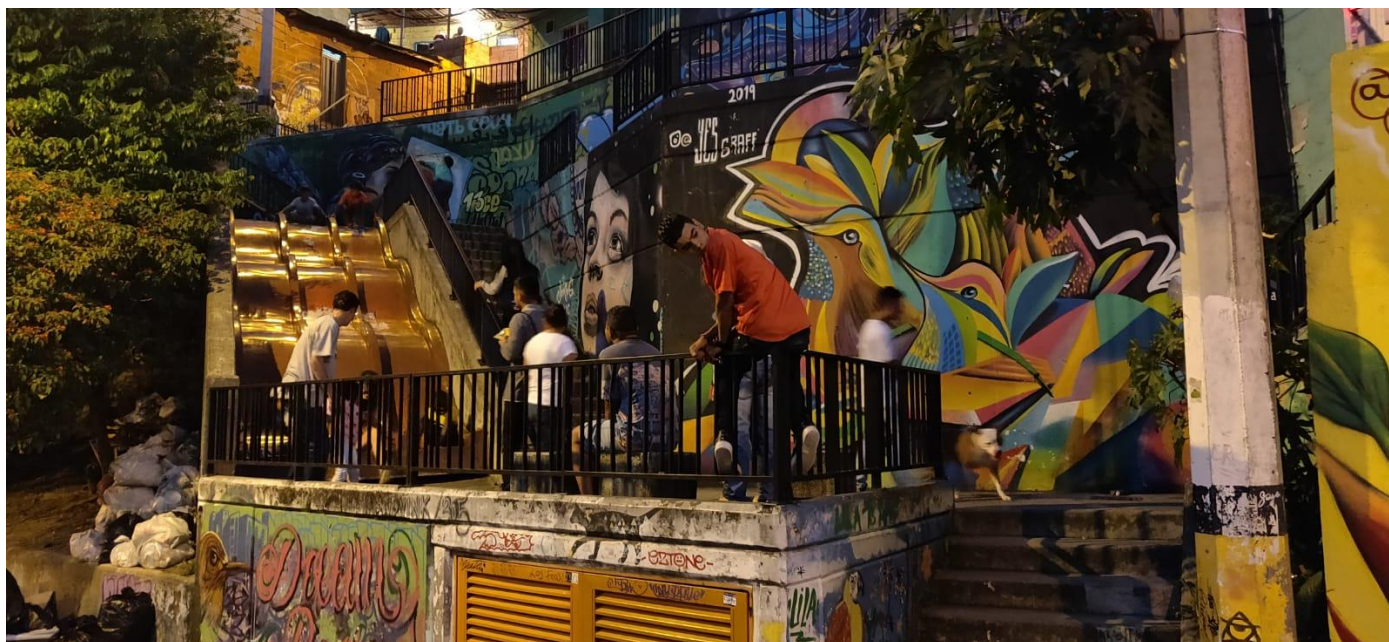


Wageningen University & Research Centre – Department of Social Science – Sociology and Anthropology of Development and Change



“Machismo as a Symptom”

A Lacanian Analysis on the Crisis of Masculinity in Medellín, Colombia

Major thesis written by Marleen Senge as part of her Master in International Development Studies.

Date of Submission: 15. June, 2020
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*Hay un espacio físico y mental
De hombres que se peinsan
El cuento de ser hombres,
Un espacio ligero, un transitar,
Quizá un sendero,
Para sonar que somos hombres nuevos.*

*Hombres mejores, hombres de amor
Sentipensantes
Hombres de manos extendidas
Ante el viejo milagro de la vida.
Suave pandilla de humos y de olvidos
Manes querido, de mambes y sonidos
Manes de abrazos, sonrisas y latidos.
- El viejo macha.*

*There is a physical and mental space
Of men who comb their hair
The tale of being a man,
A light space, a transit,
Maybe a trail,
To sound like we're new men.*

*Better men, men of love
Sentimental
Men with outstretched hands
Before the old miracle of life.
Gentle gang of fumes and forgetfulness
Loving hands, of mambes¹ and sounds
Hands of hugs, smiles and heartbeats.
- The old one, Macha*

Photo on frontpage: Author's photographs, taken on the Tour of Graffiti in Comuna 13

¹ Drumms

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Acknowledgments

I want to thank the Municipality of Medellín and the University CES, for giving me the possibility to be part and to observe some of the Encuentros (meetings) of the program “Hombres como vos”.

I would also like to especially thank Ana, an incredible woman who has supported me from the first moment in Medellín on. During my stay, you have showed me so much, offered me so many possibilities to research this topic and have shared many interesting views with me and have become a true friend to me. I hope, we can see each other one day again and enjoy some good Patacónes together, which, thanks to you I know now how to prepare. Thank you so much for making me feel so welcome in Medellín.

Further, I would like to thank José and Lizandro. All your efforts to make me gain a deep understanding on gender-relations in Medellín have been so helpful to me and I have enjoyed all the talks that we shared.

Even though I believe they will not be able to read this thesis, I would also like to thank all the men of the Encuentros of Hombres Amigos. You have been so kind and enthusiastic about our coming together, and I have enjoyed every time I visited you in Manrique – a beautiful place in Medellín. Your honesty and willingness to share insights of your life made me even more passionate about this thesis.

I would also like to thank Macha el Viejo. I always loved spending time with you and the other men of Amañaderos de Manes. Your beautiful mindset and attitude has helped me to believe, that everything is possible and that everybody can be strong enough to change. Thank you so much for your trust and your inspiration!

I also want to thank Juan David. You have welcomed me so warmly in Medellín and offered me the possibility to find beautiful spots and inspirational sides of the city.

A big thank you also goes to my supervisor Pieter, who has supported me a lot during this thesis work. You have encouraged me, to gain a complete different understanding of not only gender, but of how I have theorized society and life in general before. Your constructive feedback has helped me, to transform a lot of “crazy” ideas into something profound, and have motivated me, to “think big”, and to be courageous enough to choose this pathway for my thesis.

I would also like to thank my boyfriend Daniel, for whom reading this thesis surely must not be easy at certain parts. Thank you for always listening to my theoretical explanations of psychoanalysis and thank you for seeing past certain of my over-interpretations while wearing the psychoanalytical-gender glasses.

I would also like to thank my friend Dennis, who has supported me to make this thesis a readable outcome that can actually be understood by others.

Last but not least, I would also like to say thank you to my family. You always had to keep up with my trips and ideas, and I know that this trip has been worrisome for you sometimes. Thank you for trusting in me and for supporting me in all my decisions during my academic pathway.

Explanations

Programmes/Groups:

Hombres como vos: - “Men like you”

During my stay, I accompanied Ana and José to some of the *Encuentros* (meetings) of the program “Hombres como Vos” in both schools and public events, in which I have been observing their work. The program “Hombres como Vos” is a component of a larger project called “Familias Fuertes y Resilientes - en diferentes barrios de la ciudad de Medellín” (strong and resilient families in different neighbourhoods of the city of Medellín), and is a project of the Secretary of Health of the Alcaldía of Medellín (Municipality), supported and executed by the psychology faculty of the university CES (a university of Medellín in el Poblado). The project is thus funded by public money. In the year of 2017, they firstly initiated the program of “Strong and resilient Families”. The objective of the project is to offer a professional service and support to implement strategies of self-care of health and the strengthening of families. It aims to form strong and resilient families which allows for a positive impact on habits and behaviour from a socio-cultural construction with emphasis on the culture of care, the coexistence and the promotion of mental health in different neighbourhoods in the city of Medellín. The program consists of five components, of which one is the program “Hombres como vos” – the construction of alternative masculinities for the promotion of convivial.

Ana, José and Lizandro (see section below) all work together in this project component, which has the objective to promote equitable relations and influence social norms and representations of the construction of hegemonic masculinities that legitimize gender violence and other forms of violence. The program aims to raise awareness and to mobilize and communicate strategies with the purpose to contribute to the construction of alternative masculinities and gender equality. For that aim, the program works in different places, such as universities, schools, social and cultural collectives and public events.

Hombres Amigos (Men-Friends)

Hombres Amigos is an elderly home for men. It is situated in the neighbourhood Manrique, which is characterized by a predominantly low socio-economic status. José conducted six Encuentros for the program Hombres Como Vos in the elderly home. Usually, about 15 men participated, who are between the age of 70 and 86. I had the chance to join the group three times during my stay.

Amañaderos de Manes

The group of Amañaderos de manes is a group of men that was brought to life in the process of Carlos investigational project of masculinities and war in 2014. They are men who, in the midst of a diversity in terms of sexual orientation, academic training, age, socio-economic status and subjective conditions, share a number of fundamental concerns about the way in which they inhabit masculinity and are at the same time inhabited by it.

Poets, artists, singer-songwriters, social science professionals, health professionals, bohemians and workers are part of this space, in which they meet up regularly, talk, smoke, drink and sing. In general, as Macha described it, it is a space, in which men can come together without hierarchy or competition and just share worries and thoughts of their everyday lives without judgment. I also had the chance to visit one of their meetings, and as they told me, women are not excluded from these groups, but in general, some women who have joint the groups left the space quite quickly again. Having a place like this, as Macha says, is already outside of the hegemonic masculinity-logic, as men usually do not talk about feelings. They also share a common interest in indigenous practices.

Participants:

A few words about me (Marleen):

I am 25 years old (during my time in Colombia still 24), I come from Germany and I am studying International Development Studies at the University of Wageningen in the Netherlands. I stayed in Medellín for three months, while living in a flat in the neighbourhood of Laureles, a rather wealthier part of the city.

Ana:

My first contact person in Medellín was Ana. For the first two weeks I also stayed and lived at her place before I moved into a shared flat in another part of the city. She has been working in the field of masculinities for many years, has conducted some research projects on this topic and has worked for the program “Hombres como vos” for several years.

José:

José is 30 years old and has a degree in social science. He has worked with “Hombres como vos” for two years now. We met for several interviews and he took me with him to some “Encuentros” in an elderly home called “*Hombres Amigos*” (Men Brothers).

Lizandro:

Lizandro is 36 years old and comes from Rio Negro, a city right next to Medellín. Lizandro works for the programme “Hombres como Vos”. He is a psychologist with a focus on mental health of children and has been working for the program of “hombres como vos”, for 2 years.

Carlos:

Carlos is 34 years old. He has been working in the fields of hegemonic masculinity for several years. In the past years, he has conducted investigations about masculinity and war in Medellín.

Juan David

Juan David is 27 years old and grew up in another department of Colombia. His family was replaced to Antioquia, where he got transferred to Comuna 13, one of the most poorest and violent neighbourhoods of the city, where he lives today in a popular neighbourhood. His father died some years ago. Today he is a student at the university of Antioquia, where he does his Bachelor.

Erwin:

Erwin is 22 years old. I met him through coincidence at the metro-station at San Javier (Comuna 13). Erwin is a local guide at the Tour of Graffiti², where he works independently and informally, thus without a touristic company or agency. He grew up in Medellín in Comuna 13, but when he turned 17 years old, his parents moved to Cartagena, while he stayed in Medellín because of better educational options. He first lived with his uncle for some time but now lives alone in a small studio-apartment right next to electronic stairs in Comuna 13, which is in the centre of the Graffiti-Tour. Erwin told me, that he is doing a university career at Politecnica - a private university of Medellín, and he finances his life with money from the government and the salary he earned through his tours as a guide. However, there were some biases in his story about his academic pathway, in which certain timing, degrees and scholarship do not quite match.

Antonio:

² In Comuna 13 there is a Tour-way that passes through a pathway of a neighbourhood for tourists, which is called the “Graffiti-Tour”. While this popular neighbourhood used to be associated with crime and narco-traffic, nowadays, during the day, it is visited by many tourists to look at the Graffiti-Art that is sprayed on the walls. (Naef 2016).

Antonio is 21 years old. He lives in Robledo – a popular neighbourhood of Medellín where he also grew up. Today, Antonio is doing his Bachelor.

