The Queerest Of Them All: Doña Herlinda's Subversion of Mexican Masculinities

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> *"By queer culture we mean a world-making project, where 'world,' like 'public,' differs from community or group because it necessarily includes more people than can be identified, more spaces than can be mapped beyond a few reference points, modes of feeling than can be learned rather than experienced as a birthright."*
>
> Berlant and Warner, "Sex in Public"

This is the "world-making project" that I propose to highlight in the 1985 Mexican film *Doña Herlinda y su hijo*.[1] It is a world where the apparent traditional Mexican family accommodates itself to the needs of its members' desires. Masterfully, director Jaime Humberto Hermosillo presents a universe filled with immense creativity, which is governed by matriarch Doña Herlinda. Doña Herlinda demonstrates strong family values and a highly sophisticated lifestyle; this female protagonist seems to have been educated in the utmost Catholic conservative and elitist milieu in the second largest Mexican city, Guadalajara. However, her upbringing and apparent conservatism vis-à-vis her reality dealing with her only child's homosexuality obliges her to embark upon a world-making project of her own. This essay argues that the film *Doña Herlinda y su hijo* shows Doña Herlinda as a strong maternal figure, who creates a "queer world" by subverting the Mexican perceptions of masculinity. Despite being aware of her son Rodolfo's homosexual tendencies, Doña Herlinda uses the patriarchal Mexican values to not only accommodate her son's same-sex yearnings but also to strengthen and increase her nuclear family.

I would like to begin my analysis by defining the dynamic complex social-homosexual dimension within Mexican culture in connection with the film. In *Doña*

[1] The title translates as "Mrs. Herlinda and Her Son." All the quotes from this film are in the original Spanish language. The translations into English are my own.

Herlinda y su hijo, we see in the opening scene neurosurgeon Rodolfo who visits his younger lover, music student Ramón. As a college student at the Guadalajara Music Conservatory, Ramón is economically dependent upon his parents. In an attempt to minimize costs while attending college in Mexico, students tend to rent rooms in private houses, where the owner is normally an aged lady. The package in the *hospedaje* (room and board) usually includes one room with access to a bathroom and a telephone shared by all the tenants; it also provides three meals to all those living in the household.

Sharing such limited space leads to a very personal interaction among all the residents. For this reason, the landlady only accepts students with personal references. These references include relatives, friends and acquaintances from the student's town of origin. In Ramón's case, the landlady knows his uncle. The important factor to consider in these situations is that by hosting the student—that is, by renting a room to Ramón—the lady also establishes some connection with his family members, even if they reside elsewhere. Sometimes, the young tenant does not even know when the landlady and the family communicate. For this reason, it is crucial that the youngster act appropriately at all times because at the least expected moment, the parents could reprimand the college student if he misbehaves.

Within this context, Ramón welcomes Rodolfo into his bedroom in the opening scene. Very discreetly, Ramón allows Rodolfo inside and asks him to wait patiently while he showers; as he returns, wearing some very tight shorts and still wet, we witness a very impatient and passionate Rodolfo who proceeds to dry his younger lover's body. Unexpectedly, someone knocks at the door. With increasing frustration, Doctor Rodolfo Ledezma lies down on Ramón's bed while the younger lover opens the door; it is the neighbor who wants the hammer Ramón borrowed. He comments, "You may borrow it later, if you'd like." "No thanks," Ramón replies, "I don't think I'll need it again," and he quickly closes the door, turning to attend to Rodolfo's inviting body. Despite Ramón's attentions, Doctor Ledezma becomes upset about the continuous interruptions they face in that house. Jealous, he adds, "There is no privacy here. Besides, that neighbor of yours wants to have sex with you, don't you see?" Ramón explains to Rodolfo that all the tenants usually borrow each other's items when needed; furthermore, he also complains to Rodolfo about the explicitly sexual body posture the neighbor saw on his bed. He asks worriedly, "Haven't I shared with you that I don't want anybody in this house to suspect anything?"

