SOY MODERNO Y NO QUIERO LOCAS: QUEER CITIZENSHIP IN LIMA, PERÚ

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This article explores the queer movement in Lima, Peru, from 1980 to the present. It uses a historically-based ethnographic methodology to explore queer Peruvians’ mediation of transnational and domestic social movements as well as conditions. Particular focus is paid to the Movimiento Homosexual de Lima and the more recent ¡Union Civil Ya! campaign. It builds off existing critical scholarship examining how Latin American queer movements reconstruct transnational symbols of progress in domestic contexts. Its main claim is that although Peru’s gay rights movement initially focused on intellectually-inspired, deep-seated cultural changes in terms of sexuality, mainstream organizations now construct claims to legitimate citizenship through an internationalist discourse that forms part of Peru’s ongoing project of cultural and economic modernity. The research adds context and insight on the formation of the Peruvian queer movement within an anti-democratic, conservative political context. More broadly, it demonstrates the strategies queer movements resort to in the absence of viable political and institutional alliances. Finally, it also challenges the efficacy of transnational queer collaborations based on shared economic interests and the viability of a “global” gay movement.

Introduction

The line to a free screening of the play Un monstruo bajo mi cama was nearly two hours long. #NoTengoMiedo, a social organizing collective that spreads the word about queer media and theatre projects through social media, had organized free screenings of the play between the months of May and June 2015. In English, the name of the play literally translates to #I’m
Not Afraid, and has gained familiarity among a specific crowd of hip, modern, and young Limeños. At the gift shop outside of the theatre, I recognized the presence of the #UnionCivilYa campaign by its bright red and white logo, evocative of the Peruvian flag. Indeed, relatively new organizing efforts like #UnionCivilYa and #NoTengoMiedo have made the queer community increasingly difficult to ignore. In the process, Peru’s political elite and religious leaders have confronted challenges to the limits of Peruvian citizenship and the marginal groups it excludes.

Un monstruo bajo mi cama’s popularity is rooted both in its content and transcendental message of love, equality, and justice. The play consists of seven monologues by cisgender gay men from an array of racial and class backgrounds. Each monologue is a discussion of each man’s relationship with his mother. The excitement for the play was palpable among the audience. Dispersed throughout the crowd, I saw mothers accompanying their children to the play. When I asked the gay couple in front of me how they felt about the play, they exclaimed it was part of a turning point in Lima’s gay activism.

Such a turning point might seem refreshing for Peru’s queer community. The country is one of the remaining middle-income states in Latin America without any formalized, national protections for LGBTQ rights. Throughout the months I was in Lima, however, activists from Peru’s historical gay rights organization—Movimiento Homosexual de Lima (MHOL)—expressed skepticism about the intentions and consequences of this seemingly historical moment. For the past thirty years, MHOL had spearheaded a long tradition of LGBTQ activism. Alongside lesbian and transgender collectives, it formed the country’s first national grassroots front in 2002, the Frente por el Derecho a ser Diferente (Motta et al 2010 98). The organization also persevered across threats of violence, from the MRTA (Movimiento Revolucionario Tupac Amaru) in the 1980s and police officers that have harassed individuals and organized protests well into the 21st century (Motta et al 2010 95).

Although MHOL initially helped draft the proposed legislation, discursively, civil unions exemplify a developmental, modernizing discourse that focuses on the politics of identity recognition for Peruvian queer people. By contrast, issues like authoritarianism and police brutality against transgender women were particularly important to the old guard of queer activists, alongside individual liberties like the right to enter legally recognized same-sex unions.
and economic inclusion. Indeed, MHOL has largely operated without any substantial political alliances—save for its relationship with the now deceased leftist congressman Javier Diez Canseco—and meaningful celebrity endorsements. While waiting for the play to begin at the theatre, I wondered: what exactly led to this historical moment? What type of politics do #NoTengoMiedo and #UnionCivilYa subscribe to? What made them seemingly distinct from groups like MHOL?

Through a historically-based ethnographic analysis of the contemporary Peruvian queer movement, this essay speaks to the societal and cultural encounters unfolding in a diverse set of queer spaces—both historically and contemporaneously. These voices contradict, confuse, and reaffirm the myth of global queer progress. I argue that although Peru’s initial gay rights movement focused on intellectually-inspired, deep-seated cultural changes toward sexuality, mainstream organizations now construct claims to legitimate citizenship through an internationalist discourse that forms part of Peru’s ongoing project of cultural and economic modernization.

