*, they still needed to use an all-encompassing category to refer to the multiplicity of experiences of homosexual men in Juchitán, which is in fact what the community of Juchitán also does by calling it a "third gender." This "lumping together" disguises the fact that in Juchitán the "third gender" category does not challenge gender or sexual dimorphism, which I examined in Chapter 2. Although I took a critical position throughout my thesis, and tried to escape the homogenizing identity categories I problematize, I was not able to escape inflexible language. Thus, I empirically faced the type of control Foucault finds in the power of discourse in modern society. However, as it can be seen through my analysis, I found that the representation of Juchitán in the films did, to an extent, show fluidity and heterogeneity of

sexual and gender identities, even if restrained by their use of the word *muxe*. Thus, it is perhaps through certain types of representation, such as film and painting, maybe music, and others, that one can escape language, even if subtly. In spite of this quality, when the films make visible the seemingly incomprehensible sexual and gender order of Juchitán, they end up Othering it. And thus, because the West constructs itself in opposition to its Other, the representation of Juchitán forecloses the possibility that its apparent fluidity and heterogeneity of gender and sexual identities could ever be found within a modern society, where well-defined categories, such as man and woman, are the base upon which a civilized order is sustained. In this sense, illusions constructed through representations of Other places, not only establish uneven relationships of power where the West maintains its dominance and legitimizes the marginalization of actual groups of people, but it also establishes that the "right" societal order is one where the "catalogue" has the "right" categories.

By focusing on film, a medium that, as Minh-ha explains, creates a "space in which meaning remains fascinated by what escapes and exceeds it,"[180] I was only able to look at specific issues out of the innumerable elements I could have focused on. Furthermore, as Minh-Ha and Perkins suggest, there are as many ways of interpreting films as there are people in the world. Thus, my focus on certain elements and my interpretation of the films, both of which are part of the limitations of my study, are also a reflection of the medium's potentiality because, even though each film has an ordered and closed narrative,[181] there is an openness of meaning. Furthermore, documentary film is a particularly relevant genre to study issues of representation, particularly in regards to the representation of gender and sexuality, because it reflects the filmmaker's context, it presents arguments about the world, and it makes imaginary constructions of real places seem "real." In other words, it is as powerful medium for Othering but it is also one able to reflect larger realities, as I examined in Chapter

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[180] Minh-Ha, "No Master Territories," in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, 105.
[181] Ibid.

2. And, as I have argued, illusions about places have consequences because they are able to create and maintain uneven power relationships between actual groups of people.

Because everywhere we turn there are representations, it is important to look at how the issues I have noted in the representation of Juchitán could function in other mediums of representation, or how they could apply to other places. Because I focused on one particular city in Mexico, the types of exotization I described, such as the link with the nature, the notion of a traditional community rooted in the past, and the seemingly incompatible elements coming together within one space, may not specifically address processes that occur in places like India, for example, or the Balkans. However, throughout my thesis I built my argument based on what I observed in four films whose directors all came from different countries, which allowed me to perceive the nesting of Orientalisms where multiple Others and multiple Selves continue to proliferate through the intersections of ethnicity, sexuality, gender, race, etc. Furthermore, I decided to give particular attention to the 2002 film *Queer Paradise* because it is the one that most clearly, to me, exoticizes Juchitán as a place "like no other." This particular focus enabled to look at larger processes and move my analysis beyond the specificities of Juchitán. For example, by looking at the representation of Juchitán in this film, I examined how the notion of cultural "authenticity" intersects with ideas about ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. In doing so, I was able to consider the impact the notion of "authenticity" has on the delineation and maintenance of unbalanced power relationships through ideas about space.

Although I have taken a critical position, I enjoyed all four films I used for my analysis. As I mentioned in the introduction, I encountered Juchitán through 2005 *Muxes, Authentic, Intrepid Seekers of Danger.* Throughout my writing process I have asked myself one question: why did I buy that film in the first place?

I have, partially if only, found my answer through this process. Places like Juchitán, like sex for Foucault, are the necessary silenced secrets waiting to be discovered and divulged. Foucault explains, "[w]hat is peculiar to modern societies, in fact, is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum,* while exploiting it as *the* secret."[182] Thus, the answer to my question – why did I buy that film in the first place? – may be true for anyone who has ever felt any sort of pleasure/satisfaction/desire in reading a National Geographic or watching a BBC documentary, or engaged with any other form through which "cultures" get represented. The answer is simple: I am like a fish. I am curiously attracted to the shiny things I am unable to see in my space—and I clarify, it is not that they do not exist. Foucault would argue that what we find in a place like Juchitán, a seemingly fluid and heterogeneous system of sex and gender, has been silenced and made invisible in "our" space because it is precisely through the breaking of the silence and the construction of visibility of the secret, of sex, of the deviant, of Juchitán, that modern society can exercise its control and regulatory systems of power and knowledge.[183] Interestingly, during the past few decades documentary filmmakers, and audiences, have found interest in films that discuss alternative sexualities and gender. The films I focused on, for example, were all made during the past eleven years. Perhaps the rise of feminist studies, the human rights discourse, and the gay movement, have all had an influence on the proliferation of this thematic choice in documentary filmmaking. Because sex and gender inequalities need to be talked about and the conversation needs a space in people's imagination, film can be an useful medium. Thus, it is through studies like mine that filmmakers with a liberatory agenda may find a new approach to establish a conversation without reinstating the telling of the secret. Through its revelatory quality, instead of its

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[182] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 35.
[183] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 200.

Othering power, film, as I found through my study, is actually able to escape, even if subtly, the inflexibility of language, and thus, it deserves our attention.

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Muxes, Authentic, Intrepid Seekers of Danger, DVD, directed by Alejandra Islas (2005; New York: Ethnoscope Film and Video, 2006).

Muxes of Juchitan, DVD, directed by Yorgos Avgeropolous (2007; Athens: Small Planet, 2007).

Background Films
(By year)

Le Voyage dans la lune, directed by George Méliès (1902).

Chronique d'un été, directed by Jean Rouch, (1960).

Petit à Petit, directed by Jean Rouch, (1971).