

Straight *Línea*

A phenomenological approach to women's response to *piropos* in contemporary Havana.



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Abstract

This thesis investigates women's feelings on being subjected to *piropos* (catcalling) in their everyday lives. Through interviews with four Cuban women living in Havana, I analyse women's experiences of *piropos* through a phenomenological lens and through speech theory, investigating how norms surrounding sexualities and gender are materialised in and between language, bodies and spaces. I also investigate which acts of resistance and defence mechanisms my interviewees employ in order to cope with *piropos*. The first part of the analysis investigates the gendered dimensions of *piropos*, discussing how it constitutes gendered subject positions while enforcing gender inequality. My interviewees describe how being subjected to *piropos* makes them feel more feminine and links the occurrence of *piropos* directly to their self-esteem. They also describe how the occurrence of *piropos* conditions their possibility to move freely around the city. In the second part of the analysis I look at *piropos* as a heterosexual game in which different rules apply depending on gender. Lastly, this thesis focuses on my interviewees' accounts of resistance by analysing silence as well as verbal responses to *piropos* as a way of breaking the rules of the heterosexual game.

Key words: *Piropos*, Catcalling, Heterosexuality, Cuba, Havana, Injurious Speech, Queer phenomenology, Sexualised Space, Women's feelings

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I know now what it is to self objectify. It's a really bad thing. It's walking alone in the street, your gaze nailed somewhere on the sidewalk, not knowing what to do with your arms. To hold out your arms like a shield in front of you, understanding that you're doing it to protect yourself from the men, because they don't allow you to experience them. They only allow themselves. They crawl out of restaurants, houses and cars and look at you like the circus just came to town and you can either watch out for them or expose yourself – but you can never just be there for you.¹

¹ Ramqvist, Karolina, *More fire: roman*, Modernista, Stockholm, 2015, p.122. (my translation)

Introduction.....	1
<i>Purpose of thesis and research questions</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Disposition.....</i>	<i>2</i>
Background.....	2
Previous Research.....	4
<i>Sexualised public spaces.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Piropos</i>	<i>6</i>
Effects of Stranger Harassment.....	8
Theoretical framework.....	9
<i>Sex/Gender and heterosexuality.....</i>	<i>9</i>
The heterosexual matrix	9
<i>Queer Phenomenology</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Injurious speech</i>	<i>13</i>
Method and Material.....	14
<i>Semi-structured interviews.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>A reflexive approach.....</i>	<i>16</i>
Colonial past and present	17
Language	17
Finding my informants	18
<i>My informants.....</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Material and analysis</i>	<i>19</i>
Analysis	20
<i>Sexed orientation.....</i>	<i>20</i>
Male space	20
Female disorientation	22
Becoming female	24
Sexed and the city	25
<i>The Game.....</i>	<i>28</i>
The Rulebook	29
Deceptive objective	30
Breaking the rules.....	31
Summary and conclusion	34
<i>Proposals for further research.....</i>	<i>36</i>
Bibliography	37
<i>Printed resources.....</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>Electronic resources.....</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>Material</i>	<i>39</i>
Appendix 1 - Interview guide.....	39

Introduction

Línea is the name of the wide street that runs through western Havana, all the way from Calle 26 in Vedado up to the iconic Hotel Nacional de Cuba, where it lies overlooking the Malécon and the ocean. *Línea* looks just like one expects a Cuban street to look like. It's lined with run-down colonial palaces in glaringly bright colours, with the occasional *¡Viva Fidel!* painted in red across the chipped plaster. Along the two-way street run old veteran cars, stopping sporadically to pick up and drop off passengers.

The street, *la calle*, is an important arena for everyday life in Havana. It is where you hang out, go on dates, wait in line, work and play dominoes on a Sunday afternoon. Indeed, the street is often a space used for transportation – to *get* to places – but it is also a space where one dwells, where everyday life happens. Feminist researchers have studied the lived reality of being a woman for decades, showing how different axes of power come together and intersect in producing and reproducing subject position and social relations through social practice. The street, like all other social arenas, is a space permeated by power relations manifested in various social practices. This thesis' interest lies in a very particular type of street interaction – the practice of *piropos*.

The Spanish word *piropo*² can be translated as a 'catcall' (a comment of a sexual nature made by a man to a passing woman) and is a very common feature in daily street interaction in Havana. What this thesis seeks to investigate is how being subjected to piropos on a daily basis might affect women, their relationship to their own bodies and public spaces. These issues will be approached with the help of Sara Ahmed's queer phenomenology together with speech theory through Judith Butler.

Purpose of thesis and research questions

The overarching aim of this thesis is to examine women's feelings on being subjected to piropos in their everyday lives. My aspiration is to use Sara Ahmed's theories on queer phenomenology to try and shed light on the complex relationship between sexed bodies and the spaces they inhabit, through the personal accounts of my informants. Further, this thesis will examine how norms surrounding sexuality and gender are materialised in language, bodies and spaces. These are issues that I will be discussing in this thesis, in attempting to answer my research questions, which are:

² Henceforth, the word piropos will be used without italicization

- How do my informants feel about being subjected to piropos?
- How do piropos affect their relationship to their own bodies, their place in public spaces and their relationships to others?
- Which defence strategies and acts of resistance do they practice in order to cope with piropos?

Disposition

On the following few pages I will present a short contextual background on women's social and political situation on Cuba. This will be followed by a section where I present and position my own research in relation to previous research relevant to my work. I will then account for my theoretical framework and methodological choices, which will lead up to my analysis. The analysis will be followed by a final discussion and suggestions for further research in the field.

Background

This chapter presents a contextual background of my field, focusing on women's social and political situation on Cuba. Initially, I will give a short overview of the Cuban feminist movement, followed by a discussion on women's social realities today. As this thesis seeks to investigate the personal accounts of my informants, I will also discuss some significant statements made by my informants and other women I came in contact with during my time in Havana.

Cuba is one of the few remaining communist one-party states in the world, isolated both geographically, politically and economically. Their colonial heritage and deeply problematic relationship to the U.S has left the economy highly vulnerable, affecting the daily lives and realities of it's inhabitants immensely. On paper, Cuba has come a long way in the struggle towards gender equality. For example, The World Economic Forum's 2016 Global Gender Gap Report ranks Cuba 27th among 135 countries. By comparison, the United States is on place 45, and Sweden on place 4. In the category of educational attainment, Cuba ranks as number 1, along with several other countries (Sweden, by comparison, is number 36), and in the category labeled political attainment, Cuba ranks as number 12 out of 144.³

The modern feminist movement in Cuba stems from the early days of the Cuban revolution, where equality for women was part of the fundamental social project. The

³ The World Economic Forum, *The Global Gender Gap Report 2016* (online), collected: 23.05.2017.

feminist movement in Cuba is therefore often referred to as a "revolution inside the revolution". In 1961, Fidel Castro founded The FMC (*Federación de Mujeres Cubanas*), with the purpose of incorporating women into the construction of socialism. More than 80 per cent of Cuban women today are members of the FMC and the organization has been the epicentre for the struggle for women's rights since its formation. The political leadership and the FMC have both adopted an economic approach to equality, focusing mainly on women's economic independence and participation in the work force. Since the 1970's, more focus has been put on reformulating women's traditional roles and stimulating new norms around sexuality and family, but it's political demands have kept on reproducing ideals of gender complementarity and women's function as mothers. Today, the debate around sexual politics is headed by the Cenosex (National Centre of Sexual Education) – an organization that represents a break with certain aspects of the revolutionary legacy, such as the institutionalised homophobia and masculinity ideals.⁴

The idea of the heterosexual couple and the 'traditional family-structure' permeates Cuban society, writes Lundgren, and is seen as the rightful foundation for social life. Heterosexual love is deeply permeated by gendered and sexualised ideals about men's sexual "drives" and women's sexual "needs", and a view of the love-relationship as a sort of ownership, where jealousy is a natural and desired ingredient.⁵ In Cuba, as in many other societies, there has been a long tradition of controlling female sexuality. In a Latin American context, Cuban legislation is be radical on some traditionally formulated women's rights – such as the right to abortion – but women's social realities are still characterised by ideas of gender complementarity and reproductive responsibility.⁶

Talking about gender inequality and women's rights in Havana proved an interesting, but somewhat infected subject. On the one hand, women I talked to were quick and willing to discuss the *machismo*⁷ ideals that permeate Cuban society and the negative effects these have on the every day lives of many women. On the other hand, gender inequality was often depicted as a non-issue for Cubans – as a problem other countries have, but not Cuba. One woman I met during a world music festival in Playa told me that we (non-Cubans) choose to see problems and inequality everywhere, but that I wouldn't find such tendencies in Cuba even if I tried.

⁴Lundgren, Silje, *Heterosexual Havana: ideals and hierarchies of gender and sexuality in contemporary Cuba*, Diss, Department of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology, Uppsala University, 2011, p. 31-38.

⁵ Ibid., p.51-55.

⁶ Ibid., p, 37.

⁷ Masculinity ideals.

Many women I talked to, including my informants, often portrayed an essentialist view of sex, where being male or female was affiliated with different "natural traits". Men were often described as naturally aggressive and strong, and women calmer, more nurturing in their nature. I also noticed a recurring tendency of contrasting Latin American women to European women, where Latin American women were described as more sensual and hot-tempered in comparison to (us) cold Europeans.

Finally, I want to stress the importance of reading these accounts, as well as the accounts of my interviewees later on in this thesis, within their context. They are inevitably situated within the huge propaganda and censorship apparatus that is the Cuban state – whose very *raison d'être* is claiming equality – and in which criticising the state and its political leadership could be potentially life-threatening.

Previous Research

This section presents a summary of relevant research conducted on the topic of sexualised and gendered public spaces, with special attention towards a Cuban context. It will also present relevant research regarding stranger harassment and its effects in general and piropos in Cuba in particular. This summary will serve as background to what will then lead into my theoretical framework and to the analysis and discussion of my material.

Sexualised public spaces

An important starting point for this research is the understanding of the city as a gendered and sexualised space, my understanding of which is shaped by the book *Mapping Desire*. The editors Gill Valentine and David Bell have collected texts that study sexualities from a geographical perspective, exploring how sexual acts and identities are performed and consummated within the city.⁸ While *Mapping Desire* focuses mainly on queer spaces, I found that a focus on that which deviates from the norm worked by illuminating the role of the normative, the norm here being the heterosexual public arena.