Modernity, Identity and Citizenship

I approach modernity as the “tension between autonomy and fragmentation” (Delanty 1999 3). Specifically, I employ the definition of modernity as the “autonomy of the Subject…the self-assertion of the self” and as “a social project [that] destroys its own cultural foundations” (Delanty 1999 3). The individual rights-based framework of #UnionCivilYa aligns with this autonomous subjectivity. In terms of modernity’s relationship to cultural erasure, although literature on Latin America and modernity has focused on how both, as concepts, are “mutually excluding phenomena,” I agree with Jorge Larraín’s argument that “Latin America has been simultaneously constructing its cultural identity and modernizing” (Larrain 2000 7).

I depart from his analysis, however, by arguing that the Latin American cultural identity that has emerged from modernity reflects strategic cultural erasure. In Peru, Gonzalo Portocarrero argues that modernity has led to an “idea of creole nationalism” that rejects ethnic fragmentation by disavowing indigenous identity and wholly reconstructing a Peruvian interpretation of European culture (2015 5).
Recent scholarship has wrestled with analyzing Latin American queer movements vis-à-vis transnational influences. Part of the tension centers on avoiding centering US-hegemonic queer discourse that fails to recognize that Latin American countries like Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay passed progressive LGBTQ legislation before the U.S. At the same time, transnational influences on a discursive and material level are undeniable. Latin American queer movements have continuously negotiated and contested transnational queer discourse. Parker, for example, argues that Afro-Brazilian gay rights organizations have pursued strategies that recuperate positive, religious Candomblé understandings of homosexuality, directly contradicting the largely secular strategies of US-hegemonic movements (Parker 2014 239). Rafael Dehesa points out that early Brazilian and Mexican queer activists did not blindly exploit Western models of gay activism. Instead, these activists constructed movements using transnational and national influences simultaneously, where “changes in one field, say at the transnational level, permit actors to challenge [identity] constructions at others” (Dehesa 2010 23).

Javier Corrales proposes, however, a positive and less nuanced understanding between globalization and Latin America, arguing that “LGBT movements...[are] beneficiaries and exploiters of globalization” (2010 23). More recently, Corrales has acknowledged the nuanced effect of transnationalism stating that, “understanding the clashes among this type of ‘activism beyond borders’ and...its often controversial impact at the local level is indispensable” (2015 58). Moreover, Oscar Encarnación argues scholars like Dehesa over-emphasize domestic conditions in Latin America and “ignore or undervalue how the domestic context interacts with external influence” (2016 7). For good measure, Encarnación also rejects the conventional wisdom that “leads to serious distortions and misinterpretations about Latin American gay history” (6). However, he argues scholarship should strike a middle ground by focusing on how the “domestic environment has mediated external influence with respect to gay rights” (Encarnación 2016 7).

How has transnational queerness played out discursively in Peru? Peruvian sociologist Angelica Motta argues that even as Western understandings of homosexuality have entered the urban Lima sphere, Limeños who have sex with men have not readily embraced these notions. Motta identifies a worldview where being a traditional gay means assimilating to
stereotypical notions of homosexuality (where the gay man is seen as feminine). On the other hand, a *modern gay* assimilates differently, “less *loca* [literally translated as crazy, but in this context, feminized hysteria] and being more *buses*, or discreet” (Motta 2001 151). Peruvian gay men thus negotiate transnational influences according to their own understandings of gender and sexuality. Though in other countries an intentionally discreet and overt, masculine gay man might be interpreted as closeted and repressed, in Lima such a man symbolizes assimilatory progress.

Judith Butler posits that activism beyond borders must undergo cross-cultural translations, otherwise “the only way…universality can cross a border…[is] through colonial and expansionist logic” (35). However, by reducing universal claims to this inherent cultural contamination, Butler fails to address more complicated outcomes. Anne Tsing’s conceptualization of the translation of universal claims as encounters laced by *friction*, which disrupts the dichotomy of the *global* imposing on the *local*, informs much of my thinking. She argues *friction* “inspi[re] expansion—for both the powerful and the powerless” (Tsing 2004 9). Tsing fills the missing theoretical link between Encarnación and Dehesa. This discussion, however, only addresses the “foreign/transnational” dimension of the transnational-domestic interactions I seek to analyze within the queer movement of Peru. What about Peru’s domestic context?

