HEMBROS

– A thematized queer phenomenologic study on the lived experiences of trans- people in Quito-Ecuador.

By: Sooz Romero
Supervisor: Hanna Hallgren
Abstract

The aim of this essay is to examine the narrated experiences of three Trans-masculine activists in relationship to the emergence of a new term “hembros” as a forum for diverse forms of gender expression and subjectivity. The present study is an attempt to examine gender expression from a nomadic subjective approach and a queer phenomenological theoretical framework. The results of this study have shown that gender expression, although not free from the tensions that social sanctions present, could be proposed from different locations of embodied gender subjectivity. Meaning that awareness about the gender system and the structures of power, and working within those frames, one can create new notions of gender expression, taking the body as a starting point.

Key words: Hembros, gender identity, Proyecto Transgenero, female masculinity, pathology, trans-sexuality, body
Acknowledgements

I thank enormously to the patience, support and constant love given to me by “my constant gardeners and partners in crime” during the whole process of writing this essay. Thank you so much my beloved friends! You know who you are. Thank you to Hanna Hallgren for the support and valuable advice
# Table of contents

**Introduction** ................................................................................................................................... 5

**Objective** ........................................................................................................................................ 7

**Outline** ........................................................................................................................................... 8

**Precedent research** ........................................................................................................................ 8

**Background** ..................................................................................................................................... 13

**Theories** ......................................................................................................................................... 15

  * Queer Phenomenology: Orientations ....................................................................................... 16
  * The Feminist Nomadic Subject and Sexual Difference: ............................................................ 19
  * Hegemonic Masculinity............................................................................................................. 22
  * Power and the Subject ............................................................................................................... 23

**Material and Method** .................................................................................................................. 24

**Analysis** ......................................................................................................................................... 27

  * Gender conformity vs. Hembros................................................................................................ 27
  * Complex gender identity and the ascription of sexual orientation ........................................ 31
  * “The good sexuality” vs. Transexual practices ........................................................................ 36
    * Sexual Creativity ................................................................................................................... 37

**Conclusion** .................................................................................................................................... 38

**Bibliography** .................................................................................................................................. 39

  * Electronical Resources: ............................................................................................................ 40

**Appendices** ................................................................................................................................... 41

  * Summary: Hembro 1. ................................................................................................................ 41
  * Summary Hembro 2 ................................................................................................................... 42
  * Summary Hembro 3 ................................................................................................................... 44
Introduction

In light of new generations in which categories like gender, ethnicity, age, functional limitation, etc. cannot be taken for granted and in which the relations of power are more and more questioned by activist all over the world such as students, feminists, etc., power and resistance co-exist, resulting in an ongoing struggle for freedom. In the present essay I will attempt to describe, analyze and “bring to the table” the activism performed by a grassroots organization in Ecuador called “Proyecto Transgenero” (“Project Transgender” hereinafter “PT”)\(^1\). I will examine and question whether or not they succeed in opening alternatives for different forms of gender expression which can co-exist in their context, namely, in Quito, Ecuador. The manual “Cuerpos Distintos\(^2\): Ocho años de activismo transfeminista en Ecuador” (“Different Bodies: Eight years of transfeminist\(^3\) activism in Ecuador”) was published in 2010 and contains various texts written by Ecuadorian transfeminist activists. The theorist Gale Salamon (2009) explains transfeminism as a discipline that focuses on the study of emerging genders, beyond the binary of male and female. In explaining the need for such a movement, Salamon criticizes the lack of response of women’s studies and feminism as a discipline for its failure to take into account trans-\(^4\) studies as a discipline in itself. Salamon explains how both trans- studies and feminism have a lot to learn from one another. She explains how the lack of response to trans- studies from the women’s studies discipline means that women’s studies is left “unable to assess the present state of gender as it is lived or to imagine many of its possible futures” (Salamon 2009:115). She also explains that transgender studies needs feminism because women’s studies provide us with the “systematic understanding of the structures of gender - and the relations of power that

---

\(^1\) See their home site [http://www.proyecto-transgenero.org/](http://www.proyecto-transgenero.org/)

\(^2\) Due to its long name, from now on I will refer to this book as “CD:2010:..”

\(^3\) According to the definition given by Project Transgender, transfeminism is a feminist approach whose focus is to create a frame to understand gender beyond the societal binary system. In other words, to break through the presumption that only two genders exist; namely, female and male. Transfeminism situates the patriarchal heteronormative relationship between the two abstract gender identities in feminine public spaces, independent of the generic-sex condition of the people. (PT 2010:9).

\(^4\) I use “trans-“to refer to all those who identify with trans- identity and expression in an attempt to avoid limiting the term and to be inclusive of the diversity of trans- identity and expression.
underlie those structures- trans- studies in unable to understand gender as a historical category and is powerless to understand how the present state of gender emerged” (Ibid:115-116).

From the starting point of a transfeminist perspective, then, PT created the term “hembros”\(^5\) to refer to a person’s corporeal canon\(^6\) whose gender identity is the masculine and who’s body is occupying the female physiology erased by gender notions of masculinity. According to PT, this term reaffirms the sovereignty of gender in one’s body while criticizing the “natural association” between “female” and “femininity”\(^7\). PT’s transfeminist movement and the creation of hembros provides the transfeminist movement with an opportunity to put forth “new” narratives about trans- experiences and provides an opportunity for real transgender experiences to be visibilized. As discussed, hembros is, according to the PT, a deconstruction of a word in an attempt to construct new language. They affirm that by mixing the words “hembra” which, in Spanish, means “female” with the Spanish masculine ending “o”, they are coining a new word that refers to their activism. They explain on their web site as follows:

> We like to create our own language. We think that this is the best way to “subvert from inside” and that is why we created the word “HEMBRO” to affirm that femaleness does not have anything to do with femininity and that a female body can be masculine.\(^8\)

I will attempt to expose the concept of hembros by using a queer phenomenological approach\(^9\) in three narrations of transfeminist activist members of PT. I use the queer phenomenological approach in order to show how the lived experiences of their bodies could be seen as examples of bodies reoriented into new directions and could show the potential existing in re-orienting. I suggest that this could be seen as the strategy that hembros takes on. I will also use Braidotti’s reasoning on the theory of sexual difference and the feminist nomadic subject\(^10\), in order to

\(^5\) Hembros is, according to the PT, a deconstruction of a word in order to construct their own language. They affirm that, by mixing the term “Hembra” which, in Spanish, means “female” with the Spanish masculine ending “o” they coin a new word to create a form of gender expression.

\(^6\) A corporeal canon is a body of rules or principles generally established as valid and fundamental in a field, in this case the bodily set of rules that determine the “feminine” and “masculine” body.

\(^7\) "Cuerpos Distintos Derechos Iguales: Ocho años de activismo transfeminista en Ecuador“ (2010:7)

\(^8\) (PT’s Facebook website: http://www.facebook.com/#!/photo.php?fbid=207149285962372&set=t.100000019063477&type=3&theater [Translated by author]).

\(^9\) For details about this theory see the theory chapter.

\(^{10}\) For details about this theories see the theory chapter.
conceptualize hembros as a feminist nomadic subject which moves around the boundaries of the social gender while creating a new subjectivity.

I find the concept of hembros interesting because it could be used as a source of inspiration for those of us whose efforts and work is aimed at creating space for alternative forms of gender expression. I will not pretend to speak about any sort of “truth” or solution for the deconstruction of the gender binary system. My intention is, rather, to discuss an alternative way to “create” gender which would operate from outside the socio- and culturally- built frames of gender.

Objective

The aim of this essay is to analyze from a queer phenomenological approach and the feminist nomadic subject theory, how and if the term “hembros”, as a political approach for change and, as forum for subjectivity, if it could potentially be used to expand the spatial boundaries of gender expression given the historical and present state of gender, which is understood in terms of a binary: female/male. From a queer phenomenological perspective, I will explore the experiences expressed in three narrations written by transfeminist activists, who are also members of the PT project “Cosas de Hembros” (“Hembro Matters”). These narrations are taken from the manual “Project Transgender: Eight years of transfeminist activism in Ecuador”. In order to explore and analyze these narrations, I will apply a qualitative phenomenological method and then thematize the material. The following questions will be used as a guide to answer the objectives of this essay:

1) What are the experiences described by the subjects of my study (“hembros”) with reference to their gender and body in the manual “Transgender Project: Eight years of activism in Ecuador”?

2) Do the experiences described in the narrations about the subject’s bodies expand spaces for alternative ways to express gender outside the gender system? If so, how?

---

11 I refer to “spatial boundaries” as a term that encompasses the psychological and symbolic aspects of gender expression.
12 For more information see method chapter
3) Do the sexual practices recounted in the narrations of the subjects of my study step out of the boundaries of “the good sexuality? If so, how?

Outline

Following the Introduction and Objectives, this essay will now proceed to explain the preliminary research which will be used for the analysis in this essay. Next, I will outline the theories relevant to the subject of the present study. In the next chapter, I will explain the material used in this essay, the procedure, a presentation of the subjects of my study as well as the method used to analyze the material. Next, I will present my analysis which will be divided into three themes: Gender conformity vs. “hembros”, Complex gender identity and the ascription of sexual orientation, “The good sexuality” vs. Trans- sexual practices. Finally, I will set out my conclusions.

Precedent research

In this chapter I will proceed to cover the preliminary research completed on the subject of transgender activism as well as trans- identity construction together with the political aspects of trans-community building. I will start by presenting an anthropological study done on the PT which will serve to place this study into context in terms of location and background. In addition to this, I will present an article about “transgender community building” and how this activity is important for visibility and political organization. Finally, I will set out a contrasting anthropological study that will show how experiences of trans- are seen as a process toward a more specific gender identity which will, at a determined end, match with the physiological sex.