In her study "(Hetero)sexing space: lesbian perceptions and experiences of everyday spaces" Gill Valentine lifts lesbian women's experiences of residing in public spaces. The women describe how they are restricted by heteronormativity in some very specific manners. For example not being able to hold hands with their partners in public spaces without being subjected to negative attention, being denied double rooms in hotels and tables at restaurants

⁸ Bell, David & Valentine, Gill (eds.), *Mapping desire: geographies of sexualities*, Routledge, London, 1995.

and becoming harassed after not responding to sexual advances made by men.⁹ Valentine writes that the heterosexual norm is so strong that individuals included in it cannot see and identify its practices and how these practices in turn shape public spaces.¹⁰ Her study shows how open public spaces such as a city-street, is a space shaped by heterosexual practices that exclude people – in this case lesbian women – that transgress norms of heterosexuality. She points at straight bodies' habitual heterosexual practices, such as handholding or dressing typically "male" or "female", but also on the inherent heterosexuality of public spaces in the shape of for example advertising permeated by heterosexual love and desire.¹¹

My perception of the sexualised city of Havana resembles that of Silje Lundgren, as presented in her dissertation *Heterosexual Havana: Ideals and hierarchies of gender and sexuality in contemporary Cuba*. Lundgren debates how the street in Havana is a sexualised and gendered arena, dominated by men. The expression "to take to the streets" for example, is common among men in Cuba, and refers to an escape from the control of their wives and mothers that they experience at home. She also notes how the street is a place for public display, where both men and women dress up in special street clothing (as opposed to clothes worn in the house) that portray normative gendered ideals of appearance.¹² According to Lundgren, the arena of the street in Havana has been appropriated as a symbolically male space, in which the male gaze holds the power to examine, evaluate and desire the female body. This appropriation manifests itself in various manners, where the practice of piropos is the most common and evident. Other than piropos, Lundgren mentions *tiradores* (men who masturbate publicly), and *camellos* (physical harassment on crowded buses) as typical sexualised elements that threaten women in the streets of Havana.¹³

A different view of the sexualised city can be found in Elizabeth Wilson's book *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women*. For Wilson, rather than being a threat to women, the city constitutes a space of possibilities and liberation. The city enables freedom, she argues, in its disorder. It's a place where strangers meet and roads intersect, that offer endless possibilities of temporary social connections, anonymous sex and a freedom from traditional social intercourse. Herein lies the possibilities for women's liberation. Wilson criticises the portrayal of cities as dominantly masculine arenas in which

⁹ Valentine, Gill, "(Heterosexing space: lesbian perceptions and experiences of everyday spaces". *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 11, s, 395-413, 1993, s. 407ff.

¹⁰ Ibid., s. 396.

¹¹ Ibid., s.408.

¹² Lundgren, *Heterosexual Havana*, p. 96.

¹³ Ibid., p. 113ff.

women are depicted as passive victims, and points out how the study of women through the male gaze runs the risk of reducing women to symbols, depriving them of subjectivity.¹⁴

In the article "Det urbana som erotisk arena", Thomas Johansson criticises Wilson's views of female liberation in the city of ignoring the important aspect of sexual violence. Within cities, Johansson writes, we find widespread male violence directed towards women in both the private and public sphere. And while women may very well find an opportunity for liberation within the city's public sphere, male violence towards women must be seen from a structural perspective, in which patriarchal structures condition women's possibilities to move freely in public spaces without running the risk of being exposed to different types of gendered violence.¹⁵ My own research lies in the intersection of above presented standpoints. While I agree with Wilson on the importance of not reproducing an image of women as passive victims and subsequently rob them of agency, I consider it important to recognise and analyse the conditioned possibilities under which women can move in public arenas. This, after all, represents an important part of this research.

Piropos

Much of my understanding of the practice of piropos is based on the research of Swedish cultural anthropologist Silje Lundgren's field work in Cuba. In her dissertation as well as in follow up articles, she illuminates the interrelation between gender and sexuality in Cuban society, showing that gendered ideals and behaviours are tightly connected to ideas of eroticised gender complementarity. In her article "'Mami, you're so hot!' Negotiating hierarchies of masculinity through piropos in contemporary Havana", Silje Lundgren investigates the phenomenon of piropos mainly as a way to negotiate hierarchies of masculinity. She interprets piropos as a form of homosocial interaction, used to express and manifest masculinity in relation to other men, rather than as an expression of heterosexual desire.

Lundgren divides piropos into two main categories: piropos *bonitos* and piropos *groseros*, where the former consists of beautiful comments and compliments, and the latter of offensive or rude comments or gestures. Through interviews with Cuban men, she shows how there lies male prestige in performing the most successful piropo *bonito*, that is, a beautiful,

¹⁴ Wilson, Elizabeth, *The sphinx in the city: urban life, the control of disorder, and women*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Calif., 1992, p.84ff.

¹⁵ Johansson, Thomas, 'Det urbana som erotisk arena', in Johansson, Thomas & Sernhede, Ove (eds.), *Urbanitetens omvandlingar: kultur och identitet i den postindustriella staden*, Daidalos, Göteborg, 2004, p. 176-180.

witty and original comment. Men who are daring, funny and intelligent enough to come up with a successful piropo are admired and acquire leading positions in social groups. This way, piropos work to establish a hierarchy among men, where the most courageous man in the group assumes the hegemonic position.¹⁶ The interviews also reveal how men tend to care more about how a piropo makes them look in front of other men, rather than how they are viewed in the eyes of women. Lundgren thus argues that women could be considered as mere channels or instruments to communicate and measure strength between men.¹⁷

Lundgren also interviews women on their reactions to piropos. Her female interlocutors' reactions range from feelings of flattery and thankfulness, to anger and dejection. The reactions are also strongly affected by context, and variables such as age, class and race of the man doing the catcalling clearly influences how the piropo is received. Whether a piropo is perceived as a negative or a positive experience for the woman in question is then not only dependent on what is said, but also on who is doing the talking, and in which situation. Several of the women who were interviewed applied a range of creative challenging strategies in order to cope with and challenge piropos. Lundgren understands these as methods to challenge the male symbolic power over the arena of the street, and as efforts to re-conquer the same.¹⁸

Similar analyses of piropos are made by others. In their study "Masculinities in Cuba: Description and Analysis of a Case Study from a Gender Perspective", writers Hernández, Pita and de Juan link piropos to the notion of machismo-culture. The term *Machismo* is a term commonly used to describe hegemonic masculinity in Latin America, according to which "[B]eing a man means being a provider, heterosexual, active, fearless, [one who] resolves conflict by means of violence, does not bow down, and maintains control, power and confidence."¹⁹ The *Machismo*-culture permeates every part of Cuban society, they continue, and men are socialised from a young age to behave accordingly. Piropos is one of the more blatant and violent effects of this culture, according to the authors.²⁰

¹⁶ Lundgren, Silje, '“ Mami , you're so hot!’ negotiating hierarchies of masculinity through piropos in contemporary Havana', (online), *Stockholm Review of Latin American Studies.*, 9, 5-20, 2013, p.7f.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.9.

¹⁸ Lundgren, *Heterosexual Havana*, p. 96f.

¹⁹ Hernández, Formental, Hernández, Pita, & de Juan, Fernández, 'Masculinities in Cuba: Description and Analysis of a Case Study from a Gender Perspective.' in *Masculinities & Social Change*, 3(3), p. 220-247. 2014. p. 223.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

Effects of Stranger Harassment

Finally, this thesis seeks to investigate women's feelings and reactions to being subjected to piropos. It is therefore to be read within a larger tradition of research on sexual harassment towards women in general, and on piropos in particular. Piropos falls under the somewhat more narrow category labelled stranger harassment, a topic which tends to have been somewhat overlooked in the research on sexual harassment, according to psychology researchers Fairchild and Rudman.²¹

In the article "Everyday Stranger Harassment and Women's objectification", psychology researchers Fairchild and Rudman examine how women's mental health might be affected by being subjected to stranger harassment in their every day lives. Stranger harassment is used here to describe different kinds of verbal and non-verbal communication, such as whistling, leering, winking, groping or comments of a sexual nature that evaluate women's appearance and her presence in public. Their research suggest that stranger harassment is a frequent experience for women and that it affects many women negatively. According to the article, common reactions among women are feelings of self-blame and shame, self-objectification and an increased fear of rape and other physical sexual violence.²²

One point of interest in this thesis is the practice of self-objectification. Psychology professors Fredrickson and Roberts article "Objectification Theory - Towards Understanding Women's lived Experiences and mental Health Risks", theorises the feeling of being objectified and the consequences that this might have on women's mental health. Sexual objectification, they write, is what occurs when a body is separated from the person and reduced to a mere instrument of pleasure to be enjoyed by others.²³ A critical repercussion of being viewed by others in sexually objectifying ways is an internalization of an observer's perspective on one's physical self, an effect they term *self-objectification*. Self-objectification can, in turn, lead to habitual and destructive body-monitoring and increase feelings of shame and anxiety as well as depression, sexual dysfunction and eating disorders. In a culture that objectifies the female body, they write, women tend to self-objectify more than men.²⁴

²¹ Fairchild, Kimberly, & Rudman, Laurie A. 'Everyday stranger harassment and women's objectification.' in *Social Justice Research* 21.3, p. 338-357. 2008. p. 340.

²² *Ibid.*, p.341.

²³ Fredrickson, Barbara L. & Roberts, Tomi-Ann, 'Objectification theory: toward understanding women's lived experiences and mental health risks', in *Psychology of women quarterly.*, 21:2, p. 173-206, 1997, p. 174.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.173-180.

Theoretical framework

This section will present the theoretical framework used to approach and analyse the material for this thesis. It could be described as a small patchwork of theories, bound together by their mutual critical view on heterosexuality and of language and bodies as performative. These theories will, when bound together, help me approach the reciprocal impact of bodies, language and space and help me understand how norms surrounding sexuality and gender are materialised. Initially, I will give an account for my critical understanding of sex, gender and heterosexuality through the theories of Judith Butler. This will be followed by a presentation of Sara Ahmed's queer phenomenology and a discussion on how her theories are relevant to my research. Lastly, I present some of the main features of Butler's theories on hate speech.