What is the origin of such secrecy? Why is Ramón so frightened that the tenants may find out about his relationship with Rodolfo? As I mentioned previously, this film presents a modern setting within Mexican society; whereas Doctor Ledezma clearly belongs to a prominent Guadalajaran family, I would argue that Ramón comes from a middle class, land-owning family, who lives near the northern city of Aguascalientes. Although such a statement is not explicitly shown in Hermosillo's film, my argument relies on the following indicators: Ramón's father's cowboy clothes, his mother's dancing experience, and, most importantly, the fact that only middle class Mexican families living in the province have the means to send their youth to study in bigger cities. Hence, Ramón's studies in the Guadalajara Music Conservatory seem to support the previous point. If Ramón did not have his family's support, he would most likely have stayed in Aguascalientes to help out in the family's farming business. For this reason, Ramón is terrified that the tenants or the landlady could find out about his sexual encounters with men. Because of the continuous communication between the landlady and the people from his hometown, Ramón knows such news could be enough reason for his family to disown him and thus withdraw their financial support for his studies in Guadalajara.

Clearly, Ramón's worst nightmare is that his homosexuality could be unveiled. But as the smart and hard working student that he is, there is no doubt that he could find the means to finance his own studies. He seems to be aware that he could survive in a capitalist society such as that of Guadalajara—after all, he finds himself away from his family. If he were to use the wage labor system to his benefit in order to liberate himself from his family's surveillance, he would be the primary example of what American scholar John D'Emilio argues in his article entitled "Capitalism and Gay Identity": "[W]age labor and commodity production […] created the social conditions that made possible the emergence of a distinctive gay and lesbian identity" (263).

It is true that in a capitalist, modern society like that of the United States, the free-labor system allows great numbers of men to label themselves gay and thus to perceive themselves as part of a community similar to them. Further, it is also a fact that the same system contributes to the intense alteration "in the functions of the nuclear family, the ideology of family life […] changes in the family that are most directly linked to the appearance of a collective gay life" (D'Emilio 265). As a result, the concept of the American family takes a "new significance as an affective unit" for society begins to transition away from the household economy (266). The development of capitalism contributes to the separation of sexuality from procreation, leading the way to the establishment of intimacy in human relations. In

turn, individuals begin to pursue true happiness and pleasure. Within this context, homosexual expression also converges into a personal identity, which, "based on the attraction to one's own sex" (266), allows the creation and solidification of gay and lesbian communities independent from the family unit within American society in the twentieth century.

Nevertheless, Ramón's situation in Guadalajara becomes problematic vis-à-vis the American gay experience. Despite living in modern Mexican society, where the urban setting portrays a capitalist society and thus the individual's potential to make use of the wage labor system to his advantage, we encounter a horrified Ramón. Why is he so frightened to reveal his homosexuality to the *hospedaje's* tenants? Ramón's psychological dissonance is what Lionel Cantú refers to as the "inexistent" gay Mexican identity. He writes:

> *Anthropological reports of male homosexuality have asserted that a "gay" identity, as understood in the American context, does not exist in Mexico. "Gay" identity and culture have been understood, therefore, as American constructions—alien to the Mexican social landscape. (141)*

Cantú's assertive remarks confirm that the Mexican homosexual world differs in significant ways from the American model. In my attempt to explain not only Ramón's dilemma, but also Rodolfo Ledezma's apparent ambiguity and Doña Herlinda's silent conspiracy, I will focus my analysis on the central role that the immediate family plays in the so-called homosexual community in Mexico. As illustrated in Hermosillo's film, most gay Mexicans live in crowded conditions with their families until their late 20s or early 30s. Consequently, family attitudes and behavior toward homosexuality have an important effect on the individual's sexual and social activities. Because homosexuality is usually considered shameful, most gays in their formative years must cope over time with the dissonance produced by their behavior and their family's conception of the homosexual as a disgraceful being.