F. Echeverría’s anthropological study “Las expansiones subversivas de lo trans-feminista en Ecuador” examines the subversive expansions of transfeminism in Ecuador and the tensions that exist in the representation of trans- within the project PT, contrasting the political discourses with the discursive constructions in interviews with people who self-identify as trans- and are members of the PT. Although this article is not a thesis, but a study, I find it relevant to this
thesis for its focus on the extended political coverage of the term trans- as a daily bio-political\textsuperscript{13} practice in Ecuador and the tensions in the representation of PT-Trans House in Quito. I also find this article relevant for my study as it focuses on the ideas expressed and used by members of the PT, while also providing a detailed background on the PT.

F. Echeverría begins his study by providing some background information about the PT\textsuperscript{14}. He proceeds to analyze the discourses used by members of the PT in their activism and their self-definition. F. Echeverría uses queer theory as his frame of analysis. He explains that this theory encompasses the cultural discourses that have emerged to explain and legitimate non-normative sexualities through a theorization of desires and erotism, and through which we can understand identities as a political position against the norm. F. Echeverría explains that according to the interviews performed, PT does more than eradicate the norm, it generates a landslide which deconstructs, transforms and re-proposes social norms (F. F. Echeverría 2009:76 [translated by author]). He goes on to affirm that PT is a locus of resistance which could be a starting point for historical reflexion and future imaginary, constant re-systematization, re-oriented to urgent political objectives in expansion (F. Echeverría 2009:78).

F. Echeverría explains “the testimonies analyzed demonstrate a epistemological mobility not free of complexity or paradoxes that complicate the activist discourse which seeks to name something and, at the same time, to not be limited by a nominal category” (Ibid:79). In order to create a gender which can be understood in the context, one must use the gender norms and take a performative approach. In this sense F. Echeverría affirms that to follow a performative role created according to the gender matrix is, in itself, confirming the phallocentric heteronormativity which, in turn, becomes the common structure of oppression for all forms of diversity (Ibid:). I suggest that hembros could be understood as a concept that takes into account structures of the social gender and the biological sex, incorporating the bodily experiences of the perceived gender, biological sex and gender identity. F. Echeverría’s study is, thus, relevant to mine because it sets out the difficulties present in creating gender expression outside of the norm.

\textsuperscript{13} Bio-politics is a term used to explain a system of regulation and control of the inhabitants in a society.

\textsuperscript{14} See Background chapter
F. Echeverría problematizes the creation of a gender identity through the use of one of the existing categories of gender to refer to one’s own gender identity. In other words, he argues that, to construct a gender identity through the use of one of the existing categories, instead of creating something new, is problematic. According to his study, the female trans-identity, in order to be understood in the context of Ecuador, can only be understood through the use of “being a woman in the wrong body” (Ibid:79). To create an identity based on being an individual in the wrong body both questions the “natural” biological connection with gender and the “normal” sexuality attributed to the biological sex while, at the same time, perpetuates, symbolically and performatively, the phallocentric notions of femininity and women and the gender binary.

Further, I will be using the thesis “I’m the Prince of Pain for I’m the Princess of the Brain: Liminal Transgender Identities, Narratives and the Elimination of Ambiguities” by Mandy Wilson. This study examines the narrations of trans-people who live in Perth, Australia and who express their experiences of trans- as a phase rather than as a spatial alternative for different forms of gender expression. I think this thesis could be used as a contrast to my study on hembros.

Wilson explains how identities can be diverse in different contexts. Her study was set in Perth, Australia and was based on narrations. Wilson’s study provides an example of how some groups of transgender people follow the binary structure, explaining that there are socio-cultural factors associated with transgenderism, and that it is situational and liminal. Wilson defines “liminal” as a process where the participants of her study found themselves to be. They thought of transgenderism as a stage which will eventually have an end.

[T]here is also a pressing need for many transgendered persons to ultimately define themselves within existing and recognizable ‘normal’ gender boundaries: instead of marking difference, many seem to eliminate it. Often identity goes from being ‘liminal’ and multiple where males can be females, females can be males, and public gender categories are temporarily and spatially suspended, to being ultimately singular, recognizable and stable (as demanded by wider medical, sociocultural and public understandings of gender) (Wilsonn 2002: 426)

Wilson’s research is similar to mine in the sense that it examines gender as situational and because it studies a group of people who share experiences of trans-identity. My study of
“hembros” is situational in the sense that it arises in the specific context of Quito, Ecuador, where the gender binary is very strong and the knowledge or awareness about patriarchy and the structures of the gender system is not widespread. In addition to that, the culture in Ecuador is heavily influenced by religious beliefs. Economically, Ecuador’s economy is not strong and education is not accessible for everyone. In fact, most of the people involved in the PT movement call themselves street activists, which they define as “activism that comes from the streets”\(^{15}\) Another similarity to Wilson’s research is that Wilson’s paper focuses on finding out how trans-people understand their gender status and how they relate to their bodies. She writes:

> When I embarked on this research, I set out to explore how transgendered persons understood, (re)created and (re)negotiated their gender identities in a cultural locale such as Perth, Western Australia. Where did transgendered bodies ‘fit’? And how did transgendered people understand their gender statuses? (Ibid: 426)

Wilson explains the importance of the theoretical framework she started from; namely, the theory of the “third gender”. The third gender is a form of spatial possibility, a forum for articulations of difference, multiple categories and gender ambiguities rather than “third” as the number three category of gender (Ibid:).

Hembros could be seen as fitting in this theoretical framework. I suggest that the term hembro could be a forum for multiple categories of gender and gender ambiguities, as well as a forum for visibility and discussion. Wilson also takes note of the way people interpret gender and transgression as intimately and specifically connected to factors such as history, culture and context. She means that one cannot assume that gender variations in diverse cultures should be seen as “third” gender phenomenon, per se. However, the theoretical framework of the third gender provides us with a broader understanding of how different cultures understand or interpret sex/gender difference and why deviant bodies and symbols in certain cultures become “transgressive”, whilst in other cultures they are not (Ibid:).

Wilson demonstrates in her study, which is based on the narratives regarding the participant’s daily lives, that the participants in her research did not see or understand the “alternative of the third gender” as such. Instead, they understood their gender/sex status as a phase. In addition to

\(^{15}\) for reference to this see their home page: [http://www.proyecto-transgenero.org/](http://www.proyecto-transgenero.org/)
that, they did not want to be marked or their gender seen as a new category of gender. She writes:

\[T\]he trans of transgendered meant for many a temporary liminal phase and was before long perceived as one of limited gender potential, where the body is out of necessity suspended in a ‘betwixt and between’ limbo but where it ‘is simply a means to an end rather than an end in itself (Ibid: 427).

In conclusion, the participants of Wilson’s study were aware of the gender constraints and guided by a desire for normalcy. She explains that, being normal to the participants was not only for the sake of fitting in, but it was also due to socio-economic and cultural pressures (Wilson 2002:428) The hembros in the present study take a different approach to those in Wilson’s study, by adapting to the socio-economic conditions and adopting a political standpoint whereby trans-people need not conform to the heteronormative gender system. However, due to geographical limitations, since I am in Sweden while the subjects of this study are in Ecuador, I cannot observe how the narrations are actually put into practice. This means that the present study is open to further research from an anthropological point of view.

Additionally, I find the article “GLB+T Gender/Sexuality Movements and Transgender Collective Identity (De) Constructions” by K. L. Broad to be of an important input to my study. This article examines the processes by which transgender activists and groups engage identity in social movement activity, which, although it is examined in the context of activist movements in the U.S., its focus is on activism for political change and, thus, similar in that way to the focus of the present study. I argue that we must see transgender activism as embodying the key concerns of politics and theory today, namely, the complex commitment to and suspicion of the notion of “identity”. Affirming that movements fail because of a gap between the radical edge and the mainstream of people, this article illustrates how transgender activists in the U.S. in the 1990s attempted to achieve a balance between these two extremes (Broad 2002: 241).

K. L. Broad explains that scholars have discussed transgenderism from diverse ideologies and theoretical points of view, for instance, from the “woman’s radical feminist point of view” to the poststructuralist/postmodernist performative point of view. She explains:

Simply stated, transgender activists and scholars are arguing that the study of transgender experience has been, and remains, political. Because transgender experience has been
Indeed, the creation of a new identity plays an important role in the creation of visibility. Broad argues that this is done by creating community, grouping and gatherings. This is one of the strategies taken by transgender movements in the US during the 90’s. She elaborates:

In many ways, one important aspect of a “new” transgender movement in the mid-1990s was the concerted effort to create a politicized transgender group identity. In social movement language, the formation of a shared transgender group identity was the construction of a collective identity (a politicized social movement identity)... (Ibid:249).

While in the 90’s in the U.S., creating one “trans identity” helped push the political trans-agenda forward and brought recognition to the fluidity of identity, I argue it could be problematic to have a “trans identity” because having a set of collective rules and behaviours could also bring such consequences as exclusion and homogeny. PT and hembros use the term “Lo Trans” (that about trans-16) which they explain encompasses all the trans- identities and the ones to be created (CD:2010:12) The manual “Cuerpos Distintos: Ocho años de Transactivismo en Ecuador” was created by PT to spread the word and, in that way, create visibility and raise awareness. In the book one can find numerous variations of gender identity and expression expressed in the different narrations and essays.

Finally, Broad explains that, in her study, the formation of groups reinforced the identity and visibility of transgender groups (Broad 2002:252).

**Background**

In this chapter I will contextualize my study by locating it and informing the reader about the context in which the subjects are located. I will also be presenting specific background

---

16 Translated by author.
information relating to the organization PT, its origins and its role in the creation of the term hembros.