Portocarrero argues that the Peruvian nation-state should allow citizens to recognize unity across difference, but in Peru “racism and the colonial order…contaminate[s] daily life” (19). In terms of modernity’s cultural erasure, he proposes a new *criollismo* that celebrates Peruvian indigeneity as unique on the world stage. However, this celebration risks participating in historical erasure (thereby still being modernity). *Criollismo* envisions Peru as a “fabulous reality where the past is still alive” (Portocarrero 2015 345) and thus imposes a superficial representation of indigeneity and national unity.

In such a terrain of contested citizenship, what type of movement and voice do queer Peruvians create? Is unity across difference useful, or would its productivity be only surface-level? Furthermore, what transnational claims and myths have dominant Peruvian queer movements reconstructed and employed in their activism?
My research contributes to existing scholarship in two primary ways. First, I add greater dimension to scholarship concerning Latin American queer movements by expanding the focus beyond larger countries in the region like Brazil and Argentina. Peruvian queer movements have operated in a political context dominated by socially and economically conservative leadership, which was not characteristic of other players in the region. Secondly, my interdisciplinary methodology foregrounds the lived experience of queer, activist Peruvians based on primary source analysis and ethnographic data itself. My hope is to bring a fresh, human voice to the field of Latin American queer studies, where analyses have largely focused on the top-bottom relationship between institutions and society.

**Queer Formations**

In November 1980, Peruvian sociologist Roberto Miro Quesada reportedly called his friend, economist Oscar Ugarteche, to ask he urgently meet with the philosopher Michel Foucault at NYU. As the story goes, Ugarteche was then living in New York and Miro Quesada was interested in creating a new group that explored homosexuality. He had learned Foucault was lecturing at NYU’s Humanities Institute and sought his advice regarding strategies for gay activism. Today, Ugarteche recounts this story as the unlikely stepping stone for Peru’s longest running gay rights group: MHOL. What did it mean that a pair of light-skinned, gay male intellectuals pointed to a conversation with a famous French philosopher in New York as a place of origin for their emerging movement thousands of miles away?

Oral histories from the organization’s original founders combined with supplementary primary source analysis reveals MHOL’s initial members benefited from cultural and social capital, but that they were invested in a radical form of social change. Their activism was informed by social theory. Moreover, MHOL’s activists needed this social capital to access information about gay and lesbian activism abroad and gain attention from the media and politicians. However, this high-level foundation made MHOL’s leadership too insular to build the grassroots movement necessary for large-scale positive change.

Ugarteche’s and Miro Quesada’s identities as intellectuals dominated MHOL’s initial formation. Both leaders were “engaged in intellectual competition and disposed to a very
limeñan feud predicated on two [powerful] last names” (VvAa. Documento 2). A memory document that synthesizes the impressions of MHOL’s history describes Miro Quesada as a moderate leftist sociologist of the “Chicago school,” which differentiated him from “OU [Oscar Ugarteche] [who] was of the very radical PUM (Partido Unido Mariateguista)” (VvAa. Documento 3).

The early state of MHOL was thus dominated by high-level intellectual debates and personalities. Figures like RMQ and OU were pre-disposed to transnational news and influences. The document confirms Ugarteche’s conversation with Foucault, stating that “RMQ [Roberto Miro Quesada] asked OU to contact...New York’s gay leftists. Simultaneously, OU learns of Foucault’s theory on the rainbow of sexuality through personal conversations.” What followed were “more systematic conversations...of 10 to 12 people, men and women, with the purpose to reflect over the meaning of being gay or lesbian in Peru” (VvAa. Documento 3).

Most of the participants in these early conversations and meetings were university students. In the 1980s, Enrique Bossio—one of the participants—found refuge in a group of people that had been “organizing theatrical and social events for more than two years” (Starn 1995 502). Ugarteche identifies this culturally-informed intellectual space as the basis for MHOL, explaining he and his peers “needed to create a neutral space...where people could come from the street and be engaged” (Ugarteche 2015). The group organized theatre nights every Friday during the summer of 1985 where “we would watch a play and at the end we would pass around the wine and open the discussion...it became the intellectual craze of the summer of 1985” (Ugarteche 2015).