Juan:

Juan is 21 years old and grew up in a popular neighbourhood in San Cristobal. His family came from another part of Antioquia but was displaced to Medellín in 1998. His parents are separated and therefore, he has been living for already over 9 years with his uncles and cousins and his mother in a house in San Cristobal. Today, he studies at the university of Antioquia, doing a bachelor's in administration of health. In his family, he is the first and only child that goes to a university.

Julio

Julio is 25 years old and he is a teacher for language. He is half Colombian and half Venezolano and has lived in Medellín already for over 10 years. Half of his family still lives in Venezuela, but he grew up in Colombia from the age of 6 years when coming to primary school. I got to know him when I moved into the neighbourhood of Laureles, where we shared among five other young people a flat together.

Enrique

Enrique is 60 years old. He is a professor at the University of Antioquia. He lives in the barrio Envigado. He has a son of 15 years and a daughter who is 26 years old. He grew up in a wealthy part of Medellín and never experienced poverty or insecurities.

Emmanuel

Emmanuel, a man of 62 years lived with me in the shared flat. He is half Peruvian and half Colombian. He has lived in Peru and the United States for some time of his life but moved back to his birth-country Colombia to be with his daughter and wife, although they do not live together with him in the shared flat of Laureles. Emmanuel is a wealthy man, who is a vender of refreshment-drinks in Colombia.

Diego

I have only very little information about Diego, as he was my UBER-driver for about 45 minutes. I don't know his age nor where he comes from.

Erwin's friends, who I met at a party. I however do not have much knowledge about them, except that they all live in the neighbourhood of San-Javier around the electric stairs at the Graffiti Tour.

Juan is 21 years old. Juan grew up in Comuna 13, and today he lives with his parents and his three siblings in an apartment close to the metro station San Javier. He works in a Barbershop.

Camilo is 21 years old. Camilo grew up in Comuna 7 (Robledo), but due to forced displacement moved to Comuna 13 in 2007, where he now lives with his mother in a house that is beyond the Graffiti Tour. He works in a technology shop, that fixes broken devices.

Pablo is 24 years old. He – like the others – also lives in Comuna 13. I did not have an opportunity to ask more about his background.

Macha

Macha is 65 years old. He lives in the neighbourhood of Guayabal, a neighbourhood in which he tells me he feels comfortable and safe. He has a daughter, who is already an adult and lives in another part of Antioquia. Macha is married. He worked in the military force for a long time. During war, he experienced much violence. Today he teaches violence-prevention courses in schools and began to express himself in poems, songs and other artistic projects. He joined the Amañaderos de Manes in 2014 and ever since engages himself with topics of masculinity.

Freddy:

Freddy is 34 years old. He is an Afro-Colombian man who grew up in Comuna 13. He currently studies anthropology at the university of Antioquia. He is part of the group of Amañaderos de Manes and I met him during the meeting that they invited me to. In his childhood he has experienced a lot of the drug-

war, violence and poverty. The birth of his daughter made him rethink a lot about his masculinity and therefore joined the group of Amañaderos de manes and engaged a lot in his musical formation in order to embrace alternative pathways within the comunas - especially for the afro-population.

Summary

This ethnography intends to understand the difficulty of overcoming, what previous theorists have called the crisis of masculinity in the city of Medellín (Colombia). This crisis has been described as the struggle to live up to a hegemonic model of masculinity, which results in harmful practices for both men and women (also referred to as “toxic masculine behaviour”) and are reflected in the highly masculine violence that occurs in Medellín. The objective of this thesis is therefore to show how there is a need to rethink the crisis of masculinity in terms of a Lacanian analysis of the unconscious. In the unconscious, desires and drives reveal themselves in an unfiltered way (Kapoor 2011). Therefore, a participatory observation has been conducted, following daily acts and listening to different perceptions of men and boys in Medellín, that can be described as toxic masculine behaviour. By looking more closely into moments of antagonisms, inconsistencies and confusion, this ethnography shows, how a psychoanalytical approach offers insights, that are crucial to particularly understand the ambiguity and difficulty of treating this crisis of masculinity; meaning that men keep on investing into a model of which they ultimately know that it harms themselves and others. There are certain rituals, like performing a street-pickup, going to the club with friends to break the rules together, or visiting a prostitute to toughen up, that are a source of obscene enjoyment.

This thesis thus argues, that the crisis of masculinity is the acknowledgment that there is no hegemonic masculinity. Toxic masculine behaviours are symptoms of the Real. By acknowledging that the inherent problematic of men’s struggle can be traced back to the impossibility of constructing a stable male identity, we come to understand, that only by changing the discursive categories and social construct on gender, this crisis of masculinity cannot be solved. Thus, as a conclusion, the real challenge of gender work is not, to create gender relations that are politically correct and tolerant, but to address the libidinal attachments and amounts of obscenities as corrupted desires that are registered in the unconscious. By that, men can manage to construct a masculinity that is truly transformational.

Keywords: Medellín, Crisis of Masculinity, toxic masculine behaviour, Lacanian Psychoanalysis, hegemonic masculinities

Introduction – An UBER-driver with many questions

In the second month of my stay in Medellín, one day I decided to take an UBER to get to a part of the city where I had scheduled an interview. My UBER-driver Diego and I already caught each other on the wrong foot from the very first minute, because of some problems with the App, that somehow did not show our ride nor send me any confirmation. I was therefore already way too late for my appointment when we finally managed to get the directions right and got on the way. After some minutes, I had the feeling that I forgot my sunglasses, so I just looked around in my bag, next to the seat and on the sides, to see if they were there.

- Diego: What are you looking at?
Me: I feel like I have lost my sunglasses.
Diego: Have you looked everywhere?
Me: Well, there is not much place where they could have gone to. Although, now I am not even sure, if I even wore any when coming in.
Diego: No, you did not wear any, I know because I directly saw your beautiful eyes.
Me: I am not sure.
Diego: No no, you were presenting me your nice clear eyes directly when coming in here. Why wearing sunglasses anyway, they cover up your beautiful face.
I realized how he kept on staring at me, I would have preferred if he would have looked on the street.
Diego: So where are you from?
Me: From Germany.
Diego: Aaaah Germany. Wie geht es dir?³
Me: Gut, danke. [pause]⁴
Diego: So, Marleen, it's Marleen, right?
Me: Yeah.
Diego: How long have you been here?
Me: It's now about two months.
Diego: Ah so there you had the time to learn to speak our language with the beautiful lips you have.
I did not reply to him anymore because I started to feel uncomfortable. After some while he asked me:
Diego: Do you have a boyfriend?
Me: Why do you want to know?
Diego: I have to know.
Me: I have a boyfriend yeah.
Diego: Is he here?
Me: What?
Diego: I mean is he from here?
Me: No, from Europe.
Diego: Aah but then you didn't understand me. I meant if you have a *REAL* [emphasized the word with a loud voice] boyfriend you know, un hombre PAISA⁵. (*He made a gesture with his fist, that reminded of a power-movement*) (Long pause)
Diego: You know, chicas⁶ need a *real* man, strong.
Un hombre *Paisa*. You know what Paisa means?

³ In German; "How are you?"

⁴ In German: Good thank you

⁵ Un hombre Paisa = A man from the Paisa region in the northwest of Colombia (in Antioquia). Medellín is often referred to as the capital of the Paisa. The name derives from the term Paisano, which means countryman.

⁶ Chicas = girls

Me: I don't really feel comfortable with all this.

Diego: Noo, but we are just talking. You know, Paisa man. Un hombre paisa is somebody that knows how to work you know. Someone that can take life and is quite about it.

Me: I already have a man, I just need this one.

Diego laughed. There was a pause and it got silent.

Diego: So, are you married? Or engaged? I saw that ring on your finger.

Me: No, I think that is not your business.

Diego: I think that is not your business. (*He repeated my phrase slowly and in a higher voice as if he was making fun of me, maybe because I did not use the right Spanish expression for saying it. Then he nodded slowly and laughed ironically.*) Lucky Muchacho⁷ in Germany.

Me: Do you ask that to all your customers?

Diego laughed again.

Diego: Only the pretty ones.

After a while of silence, we arrived close to the final destination. Because I was already over 10 minutes late due to the App-Problems in the beginning, I told him that he could already let me out before, because it was easier to walk from there.

Diego: No, I will let you out where the App says.

This was however not necessary, because due to the App-Problems, our ride was officially already over before we even left my street.

Me: But it is better for me here, I will also pay you the whole amount.

Diego: No, I will not let you out here. I am the conductor.

Me: Please let me out! (*My voice was suddenly shaking*)

Diego: No!

He pushed his hand on the steering wheel and squinted his eyes together. I was angry and simultaneously felt unsafe because I was aware that I did not have the control over where I wanted to leave the car. I stayed quiet because I sensed that he was angry, he was breathing out heavily and kept staring at me with an upset look. After some minutes, Diego stopped at the sidewalk, it was not the final destination on the App and now even put me further away from my destination than as it would have been like indicated in the App. I however couldn't wait to get out of his car. As soon as I was out of the vehicle, I felt relieved, even though nothing dramatic really happened. I walked over the street to approach Diego through the window. He showed me the UBER-App to indicate the price that I needed to pay to him. Later I wondered, why I even payed him at all. It was 9.550 pesos (about 2,57 Euros). While I pulled out my purse, he still held his phone towards my direction and when I looked there again, he showed me, how he graded our ride with five stars⁸.

I handed him over the money and he insisted:

Diego: No no, for you only 9.000 my love. (2,42 Euros)

Me: No no, take everything.

Diego: No I said 9.000. (*His voice sounded upset again but then he smiled at me*) I don't want you to pay too much, amorcita.⁹

Me: Fine.

Diego: So, I'm sorry about before, I hope you are not upset. And sorry that the App had some problems and we arrived late.

Me: Ok.

Diego: Thank you for the ride. I gave you five stars, you saw that right?

Me: Ok, I see. Bye.

I probably have never passed a street that fast before and without looking back I ran down the road to get away from Diego. I thought a lot about this UBER-Drive afterwards. I believe it was the first time in my life that I indeed felt threatened by a man because I did not give him what he wanted. I was

⁷ Muchacho = term for guy, boy

⁸ A grading system of UBER to show the quality of the customer and the drive, in which five stars indicate the best quality possible

⁹ Diminutive form of "my love"

wondering, if I had done something wrong, insulted him or disrespected some cultural codes. I then however came to the conclusion that there was nothing that could have justified his behaviour when he refused to let me out his car when I asked him to. Where did his sudden anger come from, when I told him that I was happily in a relationship with a man who is not an *hombre paisa*, and therefore, to his opinion, was not man enough to please a woman like me?

I had observed some self-destructive behaviour before during my stay in Medellín, but never had I been in the direct middle of them. Because even after indirectly rejecting him two times, he kept on insisting to approach me, despite the anger it obviously caused him, and despite his dependency of my approval during the ride, as every UBER-customer has the possibility to grade -, and even report a driver. A complaint from my side could have costed him his clients and even his permission to use the application. Despite that, he however decided to keep on insisting and marking his superiority. I can only assume his motifs, when he then showed me how he graded our UBER-trip with the best category possible and insisted on only charging me a partial amount of the drive. It could have been an attempt to show me his generosity, implying that he does not rely on my payment or simply a try to make up for his behaviour before. The way how he tried to place himself in this new distribution of power in this moment seems hypocritical and inherently inconsistent – as during the drive I had firstly been equated with a perfect overly beautiful being, to the stage that he mocked me because I would not answer his question, then emphasizing his superiority and then ultimately becoming his “*amorcita*”, who he tried to charm by giving her a financial discount. This inconsistency in his behaviour reflects a sort of hypocrisy and frustration, that might go along with some feeling of (economical?) inferiority, with me as a German woman, as a foreign female paying customer of his UBER-service. His dominant masculine enactment, or what he called the Paisa male identity could be considered as a compensation-strategy for this frustration (DeVries, 2020). Detecting and understanding irrational moments like this one will be central to this thesis. In order to provide an explanation for such destructive behaviour, I will approach “toxic” masculine behaviour from a psychoanalytical angle, that differs from the previous conceptualizations that have been done on the crisis of masculinity in Medellín.