The decriminalization of homosexuality in Ecuador took place in 1995. Since that time, sexual and gender diversity movements have become highly influential in the national political processes. F. Echeverría attributes the “process of reformulation of diverse identities that enrich the discussion about what it means to be in front of a heteronormative "should be” to the growing visibilization of these movements as “places of resistance and the creative way in which they have articulated their fight on different fronts” (F. Echeverría 2009:73 [translated by author]). He goes on to explain that “according to these same activists, a unified LGBTI movement doesn’t exist, the activism efforts such as that of Project Transgender result in paradigmatic models of a process that, in a rhizomatic\textsuperscript{17} way, accesses and influences on diverse fronts of discussion about questions of identity and rights” (Ibid:74 [translated by author]). According to F. Echeverría, PT is an organization that utilizes social, political, cultural, paralegal and judicial means to realize individual and collective rights, self-identifying as a political proposal that works on strengthening trans- identity in Ecuador (Ibid:). PT works on such issues as the exercise of the freedom of personal image, identity and association of trans and intersex persons, and works on occupying those spaces from which these people have been excluded (Ibid:). Their actions are grounded in “subversion from the inside” (praxis of alternative rights and para-legality), the transfeminist alliance, the intercultural dialogue” (Ibid:). One of the most important achievements of PT for the purpose of this study was their achievement, through litigation, of the right to trans identity on the certificate of citizenship in 2007 (Ibid:). This was important because it brought visibility to trans- people in the public sphere in Ecuador. Currently, PT is working on an international campaign to stop trans pathologization, in other words, to eradicate of psychiatric, social and legal perspectives that treat transexuality as a disease (CD:2010:97).

\textsuperscript{17} Rhizomatic is a term used to describe theory and research that allows for multiple, non-hierarchical entry and exit points in data representation and interpretation. In this context is it used to describe multiplicity, a web-like, non-unified, non-hierarchical form of activism.
Theories

In this chapter I will explain what theories are relevant to this essay. I will then proceed to use these theories in the analysis. In order to review the gender experiences narrated by the subjects of my study, I will be using Sara Ahmed’s *queer phenomenology*. This theory takes into account the body and its experiences as a starting point. Furthermore I will use Rosi Braidotti’s development of the *School of sexual difference and the feminist nomadic subject*. This theory will be used with the aim of creating a frame in which the subjects of this study could be theoretically situated, since this theory focuses on the material differences and the asymmetrical relationships between women and men. In addition to this, I will use R.W. Connell’s theory of the *Hegemonic Masculinity* to support my development on Braidotti’s feminist nomadic subject and the school of sexual difference. In addition, in order to examine the power relations in my material I will proceed to use Michael Foucault’s analysis on *the Power and the Subject*. It is very important to distinguish the approach I take to the analysis of hembros in this study as a more material theoretical approach. This means that it is central to this study to analyze how the subjects of my study talk about the lived experience of their bodies and the consequences of difference they express in their narratives. I distinguish this approach from that of queer theory.

---

18 Central to queer theory is the elimination of gender categories in order to blur the binary. I believe this approach can be very problematic because “erasing” gender categories increases the risk of reproducing the construction of the masculine subject as universal; as the norm. I believe that, through discussing gender and tracking differences, one can understand gender inequality rather than ignore it. In this way, queer theory is not very applicable to the creation of hembros. Furthermore, queer theory does not take class, ethnicity or culture into consideration; hembros is a street movement which does not recognize the term “queer” as applicable to their struggle because it is an English-language and Western term. “Queer” is a term used in the context of academia. Since education and academia are only accessible to people with financial resources, this indicates an elitist status. In addition to this, since the frame of analysis of queer theory is based on the eradication of categories, it does not consider “queer” as category of identity. In contrast, PT’s term hembros was created explicitly to “name” and “identify”. PT believes that the creation of a new category of identity is necessary to create visibility and awareness (F. Echeverría 2009: 78).
Ahmed describes phenomenology as providing “a set of tools for thinking about orientation, given that orientation is commonly described as a bodily spatial awareness (as the sixth sense)” (Ahmed 2006:181). Sara Ahmed starts her thesis by raising the question of what orientation means. She argues that the world we live in varies in its shapes depending on what way we turn but what makes us “oriented” is the fact that we “know” what way we turn, meaning that we bear knowledge acquired from our surroundings and our experiences. Ahmed affirms that to be oriented means also to be turned towards “objects” which we recognize, and that we know what we see when we see them; hence these objects become our guide to finding our way. These objects are different things which we familiarize with; signs that tells us something. These symbols and objects form a base from which we form our ideas and gather together. Ahmed remarks that the objects we gather could be very different and create different grounds. So Ahmed’s question arises upon the differences produced by what objects we are oriented toward. Ahmed asks: “What difference does it make “what” or “who” we are oriented toward in the very direction of our desire?”(Ahmed 2006:1)

“What does it mean for sexuality to be lived as oriented? “(Ahmed 2006:3) Ahmed raises the question of desire and orientation and goes on to question the directions we are taught to follow and how we come to learn this from living in a space where we all are oriented towards something, and sexual orientation is part of that space we live in, hence, who or what we are oriented towards is basically not of relevance but, instead, what “objects” we learn to be oriented towards. The construction of sexuality as an orientation follows the pattern of the gender binary male/female, masculine/feminine. In this sense, being sexually oriented to the opposite sex and inhabiting a masculine or feminine body is how sexuality is formed. The process of learning to orient and recognize what is around us and what objects of desire we are supposed to move
toward is, in Ahmed’s theory of orientation, the most relevant point for creating queer orientations: the type of orientations that do not follow the directions given to us to follow.

[I] take up the concept of orientation as a way of putting queer studies in closer dialogue with phenomenology. I follow the concept of “orientation” through different sights, spaces and temporalities. In doing so, I hope to offer a new way of thinking about the spatiality of sexuality, gender and race. .. how bodies take shape through tending toward objects that are reachable, that are available within the bodily horizon (Ahmed 2006:2)

Phenomenology, according to Ahmed, makes “orientation” central when it is about arguing that consciousness is always directed “toward” an object. Ahmed argues that because of the emphasis that phenomenology puts on the lived experience of inhabiting a body “the intentionality of consciousness, the significance of what is ready to hand and the role of habituating actions that shape bodies and worlds”, phenomenology offers a possibility of rethinking the concepts of orientation and how the body turns towards objects (Ibid:). Starting from the concept that sexuality is part of the space we live in and learn to be oriented toward, Ahmed’s aim is to offer a rather different approach to retheorizing the concepts of sexualized spaces. She explains that this could be done by taking a phenomenological approach on the question of sexual orientation; in other words, sexual orientation from the point of view of the lived experiences of the subjects. She states:

“A queer phenomenology might find what is queer within phenomenology and use that queerness to make some rather different points” (Ahmed 2006:4).

Ahmed explains how the concept of “directions” is also conceptualized from a historical conceptualization. In this sense, she means that bodies are shaped by the direction we are thought to follow. She writes:

We could reflect on the difference it makes “which” way the subjects turn. Life after all is full of turning points. Turning might not only constitute subjects in the sense that the “turning” allows the subject to misrecognize themselves.... [b]ut might also take subjects in different directions (Ahmed 2006:16).

According to Ahmed, the “turning” also has potential, because it could take one in different directions than the direction which they are expected to follow. Ahmed sustains that depending on which way one turns; different worlds might even come into view. She affirms also that the
repeated event of turning shapes bodies in the same direction, therefore, bodies do not possess an endemic direction or, as she puts it, “bodies do not simply “have” a direction, it is rather that bodies are directed and they take the shape of that direction” (Ahmed 2006:16).

Ahmed goes on to explain the role of the body. She suggests that the body provides us with perspective: the body here is the starting point from which we begin. The “here” of bodily residence is therefore what takes the body outside of itself, because the body is affected and formed by its surroundings. Ahmed exemplifies the experience of the body in terms of being in contact with cold and the reaction of the skin. In this sense, the body becomes oriented in its responsiveness to the world around it (Ibid:).

Thus, becoming oriented, according to Ahmed, has to do with the body’s understanding of space. Exemplifying the difference between left and right, she means that, only by referring to these sides can one know which way one is turning. In addition to this, it is important to determine the familiarity of spaces or the world because it gives the body the capacity to be oriented in this way or in that. “The question of orientation becomes then a question not only about how we find our way but how we come to feel “at home” (Ahmed 2006:7) Ahmed even sees the “getting lost” situation as a possibility to be oriented somewhere or to be taken somewhere by this situation. She means that being lost shows us a way to register what is not familiar and, in that way, inhabit space. Being lost can also become a familiar feeling. In this sense, familiarity is shaped by the feel of space or by how spaces make an impression upon bodies19 (Ibid:).

---

19 Due to the in depth analysis of Ahmed on this matter, I will continue developing her concepts in the “Analysis chapter” of this essay.
The Feminist Nomadic Subject and Sexual Difference:

The theory of Sexual Difference, according to Braidotti (2003), should be seen as a theory which supports “women’s”20 ontological desire and structural need to place themselves as female subjects, meaning as embodied subjects and therefore as social and sexed (Braidotti 2003:43ff). The “bodily roots of subjectivity” are, for Braidotti , important in the equation, as describing a set of important aspects which come to constitute the subjectivity in ones embodied experiences. Rather than recreate the structures and the understandings of gender in Western societies. Braidotti explains that the universal, gender-free understandings of human embodiment are obsolete and, rather, focuses on gender differences which, according to her, are in agreement with the feminist politics of location. Braidotti’s “feminist subject of knowledge” is described as a multiple subject. I interpret this to mean that the feminist subject is diverse, rather than homogeneous. In this sense, we could potentially transcend from the understanding of the subject position of “woman” as not man, and also from the same one-sided conception of women as a group. But Braidotti sustains that this transcendence only can occur by taking account of the embodied experiences, using the body as the starting point, rather than separating from it. And the body should not be understood as a biological entity or a social construction, rather,

...the body, or the embodiment of the subject, is a key term in the feminist struggle for the redefinition of subjectivity. It is to be understood as neither a biological nor a sociological category, but rather as a point of overlap between the physical, the symbolic and the material social conditions (Ibid:44).

