

Maja Horn - Second Book Project/Proposal (in progress)

*Queer Dominican Moves:
Strategies of Relation, of the Tacit, and of Translation
in Dominican Literature, Visual and Performing Arts*

In the past decade a new wave of legal recognitions of sexual rights, same-sex couples, marriage, and families swept Latin America. These developments were surprising to many, given the longstanding and broadly shared perception of the South Americas as more homophobic than the North Americas. This disjuncture between such commonplace views and actual political developments in the region reflects a notable lack of understanding of the historical, political, and cultural processes that prepared Latin American societies to move toward such forms of legal recognition. I suggest that this is due to how the region's path toward greater sexual rights has not necessarily followed paths envisioned by the globalized LGBT movement, and it has hence remained largely illegible to the outside world. My book helps to account for the specificity of Latin American trajectories toward new sexual rights by highlighting some of the cultural strategies that, without drawing from LGBT repertoires of "coming out", claiming rights, and visibility, have helped pave the way for greater public acceptance of expressions of same-sex desire in the Dominican Republic.

The Dominican Republic is a particularly interesting case of study, given that the country is generally thought to "lag behind" the region's political and legal progress toward greater sexual rights. Such evaluations depend largely on the comparatively low number of formal LGBT organizations and especially on the "late" arrival of pride marches in the country; the first official pride march (or "caravan" as it is called) took place in 2008, compare this to Mexico's first pride march in 1982. Yet, if one pays attention only to such globally recognized forms LGBT mobilization, one erases a substantial history of Dominican artistic productions—in the visual arts, theatre, literature, and popular music—that have placed same-sex desires in the public realm yet without drawing from LGBT identity and sexual rights discourses. Indeed, the only anthology of Caribbean lesbian and gay creative expressions, *Our Caribbean: A Gathering of Lesbian and Gay Writing from the Antilles* (Duke UP, 2008) gives a notably impoverished view of Dominican representations of same-sex desire; as the editor himself notes, this is due in part to the rejection of identity categories such as "gay" and "lesbian."

Contesting this presumable scarcity of Dominican representations of same-sex desire, my book project recuperates a substantial corpus of Dominican creative work that has publicly addressed same-sex desire but that is lost if one only looks for explicit uses of gay and lesbian identity. My study of Dominican writers Hilma Contreras (1913-2006), Rita Indiana Hernández (*1977), and Rey Andújar (*1977), visual artists Nelson Ricart-Guerrero (*1953) and Jorge Pineda (*1964), and playwright and performer Waddys Jáquez (196?) shows how these prominent and nationally well-known figures bring representations of same-sex to a broad Dominican audience. Specifically, I foreground a plethora of creative works produced after the "full" return to democracy in 1996, with the end of the second

Joaquín Balaguer government (1986-1996) and the first Leonel Fernández's presidency (1996-2000; 2004-2012), until 2006, which saw the first openly government-sponsored sexual rights event that signaled the definite arrival and incipient institutionalization of global LGBT discourses and strategies in the country. During this key decade the country greatly opened itself up to outside forces and influences and embraced ideas of economic, political, and cultural modernization. This included a widespread circulation in the national media of international and U.S. LGBT discourses and cultural imaginaries. Yet, despite the ready availability of global LGBT discourses and images, and despite having spent significant time abroad in the U.S. and Europe, the Dominican artists and writers I study chose not to employ this global LGBT imaginary and instead relied on various autochthonous strategies for broaching same-sex desire.