Sex/Gender and heterosexuality

This thesis seeks to analyse women's feelings. In order to do so, one must first determine what constitutes a woman. I do not claim here to know what a woman *is*, but want to direct focus instead on how the subject position Woman comes into being and wins legitimacy. My theoretical understanding of the subject position Woman thus follows that of Judith Butler, as presented in her works *Gender trouble* and *Bodies that matter*.

Butler criticises the division between sex/gender in which the former is often regarded as a neutral, biological classification, and the latter its cultural inscription. Instead, she argues, both sex and gender are discursively produced and reproduced through language, and neither can exist outside a discursive universe permeated by power relations.²⁵ In Butler's view sex/gender is performative, meaning that gender attributes shape identities rather than express something already existing. Gendered norms regarding for example appearance, movement patterns and interests are constantly reiterated and materialised in bodies over time, thus creating the illusion of sex.²⁶

The heterosexual matrix

According to Butler, the construction of sexed bodies and the subsequent dichotomy between man/woman is inseparable from the notion of heterosexuality. She argues that the heterosexual matrix creates the distinction between the binary sexes by forcing bodies into two separate sexes that are expected to act according to their respective regulatory gender norms and to desire their opposites. Thus, sex/gender is produced and reproduced by the

²⁵ Butler, Judith, *Bodies that Matter. On the discursive limits of sex*, Routledge, London/New York, 1993, p. xi.

²⁶ Butler, Judith, *Genustrubbel: feminism och identitetens subversion*, Daidalos, Göteborg, 2007, s. 219f.

power of compulsory heterosexuality in which the two sexes are constructed as each others opposites.²⁷ Heterosexual desire is constantly reproduced through language and the habitual body and legitimises both heterosexuality and the binary gender identities through it's reiteration. It is through this process of eroticised heterosexual interplay that the binary appears universal, and that no outside position of "sex" is made possible.²⁸ Being a woman, then, means being understood within the logic of this heterosexual matrix, that is: having a body that is understood as female and acting in a way that is categorised as female. The heterosexual matrix, Butler states, is in it's very nature a distinct male sexual economy, in which gender hierarchies and compulsory heterosexuality constantly legitimise each other.²⁹

My use of the subject position Woman in this thesis relies on my informants' own understanding of themselves as women, substantiated by Butler's concept of the heterosexual matrix. With the help of Butler, I seek to analyse the interrelation between gender and heterosexuality in my informants' stories.

Queer Phenomenology

One of the bearing theoretical pillars of this thesis is that of queer phenomenology, understood through Sara Ahmed. I consider Ahmed's and Butler's theories as combinable insofar as they devote themselves to dissecting heteronormativity and how it comes to be. The main difference for me lies in their level of abstraction. While Butler resides on a more philosophical level, analysing how discourse, language and power are materialised in bodies, Ahmed's phenomenology starts and ends with the lived reality of the body. Below, I present some of the main features of Ahmed's queer phenomenology, as put forward in her articles "A phenomenology of whiteness" and "Orientations: towards a queer phenomenology".

From a phenomenological perspective, our point of departure in the world is the body. What we see, what is reachable to us, has to do with the body's "here" and which way we are turned. What a person sees, hears and touches, as well as their thoughts and feelings, are always directed towards something. This is what Sara Ahmed refers to as the *orientation* of bodies. Orientation, she writes, is about starting points. About where we start and where we go on from here. The starting point of orientation is the point from which the world extends into space, that is, the body's "here". And it is only through the "here" of the body that we can understand other things as "close" or "far" to this "here". What you come in contact with is shaped by what you do: bodies are orientated as they act in time and space and are also

²⁷ Butler, *Genustrubbel: feminism och identitetens subversion.*, p. 68ff.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 140ff.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 42f.

shaped by this contact with things. Thus, orientation is about intimacy between bodies and the spaces they inhabit.³⁰

Ahmed argues that bodies acquire orientation by repeating some actions over others. Some actions, directions and objects are accessible to us because of lines that we have already followed. These lines are performative as they are reproduced when we follow them – like a path that shows us where to walk but that is also created by the same trotting of feet. The lines are dependant on a constant repetition of norms, and every time we follow a line, the line itself is made stronger but is also rendered invisible, creating the illusion of the *straight line*.³¹ In "Orientations: Towards a queer phenomenology", Ahmed uses the concept of the straight line to show how heterosexuality is inherited as a social gift that one receives but also is pressured to aspire towards. Sex, gender and sexual orientation are kept on this straight line through pressuring force, and any nonalignment produces a queer effect. Bodies that follow the straight line without deviating, are orientated.³²

Being orientated, Ahmed writes, is feeling comfortable and at home in the world. This feeling of comfort becomes noticeable to us in the moment that we lose it: that is, when we experience the discomfort of not being comfortable. If feeling comfortable means being so at ease in one's setting that one cannot grasp where one's own body ends and the world begins, losing this feeling then – instead becoming uncomfortable or *disorientated* – means losing one's comfort and becoming aware of one's body and its contours.³³ The comfortable body is to Ahmed a body that can extend into space freely, a body that doesn't get pressured or questioned by glances, comments or suspicion. This body is invisible in the way that is isn't perceived as body at all.³⁴

If orientations are about how we begin from 'here', Ahmed writes, then they also involve unfolding. Public social and physical spaces are shaped by extending bodies habitual behaviours, so that the contours of these spaces become habitual themselves.³⁵ Not only bodies are oriented, then. Spaces also take shape by being orientated around some bodies more than others. In "A phenomenology of whiteness", Ahmed takes a phenomenological approach to the question of race and shows how whiteness can be thought of as an orientation that affects how bodies reside in space. Building on the works of Franz Fanon, Ahmed argues

³⁰ Ahmed, Sara, "A phenomenology of whiteness", in *Feminist Theory*, 8:2, p 149-168, 2007, p. 150ff.

³¹ Ahmed, Sara, "Orientations: toward a queer phenomenology", in *GLQ*, 12:4, s. 543-574, 2006. p. 554ff.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 557.

³³ Ahmed, "A phenomenology of whiteness", p. 156ff.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 129-141.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

that the (post)colonial world is by definition a white world, that is "ready" for some bodies more than others.³⁶ This allows the white bodies to extend into space, shaping, in turn, the contours of the spaces they inhabit, so that white bodies are made comfortable as they inhabit spaces that already lengthen their own shapes. This means that the space is orientated towards white bodies and vice versa and that this, in turn, affects how bodies that do not carry whiteness can expand (or rather not expand) in this space. Ahmed writes that "To be black in 'the white world' is to turn back towards itself, to become an object, which means not only being extended by the contours of the world, but being diminished as an effect of the bodily extension of others."³⁷ Bodies that are not allowed to expand freely get stopped, doubted and questioned – making the body itself a social stress point.³⁸

In my reading of Ahmed, I rely on her theories on comfortable expanding bodies and their effects on surrounding bodies, objects and space. I will apply these theories on the specificity of having a female body in a male symbolic space. Evidently, different power structures manifest themselves in different ways, creating different points of pressure. Being subjected to racial oppression is therefore not directly comparable with sexual or gendered oppression. However, there are noteworthy similarities between how women can be said to embody 'the other' in heterosexist spaces with how the black man becomes 'the other' in spaces orientated around whiteness, according to Ahmed. Building on these similarities then, I want to lift some key features of Ahmed's theories and apply them to my material. I do this with the awareness that Ahmed's theories on whiteness are not directly transferable to the question of gender oppression, and that certain important aspects might get lost in the translation.

There are evident similarities between Ahmed's performative straight line and Butler's performative gender. In combining Ahmed's concept of the straight line with Butler's heterosexual matrix, I want to argue that being orientated around and towards heterosexuality and following the straight line also includes an orientation towards sex. Imbedded in the straight line, then, includes not only following norms and expectations regarding (hetero)sexuality and desire, but also the normative expectations of what it means to be a sexed body - being either man or woman – and how one should behave accordingly.

For my research, this means that heteronormative and sexed orientations are created when people repeatedly direct themselves towards certain objects, bodies and spaces. For

³⁶ Ahmed, "A phenomenology of whiteness", p. 154.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 161.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 162f.

Ahmed, the term objects does not refer only to physical objects, but can be thoughts, aspirations, tendencies or, indeed, language. In *The cultural politics of emotion*, Ahmed introduces the concept of "stickiness". Stickiness, Ahmed writes, can be thought of as an "effect of the histories of contact between bodies, objects and signs"³⁹ and can thus be explained as a hegemonic interpretative prerogative that characterises a symbol, body, practice etc. Affects and associations stick to a symbol, for example, and that is what constitutes the cultural signification of said symbol.

Injurious speech

The focus of this thesis is piropos and its effects on women. In addressing piropos, one is inevitably forced to address the function and effects of language. Piropos is, after all, not only a social practice, but a practice mediated mainly through speech. Therefore, I will complete the theoretical framework for this thesis by weaving together Ahmed's theory of phenomenology with Judith Butlers theories on hate speech.

In *Excitable Speech*, Butler examines how language can function injuriously. She starts with explaining how a subject comes into being through language. To be addressed is to be interpellated, Butler writes. To be interpellated, in its turn, is to be constituted as a subject. "Language sustains the body not by bringing it into being or feeding it in a literal way; rather, it is by being interpellated within the terms of language that a certain social existence of the body first becomes possible."⁴⁰ An address or a call, she continues, does by no means "discover" a body, but it fundamentally constitutes it. The specificity of the address is naturally also of importance. If, for example, the address consists of being called an injurious name – one is not only fixed by this name, but consequently derogated and demeaned by it.

Drawing from the works of J.L Austin, Butler describes two different kinds of speech acts: the illocutionary and the perlocutionary. The illocutionary is an act that does what it says, in the moment of utterance. An example of such a speech act could be a judge pronouncing someone guilty of a crime, where the very pronouncing of guilt is what transforms a prosecuted person into a guilty person. A perlocutionary act is instead a speech act that produces certain effects as it's consequences: something is said and something else follows as its result. For instance, to relate to my own research, a compliment is expressed, resulting in the addressee feeling happy (or, indeed, something else).

³⁹ Ahmed, Sara, *The cultural politics of emotion*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2004, p. 89ff.

⁴⁰ Butler, Judith, *Excitable speech: a politics of the performative*, Routledge, New York, 1997, p. 5.