---

20 “Woman” in this essay is not used as a definite gender category. Instead, it is intended as an umbrella term to encompass different forms of subjectivities that step out from phallocentric ideologies. I will develop this idea throughout this chapter.
Braidotti explains feminism of sexual difference as strengthening the politics of women’s ontological desire - the desire to be - focusing on the creation of the female subject: the “becoming woman”. This feminist subject, then, is not seen from an essentialist point of view but, instead, as formed from embodied experiences and the awareness of political inequality. Braidotti emphasizes the importance of the experiences of inequality, which create social differences and diversity, both of which could be seen as positive alternatives.

Braidotti speaks of the notion of difference which has, in a Western European context, been historically given pejorative meaning, as a focal point for feminist transformation. Namely, if difference could be transformed into something positive, it would create space for the uniqueness and complexity of each subject. In terms of difference in the context of sex/gender, Braidotti explains:

[T]he subject of feminism is not Woman as the complementary and specular other of man, but rather complex and multi-layered embodied subject who has taken her distance from the institution of femininity. ‘She’ no longer coincides with the disempowered reflection of a dominant subject who casts his masculinity in a universalistic posture. She, in fact, may no longer be a she, but the subject of quite another story: a subject-in-process; a mutant; the other of the Other; a post-Woman embodied subject cast in female morphology who has already undergone an essential metamorphosis (Ibid:45).

Braidotti is adopting a position here in which she distances herself from the position that sees the behaviour of the sexes as biologically determined, but instead she embraces difference as arising between subjects, that arises as a consequence of the “overlap between the physical, the symbolic and the material social conditions” (Ibid:44).

The narratives of the subjects dealt with in this essay show how they embrace or at least acknowledge their differences, and that they are already seen as different in terms of their gender/sex. Indeed, the pejorative meaning associated with difference, as pointed out by Braidotti, and that is commonly found in Western ideas of equality, does little to create space for the kind of individual complexity expressed in these narratives.

Two basic points relevant to the present study on the theory of sexual difference are as follows:
1. This style is based on the "politics of location," i.e., it rests on the attention to differences among women.

2. It is focused on the embodied nature of the subject, in its intrinsic link with desire, power, and knowledge.

Braidotti explains these two points by referring to the term “woman” as an umbrella rather than a gender category. She states:

   Let me expand now on the structures of the new vision of feminist subjectivity, which I see as the center of the philosophical agenda. Fundamental to this vision is the notion of woman as an umbrella term that brings together a variety of different levels of subjectivity and different relationships to and notions of time (Braidotti 1993:6).

I do not take Braidotti’s use of the term “woman” as essentialist. One need not be a biological woman or identify as a woman to be able to create a new subjectivity under the umbrella of “woman”. Rather “woman” can be a forum where new forms of subjectivity are re-created to eradicate the patriarchal notions of “woman”. Braidotti explains “woman” as:

   The notion of "woman" refers to a female sexed subject that is constituted, as psychoanalysis convincingly argues, through a process of identification with culturally available positions organized in the dichotomy of gender” (Ibid:).

Furthermore, “woman” is everything that does not fit in the model of the male supremacy. Indeed, I wish to use the term to include all possible categories subordinated by patriarchy. In this sense, I will use Braidotti’s theory of the new feminist subjectivity to provide this study with a frame of analysis through which to understand hembros as new form of subjectivity, and, ultimately, as a forum for creating visibility and space.

Braidotti explains that desire is central to the pursuit of alternative definitions of female subjectivity. She explains that her focus is on women’s desire to become and to speak as female feminist subjects regardless to “the propositional content of their utterances” (Braidotti 1993:6). In other words, what is important is the empowering of women’s entitlement to speak, to become (Ibid).

According to Braidotti, the feminist agenda is to struggle to change the values and the male-made notions of femininity ascribed to the representation of “woman” “in the longer historical time of patriarchal history” (Braidotti 1993:7). She states:
The feminist project encompasses both the level of subjectivity in the sense of historical agency, including political and social entitlement, and the level of identity, which is linked to consciousness, desire, and the politics of the personal; it covers both the conscious and the unconscious levels (Ibid:).

To recreate multiple forms of embodied subjectivity is central to Braidotti’s theory. Regarding how to achieve this, she explains:

This strategy aimed at the creation of new subject positions also answers the question of how new models of the self are invented. From where does that sort of change begin? My answer is that the new is created by revisiting and burning the old (Braidotti: 1993:9).

In order to strengthen my analysis, I will also use Connell’s Hegemonic Masculinity. This framework will serve as a compliment and connection to the analysis about trans- masculinity and Braidotti’s feminist nomadic subjectivity and sexual difference. Connell demonstrates that, in our societies there is an ideal type of masculinity that dominates over other kinds. Feminine males are subordinated according to this model of masculinity, subsequently trans- males are part of this subordinated group. This theory illustrates how Braidotti’s feminist nomadic subjectivity serves as a model in which the difference between males and females is the key for creating new subjectivities, where everything that is not male has room to develop its own subjectivities.

Hegemonic Masculinity

In the book Masculinities, Connell uses the term “hegemonic masculinity” to refer to the normative masculinity that is the most valued in society. Connell speaks about hegemony as a cultural dynamic in which one group dominates and maintains their power over another in the same way as patriarchy - a systematic structure - dominates and perpetrates its power over women (Connell 2003:95-103). Connell asserts that, from the starting point of culture, sex, and class, one can differentiate between multiple types of masculinities. Connell explains hegemonic masculinity as one type of masculinity which dominates over all other forms (Ibid:). This hierarchy of masculinities is built with notions of an ideal “normal” masculinity that fits into the frames of heteronormativity. This “normal” masculinity exists in a hegemonic relationship to femininity and women. Therefore, gender roles and their historical ascriptions play an important
role in the construction of hegemonic masculinity (Ibid:). In the analysis of these hierarchical masculinities, Connells also sets out the notion of “complicit masculinity”, a type of masculinity in which men do not enact a strong version of the hegemonic masculinity and they do not deviate from it either (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005:832). Connells indicates also that hegemonic masculinity is not a stable type of character that looks the same wherever one goes; rather, it varies depending on class, ethnicity, and etcetera. In other words, hegemonic masculinity is situational. Connell affirms that, according to this model of hegemonic masculinity, one can see that everything that deviates from this ideal picture becomes subordinated. For example, the feminine guy, homosexual men, trans-people and women are all subordinated within the model of hegemonic masculinity. Connell explains:

Hegemonic masculinity was distinguished from other masculinities, especially subordinated masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity was not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it was certainly normative. It embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men. (Ibid :)

**Power and the Subject**

Additionally, Foucault’s analysis on power and the subject will help explain how the subjects of this study use their struggles as a form of agency to create space in society. Foucault explains that his approach is not to create a theory of power but, instead, his focus is to analyze the subject’s position and creation. He affirms that “the conceptualization should not be found on a theory of the object the conceptualized object is not the single criterion of a good conceptualization. We have to know the historical conditions which motivate our conceptualization. We need a historical awareness of our present circumstance (Foucault 1982:778). To simplify Foucault’s analysis, I will provide the reader with a brief overview of his analysis of power and the subject. He suggests that we see the structures of power relations as “more directly related to our present situation which implies more relations between theory and practice” (Foucault 1982:780). He goes on to explain the following points relevant to the analysis of power:
- One must take forms of resistance as the means to visibilize the different forms of structures of power, location, points of application and the methods used;

- One must analyze power relations through the strategies of conflict, rather than from its own internal rationality;

- Power relations should be investigated by exploring the “forms of resistance and attempts made to dissociate these relations” (Ibid:).

This analysis is useful for exploring the struggle that trans- movements and individuals face on a daily basis, which is in opposition to phallocentrism and the gender binary.

**Material and Method**

In this chapter I will explain what my material consists of, the selection of the quotations used as material, the procedure of gathering material, and introduction of the subjects of my study. I will then proceed to explain the method used to work on the material and how it was applied.

The material used in this essay consists of three narrations, which were found in the manual entitled “Cuerpos Distintos: Ocho Años de Activismo Transfeminista en el Ecuador” (“Distinct Bodies: Eight Years of Activism in Ecuador”) and a video clip which can be found on the website youtube.com. The manual was published by PT in 2010. In the manual, one can find a series of letters, essays and narrations transcribed and written by people who identify with diverse forms of self identifications and activists whose work takes different forms and approaches. In these letters, people describe their experiences and feelings about being sex workers, intersex, gender non-conformists and trans-. Among the narrations written by trans-people, one can find a section dedicated till “cosas de hombres”\(^2\) which is a group created at the trans- house in Quito. I took three narrations whose content seemed innovative and relevant to my search for queer gender expressions. These narrations contain three different perspectives about trans- experience; one from the body and labour perspective, another from the body and

\(^2\) This name changed to ”Cosas de hembros” (“Hembro Matters”) in 2011.
trans-sexual practices perspective, and the last one from the body and health perspective. I will use these narratives as the material for the analysis in order to explore what kinds of experiences are expressed and to explore whether they serve to challenge the current gender order. These narratives take on a very personal style, where the narrators speak openly about their lives. Although the narrations are rich in content, I had to choose the dominant themes and quotes that contain, according to my interpretation, detailed information about the embodied gender experience and possible contradictions which would problematize gender conformity and agency as struggle strategies. The subjects of my study are members of the working class, from the South American context and, therefore, from an entirely different structure of power and struggle than those from the West. They use their legal names in each narration; Coli, Nael and Pascal. Coli is from Ecuador, Nael from Chile and Pascal is Lebanese-Ecuadorian. My first idea was to perform interviews with the people who came up with the term hembros. Unfortunately, this proved to be an extremely difficult undertaking, in part because of time differences and geographical limitations. Indeed, I did not receive a response to any of the requests made for interviews and, thus, could not perform them. Therefore I decided to analyze the narrations of those involved in Cosas de Hembros. In order to analyze these narrations, I will thematize the material into three different themes, which will be used as a way to give structure to the material. In each narration, certain themes will be dominant and, therefore, certain narrations will be explored in more detail under each of the themes.