For that, in this thesis I will start by laying out previous work on masculinity in Medellín. I will introduce and explain Lacanian psychoanalytical theory, in order to show how this analysis of the interaction between subjects and society can bring about a different understanding on how to study masculinities. Central to this is the focus on enjoyments, fantasies and desire, that are processes in the unconscious of subjects. I will then explain, how I will apply these theoretical understandings during my ethnographic research in Medellín. Through participatory observations and interviews, I will use Lacanian psychoanalysis, to detect inconsistencies, antagonisms, (unconscious) desire and drives that are connected to the gendered structure of power. I will start by treating the fantasy of the Macho-Man, - meaning an image of masculinity that is characterized by unemotionality, strength and the ability to provide for himself and his family. This fantasy offers both a source of identification but also confronts many men with frustration and desperation, as there is a constant expectation to be responsible and tough. By sharing different stories of boys and men who particularly live in violent neighbourhoods, I will show, how difficult it is to imagine a different way of expressing masculinity, as their hostile living environment exposes them to a lot of risks and dangers, that demand for a strong masculine figure. However, by detecting moments of enjoyments and the attachment to rituals, I will indicate, that this is not the only difficulty of imagining another identity of masculinity, as it is ultimately also libidinally invested. Those libidinal attachments are fantasies and illusions that promise the achievement of a certain excessive (and sexual) enjoyment and satisfaction (Kapoor 2014: 1135) (more in chapter 2). There is an enjoyment in the sacrifice, that this strong man takes for ensuring the survival of his family. In the following chapter I will investigate further how women enter the psychic apparatus of men. Men are invested into a fantasy of romance, that promises enjoyment by finding a complementary relationship. The corruption of this desire however results in (harmful) irrational conducts, which I will detect both in chapter five and six. Based on the example of the act of the Piropo¹⁰ and my participants attitude towards loyalty, this chapter will show, that despite men’s frustration about these acts there is however a promise of enjoyment which leads to the reproduction and the endurance of ambiguous relationships between themselves and others.

¹⁰ Act of seduction on the streets, like “Street pickup”

In the seventh chapter, I will lay out how this ambiguity of relationships also stands in a conflicting position to the fantasy of the patriarchal Macho-Man. Leaning on observations and analysis of how women appear in artistic works, there is a tendency to mistrust women, as they could always result to be a prostitute or ultimately breaking the men's heart. This finally also leads to the assumption that the identity of the "strong & providing man" is endangered by women who do not accept to be subordinated to a man. The result are attitudes of blaming and scapegoating and even misogyny of women who are called as feminists. Such attitudes are also connected to some practices that are libidinally invested.

In chapter eight I will show further inconsistencies of the gendered structure of power that is created by men's perception on "other" masculine images – as for instance "softer" men. Contradicting is here the expressed desire to integrate those "other" expressions as a "normal" way of relating oneself to the fantasy of masculine identities, but simultaneously the need of justification and categorization of this otherness. In discussions in class and observations outside, I will indicate, how this urge represents an expression of the inconsistencies in the gender structure, that sometimes results in repressed tolerance or political correctness. This ultimately creates a danger for gender-based programs, to reinforce these gender containers without addressing the underlying real crisis of masculinity. This danger will be further discussed in the conclusion.

Ultimately, I will show, how a psychoanalytical lens can be used to reframe the crisis of masculinity, to reach a better understanding of toxic behaviour as part of a larger structure of power, that is libidinally invested. Such an understanding can ultimately also lay the ground to address the crisis of masculinity in a different way, to which I will briefly give an outlook in the final reflection.

1.2. Relevance of working with masculinities - problem statement

By many scholars on urban development, Medellín is referred to as a city that has managed to achieve the impossible. In less than 25 years, the city has recuperated from its violent past, contesting uncontrollable flows of migration, civil war and narco-terrorism, which made Medellín in the 90s one of the most dangerous city in the world. Today, Medellín has become a magnet of economic investments, tourism and a strong entrepreneurial spirit (Doyle 2015: 4).

However, beyond the facade of being the most innovative city in 2014, Medellín is characterized by a high degree of social segregation (Drummond et. al 2012, The World Bank 2019). In the city's popular neighbourhoods, the population is still suffering under high degrees of social exclusion, unemployment and insecurity. Although the number of homicides has declined since 1991, with more than 6800 homicides a year, to 2018 with only 626 homicides, which is a reduction of more than 90%, criminal actors are still ruling many poor neighbourhoods, exposing its population to security threats (Baird 2012 a). Due to the little opportunities for employment, illegal economies create a reproducing spiral of drug-trafficking, gang affiliation and corruption. A great amount of studies has shown (Doyle 2015; DFID & IDRC 2012) that with social inequality and poverty, particularly in rapidly growing cities such as Medellín, comes public insecurity and violence, particularly in low-income urban neighbourhoods.

These conditions shape especially young people's development. Growing up in precarity, insecurity and poverty have influenced their social behaviour, their personality, ideologies and worldviews, but also their self-perception within society (Baird 2015). Several scholars (e.g DFID & IDRC 2012) have pointed out that marginalisation, drug trafficking, gun ownership, ineffective policing and unemployment create a high risk for young people to fall into patterns of criminality and enact violence, which creates a continuous breeding of urban insecurity across generations (DFID & IDRC 2012). A survey conducted in 2010 (Drummond et. al 2012), queried young people in Medellín's Comuna 13 on growing up with a constant presence of violence and insecurity. The questionnaire pointed out that there was a high readiness for violence: 66% of all respondents stated "in a dispute one should stand one's ground to get what you want no matter the costs", and almost half of all even quoted "to finish it, when being in a fight with all means" (pp. 152 - 153). Furthermore, there was an all in all positive attitude towards actors that engage in gang-activities, who are usually involved into drug-trafficking, extortion and practices of violence. 48% stated gang affiliation is a symbol of respect within their community (p. 152).

Looking at the crime-statistic in Medellín, it becomes clear that violence is a particularly gendered phenomenon. The majority of perpetrators and victims of public violence are young men, whereas perpetrators of domestic violence are generally men - victims are most often women. According to a study of the UNDP (2010), 41% of women between the ages of 15 and 49 in Colombia have been victims of physical violence and 11% report sexual violence. This is not particular for Medellín or Colombia only. In Latin America, a masculine type of image, commonly denominated "Machismo" is often associated with sexual and social domination over women and other men, as well as a tendency for an aggressive and violent attitude in an urban context of social change. Traditional masculine ideals seem to be feeding young men's urge to enact particularly dominant, daring and even brutal behaviours if necessary. A problem seems to be that men desperately try to live up to a masculine image that is impossible to achieve. Important here to notice is also the high suicide-rate of men. In 2018, 161 people committed suicide in Medellín, of which 80.8% were men (Secretaría de Salud de Medellín, 2020). A variety of different scholars have already studied these struggles men face when growing up into a gendered adulthood. The way how role models, societal norms and patterns of masculinity are evolving in a context of a constantly changing social world has led to what many authors have titled "a crisis of masculinity": Finding one's own identity within a gender structured world becomes more and more difficult and challenging. Research in Medellín (e.g. Baird 2011-2015, Drummond et al 2012, Montoya 2010), shows how young men are facing problems in finding their own path to masculinity, which results in (self-) harming conducts that can also make them the perfect prey for the criminal scenery of the city.

1.3. Previous conceptualizations of hegemonic masculinity in Medellín / Latin America

There is a variety of theoretical concepts that aim to explain how masculinity images are reproduced and why they keep sustaining themselves. Connell and Messerschmidt (1977, 2005) have introduced the term “hegemonic masculinity”, which was formulated as “the pattern of practices (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men’s dominance over women to continue” (Connell, Messerschmidt 2005: 832). It is understood as a widespread ideological stand that is culturally rooted in gender inequality and patriarchy. As Connell emphasizes, those hegemonic masculinities can be constructed without even closely corresponding to the lives of any actual men, but however express commonly known and shared ideals, fantasies and desires of what it means to be a man. This means that a crucial part of analysing and conceptualizing hegemonic masculinities is about investigating the way men express the idea of manhood in a socially and culturally embedded context and with the symbolic and material resources that are available.

Following research in Medellín (e.g. Baird 2011-2015, Drummond et. al 2012, Montoya 2010), for most men in the city, being a man signifies to be a respected member of society. This respect can be achieved by men’s ability to provide for their family, to be their protector, to have power and strength, to dare, to be feared, to live in dignity and to have (sexual) access to women and in that way dominate femininities and other types of masculinity. Being brutal, being daring and having an expensive lifestyle are crucial signifiers of manliness, which have to be publicly displayed by wearing expensive clothes, owning motorcycles, being able to go to clubs or being spectacularly violent in order to protect one’s own honour. This hegemonic masculinity image is interconnected with the broader gender norms in Colombian society and in a broader sense, in the entirety of Latin America. An attempt to explain this tendency of a rather extreme way of expressing and displaying masculinity is Miller’s (2013) thesis of masculine overcompensation which assumes that “men who fear they have insufficient masculinity, overcompensate by enacting extreme masculine behaviours and attitudes designed to create the impression that they are quite masculine” (as cited in Willer et. al 2013: 983). This explains why particularly men who are socially excluded and live in precarious conditions tend to develop types of “hyper-masculinity”.

According to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), those hegemonic images are not isolated but exist next to a multiplicity of other masculinity-images that are subordinated by the dominant masculinity. There are many boys and young men in Medellín, who reject violence and strive for pathways of manhood that differ a lot from the hegemony of masculinity as described above. Research of Baird (2012) or Montoya (2010) show that, for some boys, manliness does not necessarily include being brutal and feared, but that cultural signifiers for manliness can be creativity, sportiness and a good education. A good example for this is the rising Hip-Hop scenery of Medellín (Montoya 2009). Young men and even some girls are joining groups in which they dance and sing together. The admiration of an audience for a good dance performance becomes a signifier for being a respected member of society.

The reproduction of hegemonic masculinities is thus a constant and active process of contesting other subordinated masculinities. “It requires the policing of men as well as the exclusion or discrediting of women” (Connell, Messerschmidt 2005: 844). Baird (2015) and other authors have recognized this in Medellín’s youth culture. “Being a man is to be strong, a brute, bringing home money, a protector, skilful, a womaniser, a chauvinist, macho, having power, being respected. Being a woman is the inverse of being a man... being weak, fragile, not having power, not having status, to be subordinate” (Interview in: Baird 2012 b 183). This discrediting of other gender images, however, is not only restricted to women, but also to any other form of masculinity, that does not comply with the pattern of hegemony. Commonly, as Baird shows in his research, boys use the term “loquita”¹¹ as an insult for other boys who, for instance, avoid fights or other types of conflicts that are solved with violence. Particularly in school, these insults have become part of a mobbing tradition.

As this masculine identity is internalized by practices learnt by the social environment of upbringing, close family members, regional or even global famous figures function as role models for the boys that represent images of masculinity. In Medellín, Baird (2012, 2015) has found out that most of the boys,

¹¹ Loquita = “Crazy girl”

who do not correspond with the hegemonic Machismo-type of masculinity, share a stronger support of their families. In their education, there has been an emphasis on school and strictness to stay away from criminal activities. However, many other boys face a void of authority coming from their closest environment, as some of their parents are either dead or have a high tendency of neglect and domestic violence. Particularly a void of masculine role models is present, as the number of female single parent households is relatively high and constantly rising (Gill, 2016; Córdoba et. al 2013). Therefore, public figures, both historically important for the whole country or characters that are only known in certain popular neighbourhoods, are images of successful men. As well-known and respected men in those neighbourhoods are usually connected to drug trafficking or other illegal economic activities, it is not surprising that for many boys, men like Pablo Escobar or gang-leaders are men, who represent real manliness. In Baird's (2012 b) interviews it also becomes clear that many boys have an admiration for those violent figures not for their violence and their personal biography itself, but rather what their actions represent; dealing with drugs, for instance, pays a lot of money, with which one can provide for oneself and one's family; daring to use physical violence against somebody in a public space creates fear and respect by the community and gives an ultimate amount of power and strength. However, those images of money, respect and access to women are again connected in a complex way. Due to the high unemployment rate in the popular neighbourhoods, only few men have enough resources to obtain those culturally coded man-signifiers (the masculine capital). While it is seen as masculine to have a pretty girlfriend, men with few financial resources face difficulties in finding one. Being poor and excluded is thus a constraint to obtain sufficient masculine capital. Feelings of pity, helplessness and the inability to provide for oneself and one's family are considered emasculating factors. Men are in constant fear of being "looked down upon by the community" (Baird 2012 b). This can put men into a state of crisis. The core of this crisis is thus the impossibility of indeed living up to the "ideal model of masculinity".