Ugarteche’s use of the word intellectual and Bossio’s university background (from a prestigious private university, the Catholic University of Peru) indicate the terms of inclusion for the group were highly exclusive. MHOL’s founding document—a manifesto—complements Bossio’s recollections of the 1980s. Its driving mission is “that homosexual men and women of Peru acquire real consciousness of their situation and organize to defend their rights as citizens” (MHOL 1983). Members of MHOL’s initial organizing committees were certainly aware of their isolation from what they referred to as clases populares, or lower-middle class people. A man
with the initials CID described MHOL’s attempts to connect with people outside its insular social circle.

I would think why not hang out with other types of people. What would be the place to meet [these people]? Voleyball. Because volleyball, for whatever reason in this country, is a sport where many gays converge. [And]...it connected the two worlds. The popular world and the middle class world. [Voleyball was] the equivalent to *popular* dining halls. (VvAa. *Documento* 6)

MHOL was fully conscious of the lack of grassroots participation in its movement. The practice of seeking out the popular classes, however, ineffectively diversified its membership. According to CID, the volleyball games quickly became “not spaces for socialization...The volleyball game would end and the [the players] from San Martin would return to their bars to drink” (VvAa. *Documento* 6). The strategy was ineffective because it was patronizing; CID assumed volleyball games were natural environments for *clases populares* and apt for consciousness-raising. Instead, to his and MHOL’s disappointment, volleyball ended up being just that: a sport.

Later on in the decade, MHOL prioritized HIV/AIDS prevention and outreach. It relied on foreign funding due to a paucity of domestic funding sources. Thus, MHOL “sen[t] a project to Holland, to the Novib [Dutch Organization for International Aid]...in October of 1985 MHOL’ receives a letter announcing the approval of the project and a congratulatory letter from John Schlanger...it was the first time the Dutch NGO financed a homosexual movement” (VvAa. *Documento* 15). By the late 1980s, MHOL became one of the few organizations that “related the fight against AIDS with affirming an alternative sexuality,” and from 1989 and 1993, cooperated extensively with USAID to “organize workshops on safe sex and counseling that attracted more than 1,000 people, in addition to establishing a telephone service that provided answers to more than 3,000 people” (Cueto 2001 80-81).

The 1990s witnessed significant legal and social obstacles for MHOL. The political climate prevented the formation of a strong grassroots base of support. Then-President Alberto Fujimori authoritarianism closed Congress in 1992, dubbed an *Auto-Coup*. In December 1992, over 117 Peruvian diplomats were also fired by Fujimori, in part because they were accused of
homosexual acts. The action provoked outrage among Peru’s ruling class. *El Comercio*, the paper-of-record, described it as “a flagrant slap in the face for Foreign Service personnel ... there is no valid explanation for the [government’s] announcement of the censure of these functionaries” (“Editorial”). Yet the newspaper hesitated to publish the government’s invalid explanation for the firing: the government accused the diplomats of having gay sex. Bossio reacted angrily to the anti-democratic nature of the firings, but felt they were symptoms of the country’s rampant homophobia “supported by the majority of the population” (Starn 1995 504).

In an interview, a prominent lesbian activist argues MHOL suffered from a lack of grassroots focus in the 1990s that prevented it from successfully opposing the Fujimori government’s policies. The political climate may have been hostile, but she describes the small circle Bossio and Ugarteche formed as undesiring of new ideas: “MHOL did not place young people as leaders in the 1990s” (Anonymous Interview, May 2015). The organization’s absent grassroots base and generational diversity was apparent in its reaction to events like the firing of the diplomats. Ugarteche led MHOL’s response through high-level mediums. He describes writing a letter to *Caretas*, a highbrow publication with an upper-class, intellectual readership (Ugarteche 2015). This action mirrored the type of activism even Bossio ultimately questioned:

> What I fear is that in our efforts to fit into the mainstream we were not successful in changing the opinion people have...the transvestites and the hair stylists—the most visible part of the homosexual community—will continue to be discriminated against and marginalized. (Stam 1995 505)