In addition, I will apply a phenomenological analysis to the narrations. The phenomenological method’s aim is to describe psychological phenomena as it is experienced. Phenomenology’s focus as a method of analysis lies in the relationship between the phenomenon and what is expressed about it. In other words, what and how the experience of an event is described become the main point and the subject of the analysis (Langemar 2008: 123). Phenomenology is the

---

22 The three narrations used in this study are direct transcriptions of different occasions in which the subjects of this study have spoken. The first narration is available on youtube at the following link: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7nW0pHhr5A&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7nW0pHhr5A&feature=related) Clip of the testimonial given by “Coli”. The rest of the narrations are available in the manual “Cuerpos Distintos: Ocho años de activismo Transfeminista en Ecuador 2010”.

---
study of lived experiences. I will follow the instructions for the application of a phenomenological analysis as set out by Pia Langemar. They are as follows:

1. Read through all the data various times so that the material becomes familiar and you will get a feeling that you can understand the narrations from participant’s perspective. Work only with the material you have, being as open and empathetic as possible;

2. Mark the quotes that are relevant for your thesis questions. Here, what is important is to be observant so that you don’t miss details that might seem unimportant upon your first read through;

3. Read the quotes that you have marked carefully and many times through, and write down your interpretation of the subjective content. The quotes can have various implications and their interpretation should be in light of the whole narration, but they should also be interpreted in the context of the material as a whole;

4. Sort out the quotes into themes depending on the implications in each quote;

5. Examine your themes so that they build a coherent whole that provides answers to the questions in your thesis. They should describe a picture that is as complete as possible about the phenomenon from the starting point of the original material (Langemar 2010:125[translated by author]).

I identify the following themes from the narrations reviewed:

- Gender conformity vs. Hembros
- Complex gender identity and the ascription of sexual orientation
- Sexuality “the good sexuality” vs. Trans- sexual practices

These themes will be described in more detail, below.
Analysis

Gender conformity vs. Hembros

In this chapter I will proceed to develop the themes that I found to be dominant in the three narrations. Despite the fact that the third theme, “Sexuality “the good sexuality” vs. Trans-sexual practices”, was found in only one of the narrations, I decided to analyze it because it touches upon the issue of sexuality, an issue of enormous relevance to this study.

The narratives used for this essay show that the subjects are aware of the social constraints on gender. For instance, Coli expresses this awareness when he tells the reader about his first job. He got this job through his sister’s boyfriend who did not know that Coli was born a girl. Coli says:

“I told my sister not to tell him that I was a woman, because he would be more careful with me and treat me delicately and besides I would not get the job, I told her to say that I was her cousin or her brother” (CD:2010:52).

Wilson explains that the participants of her study experienced some form of discrimination in Perth based on their gender status. This has made them modify their behaviour for fear of discrimination or abuse. She remarks that her participants expressed feelings of being “realistic” about the necessity to hide their gender variance from certain settings or people. (Wilson 2002:428). Similarly, some of the subjects of the narratives in this study express feeling of fear of discrimination and abuse. However, in the present analysis, I wish to point out the agency of the subjects as potential sources of change. The subjects, by choosing the settings in which they decide to hide their gender variation, demonstrate that gender can also be used as a tool for struggle and survival. In the paragraph written by Coli, above, the reader can identify how the subject used social constrains on gender to his favor; for instance, to obtain a male-identified job, and to be treated as an equal on the job. Male bodies in this context are treated as tough as opposed to delicate; in this social context male bodies are shaped and expected to be strong and tough, which also forms and orients male bodies in that direction. The subject is aware of the social limitations of his female sex and actively chooses to cross the “line” or “direction” of the
male gender. Thus, the female body crosses the boundaries of gender and enters the male space, thereby expanding it.

According to Nael, the use of visual tricks to create shapes and hide body parts is very common in the trans-world. He says, for example, that he had to use a packed pair of socks to create a shape in his underwear in order to pass and further, he writes: “replace what I don’t have and, anyhow, what a heterosexual woman would want from me; at least at the beginning”. He also bandages his chest; something he says he does because he wants to “hide something he has and does not want, however that, at the end of the day, the hiding and the tricks disappear when one gets naked, and that is the real big test” (CD: 2010:58).

The constraints of gender, according to my understanding, also form the body and mark it with experiences which will guide the subjects in directions towards the familiar rather than the unfamiliar. In the following narration the reader can see how the body is affected by social conditions and gender constraints. In his narration, Coli is very open about how he thinks about his body and gender. He tells us how he has been hiding his biological sex throughout the years in order to have a “normal life.” Even when, during work, he fell from a second floor and got paint all over his body, he had to stand up and continue to work, because of the fear of being taken to the hospital and getting “caught”, as he puts it. He says:

“So I don’t know how I managed to stand up, get myself together, because if I got picked up by an ambulance, it would be certain that I would get caught. I have always had to hide my identity, no matter what, always! To me it is more important to be Coli. Because I am Coli and it is me, Coli.”(CD: 2010:54)

Coli does not want to be “discovered” at the hospital or in the public sphere because that would disrupt the “normal life” he projects to have in those contexts. However, when he is in a “safe space” like Casa Trans he is free to be the way he is: “a man with a couple of bonuses”, meaning a man with breasts. At the Casa Trans, then, Coli can be himself, expanding the boundaries of the gender binary by not just being the one or the other, but being both which, in that society, cannot exist.

Feelings of community were also expressed in Coli’s narration. He says that at the Casa Trans he could be himself and he never needs to hide his identity, his legal name and how he feels about
it. He can find people with whom he can share his experiences and be the way he is, he says, whereas in the public sphere he constantly has to hide who he really is.

“To me, to be a man means to be who I am, it means to be the way I am. When I wake up, when I dress, when I go to work, that is what it means to me to be a man. I don’t want to copy a biological man, a biological macho. I don’t want to copy anything, I am a man but one that came with a couple of extra bonuses. I don’t want to be a man because I wish I could be stronger, or have a beard, or have muscles; I do not want to be a man because of those reasons. I am the way I am, how do I put it… I don’t even want to be a man to perform better at work; no, I do not want to be a man, I am a man” (CD:2010:54)

Nael shares in his narration that his identity and masculine transexuality started with transforming his body since, for him, the “masculinization” and transformation of the body was very important in order to define himself as a male. He mentions that for other trans-masculine people, transforming the body in order to make it more masculine is not as important and that the decision also has socio-cultural and economic aspects to it. He also defines these people as “more trans than him”. What I take him to mean by this is that these people break through the corporeal canons for men and women and take on androgynous aesthetics or simply refuse to conform to any gender identity. He affirms that wanting to “achieve a convincing masculine appearance, naked and dressed” makes him less of a “transgressor” but that does not stop him from being critical of the patriarchal system (CD:2010:57).

In this paragraph the reader can notice the agency around talking about gender conformity and the diversity of ways trans-people express gender. For Nael, this was not a question of conformity, but of having a concept of the “masculine” as the stereotypical. Transforming his body in order to fit into the male gender, as he mentions, makes him less of a trans-. I interpret this as confirming his critical standpoint on the stereotyped masculinity, and validating from the political sense the activism and agency that other trans-people partake in. I believe that the hembro approach creates a new subjectivity and challenges the understandings of gender for both trans-people and for people whose gender matches with their biological sex. In contrast to Wilson’s study, in the present study, the author perceives that, pursuant to the narrations analysed in this study, although gender constrains exist, and are strong, they are not a complete obstacle to developing forms of gender expression or to taking political action. See, for instance, the following paragraph in Nael’s narration:
In Chile, to be allowed to change one’s legal gender and name, one must go through a compulsory sex reassignment surgery. It is a very abusive intervention by the state into one’s body... (CD:2010:55 [translated by author])

The reader can establish that Nael is aware of the compulsory gender body symbolics. He is also aware of the idea of non-conforming. This demonstrates that, although he has actively decided to fit into the pattern of the male gender symbolics he is not disagreeing with the alternatives that are offered by other forms of gender expression, and that compulsory surgery is a violation of the body. Braidotti states that the dichotomy of sexes will be eradicated in so far as the sexed identities become dissolved:

In so far as the male/female dichotomy has become the prototype of Western individualism, the process of decolonizing the subject from this dualistic grip requires as its starting point the dissolution of all sexed identities based on the gendered opposition. In this framework, sexual polarizations and gender-dichotomy are rejected as the prototype of the dualistic reduction of difference to a sub-category of being (Braidotti 2003:50).