My recuperation of these various autochthonous strategies—including of the tacit, of relation, and of translation—makes an important scholarly intervention in at least four ways; 1) most immediately, I revise prevailing conceptions that there have been scarcely any public expressions of same-sex desire in the Dominican Republic until recently 2) I flesh out the cultural and political alternatives that emerge in these creative works to what has become a “*lingua franca* of human rights and sexual and reproductive rights and health” in Latin America, and I thereby help to push against the resulting “containment of the political imagination, rendering alternatives ineffective, if not unthinkable” (Pecheny and de la Dehesa 108). 3) I offer a revision of the framework for understanding the oft-noted difference of Latin American and Latino same-sex practices from the Northern American and European emphasis on “coming out of the closet,” visibility, and gay and lesbian identity. Namely, I suggest that rather than approaching such differences as “traditionally” Latin American vis-à-vis “modern” northern LGBT forms of subjectivity and politics, these are better thought of as “modern” responses to globally hegemonic LGBT discourses that emerge out of postcolonial societies and their contradictory relation with liberal democracy and its key notions of the private/public sphere and of the liberal political subject. This argument builds on the work of eminent scholars such as José Quiroga, Roger Lancaster, and Ben. Sifuentes-Jaúregui that has foregrounded the difference of Latin American and Latino same-sex desire, and furthers their arguments by showing how this “traditional” difference emerged out of constraints specific to postcolonial contexts. 4) Lastly, I suggest how the creative strategies and their underlying epistemologies – strategic forms of the tacit (as theorized by Carlos U. Decena), of relationality, and of translation – answer to current critical challenges in U.S. queer studies and usefully extend conceptual frameworks by theorists José E. Muñoz and Wendy Brown.

Ch.1 *Dominican Same-Sex Trajectories: Colonial Legacies, Imperial Forces, and Global Impulses*. This introductory chapter discusses the historical, political, and cultural formations that have shaped today's Dominican same-sex practices in the interstices of colonial legacies, imperial forces, and global impulses in the Dominican Republic. I suggest how contemporary forms of public scrutiny of sex-gender norms, rather than constituting a longstanding “tradition” emerged

in the modern crux of these legacies' interaction with globalizing processes and new Dominican mainstream media representations of LGBT subjects.

Section 1: *Beyond Speech and Silence*

Ch.2 *Anthologizing Dominican Same-Sex Desires: Hilma Contreras Speaks of Silence.*

I compare three literary anthologies, two Dominican and one U.S. collection, and note the problematic outcome of forcefully mapping "gay" and "lesbian" onto Dominican literary production and how it erases local forms of negotiating same-sex desire. Drawing from Carlos U. Decena's useful concept of the "tacit," I foreground such negotiations of same-sex desire in the writing of Hilma Contreras, the first woman to win the Dominican national literary prize in 2002, and suggest how they bear on ongoing debates by critics such as Wendy Brown and Kenneth Ferguson about the ethical and political dimensions of silence.

Ch.3 *Queer Dominican Returns and Relations: Nelson Ricart-Guerrero's Verbal and Visual Poetics.*

I analyze Nelson Ricart-Guerrero's charged homoerotic poetic and visual oeuvre and its challenge to the binary of speech/silence, and how his works imagine a path toward greater sexual justice beyond blithe narratives of progress that echo forms of queer futurity as conceptualized by José E. Muñoz.

Section 2: *Subjects in Relation*

Ch.4 *Waddys Jáquez's Performances of Queer Diasporic Survival.*

This chapter discusses the plays and same-sex subjects in the plays ("P.A.R.G.O.," 2001, and "CERO," 2007) of the acclaimed writer, performer, and director Waddys Jáquez, who is part of the Dominican diaspora in New York but who continuously returns to the island to perform his work there. I show how Jáquez foregrounds inter-subjective relations and shared commonalities, rather than individualizing (and pathologizing) his characters' same-sex desires, as a strategy for successfully pushing back Dominican injunctions to not make same-sex desires public.

Ch.5 *Rita Indiana Acts Out.*

This chapter addresses the emphasis on same-sex relations over individual identity in the novels, music and videos of the well-known Dominican writer and musician Rita Indiana Hernández whose idiosyncratic aesthetic and own androgynous looks have perhaps most boldly introduced same-sex desires and subjects to a broader Dominican audience.

Section 3: *Translating Same-Sex Desire*

Ch.6 *Rey Andújar's Translations of Dominican Same-Sex Desires.*

This chapter discusses the circuitous publication routes of Rey Emmanuel Andújar's novel *El hombre triángulo* (The Triangular Man, 2003; 2005) and shows how the process of being "translated" and made recognizable to a broader, non-Dominican audience, affects the representation of same-sex desire.

Ch.7 *Jorge Pineda's Queer Visualities.*

This chapter addresses how the (non-Dominican) framework of "queer" both enables and forestalls new critical understandings of the work of the visual artist Jorge Pineda, perhaps the most important contemporary Dominican visual artist today.