1.4. Objective of this thesis

These previous conceptualizations of masculinity help to understand societal constructions that create this state of a crisis of masculinity, by following a structuralist line of thinking in terms of a Foucauldian discourse approach. There is the assumption, that all subjects of a society are created by networks of relations of power and knowledge, that inform masculine behaviour, which form a discourse. This leads to the thesis, that masculinity is a hegemonic discursive construction of identity. Following feminist criticism (as for instance Judith Butler), this has the consequence that the definition of sexual difference between men and women is discursively and culturally constructed, and with that is based on language and signification. Masculinity is constructed as a complementary but binary term towards femininity, (as Baird shows, where a man is strong, a woman is weak.) The crisis of masculinity in this line of thinking is therefore the struggle to live up to this subscription of gender-images, which divides all subjects into two separate, both exclusive categories, that reproduce a stability between two opposing gender/sex-categories and are fundamentally also based on a model that is exclusively heterosexual. The kernel point of this crisis of masculinity is thus the impossibility, to live up to the model that is hegemonically perceived as masculine, due to a variety of constraints. This leads to frustration and anxieties, which result in self-harming conducts, physical and psychological violence towards other men and women and themselves. The solution therefore by thinkers like Butler, in order to bring about change, requires a changing discourse of these power structures, because something that is "made up" can also be unmade. "What's familiar, naturalized, credible, can be made strange: defamiliarized, denaturalized, 'incredibilized'. Negated." (Copjec, 1994: 202). This idea of a possibility of undoing gender categories is also the fundamental motivation of gender-based programmes like "Hombres como vos!", and groups like Amañaderos de Manes. By introducing boys to "alternative" models of masculinity and opening up about these categories of female and masculine characteristics as societal constructs, boys learn, to imagine new models of masculinity that differ from the hegemonic model. As Carlos explained about his work with the Amañaderos de manes *"If you only have two colours in your paint box, of course you will continue to draw the same picture over and over again. But now imagine, you have the full variety of all colours that you maybe didn't know before - its then when we can create new pictures"*.

One objective of this thesis is to show from a psychoanalytical perspective, how such a discourse centred approach however is incomplete. In my observations and interviews I will show, how daily actions and beliefs of men meet moments of irrationalities and blind-spots, in which structuralist thinking reaches the limits of its explanatory power. If we only perceive the subject to be constructed within the symbolic significance of language, we fail to understand, why subjects accept to construct themselves in relation to those structures that are imposing behaviour-codes. It is unclear why some of those structures are more successful in exerting hegemony than others and why humans become attached to certain forms of subjection within those fields and other less. What is missing, is a notion of how these power-structures that produce the subject are mediated and by that - taking into account libidinal aspects of a discourse (for example the discourse of Machismo) (Kapoor 2014). In other words, psychoanalysis argues that we must address the effects and enjoyments, fantasy and traumas that machismo can trigger and repress - meaning the libidinal economy that is processed in the unconscious. By looking more closely into those moments of antagonisms, inconsistencies and confusion, I intend to show, how a psychoanalytical approach offers insights, that are crucial to particularly understand the ambiguity and difficulty of treating this crisis of masculinity; meaning that men keep on investing into a model of which they ultimately know that it harms themselves and others. In this work I therefore aim to show how we have to rethink the crisis of masculinity in terms of a Lacanian analysis of the unconscious. I will argue in this thesis, how treating the crisis of masculinity as a crisis of achieving a hegemonic model ultimately fails to fully explain the reproduction of “toxic” masculine behaviours, even though men perceive them as a crisis. This inability of explanation might ultimately lead to an inability of finding strategies to work with men on their gendered perception.

In this report I therefore analyse the crisis of masculinity with a Lacanian lens, that reframes it as a crisis of an impossibility of a masculine identity. Central to this is not, that there is an impossibility of living up, - but of constructing a hegemonic model of masculinity. There is no such thing as an “hegemonic masculinity” that men can conform to. This lack becomes visible when focusing on the inconsistencies, antagonisms, blind spots and incompleteness of the gendered system of power (Zupančič 2017). This impossibility is the crisis that leads to a lot of anxiety and frustration, that are then the reason for practises of physical and psychological harm against themselves, other men and women. What we consider “toxic” masculine behaviour is a symptom of this impossibility. It is followed by a constant urge to invest into ideological fantasies, that are illusions that promise some sort of full construction of identity that is ultimately however never possible to achieve.

A central question that I aim to answer in this thesis is to understand, why men, despite knowing about the self-destructivity of toxic masculine behaviour, keep on replicating it. For that I will draw upon Lacanian ideology critique and focus on Žižek’s concepts as fetishistic disavowal and inherent transgressions. The aim of this thesis is however not to create a generalizable statement about a certain group of men in Medellín and their relation to masculinity. Rather, it should be seen as an attempt to study masculinities from a different angle that represents a diverse account of different men around the city. The objective is to document empirically how a psychoanalytical perspective can inform a rethinking of this crisis of masculinity, that enhances our understanding of the struggles of being a man, who invest into behaviours, that put them into a state of a dilemma.

2. Theoretical background on Lacanian theory

In the following, I will explain the theoretical basis of Lacanian psychoanalysis, and show, how I will use his accounts in this thesis to approach this research question. The French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan introduces an understanding of the subject and its formation, which gives a solution to the question of externality and internality of subject-power relations; the subject of lack (Kapoor 2017). When humans are born, they are introduced into a socialized and cultural world, which is organised by a symbolic order. This symbolic order is the order of language and is the result of historical, intersubjective and collective practices (Kapoor 2014), which have created social rules, laws, categories and logics. Those structures are expressed in terms of symbols, which are articulated through language. To Lacan, language is nothing but a string of signifiers. Each signifier derives its meaning in relation to other signifiers and there is no ultimate reference point for expressing the definite meaning of our linguistic terms. A man for example is strong because he is not weak, a man is rational because he is not emotional. The symbolic order is therefore always incomplete (Kapoor 2014). The constraints whereby the symbolic order governs the formation of the subject's own self-identity depends upon the rules of an authoritarian "super-ego". Just as the rules and laws governing the symbolic order are always present, yet cannot be acknowledged, so does also the super-ego as an embodiment for these rule and laws. Lacan calls this unconscious figure of the superego the big Other (Kul-Want & Piero 2015).

This socially shared existence within the symbolic order comes at a price. At birth, human beings experience a trauma that derives from the separation of the baby from its initial primordial mother. This initial state of human life represents complete fullness of the subject and therefore full enjoyment and satisfaction (Kapoor 2014). Entering the cultural (symbolic) world, humans sacrifice the access to this enjoyment, which is the birth of the subject of lack (Wright 2000). This permanent lack therefore stimulates desire. Crucial here is the acknowledgement, that the lack itself, the loss of full enjoyment, is just an illusion itself, because we never really had full satisfaction. However, subjects retroactively produce this illusion as soon as restrictions are placed on the full enjoyment we had in our mother's body (Medium 2019)¹².

To clarify this, the term desire requires some more detailed conceptualization. Desire itself is always unconscious and always unsatisfied. As humans are not able to express what they indeed want (as animals could express their instincts), they quest for fulfilment that goes beyond the satisfaction of biological need. According to Lacan, desire addresses itself directly to the symbolic big Other, and as such they are expressed within the chain of signifiers of human language. Therefore, desire focuses on weakly perceived goals, such as fantasies of sexual accomplishment, that substitute desire and squeeze it into the fabric of social reality. As such, desire can shift from one object to another (Kirshner 2004: 5) (which ultimately is not possible), as, how Žižek quotes (1996) "I do not actually desire what I want - what I actually desire is to sustain desire itself, to postpone the dreaded moment of its satisfaction". Desire in this way enters a libidinal economy and is diverted towards existing symbolic objects also called small objects *a* (see below).

The symbolic order therefore creates social objects and structures, which the subject thinks provide the achievement of its desires and the feeling of wholeness and a complete self-identity (Stavrakakis 2008). This illusion is unconsciously created by the imaginary order (the second order next to the symbolic and the Real that construct our inter-psychic life), in which seductive images offer easy solutions to explain the world. Lacan explains, that the imaginary order is established by the mirror stage, which is the moment, in which a young child (between 6 and 18 months) identifies with his own image (Ideal ego, the Ideal-I), and starts to recognize itself as an "I", before it however started to enter into the symbolic order of language - therefore "pre-linguistic". In this process, the subject perceives its own fictional status, that both involves a recognition that its own subjectivity is entirely fictional (based on nothing), and that this is perpetually filled in by the fiction of language.

An important term here is Lacan's *objet petit a* (small object, the "a" stands for the French word "autre", thus other). It is not a real object, but rather a symbol for a hypothetical construct, which is, as Kirshner

¹² I am borrowing the explanation from the anonymous writer: The Dangerous Maybe (2019): Lacan's Concept of the Object-Cause of Desire (*objet petit a*). In: Medium. <https://medium.com/@mdowns1611/lacans-concept-of-the-object-cause-of-desire-objet-petit-a-bd17b8f84e69>. [20.02.2020]

(2004: 2) describes it “the ephemeral, non localizable property of an object that makes it especially desirable”. As such, it is a fantasy in itself, which is the cause of desire, which however always stands for the desire, that is never achievable, thus expresses the lack that inherits the human being. *Objet petit a* is therefore a little leftover and constant reminder of our (primordial, pre-symbolic) enjoyment (*jouissance*).

The imaginary Other thus provides the subject with fantastic images that promise wholeness and clarity and “holds out the illusion that the symbolic order is a medium for achieving unitary meaning and reciprocity with other subjects” (Kul-Want & Piero 2015: 63). Those fantasies cover up for all contradictions and antagonisms that reside under our consciousness by presenting harmonic solutions. For instance, a political ideology, patterns of consumption, social classes and gender serve as fantasies that give the subject the illusion of fulfilment and the creation of a solid identity. The illusion of being part of a drug gang for instance becomes a fantasy of the subject’s desires for fully identifying as a strong man and with that fully being in line with one’s symbolic identity and the body that sustains it (Wright 2000). The current economic system of capitalism knows perfectly how to use those fantasies to make profit. The advertisement for a gun for instance, could be understood as a stimulation of desires of young men, as it represents social power, respect and wealth, that serve as means for constructing a masculine identity (Kapoor 2014).