What did grassroots demonstrations look like throughout the 1990s? A rare photograph of Lima’s first gay public demonstration in 1995 shows a small gathering of a mere 25 activists. Held in the *Parque Kennedy* of Lima’s upper-middle class district Miraflores, the march lacked the vivacity of similar events staged across Latin America at the time. One newspaper at the time recounted that “dozens of police officers surrounded and maintained their [the protestors’] place” ([http://www.semana.com/Imprimir/320508](http://www.semana.com/Imprimir/320508)). Another activist—Aldo Araujo—described the march as consisting of “motivational phrases written on poster boards that manifested our discontent with a society that did not include all people with their rights” ([SENAJU & Achahuanc 2013 52]).
Nonetheless, activists did not consider these assemblies of people marches *per se*, instead, they were precursors to Lima’s first major, publically recognized gay pride march in 2002 (SENAJU & Achahuanco 2013 45). As Jorge Chavez, another major gay activist recalls, “the first…was a meeting with a pedestal where music would be played, but I would always see that other countries realized marches already for many years and it was something that we were looking to organize” (SENAJU & Achahuanco 2013 56). Peru’s volatile domestic context was not the only limiting factor in the gay movement’s lack of a substantive march. Due to internal political divisions, MHOL’s influence had also declined. At the time, the horizontal leadership that previously characterized the organization had gradually died down. MHOL’s memory document explains:

... at first the group was very integrated, everyone would make democratic decisions, by majority vote, we would discuss and heavily analyze until the end.
We were part of the same, we did not have an institution but we had ourselves.
Now instead every decision is made by an executive. (VvAa. *Documento* 30)

Thus, MHOL’s professionalization worked against its effectiveness. In a time of political discontent, what MHOL needed was grassroots outreach based on demands for democratic participation. However, as the document later adds, “now everyone wants to be respectable. There is a new cultural moment” (VvAa. *Documento* 30).

**A New Cultural Moment?**

What does this new cultural moment look like? Lima’s highly attended gay pride march in 2015 stood in stark contrast to the picture in 1995. In recent years, the gay pride march has received widespread attention. In many ways, it includes the *clases populares* CID described. Popular media outlets with wide appeal like *Peru21*, (akin to *USA Today*), covered the event and shared its official Twitter hashtag, #YoMarcho ([https://peru21.pe/lima/yomarcho-vivio-marcha-orgullo-gay-lima-2015-fotos-videos-185977](https://peru21.pe/lima/yomarcho-vivio-marcha-orgullo-gay-lima-2015-fotos-videos-185977)).

An image of the march illustrates the vibrancy triggered by *Union Civil Ya*’s increasing momentum. An image of the march shows rainbow flags extending into the crowd, displaying a sense of mass unity and affirmation. The balloon-made *Love* banner and the rainbow flags
themselves, of course, point to the march’s participation in universal gay pride symbols. At the same time, the participants of the march demand inclusion as Peruvian citizens. The crowd members holding red and white Peruvian flags affirm their sexual identity is not mutually exclusive with their citizenship, although the rainbows might suggest otherwise.

This affirmation persists throughout Union Civil Ya’s campaign marketing materials. Its widely circulated red and white online poster evokes Peruvian patriotism. At its center, two hands are joined into a heart encircling an equality sign, further imploring civil unions promote national unity and not divisiveness. *Equality* not only consists of *equal love*, as the heart implies, but, placed against a red and white background, simultaneously of *equal citizenship*.

An interview with an academic named Francisco\(^4\) illustrates these themes in greater detail. Francisco has been involved in activism since the 1980s and now enjoys a relatively high degree of institutional legitimacy. After asking Francisco about the civil union campaign’s potential, he expressed optimism as the “topic...[is] not necessarily seen as progressive...or leftist. It’s about being modern” (Personal Interview May 2015). An overarching theme in the interview was that civil unions represented a modern, conservative strategy for LGBTQ people in Peru to gain civil rights. Francisco framed the issue as a top-down political strategy that would be inevitably successful. He thus takes Peru’s desire to be *modern* as an interest shared by all and not split ideologically. He also framed the desire for modernity vis-à-vis transnational comparison with other Latin American countries, saying that “nowadays you have people visiting Chile and there are civil unions there, and Argentina—so you start realizing, people start realizing that the country is backward” (Personal Interview May 2015).