Within the complex socio-cultural Mexican cultural landscape, we observe a contradiction to the American idea that "one-drop" of homosexuality makes the individual completely homosexual. In fact, the "one-drop" rule does not apply to the Mexican context, where a man's gender identity is not necessarily threatened by his homosexual behavior. Mexican culture accepts "*cuatismo*" (male bonding) as part of their daily cultural practice—or, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick refers to it, "homosocial" bonding. She indicates:

> *"Homosocial" is a word occasionally used in history and the social sciences, where it describes social bonds between persons of the same sex; […] it is applied to such activities as "male bonding," which may, as in our [American] society, be characterized by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality. (507)*

While American society experiences homophobia when confronted with excessive "homosociality," such as *cuatismo*, Mexican culture encourages it as a way to form and consolidate a boy's formation of masculinity. To this effect, Todd W. Resser also declares, "expressions of male-male intimacy are more likely to reaffirm their masculinity" (2). Since most homosexuals are not identifiable by their dress or behavior, Mexican men who spend significant time with other males are by no means rejected—not even suspected of being homosexual. In addition, the Mexican ability to strike any courteous conversation with a stranger in a park bench, or in a bar, restaurant or coffee shop—allows the "social space" John D'Emilio refers to as the space where the homosexual can be "gay" (270); in Mexico, however, such more private and discreet spaces allow homosexuals to both meet and blend in with the crowd.

Fortunately, the invisible homosexuality of Ramón and Rodolfo works to their advantage. Whatever sexual role they engage in privately, their masculine gendered characters are not questioned if they are discreet in the public sphere. That is, public masculine gendered performance is crucial to their survival in Guadalajaran society. The Mexican film *Doña Herlinda y su hijo* depicts a loving and caring homosexual couple. They both look after each other and their age difference establishes the dynamic in their relationship: we observe a mature and nurturing man represented by Doctor Rodolfo Ledezma, who provides for music student Ramón's needs. They both accompany Rodolfo's mother to Lake Chapala on Sunday afternoons, where they blend in within the heteronormative setting; they both dance with young and beautiful women—even if they continuously check on what the other is doing, while sophisticated Doña Herlinda sips graciously the most expensive tequilas.

The heterosocial landscape of Lake Chapala provides the setting for Doña Herlinda to introduce feminist Olga to her son Rodolfo and his so-called friend, Ramón, who exhibits dissatisfaction toward the newly introduced female character. He comments to Rodolfo, "First, it was Lucía, then Sara, then, Lupita, and now, this one, Olga! Why does your mother insist so much?" To which the ambivalent Rodolfo replies, "Let's be nice to her; that will make my mother happy." But Ramón's disdain toward Olga is noticed by Doña Herlinda, who continues to pretend as if there is no

quarrel occurring between Rodolfo and Ramón—while they feign to enjoy the music at the dance floor. She adds, "Ay Ramón, you seem to get bored with me. I have already mentioned to Rodolfo that perhaps you should not bring me along to Chapala Lake on Sundays. Perhaps both of you prefer to hang out by yourselves and do guys' stuff. But he insists; he doesn't want to leave me alone at home." To which Ramón comments jealous, "No *Señora*, why would you say that? I don't get bored with you; on the contrary, I enjoy your company very much." Immediately after, he stands up from his chair and invites another young lady to dance.

When Rodolfo notices that Ramón is enjoying himself dancing with another woman, he takes Olga away from the dance floor and proceeds to drink heavily at the bar. At this point, Doña Herlinda, acting as the panopticon, approaches Ramón and tells him she wants to leave; very discreetly, she adds, "Ay Moncho,[2] I don't like it when you dance with other girls. I am the jealous type! You must help me to stop Rodolfo from continuing drinking. Remember: he has to perform a surgery tomorrow." Ramón asserts, "*Sí Señora*, don't you worry. I'll make sure that he stops drinking." The language used by Doña Herlinda attests to her knowledge of the special relationship her son and Moncho share. On the one hand, she manifests herself as an accomplice to her son's choice of Ramón; and on the other, she insists on carrying on a life within the heteronormative Guadalajaran society, thus subverting the expected masculine roles to her own benefit. Transgressing the heteronormative expectations allows Doña Herlinda to invent new ways to accommodate every family member into a new structure, where all desires will be met. That is, the new space Doña Herlinda creates for her family will become the queer universe capable of satisfying every queer craving: her son's homosexual yearning as well as her own desire to expand her biological family.