Fantasies mediate the subject’s desire, but its ultimate ideological determination is impossible (Kul-Want & Piero 2015). Something always seems to escape both the imaginary and the symbolic order. Lacan calls this “the Real”. It is the order, that resists any form of representation or control of the symbolic order. It is a source of a massive bundle of undifferentiated sensations that lack any sensory-motor coordination and contains a powerful amount of excessive enjoyment, which we have given up when entering the socialized world (Kapoor 2017: 2667). Lacan refers to this enjoyment as “*jouissance*”. The English term enjoyment might however fail to capture the excess and immensity of this enjoyment, which the French term “*jouissance*” mirrors perfectly (Žižek 2009: 2). Subjects however do not stop attempting to re-encounter this amount of enjoyment, and by that also the illusion of full fulfilment as a subject. As those are however always incomplete, it signifies also the ultimate failure of all power structures and the creation of an interchange between collective structures and their failure, which continuously stimulates desire and ensure the persistence of lack (Stavrakakis 2008). To relate this to the topic of masculinity, we come to understand that “hegemonic masculinities” form a power-structure that ultimately fails to provide a sense of full symbolization, and thus causes the continuing desire to encounter such full subjectivation somehow, which promises the lost enjoyment. Crucial here is also the distinction between drives and desire. Whereas in desire the subject longs for the (lost) object that is not aimed to indeed satisfy, drive aims destructively to experience a deep satisfaction - which goes beyond the simple satisfaction of a need - *jouissance*. In Lacan's Seminar “Encore” (Again) (Lacan 1999¹³), he states that *jouissance* and drive extract their satisfaction by repetition, thus rituals, compulsory actions that are irrationally redone again and again, which can be self-destructive and bring pain and discomfort. The experience of this excessive satisfaction is the fantasy of the impossible contact with the Real. The Real is then the impossibility to find a true masculine identity, which stimulates further desire to find such an identity that would truly be at the level of the male fantasy of femininity. Such desire however is impeded by drive, which ultimately causes the antagonisms of such a masculine identity that traverse Medellín, which express themselves through toxic masculine behaviour. Drive is thus in some way a disruption of the symbolic world, a suspension of our social obligations (leaning on Freud’s notion of death-drive) (Žižek 1996).

2.1. Sexual difference

Lacan’s formula on sexuation and phallus indicates furthermore why ideologies and the social often become sexualized. This, unlike Freud’s theories, does not go back to biological essentialism (Wright 2000). Already Lacan’s choice of the term “sexuation” and not sexuality indicate that sexual difference is based on the structures of representation and differential power relations that are influenced by the environment and the culture, thus a matter of the signifier (Kapoor 2014). Linguistic beings insert

¹³ Edt: Miller & Fink (1999) in: Books of Jacques Lacans work, edition 20.

themselves into this binary structure in line with their identification which does not have to correspond with their biological sex (Wright 2000). The idea of phallus is thus an imaginary copula, the idea of sexual complementing relationship between men and women is therefore also just imaginary, which – accordingly to Copjec (1994: 203), “entails both absolute union and absolute aggression”. Phallus to Lacan is the signifier of castration. It is not connected to the male genital organ in a biological sense. Rather, it stands for the way how this organ appears in fantasy for both the female and masculine side, thus what imaginary or symbolic functions it has. Phallus as such is a signifier of lack and sexual difference.

The formula of sexual difference relies on Aristotelian logic and takes on Kant’s concept of the “existence of the world”, which I will here however not refer to any further. Important here to note is that based on this formula, Lacan’s approach differs from most structuralist-discursive theory on gender-structures, in which gender is considered as the outcome of social and cultural constructions of sex. Lacan assumes, that masculinity and femininity represent two distinct binary types of responses to the primordial split and with that, it’s cutting off one’s enjoyment, in which the “masculine structure only exists (in the symbolic) by repressing and denying the existence of the feminine” (McGrath 2010: 7). As to the formula of sexuation, man is wholly submitted to the rule of the signifier (the phallus). He therefore fully exists in the symbolic order. In contrast to that, Woman is not wholly submitted to the phallus, which means, that she is not fully determined by the symbolic order. The implication of that is, that Woman does not fully exist in the symbolic order, which she is aware of. What this means is not, that physical individuals who identify as women do not exist, but that Woman cannot be fully captured within the order of signifiers – there is always something in Woman that exceeds the law of symbolization. As such, Lacanian psychoanalysis points out that the nature of the female and masculine response to the entrance into the symbolic are characterized by incompatibility and structural difference. This makes both man and woman seek in each other the lack in themselves. Ultimately, this however does not mean that the sexual coming together of man and woman leads to the creation of a fulfilling and stable relationship in which the male and female side would complement each other satisfactorily. This ultimately reflects the “tragic” sign of impossibility of desire. This is where Lacan’s (1975) sentence “Il n’y a pas de rapport sexual” (There is no sexual relationship) (as cited in Frelick 2003: 109) derives its origin.

I will briefly show the consequences of this difference between the female and the masculine side. As man is, unlike woman, fully determined by the phallic function, he is denied access to the full experience of pleasure because he is entirely banned from the Real. The only trace that is left of it, is object a. Thus, everything man does and says is an attempt to encounter object a. He develops many strategies and idealizations to seek to relate to object a. He therefore seeks in sexual love the full experience of pleasure (McGrath 2010). This is also why male sexuality tends to fetishism, as for instance sexual fetishes like women in high-heeled shoes. Fetishism is a strategy for re-encountering the boundless pleasure that is no longer possible in the symbolic. Man does not desire woman for whom she really is, but for certain acts she does, that becomes a substitute for object a. Woman on the other hand, is not fully determined by the phallic function as mentioned above. What she seeks is therefore to find full determination in the symbolic order.

We can see now, how Lacan’s formula of sexuation is a signifier of sexual difference. It explains his assumption, that there is no sexual relationship, and why sex ultimately is not about sex itself: It represents the impossibility of complementarity of femininity and masculinity. Or as the saying goes: everything is about sex but sex itself, as Zupančič (2017) elaborates in her book “What IS Sex?”. The consequences of this incompatibility show itself in the social, which in itself is always divided and incomplete. Any relation between subjects is founded on a contradiction that expresses itself through sex. This is why, as mentioned in the beginning, the social and ideologies are so often sexualized.

2.2. The impossibility of full subjectivity

Realizing that all means of our signifying system are not enough for giving us the wholeness that has been taken away from us, is traumatic. The subject thus aims to constantly obscure the Real by unconsciously producing fantasies and ideologies. By that, subjects try to forget that full enjoyment is never possible. However, Lacan states, neither the symbolic nor the imaginary order are strong enough to do so (Kul-Want & Piero 2015). Despite all disavowal strategies, the Real's strong desires and enjoyments still reside in the unconscious, which is not directly accessible through the analysis of the spoken word. The unconscious should not be understood as a hidden space, but rather as a linguistic site, in which desires reveal themselves (Kapoor 2014). As the Real always exceeds the symbolic and imaginary order, unconscious desires are therefore always stronger than rational knowledge or lines of reasonings. One can be able to explain rationally why people fall into a specific pattern of hegemony, but their true reasoning might lie in the things that are not spoken out loudly, as they are not consciously known by the subject. The unconscious thus explains, why subjects follow specific rules or engage in a specific discourse (as for instance the discourse of being a strong and dominant man in a community) and in others less; because subjects tend to invest in structures that are libidinally invested, meaning that they unconsciously promise enjoyment. Our choices are made on the basis of highly specific unconscious fantasies, which endow our objects with unique promise (Kirshner, 2004: 2), while the discourse of the unconscious reveals the functioning of such fantasies. Even when individuals know that these are fantasies, they keep on investing in them. Ultimately, this means that power and discourse structures are mediated to the subject by desires (De Vries 2007; Kapoor 2014).

Therefore, for really understanding why men hold on to hegemonic structures of masculinity and why those persist, psychoanalysis serves as a tool and exceeds the possibilities of a structuralist analysis. Lacan's term "jouissance" can help to understand, why young men keep on investing in those masculine-identities, even though they are creating the experience of a crisis (Kapoor, 2014). When subjects are actively repressing their inner desires and are constantly compromised, they can corrupt and turn into obscene enjoyments and, what Žižek (1989 a: 12) calls "fetishist disavowals". These fetishist disavowals, as Kingsbury (2016: 8) describes them, are a way of how people pretend as if they were not participating in a prevailing system of ideology and power, in the formula "they know very well how things really are, but still they are doing it as if they did not know" (Žižek, 1989 a: 32). Those can make people do things of which they know are painful or dangerous and wrong for them, but do them not only despite, but because of them. "One knows something is bad or wrong, but one desires it anyway because one is so libidinally captivate by it" (Kapoor, 2014: 2668). Referring to the research question of this thesis, the concept of fetishist disavowals is of much use, as it aims to discover, why men invest in a kind of masculinity that is destructive for them, which in itself is a form of fetishist disavowal. Masculinity as such is driven by the search for these petit objects a. Detecting these fetishes is central to this thesis work.

2.3. Machismo as a symptom

Therefore, in this thesis, machismo or "toxic masculine behaviour" are rather understood and treated as a symptom of men and their relationship between their subjectivity and language. This Lacanian psychoanalytic approach provides tools to understand their struggles and their ways of coping with the trauma, that there is an impossibility to construct their (masculine) identity in a collective structure (Parker & Vanheule 2014). By unmasking the unconscious, we manage to uncover the desires that drive humans. As already mentioned above, language is marked by holes and gaps due to its inability of meaning to be fixed (Kapoor 2014). This means that as linguistic subjects, the unconscious is accessible to us by listening to the things that are not spoken out, miscommunicated or moments of confusion and slips of the tongue, blind spots but also the use of humour, as they are moments, in which knowledge exposes itself of which we did not know we had it. "Masculinity as a linguistic and discursive construction is proof that it is replete with unconscious desire that 'speak'" (Kapoor 2014: 1124). And because all our desires, acts and interpretation of our social reality are understood through the symbolic world, antagonisms, contradictory and irrational practices show up in everything we do. By detecting those blind spots in the lives of young men and, with a psychoanalytical lens, the unconscious can

become visible. Also, by understanding self-destructive drives and the seeking for their satisfaction, seemingly irrational and self-harming practices can be understood better. As such, I will use psychoanalysis to detect libidinal attachments and ideologically produced fantasies related to dominant images masculinity in order to create space to think about the possibility of change in terms of a dis-investment and re-investment of structures that we enjoy (Stavrakakis 2008). In Kapoor's (2017: 2669) words: "radical transformation [...] requires more than changing the discourse or the power/knowledge frame [...]; it requires, critically, also attending to people's libidinal attachments".

3. Methodology

For approaching my thesis-objective I chose to conduct an ethnographic in-depth research that takes place in a selection of different neighbourhoods in Medellín. I conducted a participatory observation for three months, in which I mainly took the position of a participating observer. As such I accompanied Ana and José to their work with adolescents and adults and observed within the spaces how men and boys talk about their gender-perceptions within their lives. Ana therefore facilitated me a good access to the field. Besides that, I also conducted interviews with different men in the city. These interviews were both informal and spontaneous but also sometimes pre-arranged and formal. During these formal interviews I prepared an interview plan, that was however very flexible and open in order to exercise as little control over the people's responses as possible. As such I aimed to get people to open up and let them express themselves in their own terms and their own pace. I also chose this strategy in order to keep rapport with my participants. We often met in public places, had a drink or a meal together while having the interview. As such, participants could feel as natural as possible.

Ana was my first entry-point and helped me to connect with José, Lizandro and Carlos, who further became some specialized informants, who could share with me specific views and knowledge that they have gathered within their professional work. Due to their experience within the work of hegemonic masculinities they were able to help me to learn about particularities and insights of this masculine culture - not to say that they as men themselves also have a nuanced view on it.

For further selection of my interview-participants, I chose a nonprobability sampling which varied between a purposive sampling and a convenience sampling. In some cases, I just met people per coincidence, as for example Erwin, whom I met while waiting for a friend at a bus station. We got to talk and during our conversation, I then asked him if he was interested in participating in some interviews. Often, my sampling strategy was also based on the snowball driven sampling. As such, respondents referred in their interviews to other people that they knew that could be interested in participation. (Russel 2011)

However, my main activity as a researcher was to simply "hang out" a lot with different people in different settings, having a beer, going to parties, visiting places and sharing meals together. In this way I experienced the everyday life of my participants and could observe how gender relations and masculinity are encountered in a natural and rather spontaneous setting. Therefore, in this participant observation, I also captured many spontaneous dialogues, sometimes with my interviewees after the "official" interview, or also with strangers that I met on the streets. I also often met with my interview-participants to do other activities than only talking about the investigation itself.