Foucault suggests a “new economy of power relations”; one that is empirical, meaning that it sets up a relationship between theory and practice. As outlined above, this economy of power relations consists of taking, as its starting point, the diverse forms of resistance against forms of power. By analyzing power from this point of view, we create visibility of the actions of resistance which, in their turn, will reveal the underlying power relations, examine their positions, track their point of application and the way power relations work.23

In another paragraph it’s illustrated how hembros take a step forward towards expanding the boundaries of the gender system through conscious action. Nael describes that he believes that the fear that is produced by passing this big test is what makes most trans-people decide to go through surgery, such as phalloplasty or metaidoioplasty. “[g]ambling ones masculine self-confirmation on ones genitals is not good business for any man, Trans or otherwise...[h]aving a penis does not make me more or less of a man, and my body without a penis is a perfectly masculine body” (CD:2010:58 [translated by author]).

23 see theory chapter
Ahmed uses the “fear” of something to explain the potential in emotions, because they contain historical meaning in our understanding; fear of an object, an object that is not simply “the object” but what is behind it, the connotations bore on it, the previous meaning. Ahmed’s phenomenology is described from the starting point of a model of emotions as intentional, as being directed toward objects. She means that this fear is toward something. She brings this model of emotions together with a model of affect as contact; this means that we are affected by what we get into contact with. She explains: “emotions...[m]ove us “toward” and “away” from such objects. So we might fear an object that approaches us and move away from it while learning about the object. The approach is not simply about arrival of an object: it is also how we turn toward that object” (Ahmed 2006:2)

Ahmed explains this type of phenomenologic model of emotions as being the bodily experience which is formed by the history behind the object. The emotions described by Ahmed as fear of an object that approaches us is far more complex because it is not only about the arrival of the object itself but how we react to it. The fear experienced with this arrival is combined with the recognition of this object as fearsome or the process of learning about the object. So Ahmed affirms that this moment is crucial to determine how the approaching of the object is experienced by the body. Thus, as a consequence, we distance ourselves from these objects. The feeling of fear shapes our bodies and can conduct the subject to change the direction from the “normal” orientation or can also make the subject go through feelings of being lost. Feeling lost for Ahmed posses enormous potential, since it brings with it the possibility of finding other ways to reorient ones directions. It is in this sense that I can connect the experiences of fear expressed by Nael and Coli as potential turning points to new directions towards other ways of gender subjectivity defined by the body experience.

**Complex gender identity and the ascription of sexual orientation**

I want to take the subliminal understandings of sexual orientation, which are guided by stereotypes associated with the binary understandings of gender and sexual orientation, to show how these understandings are being used to ascribe a sexual orientation on the subjects. In the
paragraphs below, I highlight those parts of the narrations that I find most relevant for this theme. For example, Coli explains how his co-workers used to think he was a gay guy and say that he was *delicate* and that “he does not like women” or “Coli likes men”. Coli recounts how people also said these things to him because of his voice and his “weakness” and delicacy at work. After having worked for three years at the same place, he got to be the supervisor for the new workers. According to him, that was an accomplishment he attained after gaining his boss’ trust. But in this position he was frequently falsely accused of having sexually assaulted his coworkers, one of whom, on one occasion –Coli says- accused him of having taken her hand and put it on his (Coli’s) penis; to which Coli’s responded: “I don’t have a penis!” After this, Coli’s boss desired an explanation, so the only solution Coli had was to tell his boss that he was a female by birth. He got fired after this incident but, according to Coli, not because he was supposedly harassing his co-worker, but because he was a “marimacho” (a dyke). This was what Coli’s boss said to him. The experiences narrated by Coli about how others thinking he was a “gay guy” when identified with the male gender and “a dyke” when identified with the female sex/gender as being ascriptions of a sexual orientation. This demonstrates how bodies become oriented, in particular in terms of with “who” or “what” they inhabit their space. As a male, whom his colleagues attempted to make fit into the binary pattern, he was ascribed a heterosexual orientation when being accused of sexually harassing his female colleagues. This demonstrates how the complex sexual orientation of a “deviant” subject can become disrupted by the context. The necessity to say out loud that he did not have a penis in order to disprove the accusations, exposed the “deviant” body to the context and, in response, his colleagues ascribed him another sexual orientation: dyke. Coli’s female sex and the sexual orientation given to him became once more “put into place” by his boss. Getting fired because he was not a he but a she and a deviant she was an experiences that the body “suffered” and therefore it is beyond a discoursive phenomenon, it is a material phenomena. This experience of complexity, according to my understanding, can potentially break the boundaries of the understandings of sexual orientation and become a new subject that differs from the binary. Braidotti’s “becoming” nomadic subjectivity suggests:

The nomadic subject is a myth, or a political fiction that allows me to think through and move across established categories and levels of experience: blurring boundaries without burning
Braidotti’s nomadic subject, by moving around and “blurring the boundaries without burning bridges”, similarly transforms identities, instead of destroying them. Braidotti’s theory of the feminist nomadic subject will be discussed in further detail, below.

In one of the narrations dealt with in this essay, Nael explains how he thinks about the body and gender constraints. Nael believes that “it is through the body and all its experiences that we have the space to explore leisure, enjoyment and pleasure”. He ponders about being “a man without a penis, questions phallocentrism, and addresses a possibility to live a life with a freer sexuality; with or without and beyond penetration and the penis, itself” (CD:2010:60 [translated by author]).

One could understand these statements as expressing the body as the material means of change through actions. Nael discusses the absence of the male sex organ as the feminist standpoint towards the eradication of phallocentrism. To be a man, but one that does not fit into the pattern of biological men, and to be proud of it as opposed to ashamed and belittled, is an active choice that denotes and redefines gender notions. In this sense, one can also criticize the fusion of the category “female” with the descriptor “feminine” which ascribes the characteristics of the female gender. This fusion of gender/sex ignores and silences the “female” as a site of multiplicity.

Once again, my study differs from Wilson’s in that hembros is indeed a fluid space where the creation of categories of gender and the expansion of the gender boundaries does not have a beginning or an end. In addition to this, hembros is a political action that intentionally brings the subjects to participate and narrate their stories in order to create visibility and to take space from the idea of male gender occupying female physiologies or the female body history. For example, Nael affirmed in his narration that, for him, the physical changes he underwent were like leaving behind, though not completely, the diffuse sexuality of the feminine biology that inhabits his body and that, in many ways, remains in his corporal memory. He considered this to be a wonderful feature about his body because, as he explained, this links the memories of the female that he once was with his present “male” gender status. This means that transgender-ism could be like a bridge that connects femininity with masculinity in a world characterized by radical dichotomies. “I believe my body represents this bridge and I am proud of it”, he says (CD: 58).
In Wilson’s study, a close observation of the daily activities of her participants was applied in order to perform the analysis. She explained that according to the results of her observations, the lived realities of her participants limited the possibilities that the term trans- had to offer. Furthermore, the behaviours of her participants were characterized by swinging back and forth across gender instead of beyond it (Wilson 2002:431).

In the case of Pascal, he goes on to explain how his identity has been formed from having been stigmatized as a lesbian in Lebanon; an identity he did not identify with, but was treated as, and he was even taken to a clinic to get “cured”, mistreated, and he experienced being treated as pathological case. He writes in his narration that now, as trans-masculine, he is still seen as a pathological case; something that he thinks is really problematic. He explains how, he was kept isolated for seven months in that clinic and what was most punished there, was behaving “like a man being a woman” he says,” they would make you dress like a girl and prove that you are soft like one” (CD:2010:100). After that hard episode of his life, he decided to start looking for hormones to ” masculinize completely and avoid trouble” he writes, affirming that becoming “a real heterosexual man” was something he thought would solve his life (Ibid:). However, he says, being a trans-masculine is still seen as a pathology called gender identity disorder, in which “no body is free” (Ibid:). The absence of the biological male sex in a phallocentric society and the deviant masculinity become, according to the narrations, reasons for the subjects to experiences diverse forms of embodied discrimination. Connell, in the Hegemonic masculinity theory, demonstrates that the notions of a “natural masculinity” connect intimately with the biological ideal of the male sex when deviant becomes extremely disrupting. To such an extent that the ideal masculinity obtains status and becomes the norm, anything which is outside that pattern becomes subordinated.

By creating the term hembro, the PT intents to create spaces for new trans- collective identities by giving space to discussions about gender in terms of making claims to both genders inhabiting one body, like Hembros do, Broad also notes that:

> The deconstructive strategy of claiming to be neither gender and also both is most clearly visible in the way that some transactivists are no longer advocating for the right to change from one gender to the other, so much as the right to stay in-between (Broad 2002:257).
Nael’s narrative expresses feelings about how the penis is considered just a male thing, which provides one with access to male supremacy as a result of a phallocentric attitude in the mainstream society. Broad exemplifies how other trans-males in her study express similar feelings about this issue:

One main way in which transgender activists advocate the “in-between” is by challenging the place of a very significant sex/gender signifier: the penis. Women with penises and men without penises...(Ibid::257).

In Pascal’s narration, he says that he suffers from a disease that makes it easy for his blood to coagulate, which made him decide not to take hormones. Pascal affirms that taking testosterone would have been “exciting” because of the “benefits” of it; he means that changes like a masculine voice, beard, and increased strength would have made him happy. However, he is glad that he does not have to go through the side effects of the hormone, e.g. higher risk for heart decease, cancer and atrophied reproductive organs. He also mentions the fact that in Spain and Sweden one must sterilize in order to change one’s legal gender, stating that this is a level of pathologization that cannot be accepted (CD:2010:100). One can read how he is very aware of the sovereignty he claims over his body and he declares that to obligate trans-people to be diagnosed and also that in countries like Sweden and Spain trans-people must sterilize themselves in order to be able to proceed with their legal processes is a violation of trans- rights. Broad writes about how identity creation and trans-activism have already taken this question on. According to her, this shows a form of political resistance:

By revelling in gender euphoria, these transactivists are not striving to escape labels of deviance so much as embracing them. Toward the end of the 1990s, there emerged transactivists who created visual representation of transgender bodies, parodying a “freak show” by illustrating a person being both man and woman (Broad 2002:258).