Indeed, Doña Herlinda defies the elitist heterocentric Guadalajaran society and carries out her plan to fortify and extend her queer family space. How is such a queer space preconceived and re-designed? In my attempt to respond this question I will divide the remainder of my analysis intro three major moments, where Doña Herlinda sets out to create her queer building: 1.- Before Moncho moves into the Ledezma's residence; 2.- When Moncho moves in; and 3.- From Rodolfo's marriage to Olga to the baptism of their infant. Along the same lines, the axes I will use to link the three moments are *familismo* and silent conspiracy.

[2] "Moncho" is an affectionate derivate nickname for Ramón in Mexican culture. It is especially used when referring to youngsters or teenagers.

The first phase focuses on the events occurring before Moncho moves into the Ledezma's mansion. This stage shows how the secret collaboration between mother and son embraces Moncho. It demonstrates the silent conspiracy between mother and son. As previously discussed, I depicted the Lake Chapala scene, where Doctor Ledezma tries to calm down Moncho's jealousy at the moment Doña Herlinda introduces Olga. By telling Moncho, "Let's be nice to her; that will make her happy," Rodolfo manifests how important it is for him to keep his mother happy. Knowing that his mother is his only family, he sees nothing wrong with being introduced to young women, who could become potential wives. Whether Rodolfo decides to marry Olga or not is not the key question, for what is crucial at this point is the existent harmony in the family. The concept of family for Rodolfo is extremely important; he is fully conscientious that being markedly polite to Olga will maintain the family unity. Rodolfo will continue to enjoy his mother's support; he will be able to maintain his relationship with Moncho as long as he displays a romantic interest in Olga. After all, how could that be harmful to anyone? Evidently, Rodolfo and Moncho know that Doña Herlinda is trying to marry Rodolfo to a good Guadalajaran young woman so that she can have grandchildren, which is her ultimate dream. Unthreatened by Doña Herlinda's fantasy, they both abide by her wish since they are aware of the importance of family relations.

Such connection to families and homosexuals is demonstrated in Rafael Miguel Díaz's article, "Latino Gay Men and Psycho-Cultural Barriers to AIDS Prevention," which claims that Latino—and hence Mexican—gay men seem to understand that the actual close involvement of families in the lives and affairs of each individual is not considered a temporary situation of youth, but a lifelong commitment that connects individuals to a relatively large and supportive social network of caring and concerned human beings. Thus the central family value in the Mexican film *Doña Herlinda y su hijo* illustrates what researchers in the field have termed *familismo*, which, according to Marin and Marin is "a cultural value that involves individuals' strong identification with and attachment to their nuclear and extended families, and strong feelings of loyalty, reciprocity, and solidarity among members of the same family" (13). Unquestionably, Rodolfo's love and respect for his mother translate into his determination to make her happy—a fact that Moncho completely understands and supports.

Similarly, Doña Herlinda's maternal love is shown with her understanding about Rodolfo's homosexual desires. As previously described, when she tells Moncho she is the "jealous type" after witnessing Rodolfo's jealousy whilst Ramón dances with other women, she is playing out her son's feelings and articulating them as if they

come from herself. Hence, she also demonstrates her reciprocal interest in keeping her son happy. This feeling can only be achieved if Moncho stops dancing with other girls. In such a way, we arrive at the second part of the secret collaboration shaped by Doña Herlinda. She pushes the situation even further in the Chapala scene: not only does she put an end to any possible misunderstandings between the two male lovers but she also establishes an alliance between herself and Moncho, which is independent from her son's.

Describing herself as the "jealous type" to Ramón, she is not only protecting her son's feelings but she is also communicating to Ramón that she approves of him—that she enjoys his company and hence spending time with him in Chapala Lake on Sunday afternoons. Undoubtedly, this is a flattering moment for the youngster from the countryside; he is embraced by matriarch Doña Herlinda, who now expresses an interest in protecting him, creating a bond between them. On the one hand, she uses her own role as a woman when she asks Moncho for help; aware that Rodolfo is drinking heavily at the bar, where only "men" are allowed to gather, she uses this knowledge to her own advantage and asks Moncho to help her son stop drinking for she must not act outside her gendered script. Conscientious of her heterocentric surroundings, Doña Herlinda does not expose herself or her beloved ones to any sort of ridicule or stigmatization before Guadalajaran society; on the contrary, she performs her expected role masterfully. In this context, Robert McKee Irwin states, "an individual consciously follows a gendered script […], the prescribed actions and behaviors associated with a given gender, [which] cannot be invented by the individual" (xxii).