I am also aware, that some participants lied about certain things or represented them in a different light. However, ethnography is never about discovering "the truth", but rather how people live within the tensions constituted by our memories of the past and anticipations of the future. Personal narratives are as such a response to the human problem of authorship, the desire to make sense and coherence (Ellis & Bochner 2000). As such, I always tried to understand why participants intended to hide certain facts or lied about them. I however also tried to check and evaluate my key-informants' data, in order to assure some internal validity of the research. When informants would tell me about cultural practices that were "commonly exercised", or "general knowledge", I always made sure to cross-check these stories with at least three different opinions, and if possible, looked for previous academic work that has been written about them.

As Van Maanen (1991: 39) quotes: "Neutrality in fieldwork is an illusion. Neutrality is itself a role enactment and the meaning of such a role to people will, most assuredly, not be neutral." A neutral or objective analysis on my data is neither possible nor desired. I as a young female foreign researcher in between men of all ages always had to be aware of my own positionality within the fields and how I influenced dialogues and information between the analysand and the analyst. Important for the data-collection of my research is therefore particularly my auto-ethnographic approach. As such, I write a lot about my own experience as a woman in the gender (Machista)-culture in Medellín and refer back to personal stories that happened to me in relation with other men but also women. Our personal stories are always part of our research. "The question is whether we should express our vulnerability and subjectivity openly in the text or hide them behind 'social analysis'?" (Ellis & Bochner 2000: 747). Important for this matter was therefore a constant reflection about my own positionality for which I

always captured my thoughts and feelings in a personal diary, that I kept additionally to my ordinary fieldnotes. As such I also tried to detect and confront my own (unconscious) desires during my research and understand how those influence my interpretation and interaction with my participants (Parker 2005).

3.1. Ethics of research

Leaning on this, following Nancy Scheper-Hughes's work (1995¹⁴), I therefore intended to rather be a morally engaged witness than an "objective" observer. Scheper-Hughes sees it as a responsibility of anthropologists, to take an ethical stand on the events that they are privileged to witness. As Foucauldian postmodern criticism argues, anthropological observations are hostile acts of reducing "subjects" by turning them into "objects". Scheper-Hughes (1995: 417-218) however counters, that instead of consequently giving up the practice of descriptive ethnography, "we can do the best we can with the limited resources at hand: our ability to listen and to observe carefully and with empathy and compassion". In this sense, her engaged anthropology is often referred to as a "womanly" ethic of care and responsibility. Even though, I see it as an important step to distance ourselves from the term "womanly", I however identify my research-approach as engaged in terms of an ethic of care and responsibility as described by Scheper-Hughes. During my fieldwork I often expressed empathy with participants and also asked sometimes "naive" seeming questions, in order to detect and understand certain patterns that were self-destructive or even dangerous. I also talked with participants about "negative" experiences that I had in Medellín and thus sometimes gave some clear "judgement" about certain practices.

3.2. Confidentiality and informed consent - struggles for ethical codes

In all my interview, I firstly reached out for an informed consent with my participants that I could conduct and, in some cases, record the interviews. In moments of rather spontaneous talks, I most often wrote down the dialogues and cross checked the content with the people afterward and asked them, if they agreed that I could use this data for my thesis. Particularly with very sensitive data, I then searched for reassurance for using data in my thesis again after the interview. Sometimes, participants asked me to keep their identity anonymous, for which I then changed their names. Particular precaution was taken when I conducted the observation in schools with the children. I received permission of the program of "Hombres Como vos" to participate in the Encuentros¹⁵ and to collect data. However, I did not conduct any direct interviews with the boys, who were mostly underaged. In order to protect rather "vulnerable" or not yet "self-aware" individuals, I only collected data that was not directly induced by me, but only by following and observing the classes. Further, I analysed and interpreted their creative works, statements etc. on the topics discussed in class, which delivered me some valuable data. Further, I never refer to the children's names, nor the name or region of their school.

However, I am also aware, that principles of confidentiality and informed consent are inherently problematic. When ethnographers aim to provide full confidentiality and privacy, one has to wonder to what degree anonymity can even exist and be promised. Even by anonymizing the individuals and using pseudonyms, they still might be recognizable. The practice of contextualizing the participants through details and thick descriptions makes it even more difficult to guarantee confidentiality. By leaving too much information out in order to provide anonymity, we ran the danger of creating fictions or to lose the data's significance without its context that it was created in. Also, sometimes, having informed consent was not possible. Often, when I would write about situations that happened with strangers on the streets, I could not get the people's agreement on using their data. This is a common problem in participatory observation that I tried to reduce by anonymizing the persons that appeared in the situations.

¹⁴ Referring to "The Primacy of the Ethical: Propositions for a Militant Anthropology"

¹⁵ Gatherings

4. Fantasy of Machismo

“In today’s society and for many years, it is believed that men are strong while women are weak and are more likely to cry. Strangely, this belief has created men that can look strong on the outside but are weak on the inside.”

(Quote of a boy in one creative work of an Encuentro, as an explanation, why more men commit suicide in Medellín’s society)

I will start this ethnographic chapters with an investigation on the ideological fantasy, that has been characterized by much research (as shown above) as the image of hegemonic masculinity in “patriarchal-societies”. This man is unemotional, strong and the protector of his family. I will refer to this masculine image as the fantasy of the “Macho” man, which offers both a source of identification but also confronts many men with frustration and desperation, as there is a constant expectation to be responsible and tough. By sharing different stories of boys and men who particularly live in popular neighbourhoods, I will show, how difficult it is to imagine a non-toxic-, or non-hegemonic way of practicing masculinity, as their hostile living environment exposes them to a lot of risks and dangers, that demand for a strong masculine figure. By detecting moments of enjoyments and the libidinal attachments to rituals and acts of such toxic masculine behaviours, I will show, how men invest into fantastic images of masculinity, which are produced the imaginary order. By looking at those fantasies that often entail fetishistic disavowals, this chapter will show, why such imaginations of masculinity so dominant.

4.1. Being a “Macho-man” in Medellín

During my stay, I reviewed a lot of creative materials that boys had produced during the Encuentros in their schools. In one Encuentro, she boys were asked to write down a stereotype that they would like to change in their society. The collection of their answers indicates how many of them feel about this fantasy of masculinity, that I have mentioned above:

Collection of answers of some boys:

“The stereotype that I would like to change is...

- “...The one that a man has to be strong and that he cannot be tierno¹⁶ with other men and that he always has to be aggressive and that he cannot serve or help with domestic works.”
- “I have felt that [they] think and say that I am vicious and that I express myself in a rude way.”
- I would like to end this stereotype that all men are strong and that they start talking about resistance and viciousness.”
- “I would like to end the stereotype that the man always has to be strong and cannot cry or be weak”.
- “A prejudgement about me could be that I am a person of a bad pathway because of the barrio where I live. But we are all equal and free in our expression. “

As an answer, the boys wrote down a solution, to reduce these. Most boys wrote “liberty of expression”, people should not judge the book by its cover etc. Some also wrote that people should not label men to be bad people because of the violent neighbourhoods they come from. A boy drew for instance a man who wears “gangster-clothes” and helps an old lady over the street. Others wrote:

- “Un-learn the ‘Formation’ that society has given us and generate new spaces in which one speaks of human beings and not of men and women”.
- “All the aspects and colours that we have [learnt?] from home, speaking in the field of men who, since childhood, have to behave “strong”, teaching them to fights as to conquer to not treat badly [grammatical mistakes?]. Society has an idea. A man does not have to be “strong” and much less behave like a Macho-Alpha, everyone has a different personality but this does not want to say that they are weak, we are all strong in our way and violence is not the

¹⁶ “being kind, sweet”

solution to the problems, a boy does not have to be educated this way because then he will be aggressive and impulsive, but in reality it is not his fault.

What this last comment of a boy addresses are the consequences of this “formation”, that produces men that are “strong” from the outside and “weak” from the inside. In one class, Ana, while introducing them to the program of *Hombres Como Vos* confronted the boys with the yearly numbers of suicides and homicides in Medellín both mainly affecting men. She asked the boys, if they have an idea, why men are more vulnerable to commit a suicide. A boy raised his hands:

Boy: Yes, for me that is very logical. In Colombia the man is the one who has to do it all. You have to give food to the family, finance the education of the children, and if you do not have money you are the bad person because you cannot offer a quality life. And women are out of responsibility. So, men can be in very difficult situations and they kill themselves because they are desperate because they cannot bear the pressure.

What the boy mentioned in class, was emphasized by a talk that I had with Henry, one of the participants in the meetings in *Hombres Amigos*. In my first encounter in the elderly home, the men were working on some manual works that José had given them in order to initiate some mindfulness-training. At the same time, he gave me the possibility to stimulate a conversation about how it is to be a man in their society. That day, about 15 men showed up, and we were sitting in a circle of five tables, so we were all being together closely. However, the conversation was rather started with the very table that I was sitting at. It wasn't easy to have a talk with all men together, as many have difficulties in hearing and usually it was hard for them to indeed focus on a conversation that would be conducted in the whole group. Therefore, at the table I was sitting, only Henry and Santiago were involved with the conversation. We got involved into a conversation about fears of men in Medellín:

Henry: Well, the biggest fear is to look weak. [...] Especially in front of other men. The second fear is the lack of work, being unemployed. [...] With that together there comes also the fear of all the responsibilities. Look at how many things a man has to take care of, there is so much. There is also a big fear of having children [...] Because there comes more responsibility with having children. Look, what if the child is going to be a drug-addict? Or what if your daughter finds a man who will rape her? What if you cannot pay the school-fee? Children are just more responsibilities that are on the men.

As the comments of boys and men above indicate, there is a wish for changes within this societal ideology of men. To exemplify, how boys consider “alternatives” or “non-hegemonic” - masculinities, Ana conducted in many classes with boys (and girls) of different ages an exercise, that is called “La mitad de Juan (One half of Juan)”. This boy Juan is a representation of an “alternative” model of masculinity, a boy who cries, wears pink shirts and plays with girls and dolls. Unlike the other boys he does not like to play football, and therefore receives much criticism. People tell him to stop acting like a girl. Ana therefore asked in a class, which was a mixed class of girls and boys, what would be an advice for this boy, on what he could do. A girl said “Stop crying so much”, another boy said “wearing other clothes” and one boy said, laughing behind his hand “having girl-friends” and “not giving boys hugs”. One boy said, even though it was not loudly and meant for the whole class “you can close the whole kid in a box”. However, after the discussion in class, Ana asked the boys to write a personal note to Juan, which was collected anonymously. When I read these personal advices to Juan, there was not a single boy or girl who repeated the advices mentioned above in class. Many wrote:

- “Do what makes you happy”
- “You can dress as you like and any colour because everything goes in the personality which has nothing to do with gender, those who are wrong are them for creating stereotypes and for having a “masculinity” so fragile that breaks for the slightest reason.”

The consent is clear; Juan should not worry about the other people; the most important thing is that he feels comfortable with himself and that the opinion of others should not matter to him.

Peer pressure is thus crucial when boys talk about alternative expressions of masculinity. In another class, Ana talked with the boys about violence and peer pressure. She invited the boys to imagine a situation in a football stadium, in which there is a dispute with two players that is escalating. People around them start to cheer the two up to get into a fight. She asked the boys, how they would personally react. Would they carry out a fight or would they risk being called a coward and not engage into the

fight and go away? The boys started to discuss, asking questions on the concrete matter of the fight. A boy raised his hand to tell a story about violence and being a coward¹⁷. *At his home his father had, per accident, rolled over the neighbour's cat. He went to his neighbour to apologize and compensate for the accident, but the neighbour however did not accept his apology and started to attack the father, damaging things around their house and engaging in little physical fights. So, then his father went to the Muchachos¹⁸, who are considered as the unofficial system of "justice" in their neighbourhood and told them about the situation, in order to get help. The Muchachos then came to the neighbour, told him he had 24 hours to leave his house and get out of the neighbourhood, if he did not want to pay the consequences.* The boy then asked the class, if this reaction made his father a coward, because he avoided the fight, or was he a hero, because he protected his family with all means? Nobody in the class reacted to his question and after a while, Ana asked into the silence: "Should there even be this distinction, that you are either a coward or you fight?". Nobody answered. Ana broke the silence again by referring back to the figurative situation in the football stadium and asked, if there would be a fight, if nobody around them would have cheered for it. One boy raised his hands: "Probably, if nobody would be watching, people could go away from the fight, because then there are actually no people who will call you a coward."