Nael talks about how nudity is, in itself, where the reality of the experience of the body lies. He expresses himself very openly about how important it is to talk out loud about trans- male sexual practices and how the naked female body inhabits the male spaces of gender. Broad recounts how activist talk about nudity and exposure to the public as a way to create a disruption in the societal binary understandings about gender. She writes:

[P]arading a naked intersexed body in public is a political act. An act that challenges the widespread conviction that sex and gender represent a binary
system. So much is riding on the perpetuation of that myth...[W]ith clothing, I can create a male gender presentation that leaves everyone feeling cozy in their either/or, male or female universe. Naked, I expose the lie of that binary myth. Naked, I make people uneasy, anxious. Naked, I undermine the dominant paradigm (Ibid:).

Foucault directs us to ask the question: what does this struggle tell us? Foucault explains that struggles have much in common with one another and that, therefore, they should be seen as more than “anti-authority” struggles. He affirms that struggles are “transversal”, meaning that they exist in different geographical locations rather than being limited to one country. Struggles aim is the power effects as such (Foucault 1982:780). For instance when trans-people refuse to go through sex reassignment surgery it is not because of the practice in itself but because of the reasons behind choosing to elect for surgery, and the attitudes around surgery. Nael says in his narration:

“[a]t the end of the day hiding and tricking disappears when one gets naked and that is the real big test” Nael believes that the fear which is produced by passing this big test is what makes that most of the trans people decide to go through surgeries, like phalloplasty or metaidoioplasty...” (CD2010:58) [translated by author].

Foucault sees struggles as immediate in the sense that “people criticize instances of power which are the closest to them, those which exercise their action on individuals” (Foucault 1982:780). These struggles do not look for the big enemy but, instead, for “the immediate enemy” (Ibid:). Struggles question the status of the individual and the right to be different. So, according to Foucault, the main objective of struggles is “not to attack such or such an institution of power or group or elite, but rather a technique, a form of power” (Ibid:781). The creation of the term hembros is an example of how PT is attacking the “immediate enemy”. Instead of attacking the gender system as a whole, the “immediate enemies” for PT are elements of the gender system, such as the exclusive relationship between feminine and female and masculine and male.

“The good sexuality” vs. Transexual practices.

The good sexuality according to our societies can only be between one heterosexual man and one heterosexual woman, where penetration and women’s passiveness are the norms. This is the
heteronormative heterosexuality, and other forms of heterosexuality are seen as deviant. I believe my hembros, even though they express feelings of a heterosexual attraction, do not conform to the “good sexuality pattern”. For instance, Nael talks about trans-sexual practices as non-conforming with the phallocentric ideal. His narration, according to him, is dedicated to sexual practices, “secrets” about being a trans-male and especially the political connotations that are conveyed in such an identity. This is done – says Nael – with the intention of raising awareness and creating visibility for the trans-community, since one of the biggest problems for the community is the lack of dialogue about this important subject.

Nael is aware of the compulsory heterosexuality dominant in this societies (Chile and Ecuador) however he chooses to criticize this and explains his understanding of the Trans –sexual practices. Sexual practices become, according to Nael, Trans-sexual practices because, for him, sexuality is experienced on two levels; the physiologically feminine and the psychologically masculine. He ponders about the phallocentric society he lives in and says that transmasculine people are the unthinkable males but, after all, existent, so this might make them threatening for the typical macho and manliness. He means that masculinity is not impossible to reach for the female who becomes “female-male”24 (CD:2010:59) I understand the “female-male” as someone who has learned to be the gender that he was forbidden and wanted to function as opposed to the gender assigned at birth.

Sexual Creativity: Nael writes that he has constructed his own penis which he has named “sextransprothesis” and which can be used as a “trick to create a shape in the underwear” and also can be used to have intercourse (CD:2010:60). The fact that he was able to create a replacement for something that, for most men is the center of their masculinity, makes Nael see that being trans- is way better than just being a biological man. First of all, he can emulate a penis with “some fabric and wire, it can be the size his sexual partner prefers, he will never have precocious ejaculation or sexual impotence” (Ibid:). Nael believes that it is through the body and all its experiences that we have the space to explore leisure, enjoyment and pleasure. He ponders about being a man without a penis, questions phallocentrism, and addresses a possibility to live a life with a freer sexuality; with, without and beyond penetration and the penis, itself (Ibid:)

24 (Hembras-Hombres) Translated by author
Conclusion

I understand hembros to be a creation that, rather than becoming an identity or a category, is a forum for the expression of the male gender re-oriented in a different direction. The bodies of the subjects in this essay - subjects that experience the female sex and the male gender in one body, and that refuse to change their bodies through surgery - are central to this study. The subjects of this study express their gender as male, but also refer to their female bodies as part of their gender identity by accepting them, and as inhabiting in their bodies. The narrations of the subjects of this study demonstrate that, while the experience of the biological sex has enormous consequences on the way the subjects are perceived by society, they do not let this stop them from using the gender constraints to create a status where “looking” like a male becomes a strategy to “convince” the society, thereby passing. In addition, the subjects refuse “the intrusion by the state into one’s body” (CD:2010:57) through sex reassignment surgeries for health, economic or political reasons. Common to the narrations is the embodied experiences of gender constraints, the isolation from society, hormone-taking in order to fit the gender pattern, and the lack of access to health care for fear of getting caught. These are experiences that visibilize diverse forms of subjectivity.

The queer phenomenological approach demonstrated that the experiences of rejection, confusion and fear have become elements which cause the subjects to find ways to re-orient their understandings of their own bodies and become more pragmatic about them. Embracing their bodily experiences and actively taking them to form a more real concept of gender that suits them becoming in this sense female trans- males.

Furthermore, while in Wilson’s study trans- is seen as a liminal phase, something more like a phase towards an end, through gender reassignment surgery in order to combine body and gender identity, in my study the narratives show that going through surgery is not a necessity for the subjects involved. Furthermore, surgery is something that is seen as economically inaccessible as well as being a rare practice in Ecuador. Wilson explains a similar situation with regards to accessibility and the effectiveness of surgeries for the trans- people in her study. As discussed, hembros is, according to the PT, a deconstruction of a word in an attempt to construct new language to affirm that femaleness does not have anything to do with femininity and that a
female body can be masculine. Nael, Coli and Pascal, through their narrations, provide us with some notions of male gender inhabitants in feminine bodies as political activism against essentialist beliefs regarding masculinity as only occurring in a male body. Masculinity is seen as, rather, beyond the male body and its effects. Far from being an imitation of maleness, hembros provides us with a proposition that masculinity is rather a “contruction in a sexualized space”, the phallocentric societal masculinity. This question the rejection of female masculinities as “not the real thing” since the understanding of masculinity has to do with maleness, power and domination. The analyzed narrations demonstrate that masculinity, without the essentialist beliefs that the biological sex determines one’s gender identity; can co-exist in one body with diverse experiences of subjectivity.

The subjects of this study share a sense of community involvement and talk about their experiences, forming a collective trans- identity to reinforce and create visibility as a political movement. Specifically, hembros attempts to invade the masculine spaces with femaleness as a form of resistance. Thus, the PT creates spaces and raises awareness by creating and organizing forums and events where trans-people can participate and share their stories in order to create awareness. For example, the “Casa Trans” (“Trans House”) is a place where trans-people can hang out and even live for a period of time. Hembros is a concept developed to expand the umbrella of transgender activism or include those who wish to transgress gender. I understand PT as an innovative group of activists who want to include all kinds of different forms of trans-peoples under the umbrella of their movement. For instance, hembros are those who will not conform to a form of gender oppression. Broad affirms in her thesis that transgender movements have used deconstruction and construction as a way to perform inclusive activism (Broad 2002:243). The subjects of this study expressed feelings of never denying their female biology and affirmed that this is what makes them different from other transgenderism.

**Bibliography**


”Proyecto Transgenero (2010). *Cuerpos Distintos: Ocho años de Transactivismo en Ecuador*. Martha Editores info@martha.net.


**Electronical Resources:**


Coli’s narration video clip (2009)”I don’t want to be a man, I am a man!” URL: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7nW0pHhrcjA&feature=related [downloaded 12.12.11]


Appendices

Summary: Hembro 1.

"I don’t want to be a man, I am a man!”

Coli writes in his narration about his life as a labourer. He tells us about his first job; when he was about thirteen years old. He got this job through his sister’s boyfriend who was a bus driver and who did not know that Coli was born a girl.

“I told my sister not to tell him that I was a woman, because he would be more careful with me and treat me delicately and besides I would not get the job, I told her to say that I was her cousin or her brother.”

He tells us about how in the neighborhood he was always known as “the boy” and not as “the girl”. People always saw him as a boy so at all his places of work he had to hide his biological sex from his bosses. He says that people have never treated him as a girl because, ever since he remembers, he has always behaved as a boy.

He had to leave one job because he was not “strong enough” to perform the job. He writes that they had to unload a trailer full of wet wood. The issue of physical strength has been a constant obstacle for him –he reveals-“ It is very common that guys, when they have to carry a gas tank, for instance, they just take it on their shoulders and that’s it…but I say to myself, if I try and I cannot do it, well at least I tried”.