What constitutes injurious speech, then? To fully understand how words or utterances become offensive, Butler writes, one must try and understand how context is invoked and restaged at the moment of utterance. Injurious speech is not a fixed list of names, words or expressions that are, by nature, hateful or demeaning. Rather, it is an act marked by repetition and history – an act that that recalls prior acts and that requires a future repetition to endure.⁴¹ Understood through Ahmed's terminology, one could say that certain words, names or expressions work injuriously through "sticky" associations. Butler defines being injured by speech as suffering a loss of context, a loss of control, of not knowing where you are.⁴² This, I argue, is directly linkable to Ahmed's description of the bodily feeling of disorientation. With both Ahmed and Butler, language is then not only expressive, but performative, and sticks to bodies and spaces.

Butler argues that injurious speech is not only injurious as a perlocutionary act, but, in being part of the process of social interpellation, it also constitutes one's social position. Certain kinds of utterances, when delivered by those in position of power, have the effect of subordinating those to whom such utterances are addressed.⁴³ In relation to my research, this would mean that piropos, insofar as it is interpreted as injurious speech, can be seen as a way of continually resubordinating women.

But injurious speech is not always effective, Butler writes – as it also creates a possibility for resistance. "If to be addressed is to be interpellated, then the offensive call runs the risk of inaugurating a subject in speech who comes to use language to counter the offensive call."⁴⁴ Injurious speech, then, opens up the possibility of a response, and thereby the possibility for resistance.

Method and Material

In the following section I will present the method utilised to obtain my material, which will be followed by a short discussion on reflexivity and the ethics of interviewing. Finally, this section includes a brief introduction to my four interviewees and the method used to analyse the material.

⁴¹ Butler, Judith, *Excitable speech: a politics of the performative.*, p. 20.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 3ff.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 19-26.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

This thesis is based on four semi-structured reflexive interviews conducted during two months of field studies in Havana, Cuba. My methodological strategy is based on my reading of Heléne Thomssons book *Reflexiva Intervjuer*, in which she stresses the inherent subjectivity of the practice of interviewing and the importance of constant reflection on the interviewer's part. The semi-structured interview is a qualitative research method, which seeks to produce knowledge through personal experiences rather than establishing objective truths through generalization.⁴⁵ I have a feminist approach to the concept of knowledge which means that I, in accordance with researchers such as Donna Haraway, view knowledge as always situated in social, political and cultural context.⁴⁶

In this research, the point of departure is the interviewee's own perception and description of reality, and it is with and around these personal accounts that I hope to build an interesting theoretical discussion.⁴⁷ This means acknowledging that the personal accounts of my informants are exactly this – personal – and that my results are by no means universal. I consider this research to be a collaborative process, in which I, along with my informants, produce the knowledge that is the result of this thesis.

Semi-structured interviews

As my aim in this thesis is to capture the personal experiences and feelings of my informants, I have chosen the method of semi-structured interviews. In *The practice of feminist in-depth interviewing*, Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber writes that the semi-structured interview, while based on an interview guide with written questions, also allows spontaneous questions throughout the interview. This, she writes, allows the interviewer to steer the general topic of the interview while not disrupting the flow of the conversation.⁴⁸ I find this method to be rewarding for this project as it takes the specificity of each interview into account, letting the informants rather than myself steer the more specific topics of the interviews. This is beneficial to my project of trying to reach my informants feelings surrounding piropos.

The interviews are based on an interview guide of questions and possible follow up questions concerning piropos and my informants' feelings towards them.⁴⁹ As it was my intention to let the informants rather than my questions steer the interview as much as

⁴⁵ Bryman, Alan, *Samhällsvetenskapliga metoder*, Liber, Malmö, 2011, p, 272.

⁴⁶ Haraway, Donna, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective", in *Feminist Studies*, 14:3, 1988, p. 575-599.

⁴⁷ Thomsson, Heléne, *Reflexiva intervjuer*, Studentlitteratur, Lund, 2002, p.30.

⁴⁸ Hesse-Biber, Sharlene N and Leavy, Patricia L, "The Practice of Feminist In-Depth Interviewing." in *Feminist Research Practice*. SAGE Publications, Inc., p. 110-148. 2007. p. 115ff.

⁴⁹ The interview guide can be found in appendix 1.

possible, I also posed questions not included in the questionnaire, when suitable. The questionnaire is divided into two parts, where the first part consists of inquiries of a more factual nature – what my informants regard as piropos, what is and isn't included in the term according to them, how often they experience it themselves or hear it being done to others etc. I chose to begin with this more informative part in order to ensure that my understanding of the term corresponds with that of my informants. I also found it a good way to ease into the conversation. Part two consists of more open questions, focusing instead on the informant's own experiences, thoughts and feelings about being subjected to piropos in their every day lives.

A reflexive approach

To work reflexively, Thomsson writes, is to recognise that knowledge never just *exists*, but that it is constantly *produced*, and that theoretical, cultural, personal and political circumstances inevitably affect our understanding of ourselves and our knowledge of the world.⁵⁰ The reflexive researcher's perspective thus begins, writes Hesse-Biber, by understanding that one's own values and attitudes are of great importance in relation to the research process and by reflecting on one's own lived reality and experiences in relation to one's research.⁵¹ In relation to my own study, this means acknowledging the impact of my own position as an interviewer and my own feelings on piropos on the results of my research.

The interview is by definition a situation imprinted by power relations. As interviewer, I hold not only the power to pose the questions, but the power to choose what is relevant to include in this thesis and, most importantly, the power of interpreting my informants' words. I understand my interpretation and analysis of the material as inevitably subjective and affected by my own experiences and factors such as gender, class, age and race. I strive to be present in the text, to reflect on my own position and to be explicit about my authorial voice. This reflexive approach is present throughout the entire course of this research and permeates the choice of method, theoretical framework, as well as the analysis and conclusion.

A couple of factors seem particularly relevant to emphasise in relation to this reflective approach. For example, my understanding of the streets of Havana as a symbolically male space is, although reinforced by the research of Lundgren, also a profoundly personal understanding, inevitably intertwined with my own experiences of

⁵⁰ Thomsson, *Reflexiva intervjuer*, p.38.

⁵¹ Hesse-Biber & Leavy, "The Practice of Feminist In-Depth Interviewing.", p. 129.

walking these very streets for several months and receiving piropos on a daily basis. For me personally, getting piropos is associated with feelings of great discomfort and annoyance, feelings that that might, albeit unconsciously, affect how I relate to my material.

Colonial past and present

A requirement when applying for the Minor Field Studies scholarship is that the field study in question take place in what SIDA refers to as a "developing country". I find this classification problematic, as it implies that some countries are by definition already developed while others are not, thus reproducing a colonial world-view. However, because of this study object's apparent parallels to a classic ethnographic desire to know 'The Other', it's imperative to address the power relations imbedded in this project of interviewing women from Cuba, it being a country deeply marked by colonialism.

Postcolonial feminists have long discussed this politics of representing others. In *Feminism without borders*, Mohanty criticises western feminist scholars of producing the "Third World Woman" as a homogenous entity, thereby failing to capture the constitutive complexities that characterise the lives of women. She emphasises that Western scholarship on Third World countries must be seen in the light of a world system dominated by the West, and that failing to do so often results in assumptions of ethnocentric universality and inadequate self-consciousness on the researcher's part.⁵²

But how does one practically carry out an ethical feminist project within this colonial and ethnographic tradition of inequality? In my case, I strove to let my interviewees steer the conversations as much as possible, to try and avoid putting words, feelings or concepts in their mouths. I also began the interviews by asking my interviewees to explain the phenomenon of piropos to me, thus using their explanation rather than my own as the starting point for the conversation. During the interviews, I also made notes about noticeable changes in body language among my interviewees, to ensure that their words were interpreted in their corporeal context. Finally, when working with my material and picking out quotes, I was very conscious about keeping quotes in their right context, constantly going back to check their origin, thus resisting the recurrent urge to cherry-pick to make theoretical points.

Language

The spoken language in Cuba is Spanish. This is, unfortunately, not one of the languages in my own repertoire. Though English is taught in school (and school in Cuba is mandatory and

⁵² Mohanty, Chandra Talpade, *Feminism without borders: decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity*, Duke Univ. Press, Durham, 2003, p. 19.

state-financed)⁵³, finding Cuban women that could and wanted to carry a conversation in English proved to be quite a difficult task. I considered hiring a translator to help me with the interviews, but, as Thomsson also states, was afraid that this third part might make their own interpretations of what is said, and that it could influence what my interviewees felt comfortable expressing.⁵⁴ For this reason, I ended up looking for, and finding, English speaking women as my interviewees. My interpretation and analysis of the material is therefore made with the awareness that my informants were not speaking in their mother tongue, (as, of course, neither was I), and that this may have had an impact on both their sense of security during the interviews, and their possibility to get their points across accurately.

Finding my informants

Because of the difficulties of finding Cuban women that speak English on a conversational level during my limited time in Havana, the selection of informants for this research was based purely on two aspects: they had to identify themselves as women and had to be able to communicate their feelings and thoughts in English. This led to a certain lack of diversity in factors such as sexual orientation, educational level and age, which undoubtedly affects my material. All four of my interviews identifies themselves as heterosexual, two of them are black women and the other two are white. They all have university degrees or are in the process of finishing their university studies. The question of race, however, was never mentioned during any of the four interviews, and neither was the notion of class. This does not mean that they are irrelevant, but as it was my intention to let the interviewees steer the conversation, I decided not to prompt my interviewees with these concepts. One must also understand the implications of speaking about for example class-difference in a communist society that does not acknowledge its existence.⁵⁵

I came in contact with my most of interviewees through snowball sampling and through mutual acquaintances in Havana. For full disclosure, I will include information on how I came in contact with each woman in their presentations below.

My informants

Eliana is a 28-year old woman living in Havana. She was born in the city, but as a child her family moved around a lot. After a few years in Europe, she returned to Havana at

⁵³ Svenska FN-förbundet, *Kuba fakta*, (online) updated 23.03.2106, collected 22.05.2017.

⁵⁴ Thomsson, *Reflexiva intervjuer*, p. 96.

⁵⁵ For a discussion on whiteness and class in a Cuban context, see Lundgren, *Heterosexual Havana*, p. 44f.

the age of 15 and has been living in city since then. Eliana works as a technical engineer at a state-owned company but makes extra money on the side editing photographs. I met Eliana through another of my interviewees.