What becomes clear here is how peer pressure has a crucial importance in the ability to evoke boys desired change of the way, that strength and unemotionality is expected from men. There is a certain frustration in understanding, that in a whole class of boys, more than a "critical mass" of participants have expressed their wish for a change, but still do not manage to undermine this peer-pressure together. We can detect this frustration also in the way how boys give an own analysis of the crisis of masculinity, acknowledging, that they suffer from these societal "constructs" of masculinity that impede certain behaviour codes on them. We can see, how peer pressure is as such nourished by the laws of signification in the symbolic order – expecting behaviour that are following the logic of the signifier "man" and "woman". In the following I will investigate further, what informs this ideological fantasy of this "Real" man that makes it so difficult to overcome.

4.2. Enjoying Machismo

For that I will refer first to an interview that I had with Erwin about the "traditional" role distribution between men and women.

- Marleen: So, what do you think about this model that the man is working and the women is staying at home with the children and not the other way around?
- Erwin: Good, yeah I think it is good because look women should stay with the girls and boys because someone has to take care of the children. In childcare it's difficult because you don't know what kind of food they will serve there, and there is no help for the children. I wouldn't want to bring my children to any guardería¹⁹.
- Marleen: Do you think that that is fair for the woman?
- Erwin: Yes. Look, something is really important, more important than work. It's the love for the children. I think, only a mother can love her children enough.
- Marleen: And the father?
- Erwin: Yees sure the father as well. But I think there is something special about the love of a woman.
- Marleen: Why do you think that?
- Erwin: I think it is because men do not learn that. Because look, boys as babies they are not loved the same way as girls. If the boy falls, he falls but nobody will help him.
- Marleen: Was that for you like that?
- Erwin: Sii, I eh eh always. You know there was one thing that my grandfather told me once that is eh, if you tell your son too often that you love him that you, sorry for saying that but (lowers his voice) that the boy can become gay. (He gave the word gay a

¹⁷ As I did not write down his exact choice of words, I chose to however tell the story paraphrasing it as close as possible to the original.

¹⁸ Here is meant a potentially criminal group who is controlling the territory of a neighbourhood

¹⁹ Childcare-centres like nursery schools

- strong emphasis) I think that is why the older people like my grandfather don't know love.
- Marleen: That sounds hard.
- Erwin: It is. I think that many men are so rude because eh you know because they don't know love.
- Marleen: Do you want to have children?
- Erwin: Claaaro²⁰.
- Marleen: And would you try and raise them differently?
- Erwin: Yes. Because boys also need more love. You just have to be attentive, because sometimes the Muchachos need another education than girls. So that they can confront themselves with life outside. So that they can grow personally.
- Marleen: Oh yeah?
- Erwin: Si eh, because, so that they are strong enough to work and take care of their wives. So, eh you have to be a bit harder with your son than with your daughter.
- Marleen: But didn't you tell me that this is the reason that boys become rude?
- Erwin: Yes, siiii, but this is for example if they hit them at home you know, if eh for example I am the father and I hit my son because he came home late. This no, I don't like that (waves with his finger to show "no"). I want to raise my son so that he will be respectful and that he can salir adelante²¹, you know?

There is thus the idea that a boy needs to "toughen up" in order to survive the harsh and hostile environment that men (particularly in popular neighbourhoods) are exposed to. When I asked participants about the difficulty for men to embrace another way of masculinity, many answered therefore, that it was not so much about what men want to do, but what one needs to do to survive:

- José: You know, here in the comunas²², the stronger man wins, you know, that is a bit the logic that resides in the heads of the families.

In my first meeting in *Hombres Amigos*, Henry summarized in a metaphorical sense, what this *need* for strength means:

- Henry: Let me explain this to you like this. We men, we are like tigers, or lions. And if we want to eat, we have to come face to face in fights with the animals, so that we get our peace of meat. But now, if there is another tiger, who is so much stronger than us, we are afraid to take it on with him, because he might kill us. So we might not go for the meat, but it will make us weaker and weaker, every confrontation more that we avoid. It is this animalistic fear. Its psychological as well. In our society there are others, that don't like to take it on with anyone and they are trying to run away from it and hide behind drugs and alcohol. Face life! If you are already facing [life] in your adolescence, you'll be more capable.

Ana told me about a boy in class, who visualized this metaphor, by telling a story about a conversation that he overheard of his mother and his stepfather. *The two were out in the street and somebody came with a gun and threatened them and then requested them to hand over all the properties they had on them*²³. *When the mother and the stepfather came home the mother was angry at him and yelled, why he did not protect the two in that situations*²⁴. When the boy told this story in class, he questioned then, how men can embrace their feelings and accept vulnerabilities, if their environment expects them to be fearless all the time.

He was not alone with this question. In an interview with Lizandro, he told me about a boy, who participated in the program „Hombres como vos“ and came to him after the class: “Lizandro, I think I understand something of this process that you have talked about, but I have a question about this: I have

²⁰ Of course

²¹ *Salir adelante* literally means “Get ahead” or “come through”. What is meant in this context is to grow personally in life.

²² The different neighbourhoods of the city

²³ Something, that is not uncommon in both popular neighbourhoods and “wealthier” areas

²⁴ I am only paraphrasing his story, as I could not write down the exact choice of words

a girlfriend and I love her so much. And I want to cry in front of her, but I don't want to embarrass her. How can I show this, without embarrassing her?”. This boy also talked to his friends about it, and they laughed and told him, he couldn't cry in front of his girl. Each man I asked, had a similar story to tell about moments in their childhood or adolescence, in which their family or friends told them to “be more as a man”.

In separate interviews:

Juan David: They always told me, when a neighbour's kid would try to get into a fight and I ran away: “He Chico fight! Go, don't cry!”

Antonio: Always when the boys of my neighbourhood would find some small firecrackers and light them up on the streets, I always wanted to go home because I was scared. Then my brother and my father always told me I shouldn't be a girl and should go with the other boys. They really had to push me there sometimes. I really did not like that. Then, if I did not want to pull the string of the crackers, they always said this thing “Pull if you are a man!”

These moments of policing boys to be strong were sometimes embedded in organized traditions:

Julio: After I turned, I think 15 years old, my uncle always took me on Saturdays to the tienda (shop), you know eh we had a little tienda in the street where they always show the matches of football. And then we drank beer together. And if I didn't want to have more, he always told me not to be a doll, saying “Men drink beer”. So there we were always yelling at the TV with the other men. When my little brother also turned 15, he joined us, and I would also tell him to drink beer. Now that I think about it, I wasn't a very good influence for him.

The 15th birthday is an important life-mark in some Latin-American communities, in which adolescents make an official step towards adulthood. However, this birthday is mostly important for girls, who get a big party that has similarities with a miniature wedding - called *la quinceañera* (Cantú, 2000). Even though not comparative to the big party for girls, boys however have some internal small events in order to celebrate their way of becoming a real man, as the “Saturday-tradition” of Julio and his uncle. Many other men told me about another ritual, in which the 15 years old boy will visit for the first time a prostitute, in order to lose his virginity. The objective of this is to prepare the boy for his first intercourse with a girl. This ritual exists in different variations. Some men told me, that a man has to visit a brothel before his wedding-night - however only under the Christian assumption, that he has been saving himself for his wife, and is therefore still a virgin. Even though many men knew about these kinds of traditions, most of them told me that they had not experienced them themselves - or they were at least not admitting it. Erwin however shared with me, while we took the Graffiti-Tour and did a little break, that his uncle did take him and another cousin to a prostitute when he turned 15 years old.

Marleen: And, how was it?

Erwin: Eh well what do you think? (Laughed) I remember that I was really nervous.

Marleen: I can imagine. But did you like it?

Erwin: I must admit that I was just scared. Before we met these Muchachas, my cousin and I had to drink a lot, so eh we wouldn't be so nervous.

Marleen: Was it the first time you had sex?

Erwin: (Smiled and laughed, and then looked away) To be honest... no. I already had a girl in that time. [...]

Marleen: If you would have a son, would you do the same tradition with him as well?

Erwin: I don't know. Eeh well normally the fathers do not do that. Maybe more an uncle or a brother or so. I think yes. I mean, I mean I would not do it, but if like eh my cousin would want to do it with my son, I think I would agree.

Marleen: Why?

Erwin: Ah I don't know, it is just a tradition and I think that this is something a boy has to experience one time.

Marleen: Even though you were scared?

Erwin: You know, men have to have fear sometimes, it makes you eh stronger.

Marleen: And what is the intention of this tradition?

Erwin: It is just eh an important moment you know. It is a moment in which a boy

becomes officially a man.
 Marleen: Because he has sex?
 Erwin: Yees eh yes. With a woman.
 Marleen: But ... you had sex before no? So, then you were officially already a man?
 Erwin smiled and tabbed me on the shoulder.
 Erwin: Aaaah señora logica²⁵. (*He laughed*) No, I don't know Marleen. It's just a tradition that we do here. It is a bit weird, I admit that. I also have some doubts about it.

This tradition is thus sustained by a belief that is for Erwin irrational, but still informs his behaviour. We can recognize a fetishistic disavowal. Despite it being a fearful experience that he went through in the age of 15, he however thinks that the tradition itself is valuable for the process of masculinisation. Losing one's virginity seems to be the core-reason for this tradition, so that men are prepared to please women in the future. For Erwin, this tradition is therefore without substance, as he already had sex before. He argued, that this tradition is something "a boy has to experience one time", and as I confronted him with the meaninglessness of the tradition, he reacted with humour. By that, he exposed some unconscious acknowledgement that this tradition does not entail any logical argumentation, and thus must be invested in a libidinally way.

It is a good example to detect, how these small rituals of "toughening boys up" are connected with a sort of unconscious jouissance - resulting in the deep comfort that people experience from following rituals of all kinds (Kapoor 2014). This enjoyment of some "irrational" things explains, why people are so attached to cultural rituals and values. The ritual of bringing one's nephew to a prostitute can therefore be a source of jouissance, in which men are bind together- welcoming new "members" into their manhood. As Žižek puts it, such moments show the obscene underside of the social, which is composed by ugly, irrational rituals that provide a jouissance in bonding (as referred to in Aristodemou 2015: 21).

We can thus see, how men learn from small on the importance of being "strong" in life, in order to guarantee one's own and owns family's survival. "Toughening up" boys is connected with certain rituals that distract power by a certain enjoyment that boys or rather their family-members experience despite knowing how they are somehow harmful. Many boys in general recognize that this mentality is rather dangerous for their own mental health, and, even though not discussed any further here in the thesis, also contributes to the endurance of this "hostile" environment around the neighbourhoods.²⁶ It is therefore crucial to detect the unconscious within practices that are embedded into the power-structures, that keep on informing this discourse. Therefore, I will lay out some observations in which I pay specific attention to the choice of language that men and boys chose when talking about this "real" man.

For that, I will refer back to the UBER-ride, which I have already mentioned in a former chapter, when Diego asked me, if I had a boyfriend from Colombia, and I explained, that he was from Europe:

Diego: Aah but then you didn't understand me. I meant if you have a REAL boyfriend you know, un hombre PAISA. (He made a gesture with his fist, that is like a power-movement) [...]
 You know Marleen when I look at you, I know you need a REAL man, strong.
 Un hombre PAISA. You know what Paisa means?
 Marleen: I don't really feel comfortable with all this.
 Diego: Noo, but we are just talking normally. You know, you need a Paisa man.
 Somebody that knows how to work you know. Someone that can take life and is quite about it.

²⁵ "Madam logic", Erwin called me like that already one time before when I asked too many questions that seemed too complicated.