Whether this action is unintentional or play-acted, Doña Herlinda is merely performing her gender within the *habitus* in Guadalajaran society. Not only does she protect her privileged status as "Doña Herlinda Ledezma" and her loved ones from being pushed to the margins of society, but she also establishes trust between herself and Moncho. The Guadalajaran *habitus* causes Doña Herlinda to realize she cannot act alone in maintaining her son's masculinity and professional reputation. Risking the revelation of her son's jealousy and his homosexual desires toward Ramón when drunk, ingenious Doña Herlinda uses the justification of Rodolfo's surgery the following day to involve Ramón in conserving Rodolfo's status and reputation. The sense of protection displayed by Moncho resonates with Todd W. Reeser's definition of a harmonious male-male relationship: "Another approach is to consider male-male relations as a peaceful lack of rivalry or as a non-problematic male bonding, in which an imagined masculine sameness permits masculinity to be viewed as harmonious. […] Men may also imagine mutual protection with other men

or an absence of rivalry" (56). Drawing upon the heteronormative expectations of Mexican patriarchal society in regards to male bonding, Doña Herlinda recognizes that the only one capable to protect his son's reputation is Moncho, who accepts willingly. The support Rodolfo finds in Moncho is not only one of friendship but of a much deeper affection. And Doña Herlinda has a clear understanding of such a relationship. From this point forward, Doña Herlinda, apparently following a gendered script in the Guadalajaran *habitus*, actually revolts against the heterocentric norms of her milieu. Her efforts to protect her ever-growing family solidify the foundations she uses to build her own queer consortium.

Doña Herlinda's perception that her son's happiness relies entirely on charismatic Moncho leads my analysis to the second stage: when Moncho moves into the Ledezma residence. Consistent with the previous stage, silent conspiracy and *familismo* continue to shed light on my argument. The film *Doña Herlinda y su hijo* shows a latent manifestation of what Joseph M. Carrier calls the "problem of using conspiracy of silence about homosexuality" (230), as it occurs in the scenes that include the Ledezma family's social gatherings. Joseph Carrier states, "In social functions with relatives and neighbors, gay youth are frequently treated by their families as though they were straight" (230). According to Carrier, coping with the homosexual behavior in the form of silence could be perceived as a problem, as a stigmatized invisibility, which ultimately affects the homosexual youth themselves. However, what Carrier identifies as "conspiracy of silence," I would call "pact of silence" in Doña Herlinda's case, because she does not ignore her son's homosexual desire toward Moncho. Stigmatized invisibility is not present in her relationship with the male lovers. On the contrary, what she demonstrates is her ability to resist and even subvert Guadalajaran society, as she re-defines and adapts her son's queer sensibilities amidst the regulatory herteronormative surroundings. Doña Herlinda's behavior is what McKee Irwin refers to as the possibility of agency (xxii). Her silence is a "pact of silence" between herself and Rodolfo first—and subsequently, between herself and Moncho. She does not want her beloved queer male figures to be stigmatized or marginalized in any possible way; she is fully aware that it is only herself the one who ought to provide the space, where the binary outlaws could meet their emotional needs and sexual desires.

This is best illustrated when she prepares Moncho's favorite dish on a Sunday afternoon. As the three characters sit at the table, Doña Herlinda encourages both men to eat the chicken tostadas satisfactorily. Such an act of bodily gratification introduces her follow-up statement: she comments while serving also the best tequila of her house, "Now my darlings, you will be as happy as I enjoy seeing you