Anna is 26 years old. She was born and raised in Vedado in Havana, but now lives in a small rural town in the middle of Cuba where she studies to be a scriptwriter. She defines herself as a heterosexual, but stresses that she has a lot of gay friends. I met Anna through her mother whom I knew a little.

Jasmin is a 26-year old woman, born and raised in the city of Havana. She works at the same company as Eliana, as a technical engineer, while simultaneously finishing her masters' thesis in the same field. Jasmin tells me that she recently came out of a longer relationship that "made her boring". I met her one evening when we were both standing in line to see an art show in Vedado, an area in western Havana.

Lena is 35 years old and works as an English teacher at the University of Havana. She was born and raised in a smaller town south of Havana and moved to the capital to attend the university. Because of her job she has travelled outside of Cuba, to both Europe and North America. Lena has been in a relationship with the same man for over ten years. I came in contact with Lena via email after seeing her name on the University's website.

Material and analysis

All four interviews, which lasted between 45 and 65 minutes each, took place in my apartment in Vedado and were recorded with the consent of my interviewees. The interviews were subsequently transcribed and analysed inspired by Thomsson's horizontal analysis.⁵⁶ This method helped me sort through my material, by first reading through all interviews multiple times, then dividing them up by themes and creating new segments of text that I used as the basis of my analysis. This is, of course, a selective phase, which affects what parts of the women's narratives that take place in my finished thesis. As my interest in this thesis is the personal experiences of my interviewees, I chose quotes in which my interviewees talk about their own feelings and experiences, rather than when they speculated around what other women might feel in the same situations. Quotes were colour coded according to theme, and then chosen based on both uniqueness and resemblance, making sure that all four women's voices are heard throughout the analysis. As previously mentioned, I also made notes on body language in situations where I found that this was an important part for my informants in getting their points across.

⁵⁶ Thomsson, *Reflexiva intervjuer*, p.156ff.

Analysis

The analysis chapter of this thesis is divided into two themes. In *Sexed orientation*, I look at the gendered dimensions of piropos, discussing how it constitutes subject positions and enforces gender inequality. In *The Game*, I focus on piropos as a heteronormative practice that produces and maintains the same power relations it is said to express. I approach the accounts of my interviewees through the theories of Sara Ahmed and Judith Butler accounted for above.

Sexed orientation

This section is divided into four sections. In *Male space*, I look at how my interviewees describe the practice of piropos and how it can be understood as shaping the arena of the street. In *Female disorientation*, I focus on what it feels like to be subjected to piropos and how it affects my informants' relationship to their own bodies. In *Becoming female*, I analyse the practice of piropos as a speech act and how it can be seen as constitutive of the subject position Woman. Finally, in the section *Sexed and the city*, I discuss what consequences piropos might have on my informants' movement patterns in the city.

Male space

Firstly, let us look at how one of my informants, Lena, explain the practice of piropos to me:

People would say that they are similar to pick-up-lines, but in Spanish we call it piropos. And that is something that a man would say to you as you're passing by and it could be to compliment you on something or just to get your attention and they would usually refer to your body or the clothes that you're wearing or your make-up or you know any other feature.

All my informants agree that piropos is something that men do to women. The practice of piropos is then, in itself, perceived as a sexed practice: men do it, women receive it. Sometimes my informants talk about piropos as something men choose to do in order to appear and feel more masculine, sometimes they describe it as an inevitable expression of masculinity. Piropos is thus linked to the notion of *machismo* masculinity, as shown by Hernández et al.⁵⁷ For example, Jasmin says:

Yeah. so it happens every day you know. And even if you're not dressed up or something like they would just tell you, because it's in their blood to say something to a woman.

⁵⁷ Hernández, Formental, Hernández, Pita, & de Juan, Fernández, 'Masculinities in Cuba: Description and Analysis of a Case Study from a Gender Perspective.', p. 220-247.

All my informants talk about getting piropos on a daily basis. Sometimes, they tell me, they like it. Sometimes they don't. There are different factors that influence whether or not a piropo is perceived as a positive or a negative experience. Just like in Lundgren's article "'Mami, you're so hot!' Negotiating hierarchies of masculinity through piropos in contemporary Havana", my interviewees make a distinction between nice and rude comments. Nice comments, what Lundgren refers to as *piropos bonitos*, include compliments such as "you're beautiful" or "you have a beautiful body" and beautiful or funny metaphors. Lena says:

It's sometimes nice. you know? That a man is a gentleman and then he says like, he compares you with a flower or uses a nice metaphor, so then I thank him for that intention you know, of being nice to a woman, which is... it's okay. And uh. But I guess most of the time what they tell you is not nice, that's the problem, yes.

What is considered to be rude among my interviewees is mainly sexually explicit language. Here, Eliana explains what a rude piropo might sound like:

It's mainly like what they would do with some part of your body in a sexual way, they're really sexual, and maybe a disgusting way and maybe they're just telling it because okay, they're saying it's a good part of your body but its...the way they're telling it its... Oh my god.

Even though certain types of piropos can be positive experiences for my interviewees, both Anna and Eliana tell me that they would prefer not hearing piropos at all, if they could choose. Anna says:

I'm not asking you about your opinion of me. And uh, you, when you receive a piropo on the street... Like if you for example want to know the time, and you ask what time it is I can choose to answer. Piropos is just like.. not like that. It's not like they ask if I want to know what they think about me. So for me it's very intrusive.

The way Anna describes it, getting piropos is never her choice. It is not a dialogue between two consenting parties but rather a male monologue, where the fact that she enters the arena of the street makes her susceptible to piropos. This, and the fact that all four of my interviewees are subjected to piropos on a daily basis, confirms Lundgren's description of the streets of Havana as a symbolically male space.⁵⁸

Speaking with Sara Ahmed, one can say that the street is a place orientated around maleness. As we can recall: spaces extend bodies and bodies extend spaces. Spaces acquire the 'skin' of the bodies that inhabit them and take shape by being orientated around some bodies more than others. Male bodies are thus made comfortable because they inhabit spaces

⁵⁸ Lundgren, *Heterosexual Havana*, p. 113ff.

that already extend their shapes, in this case the street.⁵⁹ Let us look at how this extension of male bodies can look like, through Jasmin's story:

It's very uncomfortable for me to walk through a group of men on the street. Like, I always cross the street and try to avoid them. It's like.. when they're in a group they all start saying things to you. Either good or bad or both, but they're all doing it at the same time...

Jasmin describes how the comfortable male bodies are allowed to extend into space through piropos, thereby conditioning her own motility. In the following section, I want to examine what this conditioned motility might feel like and how the extension of some bodies at the expense of others might affect my interviewees.

Female disorientation

Eliana describes how getting piropos sometimes makes her feel good:

When you're busy and doing stuff and then you hear a piropo to you and it makes you feel better, it makes you happier, like 'Oh okay I don't look that bad today' or something. It makes you feel better about yourself.

Here, Eliana describes how hearing a piropo can make her feel better about herself and how she looks. It makes her happier, she says. All of my informants express very similar feelings in response to piropos, that it makes them feel more confident about themselves and their appearance. However, this doesn't seem to be an unambiguously positive effect, as it also results in the women feeling less confident and less happy about their bodies during days or moments when they don't receive piropos at all. Anna, for example, says:

Umm. Sometimes piropos are very disgusting. But, for example when I'm going to a club and like I walk and I don't receive piropos, I feel bad. I think like 'Okay, like this dress is not good for me' Because it's usual you know, and... I don't know why.

Even though Anna recognises that piropos are often disgusting, she admits that they also make her feel good in a way. Or – to be precise – that she feels bad when she *doesn't* hear them. Both Eliana and Anna describe that their confidence is directly linked to receiving piropos, and that hearing that one is attractive makes one feel attractive while hearing nothing makes one feel that one isn't.

One way of understanding these accounts is as a matter of internalizing an outsider's view on the own body and self or, putting it simply, a matter of self-objectification. This practice of self-objectification, this adopting of the male gaze if you will, can be related to Ahmed's thoughts on "being not", as expressed in "A Phenomenology of whiteness". Here,

⁵⁹ Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of whiteness" p. 156ff.

Ahmed draws from the work of Frantz Fanon, who describes the black man's consciousness of his body as a 'third person consciousness' and a feeling of negation. This third person consciousness is comparable with the practice of self-objectification, as explained by Fredriksson and Roberts in their article "Objectification Theory - Towards Understanding Women's lived Experiences and mental Health Risks". Given that some bodies feel more at home in a world that is orientated around some bodies more than others, other bodies appear 'out of place' or *disorientated* in this world. For Ahmed as well as for Fanon, these are bodies that do not embody whiteness: the black man becomes an object and can not act or extend himself in a world orientated around whiteness. Similarly, my interviewees are made to feel 'out of place' in spaces that are oriented around men.⁶⁰

I want to examine further what this disorientation could feel like. This is how Eliana describes getting a piropo she classifies as disgusting. While she speaks, she pulls her arms up to her body and mimics covering her arms with clothes. She then keeps her arms there – tightly folded across her chest.

I've gotten like really disgusting ones maybe.. and that's the ones that make me feel you know, very uncomfortable... Like if I'm walking down the street and they tell me something disgusting about my body or something like what they would do with my body, like I'm talking about that. I would feel like I wanna disappear in that moment like "Oh my god" I want to cover myself in clothes and not show an inch of skin, so nobody would notice me, cause it makes me feel like.. dirty or something.

Eliana describes here how she becomes aware of her body in the very moment she receives a piropo. She suddenly feels too visible and wishes that she could disappear so as to not be seen by anyone. Ahmed points out that bodies that stand out become hyper-visible, which transforms the body itself into a site of social stress.⁶¹ Eliana not only feels visible – this visibility makes her feel dirty, she says. One can thus discern how piropos work by "sticking" to the surface of Eliana's body so that the body itself feels "sticky" or, indeed, dirty.

As shown above, my interviewees describe the feeling of being subjected to piropos as a bodily experience of disorientation. The constant repetition of piropos leads to their self-objectification, of seeing themselves as 'others' through the eyes of men. This result corresponds with that of Fairchild and Rudman as put forward in their article "Everyday Stranger Harassment and Women's objectification".

⁶⁰ Ahmed, "A phenomenology of whiteness" p. 160ff.

⁶¹ Ibid., p.159-162.