These excerpts reveal Francisco defines modernity in relation to progress in seemingly more modern Latin American countries as well as the West broadly. He dismisses voices within the community that criticize the movement’s focus on civil unions, arguing this legislation—more so than an anti-discrimination bill—will provide the foundation needed to gain legal and social recognition. As he states, “it [civil unions] makes you into a citizen. In equal terms...I think that civil unions provide grassroots support and...generate debate on sexuality.” Francisco’s comments reveal that he views civil unions as a source of unity with the potential to resonate among a wide array of *straight* Peruvians.
This vision contrasts sharply with MHOL’s Executive Director, Giovanni Infante. MHOL’s headquarters are located in a less glamorous and exclusive environment. In many ways, MHOL’s location of an area in Jesus Maria that borders downtown Lima stands in stark contrast to Francisco’s office (in Miraflores). The promise of a new, modern Peru lies in districts like Miraflores, where tourists and Starbucks coffee shops abound next to the city’s most popular gay bar, *Downtown Vale Todo*.

These differences of place manifest themselves in Francisco’s comment that activists like Gio—who did not oppose civil unions *per se* but rather their prioritization—were “conservative” (Personal Interview May 2015). Gio refuted Francisco’s comments as misinterpretations. The MHOL director emphatically insists support of civil unions, claiming MHOL “wrote the proposed legislation and had the political connections for it to receive a fair hearing in Congress” (Personal Interview May 2015). He explains his hesitation was due to the mainstream attention civil unions absorbed. Especially, he argues, when “there are hundreds of murders every year against transgender sex workers, when there are homeless youth in shantytowns who don’t care whether they can get married” (Personal Interview May 2015).

Gio’s comments illustrate a key difference between his and Francisco’s style of activism. Infante ascribes to a bottom-up approach to activism. He repeatedly emphasizes challenges pertinent to the most marginalized queer people. Indeed, Gio relates to his sexual identity from a completely different cultural position. He identifies as “a *cholo* (a derogative term for dark-skinned *mestizos*) *pobreton* (extremely poor), and an unashamed member of the *mariconada*” (Personal Interview May 2015). Infante intentionally constructs his identity across sexuality, economic class, and race. He recuperates the word *maricon* (faggot) —like he does with *cholo*—to draw attention to the fact he speaks from a place of marginalization. Gio’s self-identification complicates the view of citizenship *Union Civil Ya* puts forth. By coupling his identity as a *cholo* and a member of the *mariconada*, he asks how civil unions will make him a citizen, when his rights are still constrained by the marginalization of his other identities.

What is the basis for the form of Peruvian citizenship *¡Union Civil Ya!* conceptualizes? An analysis of the Third LGBT Summit of the Americas, held in Lima from May 28th to 29th, offers insight. The summit was sponsored by the US National Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce,
the US Agency for International Development, and the newly formed Peruvian Chamber of LGBT Commerce. ¡Union Civil Ya! had a strong presence at the summit. One of the summit’s keynote speakers was Carlos Bruce, Peru’s first openly gay congressman and since coming out, a visible proponent of civil unions. As the list of summit sponsors indicates, the event focused less on the specific particularities of the Peruvian LGBT movement and instead on its economic potential.

The stakeholders of the summit had different objectives. NGLCC’s effort was to “convene...entrepreneurs, business leaders, and government officials to discuss issues surrounding diversity and LGBT economic inclusion” (Personal Recordings from 3rd LGBT Summit of the Americas Report). The organization also professed a third goal: advancing free-market oriented development for LGBT rights in Peru. NGLCC’s director opened the summit by welcoming the audience to an “economic movement focused on economic inclusion,” demonstrated by “corporate sponsors that see the value of supplier diversity” (Personal Recordings from 3rd LGBT Summit of the Americas Report). NGLCC’s Assistant Director clarified the ties between economic inclusion and LGBTQ. She explained the organization believes “supporting the advancement of owned business is the quickest and most efficient way to secure LGBT progress,” pointing to the strategy’s success in “the U.S., Colombia, Argentina” (Personal Recordings from 3rd LGBT Summit of the Americas Report).