both." Possessing excellent hosting skills, she is pleased to witness that the two lovers have truly enjoyed her cooking; then, as discreet as she is, she excuses herself to go to the kitchen to get the dessert. This queer moment is not "wasted" by the men, who, as they begin to feel the exquisite tequila warming up their bodies, also initiate exchanges of passionate caresses and lustful gazes. Upon her return to the table, Doña Herlinda adds, "Ay Moncho, Rodolfo told me you live in a very small room, where you also have to share the shower with the rest of the tenants. My son has shared with me that you don't have any privacy. You've been to Rodolfo's bedroom, correct?" To which the astonished Moncho mumbles affirmatively. Then, she continues, "Well, Monchito,[3] you've seen how big his bedroom is. Why don't you stay here with us at night as well? There is plenty of space for both of you up there. Ay, Monchito, you've seen how big Rodolfo's bed is, haven't you? You know, the space in this house could also benefit your music rehearsals." Doña Herlinda's seductive skills successfully contribute to Ramón's decision to move into the Ledezma's house. This scene not only illustrates her approval of Rodolfo's homosexual desires for Ramón but also expresses her desire to provide the space where every family member's sexual cravings will be satisfied. In this manner, she solidifies her welcoming queer universe.

To best explain Doña Herlinda's queer universe, I would like to borrow Jean-Ulrick Désert's definition of "queer"—which I would like to transpose into "queer space" for the purpose of my analysis—as "elastically to include sensibilities other than the normative with a propensity toward, but not exclusive of, the homoerotic. 'Queer' is therefore a liberating rubric encompassing multiple sensibilities exclusively or in tandem" (19). Keeping in mind the gendered script imposed on her by the Guadalajaran *habitus*, we observe Doña Herlinda as a woman with agency, who bends the heteronormative environment to her own desire. Her mission is to establish and solidify a queer space, which will gratify each occupant's queer sensibilities; hence, Doña Herlinda's liberating agenda will fully compensate its three elastic-minded residents.

Now that Moncho lives in the Ledezma residence, Doña Herlinda implements her queer outline to satisfy the male lovers' desires via what I call a "pact of silence." At night, Doña Herlinda ignores the noise made by the two lovers. In the mornings, she brings them orange juice while they exercise by the swimming pool; this is a very

[3] By using "Monchito," which is the diminutive of the familiar form of Moncho, Doña Herlinda expresses a progression of her affection for her son's lover. That is, by calling Ramón "Monchito," she has converted him into another son in her family dynamic.

charged homoerotic scene, which she also pretends to ignore. Doña Herlinda does not interrupt the loving couple as they go about their daily routines; they are completely enchanted, displaying affection for each other, and thus she seems to understand the importance of her discretion in this "threesome relationship." As members of this queer association, the three of them live in perfect harmony and do many activities together. In fact, queer Doña Herlinda is also able to manifest her loyalty when Moncho's parents visit from Aguascalientes.

Continuing their pact of silence, Rodolfo's mother also validates the importance of *familismo* before Moncho's parents. Unknown to Ramón, his parents have arrived to Guadalajara to attend his uncle's funeral. When Ramón's parents ring the door bell, Doña Herlinda is overjoyed and invites them inside immediately, offering them something exquisite to drink. Moncho's mother is upset to learn from Moncho's former landlady that he has moved out of the guesthouse without notifying them. When they learn they will be spending some days in the city, they also take the opportunity to spend some time with Moncho, who, without notifying them, has moved into the Ledezma's residence, where Doctor Ledezma lives. While Moncho's father seems satisfied to learn his son is well, living with a "decent" family while continuing his studies at the Music Conservatory, Moncho's mother is suspicious of Doctor Ledezma's kindness and friendship toward Moncho.

Sensing these doubts, which could turn into having Moncho reprimanded or even taken away from her son Rodolfo, the elastic-minded Doña Herlinda attempts to appease Moncho's rigid mother. Doña Herlinda comments, "Ay, *señora*, you're in such a great shape! Do you follow any special diet? Do you exercise? I diet and exercise continuously but look at me: I don't even come close to having such a wonderful and enviable figure like yours!" Moncho's mother responds indifferently, "Well, I am a folkloric ballet instructor. Perhaps dancing helps me stay in shape." But knowing how important the concept of family is within Mexican culture and thus for Ramón as well, Doña Herlinda insists on winning Moncho's mother's trust. She changes strategies and introduces Olga as her son's girlfriend. Now that Moncho's unyielding mother seems appeased because Doctor Ledezma has a girlfriend, she becomes part of the group and begins to enjoy their daily excursions to the arts and crafts stores, museums, and restaurants throughout the city. She is pleased to witness that her son Moncho is loved by such a generous and caring family like the Ledezma family. What Ramón's father understands as the "mutual protection" within a harmonious male bonding relation, as alluded to by critic Todd W. Reese, Moncho's mother questions, only reassured when tactical Doña Herlinda provides blatant signs of what Todd W. Reese defines as "performing masculinity:"