Becoming female

Piropos is a question of language, of being addressed. I want to approach the accounts of my informants through Butler's theories on injurious speech, to examine how piropos not only act on women in injurious ways, but is constitutive of the subject position Woman itself.

It makes you think more about being feminine, or vulnerable. I don't know, like if I would not get any piropos or something, like if I would hang out with a lot of girls and they would all get piropos and I wouldn't, I would feel like a little bit more masculine.

Here, Eliana associates the feeling of "being feminine" to being told piropos, and further expresses how a lack of piropos would make her feel a "little bit more masculine". This is a very interesting statement, as it links femininity directly to the occurrence of piropos. Drawing to mind Judith Butler's theories on hate speech and how subjects are constituted through interpellation, we can discern that for Eliana, the subject position Woman emerges as an effect of being interpellated through piropos. Or crassly put: Eliana feels like a woman when she gets piropos. Piropos, in this case, work as perlocutionary acts whose effect on Eliana manifests itself as a feeling of femininity.

What also interests me here is the vagueness with which Eliana speaks about piropos. It doesn't seem to matter what kind of piropo she gets – whether or not she considers it nice or rude, whether or not it's verbal or consists of just whistling sounds – just getting them has an effect on her. Not saying that Eliana reacts to all piropos in the same way, it still seems like she lumps them together as a practice that makes her feel more like a woman. If this is true, how can we make sense of the fact that a whistling noise can make Eliana feel more feminine, when whistling itself has nothing to do with femininity? After all, whistling noises in another context, for example a baker that distractedly whistles while kneading his dough, or a man whistling to hail a taxi, don't invoke feelings of femininity in anyone.

Here, we must see to the mutual impact of bodies, spaces and objects on the effects of the speech act in question. The whistle has, over time, become "sticky" with associations of femininity, when uttered by certain bodies in a certain space. Or, to speak with Butler, the whistle can be seen as a sort of citation of the tradition of whistling at women.

Anna also relates piropos to a feeling of femininity. This is how she describes feeling when visiting her mother in Havana:

For me.. because as I told you, I live in a very special place. And there it [piropos] never happens. Usually there I'm not conscious about being a woman. But when I'm in a different place, like here in Havana where it happens all the time, I notice for example my way to sit, you know? There is like a protocol of being a woman. And I feel conscious about that. Uhh.

Like I notice that I have two tits and I have to act in that way too... and I can't move like I usually do.

Anna describes that where she lives she never gets any piropos and so she's not usually conscious about being a woman. But when she comes to Havana, she suddenly starts to notice the fact that she is a woman and that she is expected to act accordingly. Again, we can see how the subject position Woman emerges as an effect of piropos. Though it seems like Anna doesn't even have to hear piropos in order for this to happen – just entering Havana seems to suffice. Ahmed argues that public spaces take shape through the habitual actions of bodies, so that the contours of space itself become habitual.⁶² For Anna, piropos is not only something that affects her when she hears it. It is something that is imbedded in the contours of Havana, that affects her when entering this space.

For Anna, this sudden feeling of femininity and having to act in a "womanly" way, is a feeling of discomfort. She notices certain parts of her body and how they move. As a woman, she cannot move like she usually does, she says. If being subjected to piropos means being interpellated, then piropos, according to Butlers train of thought, also constitutes one's social position. As we know, Woman is a subject position marked by gender inequality. I suggest that a piropo not only functions as a perlocutionary speech act – an act that has consequences – but as an illocutionary one, where the speech act *is* the injury in itself. Piropos, then, do not only act on women in injurious ways, but constitutes, in its very utterance, women as the inferior class.

Sexed and the city

I have shown, through the accounts of Anna and Eliana, how the subject position Woman emerges as an effect of piropos. This, in turn, has consequences for how they relate to surrounding spaces and other bodies around them. All my interviewees describe how their movement patterns in and around the city of Havana are affected by the occurrence of, or even possible occurrence of piropos. Anna tells me about coming out of the supermarket and always having to carry her two heavy grocery bags an extra three blocks, just to avoid passing the men on the corner outside the store, who she knows will shout something at her. All four women tell me that they habitually cross the street in order to avoid groups of men and so, by extension, piropos. I will approach these narratives through Ahmed's theories on the politics

⁶² Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of whiteness", p.156.

of mobility – of which bodies gets to move freely and with ease across the lines that divide spaces – of who gets to inhabit spaces and feel at home there.⁶³

This is how Eliana describes how she moves in the city:

Sometimes I try and like, maybe try to like walk fast through a group of men or if you see like a really big group of men or something, you cross the street or if you know there's a place where there's a lot of men, you try not to go there 'cause you try to avoid those moments because... It's not the same when a guy just like or maybe two guys on the street tell you something fast and you're just walking by, but like... If you're like going to a place and there's a lot of men like harassing you, you feel really stressed out.

Eliana describes how her mobility in the city is restricted insofar as she tries to avoid piropos and situations in which she feels she runs a great risk of hearing them. These tactics – walking faster, taking detours, or plainly avoiding certain spots – are all employed with the very outspoken goal to avoid men and/or groups of men. For Eliana, then, the presence of men is inevitably intertwined with the anxiety of hearing piropos. Claiming that the presence of men equals the presence of piropos is not saying that all men tell piropos at all times, or that it would necessarily happen to Eliana in all situations stated by her above. But it is acknowledging that in meeting or seeing a man, or even just expecting to do so, Eliana has to address the possibility of piropos and adapt to it. This, I argue, can be thought of in the language of Ahmed, as being stopped.

Because Eliana is not extended by the skin of the social, her bodily movement is hindered. She is stopped not only by the practice of piropos itself – the questions, the comments, the whistles – but through the planned detours and strategies she is forced to employ when wanting to escape them. As a woman, she can not move freely on the streets without being stopped. Lena has similar experiences of moving around the city. This is how she describes walking to work in Playa, a suburb in western Havana:

In the beginning I used to go down the same street. And then there was a corner like where you would meet five or six guys, and then one day I just passed by them and they told me something and it wasn't super unpleasant you know, but anyway. You never know because some days they could be nice and the next day you don't know. And you have to go the same way every day. So what I did was I just changed streets, and started walking another way to work. And then the other day I accidentally took the same street again. And I had to pass them you know. But I didn't take the sidewalk, because that's where they were. But yeah that's one of the things that I do, I change paths like if I know that that is going to happen.

Lena's description of her walk to work is interesting in several different ways. Noticeably, she portrays the same kind of tactical approach to moving around the city as Eliana, avoiding

⁶³ Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of whiteness", p. 162.

certain spots inhabited by men. She, too, gets stopped on her way by piropos. But what Lena's story can show us specifically is how some bodies fail to become habitual in a space that does not extend their shape.

The body is habitual, Ahmed writes, not only because it repeats certain actions, but in the sense that it does not demand attention when performing them. The habitual body 'trails behind', as she calls it – it does not pose a problem or an obstacle to the action and is not 'stressed' by 'what' the action encounters.⁶⁴ Lena's body fails to become habitual in the very sense that it is interrupted in its habits. I'm not referring only to the thought-out habit of choosing a specific street or feeling forced to choose another, although that is certainly a question of hindered habits. I'm more interested in the habitual body as a body that is allowed to *do* things without thinking – the body that 'trails behind'. When Lena's body *does* without thinking – when she *accidentally* takes the same street she has been avoiding – she is immediately forced to direct attention towards her own body and its movements. But changing streets is only one of the things Lena does in order to avoid piropos. She also tells me about other strategies:

Yeah I really avoid going out alone at night, because you never know and you get a lot of piropos you know at night. I also avoid going to cafés alone, which I love to do, but in certain areas I can't do it.

Lena describes how she stops herself from doing things that she loves, and how she prefers to stay at home at night rather than exposing herself to piropos. This, I argue, indicates yet another dimension in which women are stopped by the practice of piropos. Lena's statement shows us that she is not only being slowed down or redirected as an effect of piropos, she is actually stopped from going out all together.

Ahmed describes stopping as both a political and an affective economy, one which is distributed unevenly between bodies and that affects the bodies that are subjects to its address. As shown in the examples above, my interviewees' relationship to the city is a relationship marked by stopping and a need of strategic thinking. All four women adapt their movement patterns in order to avoid being exposed to piropos. In some cases this entails crossing a street, in others it amounts to staying at home, avoiding the street all together.

Having one's mobility restricted is, to speak with Ahmed, to lose the bodily privilege of moving through the world without losing one's way.⁶⁵ In spaces orientated around men, such as the street of Havana, women are made to feel out of place, disorientated, and are

⁶⁴ Ahmed, "A phenomenology of whiteness" p. 156.

⁶⁵ Ahmed, "A phenomenology of whiteness" p.161.

subsequently robbed of the privilege to move around the city without being stopped in various ways. I have shown how my interviewees employ different strategies in order to avoid piropos, but as we have seen, piropos can also be perceived a positive experience. In the next section, I will discuss how piropos is not only something that is done to women, but how it can be considered a mutual game in which women, too, are pressured to engage.

The Game

I have shown how piropos work by sexing bodies and spaces while enforcing gender inequality. In this section, I want to stress the inherent heterosexuality of the practice of piropos as well as examine the performative force of language, bodies and spaces. At one point or another during the interviews, all four women referred to piropos as a ritual, a play or a game. I want to dwell on these statements and examine how my interviewees relate to this so called game. This theme is divided into three shorter sections. In *The Rulebook*, I focus on the rules of the game as they are expressed through the words of my informants. In *Deceptive objective*, I discuss what the goal behind this game might be. Finally, in *Breaking the rules*, I look at the defence mechanisms and acts of resistance my informants practice in order to deal with piropos and how these might be understood.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a Game as "[a]n activity that one engages in for amusement or fun", or "a form of competitive activity or sport played according to rules."⁶⁶ Defining heterosexual wooing in terms of a game is nothing new. For example, in 2005, the book *The Game: penetrating the secret society of pick up artists*, was featured for two months in the New York Times Bestseller list.⁶⁷ The term "Player" is, according to the Urban Dictionary, slang commonly used to describe a "male who is skilled at manipulating ("playing") others, and especially at seducing women by pretending to care about them."⁶⁸

Phrasing the practice of piropos in terms of a heterosexual game has some very tangible consequences. Firstly, the word "game" implies that something "isn't for real". This is not, however, the same as saying that it isn't a reality. Rather, the point is to emphasise that the practices included in this game are constructed, reminding us that that they are not "natural" or in anyway consequences of something "natural". Secondly, it directs our attention towards the rules of the game. How does one play? Thirdly, it makes us wonder: what is the objective of the game?