The remarks made by the NGLCC representatives strive to create a connection between economic inclusiveness and LGBTQ rights. By calling economic entrepreneurship the most effective way to secure LGBTQ progress, they implicitly recognize universal rights like equality and self-expression are easier to achieve with financial leverage. What was less clear from their speeches was the reasoning behind their interest in promoting LGBTQ entrepreneurship in Peru. Brian Nichols, the US Ambassador to Peru, clarified this ambiguity. At the time, a pressing bilateral issue was Peru’s inclusion in the Trans-Pacific Partnership. The trade agreement was a top priority for the Obama Administration, and the ambassador praised it as potentially bringing “$45 billion dollars in investment to Peru...which the LGBT community in Peru should demand to be a part of” (Personal Recordings from 3rd LGBT Summit of the Americas Report).
Peruvian activists interpreted these remarks as validation for the potential of LGBTQ Peruvians and the country as a whole. During the breakfast before the conference, an organizer told me she and other activists had “many expectations for the conference...we’re excited to see what the presenters can offer us” (Field note May 2015). At the summit’s evening cocktail, an American businessman received thunderous applause after he explained his numerous investments in the country were the result of him having tasted “excellent Peruvian food” (Field note May 2015).

The interest of foreign stakeholders in expanding economic opportunity and growth thus did not diverge remarkably from the Peruvian stakeholders and activists present at the summit. Peru is a country where Limeños herald new restaurant openings as signs of Peruvian superiority and GDP growth rates are common knowledge for even modest market-sellers. Economic growth has seemingly made the country’s authoritarian and violent recent past seem like a distant nightmare. Alongside the potential legalization of civil unions, the NGLCC’s message seemed to show queer and professionalized Peruvians a path towards becoming first-class Peruvian citizens.

**Conclusion**

¡Union Civil Ya! is a tantalizing catalyst for the Peruvian queer movement. In many ways, its political strategy emulates the civil union-*now*, marriage equality-*later* structure of the US gay rights movement. It has cultivated previously unseen engagement levels across demographics, like the well-attended screening of Un monstruo bajo mi cama. The campaign also appeals to Peru’s larger economic aspirations, as the Third LGBT Summit of the Americas shows. Queer Peruvians’ aspirations for civil unions and to become important economic actors is consistent with the vision of modernity and progress Portocarrero calls nueva cultura nationalism. For Tsing, this aspiration confirms the reality that so-called “peripheral” communities make sense of a global ideal like gay rights according to what their context demands.

The path towards social progress across the globe, in terms of queer rights or otherwise, is increasingly difficult to chart and understand. News and media are accessible more quickly
and to a broader audience than ever before. Yet the all-knowing spread of knowledge that characterizes the information age has not led to neat global homogenization. The ideal of a global gay rights seems more like a performance than a reality; every stakeholder negotiates their roles as situations evolve.

A scene from the summit concretely captures this idea. As I sat down for the summit’s lunch with a few Peruvian transgender activists, one looked at the soufflé we were served and remarked: “Where’s our [my emphasis] Peruvian food?” The servers subsequently scoured the kitchen for hot Peruvian pepper sauce to please my new friends. They brought back tabasco. Frustrated, I quickly ran to a vegetable stand outside and purchased spicy red peppers. Using a knife and lime juice, I made classic aji for everyone to enjoy. The whole affair seized the group’s attention, and soon everyone commented on the lack of Peruvian food. We had all just idealized ourselves as members of a global community, yet here we were combatting over what Butler would call cultural contamination. The lime juice and hot pepper literally and figuratively cleared our senses to the reality that we were not, and perhaps could never be, the same.

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Notes
1 Denoting or relating to a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their assigned birth sex.
2 A note on language: whenever possible, I prefer to use the acronym LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) instead of the word queer. While queer is gender inclusive and represents a spectrum of sexual identities, I found it confusing to use queer when there was no direct translation of the word in Spanish. However, for the sake of clarity and word variation, I interchange LGBTQ and queer. Finally, I use gay rights or gay when speaking of movements that primarily focused on gay men and women or when referring to the sexual identity of gay men and women. In the appropriate context, I also use variations of lesbian, but as an adjective instead of a noun. To be clear, many of my informants

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used *gai* and *LGBT* interchangeably in Spanish, but this liberal use of the terms is not intelligible to an English-speaking audience.

3 The activist wished to remain anonymous. She is still a living figure and does not want her comments to affect her relationships.

4 I have chosen to use a pseudonym for this interviewee as my research might inadvertently compromise their public position.