> *A man performs his masculinity, but he is not working from some kind of originary or cultural script. Rather, his gender performance implicitly refers back to other people's previous actions which give his own actions authority and grounding. (81)*

When over-indulging complements fail to connect her with Moncho's mother, Doña Herlinda strategizes to establish her son's masculine performative role, which Moncho's mother will recognize and thus accept. Doña Herlinda is a mastermind of Mexican patriarchal society. As such, she understands a Mexican mother's concern to protect the masculinity of her male children. Doña Herlinda quickly realizes that the only way to establish authority and grounding to her son's ambivalent performative masculinity is by explicitly informing Moncho's mother about Rodolfo's girlfriend, Olga. In this manner, perceptive Doña Herlinda successfully protects her queer universe: not only does she maintain the male lovers' affair untouched but she also continues to fulfill the wishes of her loved ones. And to take her strategic plan a step further, she also satisfies Moncho's parents when she provides them with the assurance they expect: their son's masculinity unthreatened. As previously stated, Doña Herlinda's mission is to fulfill everyone's desires. She creates a queer universe, which accommodates not only all of her loved ones' yearnings but also her own. From this point forth, she will also include herself in this queer agenda: her actions will help her meet her own emotional needs since her ultimate goal is to have grandchildren.

This is now the final stage of my analysis: from Rodolfo's marriage to Olga to their child's baptism. Like the exemplary Catholic mother she was brought up to be, Doña Herlinda epitomizes the Mexican cultural term *familismo*. She portrays the engendered script in the virtues that the Mexican Catholic *habitus* dictates since she is a dedicated and loving mother. As such, her primary mission is to provide for her son's success in life: not only will Rodolfo become a well-respected neurosurgeon in the elitist Guadalajaran society, but he will also satisfy his own homosexual desires with Moncho. Because her love for Rodolfo is immeasurable, Doña Herlinda also embraces his homosexual lover, protecting and providing for him, just as if he were also her biological son. Such accepting love shows Doña Herlinda as a devoted maternal figure.

Undoubtedly, her fervent Catholicism is depicted in her desire to expand her biological family. Having a queer son does not prevent Doña Herlinda from wanting biological grandchildren. With this in mind, she seeks to finalize her queer project. All she needs is a young queer woman to procreate with Rodolfo: Olga. This young

lady is very independent. Continuing with the importance of family life in Mexican culture, the self-sufficient Olga, who intuits that marriage is the only way to gain independence from the constraints imposed on her by her family's middle-class values. Olga not only leads the Guadalajara branch of the Human Rights-International but she also aspires to continue her graduate studies in Germany. However, her family does not approve and hence will not support her financially. In consequence, Olga knows she has to leave her conservative family if she wishes to pursue her academic goals. This type of personality seems to be the best fit to mother Doña Herlinda's grandchildren.

Since Doña Herlinda's queer world evolves around paramount discretion, Olga does not seem to care about her husband's excessive friendliness toward Ramón. Accustomed to the Mexican male homosocial milieu,[4] Olga also signs the "pact of silence" already existent in the three-way relationship amongst Doña Herlinda, Ramón, and her husband, Rodolfo. Since Moncho and Rodolfo act as best friends, they are often left alone; while they cook or simply spend time together, Olga acts indifferently and opts to go shopping or to cultural events with Doña Herlinda. The domestic activities the two male friends engage in are not even considered effeminate for such a free-spirited young woman like Olga. As the modern woman she thinks of herself, Olga acts on the ideologies of progress and cultural virility within Mexican society, which are described accurately by critic Robert McKee Irwin:

> *The paradigms of masculinity are crossed with notions of civilization and barbarity. The ideology of progress implies a cultural virility [...] at the same time, progress leads to civilization, and in civilized society, men no longer need to work hard and become soft. In Mexico, the rhetoric of race and class frequently intersects with that of gender in complicated ways [...]. Lower class Mexicans are both less civilized [more brutishly masculine...] than upper-class Mexicans. (xxix)*