⁶⁶ Oxford living dictionaries (online), search word: Game, collected 15.05.2017.

⁶⁷ May, Gareth, 'The art of the pickup: how The Game changed the game', in *The telegraph* (online), 28.07.2014, collected 15.05.2017

⁶⁸ Urban Dictionary (online), search word: Player, 21.10.2014, collected: 15.10.2017.

The Rulebook

It's a way to.. Like I don't know how to say that in English. but cortejo? You know? like... two birds. This thing... Like it's like a ritual in a way you know? And they have the... in a way they have the responsibility to make the woman feel good. Because... That's part of the machismo. And it's cultural.

This is how Anna explains piropos to me. While she utters the word *cortejo*, she brings both her hands up to her head and spreads her fingers as if to mimic a crown, or, I must assume, a peacock's feathers. The Spanish word *cortejo* can refer in English both to human courtship and to an animal mating ritual. Here, I believe both translations are illustrative. What Anna describes both supports and contradicts what Lundgren finds in her studies on the connection between piropos and masculinity. In her article on piropos in Havana, Lundgren describes the practice of piropos as a homosocial custom, practiced to manifest hierarchies of machismo masculinity.⁶⁹ On the one hand, Anna agrees that piropos is indeed part of the machismo; a way to prove one's masculinity. On the other hand, she emphasises the importance of women as receivers, thereby underlining the inherent heterosexual qualities of piropos.

Yeah. it depends. Sometimes they want to... When they are very disgusting, they do that because they know they're going to provoke that feeling of you. So they would like you to say like 'Ewww' or something. And it's part of the ritual. But sometimes they are nice and then they just expect you to just smile and 'Thank you' and.. for example if they say 'You're beautiful' you say 'Okay thank you'.

Anna seems to have a very clear understanding of how men expect her to react and reply to a piropo. If she gets a disgusting one, for example, she is supposed to react loudly with disgust. A nice piropo should instead be followed by a simple 'Thank you'. It is, she explains, all part of the ritual. All four women tell me that they habitually thank men after getting a nice piropo and that it is expected of them to do so. It is polite, but doesn't encourage further contact. It is evident, then, that there are different rules for men and women in this game. Men, in Anna's words, have the "responsibility" to tell piropos. Women, on the other hand, are expected to respond in specific ways.

I have shown how piropos work by sexing bodies and creating gendered subject positions. I want to continue that train of thought by shedding light on how the heterosexual matrix is materialised through language in the practice of piropos. As we can recall, the heterosexual matrix is reproduced through language and the habitual body and works by legitimizing both heterosexuality and the binary gender identities through it's constant

⁶⁹ Lundgren, "'Mami, you're so hot!': negotiating hierarchies of masculinity through piropos in contemporary Havana", p. 7.

reiteration. The practice of piropos, through its repetition, secures the two opposing sexes and pressures them into following two different set of rules. This mechanism is tied up in a neat little package in the shape of a speech act that voices heterosexual desire. The choice of the word "package" here, is not coincidental. We can recall how Ahmed describes heterosexuality as a social gift that one is pressured to accept and pass on.⁷⁰ The habit of thanking for a piropo, then, becomes an almost comically explicit way of accepting this gift, of engaging in the game of heterosexuality.

Jasmin and Lena describe another very specific way in which the rules of piropos work:

Sometimes I've gotten like some comments or like, they've told me I'm ugly and stuff like this.... and other guys that have commented on my you know... on my vagina. And they're not very nice... But like when a guy calls you ugly or something, it's just so that you look at him. He's not really calling you ugly ugly. He just wants to get your attention the other way around. - Jasmin

It's funny also because sometimes they would say to you the opposite. So if you're looking nice, or uh you know to a physically attractive woman they would say like 'you're ugly'. - Lena

According to the rules of piropos, saying that a person is ugly doesn't mean that you're calling them ugly. Instead, it seems to mean the opposite. Again, we can see how language has become sticky with associations in the interplay between bodies, objects and spaces. In the piropos rulebook, it seems that some words have even been washed clean of their usual meaning and instead become sticky with new associations.

Deceptive objective

Sometimes they say something and I'm like, I totally ignore it and they're like 'oh she's so rude', but like they say it so fast it's as if they were expecting me to ignore them. So they just said it so they could tell me I'm rude afterwards. Uhhh. I guess they're not expecting you to turn around and like 'okay give me your number' Haha /.../ They're not really looking for anything.

Here, Jasmin pinpoints an interesting dimension of the practice of piropos: the lack of objective behind the action. Or more accurately, she exposes the objective as deceptive. The goal of the pick-up line is not, according to Eliana, to actually pick up women. "They're not really looking for anything", she says, referring to men who tell piropos. This suggests that the objective of piropos is not to produce the effects that it claims, but, in fact, something else.

Playing the heterosexual game can be translated into Ahmed's terms as being orientated along the straight line. As we can recall, lines are performative: they are created

⁷⁰ Ahmed, "Orientations: towards a queer phenomenology", p. 557.

when we follow them. Similarly, the practice of piropos and its effects are made possible through constant reiteration. This, in turn, reinforces and neutralises both compulsory heterosexuality and the binary sexes. It seems that the objective of the game, then, might in fact be the game itself. Ahmed writes that bodies that step outside the straight line in any way are perceived as oblique. For things to line up, queer or oblique moments must be corrected: reoriented along the straight line.⁷¹ I suggest that piropos can be considered such a straightening device, that interpellates bodies into a heteronormative universe and ensures spaces' and bodies' continued orientation along the straight line.

Breaking the rules

I have shown above how piropos is a practice that relies on certain rules in order to persist and be effective, and how it can be interpreted as a straightening device. But, as the saying goes: rules are meant to be broken. As Butler states, interpellation is not always effective. Injurious speech opens up the possibility of a response, thereby enabling resistance. In this section I want to examine what types of responses are available for my interviewees and what type of defence mechanisms and acts of resistance they practice. My interviewees talked about different ways to protect, defend and strengthen themselves in response to piropos. I want to start by undertaking the practice of verbally replying – of "talking back". When asked if she ever verbally replies to a piropo, Anna explains:

Yeah, like I would sometimes say 'Okay you're beautiful too'. Haha. Um. I think it's my way to break the rules. But just. I only do that when they told me something first. So it's like.. it's like a game, like a play, a joke. you know? Because women don't usually do that.

Anna describes how she would never be the one to initiate street interaction but that she will, on occasion, reply to a piropo with a similar comment. This, explains Anna, becomes comical, because it's very uncommon for women to say these kinds of things to men. Here, Anna reverses the gendered positions, thus creating a comical effect. Breaking the rules in this scenario can be interpreted as momentarily occupying the subject position Man through using language traditionally reserved for this position. The comical effect disarms the situation and lets Anna distance herself. Eliana also sometimes responds:

If it's a really bad one, maybe I just insult him back like, it depends on the moment really. but I've done it. I've been like really pissed off and some guy tells me some disgusting thing and I would just like you know 'fuck off' or something.[...]and it makes me feel like stronger or something. Like I guess it makes me feel like I'm kind of telling him or um... I'm not cowarding

⁷¹ Ahmed, "Orientations: towards a queer phenomenology" p. 560ff.

away like 'oh my god' like embarrassed or something. It makes me feel like 'dude you're saying something wrong, just stop it' or like, it makes me feel like I'm defending myself.

Eliana describes how telling a man to "fuck off" after he tells her a disgusting piropo, makes her feel stronger and like she is defending herself. For her, not answering in this particular case, would be to "coward away" from the situation. Eliana's reply and the feeling of strength she acquires from the act of verbally countering the comment, could be seen as a way of opposing to the straight line – of choosing to walk another path.

The most common way to respond to piropos among my interviewees was with silence. And while silence can be considered the opposite of language – the very absence of a response – my interviewees speak of it instead as a carefully thought out strategy in response to piropos. I want to argue that silence, as is it used by all of my informants, can be seen as a sort of power that manifests itself in the very rejection of speech – in a refusal to agree to a dialogue. Or, to speak with Butler, a refusal to be recruited, to turn around when interpellated. When asked if she ever responds to rude piropos, Lena answers:

No. never ever ever. Because I think it makes him feel like he has the right to say these things. And if I answer it's like he's accomplished his goal like 'Oh I told her something nasty and she reacted to that and that's what I was expecting, so I prefer not to say anything actually. I just ignore the person. Responding would be like.. a spark of the conversation in a way, and then he would just continue to tell you more things. You know? So it's like... They are expecting you to react like that, to say something. So I feel like if I don't react, or if I don't respond to his words, then it just ends there and it ends on my terms you know. So, yeah I guess that's a tactic that I have.

Lena describes very thoroughly how replying to piropos can feel like a confirmation of the piropo itself. In situations where she feels she is expected to reply, she instead defies the rules by being silent. Replying in a way that isn't expected – through silence – becomes Lena's way of taking power over the situation. When rejecting the piropo through silence and not letting herself get interpellated, she thereby rejects playing the game all together. If piropos can indeed be considered a sort of straightening device, then this refusal could be seen as a refusal to be straightened, a refusal to being forced into the straight line at all. Anna talks about silence in a similar way:

For example when I was a teenager I used to answer a lot. But in the end it wasn't better for me because it was so stressful for me to say things and they just laughed at me, in my face. I prefer just to ignore, and not answer it. That makes me feel better than responding. I don't know. It's a way to defend myself. To build more courage.

Anna describes how she used to answer to piropos a lot when she was younger, but stopped doing so because of the ridicule that she experienced when talking back. For Anna, silence

works as a defence mechanism. Through silence, she says, she builds courage. But not all silences are a self-elected strengthening practices. My interviewees also told me about situations where they wish they would have responded in various ways, but didn't. This is Anna describing how she would sometimes feel when getting a piropo:

I would, in that moment, sometimes I just want to punch them... But I know I can't. Because I'm a woman and they are stronger than me and well... Uh.. Sometimes I feel like, because you know I'm a woman. and there are like rules and cultural.. you know... that I cannot break. and I feel impotent. /.../ Because I know I cannot break these rules.