Coli narrates how his co-workers used to think he was a gay guy and say that he was delicate and that “he does not like women” or “Coli likes men”. Coli recounts how people also said these things to him because of his voice and his “weakness” and delicacy at work. After having worked for three years at the same place, he got to be the supervisor for the new workers. According to him, that was an accomplishment he attained after gaining his boss’ trust. But in this position he was frequently falsely accused of having sexually assaulted his coworkers, one of whom, on one occasion –Coli says- accused him of having taken her hand and putting it on his (Coli’s) penis; to which Coli’s response was “I don’t have a penis!” After this, Coli’s boss asked for an explanation, so the only solution Coli had was to tell his boss that he was a girl by birth. He got fired after this incident but, according to Coli, not because he was supposedly harassing his co-worker, but because he was a “marimacho” (a dyke). This was what Coli’s boss said to him.
During this narration Coli expresses himself very openly about how he thinks about his body and gender. He tells us also how he has been hiding his biological sex throughout the years in order to have a “normal life.” Even when, during work, he fell from a second floor and got paint all over his body, he had to stand up and continue to work, because of the fear of being taken to the hospital and getting “caught”, as he puts it. He says:

“So I don’t know how I managed to stand up, get myself together, because if I got picked up by an ambulance, it would be certain that I would get caught. I have always had to hide my identity, no matter what, always! To me it is more important to be Coli. Because I am Coli and it is me, Coli.”

Feelings of community were also expressed in Coli’s narration. He says that at the Casa Trans he could be himself and he never needs to hide his identity, his legal name and how he feels about it. He can find people with whom he can share his experiences and be the way he is, he says, whereas in the public sphere he constantly has to hide who he really is.

“To me, to be a man means to be who I am, it means to be the way I am. When I wake up, when I dress, when I go to work, that is what it means to me to be a man. I don’t want to copy a biological man, a biological macho. I don’t want to copy anything, I am a man but one that came with a couple of extra bonuses. I don’t want to be a man because I wish I could be stronger, or have a beard, or have muscles; I do not want to be a man because of those reasons. I am the way I am, how do I put it… I don’t even want to be a man to perform better at work; no, I do not want to be a man, I am a man.”

**Summary Hembro 2**

A man without a penis: The political importance of the trans-masculine sexuality.

The following narration is made by Nael, a person who self-defines as a trans- male and an activist. His narration, according to him, is dedicated to sexual practices, “secrets” about being a trans- male and especially the political connotations that are conveyed in such an identity. This is done –says Nael - with the intention to raise awareness and create visibility for the trans- community, since one of the biggest problems for the community is the lack of dialogue about this important subject.

Nael shares in his narration that his identity and masculine transexuality started with transforming his body since, for him, the “masculinization” and transformation of the body was very important in order to define himself as a male. He mentions that for other trans-masculine people transforming the body in order to make it more masculine is not as important and that is also has socio-cultural and economic aspects to it. He also defines these people as “more trans than him”. He means this in the sense that these people break through the corporal canons for men and women and take on androgynous aesthetics or simply refuse to conform to any gender. He affirms that wanting to “achieve a convincing masculine appearance, naked and dressed” makes him less of a “transgressor” but that does not stop him from being critical of the patriarchal system.

Nael’s transition process took place when he confronted his family and friends, by telling them about how badly compulsory femininity, imposed on him as a result of his biological sex, made him feel bad on a daily basis. He mentions how this obligation to be a woman made him forget about having a social life and, instead, made him isolate himself in his room “and dream about being a man”. He affirms that
overcoming fear was a huge step that helped him to proceed: to choose a male name and assume a masculine identity. In Chile, to be allowed to change one’s legal gender and name, one must go through a compulsory sex reassignment surgery, says Nael. He argues that this is a very abusive intrusion by the state into one’s body is something that also brings with it enormous consequences. First, surgeries of this type are considered plastic surgeries; these are very expensive, which make it not accessible for most trans-people. Consequently, they cannot change their paperwork and, thus, obtaining a job becomes even more difficult. Nael describes how, contrary to accessing surgeries, obtaining hormones is relatively easy in Chile. Instead of just copying men and the way they dress, taking testosterone made it possible for Nael to attain significant physical changes to his body.

He describes the changes he went through - such as the masculinization of the voice and the appearance of a beard - as the most obvious changes when he started taking testosterone. Nael says that his physical changes continued with changes in the bone structure, skin texture, his back got broader and his hips narrower, he says that his erogenous zones concentrated around his genitals. He affirms that for him this was like leaving behind, though not completely, the diffuse sexuality of the feminine biology that inhabits his body and that, in many ways, remained in his corporal memory. He considers this to be a wonderful feature about his body because he likes the memories of the female that he once was, he says. In addition, this means that transgender-ism, when seen as a transition, could be like a bridge that connects femininity with masculinity in a world characterized by radical dichotomies. “I believe my body represents this bridge and I am proud of it”, he says.

According to Nael, using some visual tricks to create shapes and hide body parts is very common in the trans- world. He says, for example, that he had to use a packed pair of socks to create a shape in his underwear in order to pass and further, he writes: “replace what I don’t have and, anyhow, what a heterosexual woman would want from me; at least at the beginning”. He also bandages his chest; something he says he does because he wants to “hide something he has and does not want, however that, at the end of the day, the hiding and the tricks disappear when one gets naked, and that is the real big test.” Nael believes that the fear that is produced by passing this big test is what makes most trans people decide to go through surgery, such as phalloplasty or metoidioplasty which, according to him, are not sufficiently advanced to create a functional penis like that of a biological man. Furthermore, he says that gambling ones masculine self-confirmation on ones genitals is not a good business for any man, Trans or otherwise. He writes that “having a penis does not make me more or less of a man, and my body without a penis is a perfectly masculine body”. Nael means, also, that is from this perspective that he takes the political importance of this issue, namely exercising ones sexuality with no normative thoughts of a “heterosexuality where the man penetrates the woman, she has the passive role where she does not have options, thus cornering her with the result that she is unsatisfied sexually. Society concludes that, when the man comes, the woman should feel satisfied at the same moment.” He means, also, that sexuality is not merely physical but is something that has to do with feelings and emotions, regardless of what we have in between our legs. He believes that because his body is penis-free and still masculine, it represents an opportunity to rethink sexuality and the patriarchal tyrannies that oppress the masses.

Sexual practices become, according to Nael, Trans sexual practices because, for him, sexuality is experienced on two levels; the physiologically feminine and the psychologically masculine. He ponders about the phallocentric society he lives in and says that transmasculine people are the unthinkable males.
but, after all, existent, so this might make them threatening for the typical macho and manliness. He means that masculinity is not impossible to reach for the female who becomes “female-male” (Hembras-Hombres).

Nael writes that he has constructed his own penis which he has named “sextransprothesis” and which can be used as a “trick to create a shape in the underwear” and also can be used to have intercourse. The fact that he was able to create a replacement for something that, for most men is the center of their masculinity, makes Nael see that being trans- is way better than just being a biological man. First of all, he can emulate a penis with “some fabric and wire, it can be the size his sexual partner prefers, he will never have precocious ejaculation or sexual impotence.” Nael believes that it is through the body and all its experiences that we have the space to explore leisure, enjoyment and pleasure. He ponders about being a man without a penis, questions phallocentrism, and addresses a possibility to live a life with a freer sexuality; with or without and beyond penetration and the penis, itself.

**Summary Hembro 3**

Transmasculinity; civil identity and a life without testosterone.

Pascal is a trans-man who is originally from Lebanon. He resides in Ecuador and has recently obtained his Ecuadorian nationality. Pascal explains how his identity has been formed from having been stigmatized as a lesbian in Lebanon; something he did not identify with but for which he was treated, taken to a clinic to get “cured”, mistreated, and experienced being treated as pathological case. He writes in his narration that now, as a trans-masculine man, he is still seen as a pathological case, something that he thinks is really problematic. He explains how, in those clinics, what was most punished was behaving “like a man being a woman”. He says,” they would make you dress like a girl and prove that you are soft like one”. He says he was kept isolated for seven months in this clinic. After this hard episode of his life, he decided to start looking for hormones to “masculinize completely and avoid trouble” he writes, affirming that becoming “a real heterosexual man” was something he thought would solve his problems. However, he says, being a trans-masculine man is still seen as a pathology called gender identity disorder and “no body is free”.

He changed his legal gender in Ecuador, which became legal 2009, something he says he did before he decided to start taking hormones. Ecuadorian elections were at the time when he had just changed his gender, so when he went to vote with his father, this became really awkward since in Ecuador the urns for voting are separated by gender. It was then when he had to tell his father about his legal gender and all the decisions he was about to make, especially the one regarding taking hormones. Telling his father this meant that he got to know that he suffers from a disease that makes it easy for his blood to coagulate. This made him decide not to take hormones. Pascal affirms that taking testosterone would have been “exciting” because of the “benefits” of it; he means that changes like a masculine voice, beard, and
increased strength would have made him happy. However, he says, he is glad that he does not have to go through the side effects of the hormone, e.g. higher risk for heart disease, cancer and atrophied reproductive organs. He mentions also the fact that, in Spain and Sweden, one must sterilize in order to change one’s legal gender and that this is a level of patholization that cannot be accepted. He argues that one’s gender identity is something one chooses sovereignly, it is not something others should decide for one, how and when one can choose to be the gender one wants, he says “I make myself the way I am”. He writes in his testimony that he feels lucky to be able to have been living in a community in Manabi-Ecuador where he found all sorts of gender expressions and people who reaffirmed one another and do not need surgeries or hormones to be happy, feel the gender they feel like they are and validate themselves as such. He believes in the power of diversity and speaks about how homogenizing trans- is a serious mistake because that kills people and besides diversity does not fit in limited catalogs and medical models. He takes his experience as a person who cannot take hormones because of his health conditions, and this is, according to him, one case among millions. People kill themselves because they cannot fit into the model of masculinity or femininity and not being able to take hormones or go through surgeries takes away the possibility to identify with the gender they feel they are. Having a limited model for each of these genders takes away the possibility to be the gender one wants the way one wants.