Because Doña Herlinda's queer space is highly civilized and sophisticated amidst the Guadalajaran heteronormative society, Rodolfo's masculinity is not compromised in any way. Both male lovers have college educations, are considered sophisticated and thus civilized; while Rodolfo is a prominent neurosurgeon, Ramón is a promising student at the prestigious Guadalajara Music Conservatory. Because their

[4] I continue to use "homosocial" as explained by Eve Kosofski Sedwick, which I also include on pages 5-6 in this essay.

display of behaviors does not expose extreme effeminate traits, their masculinity is seen as the norm within the upper classes of the Mexican male homosocial milieu. Here too, the relationship built by Moncho-Rodolfo-Olga (MRO) echoes Todd W. Reese's *Masculinities in Theory*, more specifically, his analysis on "love triangle," where he states:

> *In the love triangle, the goal of triangulation is not for two men to desire the same woman, but rather to cement the problematic relationship between men. […] The love triangle, in the end, serves a number of ends for masculinity: it avoids the homoerotic threat and it keeps male domination in place by treating the female love object as object. (62)*

Doña Herlinda's objective to create the MRO love triangle is not for Rodolfo and Moncho to desire Olga, but to strengthen their homosexual relationship. Clearly aware of the heteronormative society, Doña Herlinda subverts the notions of male-male bonding by fulfilling the ends for masculinity: a male grandchild will establish her son's masculinity before the Guadalajaran milieu, cement the male lovers' relationship, and provide Olga with social independence.

Taking it a step further: what initially seems a love triangle turns into a four-way alliance, where all sexual, emotional and social aspirations are met. Progressive thinker Olga provides the space for the male friends to enjoy themselves, as she also delights in the autonomy provided by the four-way alliance. As the caring queer mother that Doña Herlinda is, she also allows the male lovers to know the exact time when Olga and she will normally return home from their daily errands out in the city; hence, Rodolfo and Moncho are not unpleasantly surprised. In addition, the four of them often do plenty of activities together; they gather for lunch or dinner regularly. This newly formed bond with Olga provides Doña Herlinda with a "daughter," as she creates her own homosocial milieu in the household, and thus profits more with Olga's company.

However, not conformed with seeing the newly weds often enough—since they live separately, in a modern and very expensive apartment—Doña Herlinda fortifies her queer building by having the entire family living in the same household. At this point, liberated Olga becomes pregnant with Rodolfo's child. Such a longed anticipation of the soon-to-be grandmother will be fully satisfied because she will enjoy having her only grandchild growing and playing in her own queer backyard.

In this conclusive manner, Doña Herlinda creates a queer world of her own. By portraying the homosexual couple as an affectionate male-bonding relationship within the elitist Guadalajaran *milieu*, Doña Herlinda transforms silent conspiracy into a pact of silence. She subverts the Mexican beliefs of masculinity and embarks upon orchestrating the meeting between Olga and Rodolfo, while assuring her son's romance with Moncho. She not only convinces Ramón to move into the Ledezma family's residence but also establishes an alliance with him. Her well-protected queer universe welcomes also Moncho's parents and contributes to the harmony of this family—attesting, in this way, to the importance of *familismo* in Mexican culture. Since her queer space also satisfies her own aspirations to become a grandmother, Doña Herlinda also strategizes for Rodolfo to date, marry and ultimately procreate with Olga. Ingenious Doña Herlinda continually assists Rodolfo in alternating between Olga and Moncho in sexual encounters. Queer Doña Herlinda brings orange juice to the male couple as they exercise in the mornings, and then forms a connection with her daughter-in-law, going together to shop, to art gallery exhibitions, and to the gynecologist when Olga gets pregnant. Even the day Olga is about to give birth, Doña Herlinda, who knows Rodolfo is inside Moncho's studio, cries out for help—and determined that the two male lovers should hear, "Ay, Moncho, Rodolfo told me he would go to the local store and he has not returned. Could you please go fetch him? Olga is having the contractions!" Ah… What a world that of Doña Herlinda! Isn't this the queerest world of them all?

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