Anna wishes she could sometimes just punch the men telling her piropos, but feels like she can't. We can see how she is held back by the knowledge that she is a woman, and by the rules that she feels forced to follow. One can argue that physical violence is marked by rules for everyone, insofar as it is generally illegal and considered deeply immoral. What interests me here is that Anna doesn't refer to violence as something she shouldn't do, but to something that she physically *can't* do. The word impotent is illustrative. For Anna, her main reason for not using physical violence as a response is the fact that she is a woman, not the fact that it is illegal or immoral. It seems then, that the subject position Woman – a position she acquires through being subjected to piropos – is perceived as a position of bodily impotence that conditions what Anna can and *can not* do. In this case, she can not reply the way she would like to. Jasmin has other reasons for not talking back after a piropo:

I generally just like.. My reaction is inside my mind but I don't respond or anything. it's not worth it, because that would be to like stoop to their level or something. /.../ I guess I would want to say something rude back, but it's just not worth it.

For Jasmin, talking back would be to engage in the same type of behaviour that she opposes to. The account exposes a view of piropos as being generally bad behaviour and to reply would thus be to "stoop to their level". She expresses how she would like to say something back, but that the disinclination of engaging in such bad behaviour stops her. Instead, the reaction remains inside her mind.

Both Jasmin and Anna express a wish to break the rules, to do what isn't expected of them as women. However, they are both stopped by the same rules they wish to break. These accounts show the multifaceted force imbedded in the straightening device and the subsequent difficulties of breaking these rules. The fact that women, in spite of this pressure, find ways of replying that isn't expected of them, could be interpreted as a confirmation of Wilson's understanding of the city street as a place of possibilities for women, put forward in her book *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women*. Somehow, it seems,

the practice of piropos can create an arena in which women have the opportunity to oppose to the straight line. Like Lundgren writes, these defence strategies can be understood as a way to re-conquer the street, or, to speak with Ahmed, to block the extension of some bodies at the expense of others.

Summary and conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to analyse women's feelings on being subjected to piropos through a phenomenological lens. In the first section of the analysis, I showed that being subjected to piropos is an ambiguous experience. On the one hand, my interviewees describe how being complimented makes them feel beautiful and more confident. On the other hand, they describe how they go out of their way to try and avoid piropos all together. I have shown how piropos can be directly linked to self-objectification and body monitoring for my informants, and how this is described as a feeling of bodily discomfort that affects their motility in the city. In the second part of my analysis, I focused on piropos as a heterosexual practice, built on different set of gendered rules. Men and women are both expected to engage in this game of heterosexual desire, but in different ways. Piropos turned out to be not only an expressive practice that reflects current societal norms of gender and sexuality, but also a performative one, that produces the same conditions said to be its cause. The game of piropos was thus analysed as a straightening device, practiced in order to interpellate all as players in a heteronormative universe.

Finally, I looked at what defence strategies and acts of resistance my interviewees practice in order to deal with piropos. Some of them sometimes reply verbally, insulting a man back or making a joke to disarm the situation. This, they told me, could make them feel stronger or as if they were defending themselves. All four women habitually used silence as a strategy to refuse to participate in the game at all. Silence was thus analysed not as the absence of a reply, but one of the most common ways of resistance. Finally, some of my interviewees talked to me about ways in which they wish they could respond, but felt as if they couldn't, thus exposing the force of the straightening device.

The practice of piropos has thus been analysed as a gendered practice: something that men do, that affects women. We must remember, however, that piropos is not only something that acts injuriously by pressuring women in different ways, it is also something that men are pressured into doing, in order to "be men". In a heteronormative society, being a man or a woman is not a free choice. We are constantly being pressured through gendered and

sexualised practices to express and maintain these power structures, and piropos is just one of many practices with the same goal. It is also just one of many heteronormative practices that permeate the arena of the street. Piropos then, must be seen in the light of a world filled with other straightening devices, and its effects must be viewed in the intersection between different axis of power as well as other practices. Piropos is, after all, only one of many ways to play the heterosexual game: just one of the many sports in the ever on-going world-wide heterosexual Olympics.

By exposing piropos as not only an expressive practice, but a performative one, I hope to have shed light on how heterosexuality and gender are materialised and maintained in the complex relationship between language, bodies and spaces. Phrasing piropos in terms of a game helps to underline the performance part of the practice. Let's stop for a moment and reflect on the difference between performance and performativity. The word performance implies a possibility of a choice: a conscious enactment. This is not how Butler's notion of performative gender should be understood. The line between performativity and performance is not always clear, however. Which habits do we choose to have and which habits are just there, stored in our bodies, without ever being challenged? If piropos is a habitual performance that produces gendered subject positions, as I have shown, then it should plausibly be a question of performativity as well as of performance? A sort of performance-extension of performative gender, perhaps. My point is thus not to say that gender is itself a performance, but that the practice of piropos is a gendered performance which, when dissected, might help expose the inherent performativity of sex/gender itself, thus breaking the heteronormative illusion of the gender binary.

I have analysed piropos as a matter of social interpellation. But as we have come to see, this interpellation is not always successful. My interviewees find ways to resist, by rejecting the game of piropos all together or by playing the game in unexpected ways. This opens up a possibility for disorientation from the straight line, of possible queer moments. Insofar as piropos is both an expression for and a manufacturer of heterosexuality, it is something that happens to both men and women, albeit in different ways. We know already that heterosexuality, due to its innate inequality, is more dangerous for women than for men. The point here is not to issue a contest of who's the real victim of piropos, as that is clearly a dead end, but to look closer at the possibility for resistance in these queer moments of rejection.

Seen in the light of a larger tradition of sexual harassment and violence against women, piropos might be considered a more innocent act of violence. I have shown, however,

how being injured by speech can be perceived as a highly corporeal experience, thus placing it within the realm of physical violence. Granted, there are levels in hell, and my intention here is not to equate piropos with other types of physical sexual violence towards women. There are, however, interesting similarities. Resisting piropos could, in the light of these similarities, be seen not only as a way of symbolically objecting to compulsory heterosexuality or gender ideals, but as part of a larger political struggle against sexual violence and for women's rights to their own bodies.

There lies power in resistance, then. But let's not confuse the possibility of resisting violence with the freedom of escaping it all together. There can, after all, only be resistance insofar as there is something to resist. Violence is a reality, and resisting it should not be equated with holding a position of power. The power, after all, lies with the person or institution responsible for the violence. But as resistance grows stronger, as more people resist, this resistance might very well be the very thing that overthrows these socially sanctioned practices of violence all together. And that thought is powerful.

Proposals for further research

This thesis' main interest has been to investigate women's feelings on being subjected to piropos in their everyday lives. For this reason, gender has been the main category for analysis. However, further research must be conducted on how other social factors such as class, age and race intersect and affect women's self-image and mobility in public spaces in relation to piropos. Several of my informants talked about *Habana Vieja* (old Havana), as an area where piropos was more common and where women would dress up in order to receive more comments. It would thus be interesting to investigate how different spaces in Havana are associated with different levels of sexualisation, based on a notion of class. Vedado could, after all, be described as the middle class part of the city, in comparison with *Vieja* and *Centro Habana*.

Cuba is a country currently undergoing great changes in sexual politics, which will inevitably have immense effects on the social realities of its inhabitants. The recent achievements of CENESEX in questions regarding LGBTQ+-rights, for example the right to state-financed sex-reassignment surgery, should also be put under the microscope and studied in relation to the social realities of life on Cuba.

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Material

Interview with Eliana, 45 minutes, 2017-04-01, Vedado, Havana.

Interview with Jasmin, 66 minutes, 2017-04-07, Vedado, Havana.

Interview with Anna, 47 minutes, 2017-04-07, Vedado, Havana.

Interview with Lena, 61 minutes, 2017-04-15, Vedado, Havana

All recordings of the interviews are in the possession of the author.

Appendix 1 - Interview guide

Introduction

- Presentation of myself and of the research. Why I think it's important.
- Presentation of the interview. The focus is on her feelings, it's not a test.
- Ask for permission to record. Explain anonymity and ask about preferred pseudonym.
- Short presentation of her. Age, occupation, sexual orientation, interests etc.

Part 1 - What?

1a. Could you describe to me what piropos is? How would you describe it to a person that has no clue what it is? What does it include?

1b. Is it always men doing it to women or could women do it to men or men to men etc?

1c. How often would you say it happens to you in your everyday life? Both to you and around you?

1d. Would you say there is a visible pattern? Certain areas of the city or certain times of day? when you're alone or with friends? When you're dressed up?

1e. In your opinion, what's the reason behind catcalling? Why do you think they do it?

Part 2 - How?

2a. Is there a way that you usually feel when you're the subject of piropos?

(if hesitant, clarification) Does it usually make you happy/angry/scared/surprised or something else?

2b. Do you feel different depending on what kind of catcall it is? if it is a verbal comment or just a kissing noise or something else?

2c. Do you think it matters who is doing the piropo? Does it affect you any differently depending on who you get it from?

2d. Can you remember any specific piropo that you've gotten?

(if yes) Do you remember a specific piropo that you appreciated? What was it? How did it make you feel? why, do you think?

(if yes) Can you remember comments that you have perceived as extra negative? That have made you sad or angry? What was it? Could you tell me about it?

(if no) So is it not a thing you dwell on then? or does it stay with you at all?

2e. How do you feel/would you feel days when it doesn't happen to you at all?

2f. Do you feel like there's a certain way that you are expected to react?

(if hesitant, clarification) like, are you expected to smile or get angry or ignoring it or something else?

2g. Does being subjected to piropos make you conscious about yourself or your body do you think? How do you think about your own body in relation to the piropo?

(if yes) do you feel like there's a way that you SHOULD look that makes you feel this way?

2h. Do you think about gender in relation to piropos? Like do you think about the fact that you're a woman when you're subjected to it?

2i. Do you feel like it affects how you relate to the city?

(if hesitant, clarification) do you avoid certain places or walk across the street when you see a group of men or something like that?

Does it make you feel unsafe? if so, when and in what situations?

2j. Do you ever respond to Piropo? How? Could you give me an example?

Which feelings make you respond? When?

2k. Is there a way you wish you could respond but don't? why?

What do you think stands in the way of you responding?

What do you do with your anger/ other feelings?

2l. What happens when you respond / if you were to respond? How does it make you feel and how to the other react to it?

Finally:

-Is there anything you've think we have missed during our interview, anything else you want to talk about or anything else you want to tell me?

-It's never too late to change your mind.

-Thank you.