²⁶ The following story that Ana told me is just a small excuse, in order to exemplify this. In one public encuentro, Ana met a man who shared the story of how he lost his son over a parking spot. The son intended to park somewhere and another men passed with his car, wanting to park in the same spot. They got into a fight that escalated quickly into physical violence because none of the two wanted to give in. After the situation went on, the other men pulled out a gun and shot the son. This tragic story shows, how dangerous it is to believe, that men are never allowed to walk away from a fight, or that they are allowed to be scared and to surrender.

The emphasis on the ability to work in order to please and provide for a woman recurred in several talks, when talking about the meaning of a real man.

Erwin: If I'm going to have a woman, I'll respect her and work hard for her, even in difficult times, I will go ahead to work very hard because she knows that I am a man who respects her with all my efforts, also if I am tired I will still work for her and our family. That's the man I am. [...]

At my first meeting at *Hombres Amigos*, when I asked the participants what they liked about being a man, Rodrigo, another participant answered:

Rodrigo: What I like is that when I am together with my family, and there is a conflict and there are money problems, then eh I like that in the end of the discussion, all heads will turn around towards me, and I am the one then who can make a decision for them and solve the problem. That makes me very proud to be a man.

In the same encounter, I talked to Henry about the importance of work (already mentioned before), after he told me that a big fear of men was to be unemployed.

Henry: Values are the most important. We think the main value we have is plata²⁷. But let me tell you, its not. [...]

Marleen: But if you say values are not about plata, why is work so important for men?

Henry: It's about dignity. I work because it gives me dignity. With my money, I can be the men I need to be for my family, you know, even if it is possible that I will not spend a pesito²⁸ for myself.

Some weeks later, in another meeting with *Hombres Amigos*, there was an evaluation of the meetings to be filled out, because it was their final Encuentro. Men had to respond to some questions that they had filled out already before the first meeting. The aim was to create a comparison of how/if men's perspective on topics of gender had change during the meetings. I sat at one table where some men had struggles to read and understand the questions, thus, I read the questions out loud for them. One question was the following: "Men should under all circumstances protect a woman who seems to need help, even if she does not request the help or rejects it". The men discussed this question, mainly to clarify its content and then all agreed that the good answer was "yes". Santiago, another participant, explained to me: "Even if a women might not see that she needs help, we have the duty to always be there for her. This is what a respectful man does. And you know, here in this city, there are many bad men out there, that want to harm."

Here, we re-encounter the notion of a hostile environment, that requires the figure of a strong protecting man. I observed many small gestures, that emphasized this sense of duty to protect. Many times, when I for instance left a place with a man, another man would say "Take good care of her", followed by the men's answer "I will do so!". After my night out with Erwin and his friends that I will further write about in the following chapters, Erwin accompanied me outside, to find the UBER that I ordered. When leaving, Santiago put his hand on Erwin's shoulder, saying "Parce²⁹, if there is a bullet and a gun, you catch that one for her will you?" - followed by Erwin saying, "What a man's gotta do". Even though, such gestures also indicate a way of bonding between men, it also binds them as an entity that has the objective to protect "their" women as men.

An additional example struck my attention, when I once went out with Julio and one of his friends to an open sport-spot. These places are public and can be used in many neighbourhoods all over the city. They were constructed by the Alcaldía of Medellín to offer a free terrain with some machines to workout outside (INDER Alcaldía de Medellín 2014: 95pp.). While Julio and his friend did some sport exercises, I observed how many groups of men were there - working in teams, pushing each other, sweating and yelling at each other and after finishing their exercises clapping each others' shoulders. It was an inherently masculine space, besides me, there was only one other girl, who however did not participate in the sport-exercises. I only ran a little around and did a short exercise - I preferred to spend time on the side to observe and discover the scenery. Close to me there were three

²⁷ Plata = Slang for Money

²⁸ Colombian Peso (Colombia's currency)

²⁹ Slang for: My friend

guys standing together - wearing matching shirts with a common print on it, it seemed as if they were part of an urban gym-team. One of them waved towards my direction and after I waved back he jogged towards me. He asked me “Excuse me, could you take a picture of us?” - “Of course”. The three guys moved together, squat down and showed off their arm-muscles, flexing their teeth as if they were wild animals. The guys were very trained and fit.

Marleen: Are you guys preparing for a competition or something? You are working out pretty hard.

At the same time, I realized, that my question also could have counted as a pick-up line, but the three laughed and punched each other on the shoulders. One of them then said: “No Mami, we are preparing for *life!*” He emphasized the word Life and made a fist while saying it. The other two laughed and one of them said something like “Ooh so poetic”. They punched each other again and then one of them said:

Him: No, we are part of a CrossFit it team. You know CrossFit?

Marleen: Ehm, I think so. You do many exercises in intervals right?

Him: More or less. The main thing about CrossFit is, that you use your own body for the exercises. You don’t need much more.

Marleen: Ah you mean, you don’t use weights and all that?

Him: Yes you do everything with your own bodyweight, you know. Lifting yourself with Pull-ups. If you are strong enough to lift yourself (*clapped his hands together*): Ya³⁰. You don’t need more.

The other two already went to their bags.

Him: Are you here more often?

Marleen: No, it is the first time.

Him: Ah alright. Maybe we see you next week.

Marleen: Yeah, maybe. Thank you for the explanation.

We said goodbye and him and his friends left.

Even though, the boys represented the preparation for “life” in an ironic way, it are exactly such moments that can entail some glimpse at the unconscious. To recall, as linguistic subjects, the unconscious is accessible to us by listening to the things that are moments of confusions and often also the use of humour, in which knowledge exposes itself that we were unaware that we had it (Kapoor 2014: 1124). It is thus interesting to think about, what life entails for these men, that needs such physical strength for which they are actively training.

Some other moments reminded me of this preparation for life and the notion of protection. From the 21. November 2019, there were some mass-manifestations, that were ongoing on the streets of whole Colombia, demonstrating against a variety of societal problems, for which the population demanded the opening of a dialogue with the government (Daniels in the Guardian 2019). The day before these manifestations started, Antonio texted me over *WhatsApp*³¹:

Antonio: Oye³². Tomorrow the shock begins. 19:40

Marleen: So you will go demonstrate? 21:01

Antonio: Yes, I will go out. If something happens to Camilo or me, that will make us martyrs. 🤔 21:10

Marleen: 😱 Oh, sooo take care Antonio! 22:00

Antonio: I will do what’s possible.22:12
But I can’t promise anything.
We will do what we have to! So YOU take care, it might be dangerous.

³⁰ Ya = Already, in this sense, it means rather “That’s already everything”.

³¹ Even though I have not mentioned methods of Netnography, this excerpt of this chat seems however as a valuable contribution to the topic. It should therefore be kept in mind, that online communication and “face-to-face” communication can be very different, that would need an additional aspect within the analysis. I have added the used Emojis during the chat, as well as the time of the send messages.

³² Oye = Similar as “Hey”, “Look here”

Even though Antonio's comment about martyrs was probably meant in a rather ironic or overdramatic way, as his smiley also indicated, humorous comments like that often indicate some unconscious motifs. It is observable, how Antonio transferred the sense of protection not only in regard to the protection of women, but of society in general, and described it as something that him and his friend Camilo "have to do", while the notion of martyrs indicates that he is not afraid of sacrificing his life for this duty. The day after, I asked him on WhatsApp:

Marleen: Oye, how was everything? 😊😊 21:02

Antonio: Hermoso³³. A lot of adrenaline. But it's not over yet. 21:07

When he refers to the manifestations as a "shock" that will begin the next, it is somehow as if he was talking about war that will start, which carries a certain excitement that he also expressed the day after. I want to stress that I do not want to represent Antonio as an enthusiast of war. What I try to refer to is the certain enjoyment of the moment to actively go out and sacrifice oneself, and the possible danger that it entails, while simultaneously emphasising, that me (a woman?) should maybe not be involved in that, as it might be dangerous – it is thus a men's job.³⁴

In an interview with Juan David, he explained me how he imagines the dominant male model in his neighbourhood, and his description summarizes, what these small encounters that I have shown above all capture on a certain scale:

Juan David: It is this figure like ... like something aggressive and strong. Strong with the other man, strong with the woman... eh... I should present you this what they call Barraquero³⁵... Barraquero is like eh working like an animal... right.

Marleen: Work like an animal?

Juan David: Romperselo durisimo³⁶. So that's the man who runs the whole place... right? But here in Medellín I especially see that..like that fight that looks like ... like something of pleasure.

The emphasis here lies on "that fight that looks like something of pleasure". Striking about these moments that have been described above when talking about men's duty, is the emphasis on the sacrifice that men are constantly doing while taking care of their families or the girl they love. While the man sacrifices himself for the sake of the family, or even his country, there is a notion of pleasure that simultaneously meets pain. It is exactly this sacrifice of this real man, or the "hombre paísa", who suffers without complaining, that is however suspicious. As Žižek (2017 c) mentions in an interview, it seems that there is always a secret enjoyment in renunciation itself. Even though people suffer or fear the sacrifices that they do, there is an enjoyment that goes together with it. As Macha told me in one interview, "We've been forced to pretend. All the men get up and go out hunting and it is him who comes and he suffers everything, without complaining, and with that comes a kind of pride of man, that is, that uh paísa man. I am un hombre paísa³⁷!" It is exactly this pride of the "Hombre paísa", or the "real man", that displays a surplus-enjoyment. This jouissance is "generated by the very opposite of pleasure, that is pain. Pain generates surplus enjoyment via the magical reversal-into-itself by means of which the very material texture of our expression of pain (the crying voice) gives rise to enjoyment." (Žižek 1997: 47 as cited in Smith et. al 2009: 17).

4.3. The meaninglessness of sacrifice

At this point, I further want to add, that this enjoyment is grounded in a sort of irrationality and even senselessness. This might make the endurance of this ideological imagination of the "Macho man" even more dangerous. I detected these irrationalities mostly in moments, in which men experienced some

³³ Beautiful, fine, lovely

³⁴ At this point, it is important to mention, that during the demonstrations in November in Colombia, many women were on the streets as well, and the manifestation was not only a "masculine" march.

³⁵ Slang that is used in many parts of Medellín differently. There are many different terms for it, it is however connected to how people who live in a barrack (like in an informal house) work very hard and obsessive

³⁶ *Romperselo durisimo* in a literal sense: Breaking down hard, but rather means "working very hard"

³⁷ Hombre paísa = Paísa man

disrupture of usually gendered codes of behaviours in daily situations. My observations only happened on a small scale but still show irritations and confusion, accompanied by shame and embarrassment, which, from a psychoanalytical perspective are alarming symptoms of the unconscious.

In my first interview with Antonio, I asked him:

Marleen: So, is there something that you don't like about being a man?

Antonio: Yes, so much (*laughed, pause*) Eh, what's there? That I have to pay everything. Like literally, if I want to go out with a girl it takes me to pay everything, everything absolutely everything. I have to bring her to the house, I have to talk to the parents, tan, tan, tan (*slabbed with his fingers on the table*), I have to do all this process, as if it was a pact. As if the women don't enjoy it. Which is not true though. This seems to me very bobo³⁸.

When we met for a second interview, I wanted to invite him to a coffee. The moment I pulled out my purse, he suddenly started to be very insecure and nervous, hectically waving his purse and stammering that he wanted to pay for this coffee himself. I tried to calm him down, saying to relax, that I would do it and that he could already go look for a place to sit down. He then told me with a strong voice:

Antonio: No, Marleen, please let me take care of this.

He obviously felt very uncomfortable with the situation, so I decided to let him pay for the drinks, which seemed to relax him. After we sat down, I asked him:

Marleen: Sorry, if I talk about this again, I don't want you to feel weird. But why was it so important for you to pay for this now? Or why is this so uncomfortable if I would pay for you?

Antonio: To be honest, I don't really know. Just that you really don't have to pay for me. This is just how things are here. And I want to invite you, that is nothing bad no?

Marleen: No no, of course not! I just try to understand this... What would be so bad if I would pay for you?

Antonio: Mh no, eh, eeh I don't know.

Marleen: And I mean it's normal nowadays too that women have jobs and money, right? I mean to pay for themselves.

Antonio: Yeah, no no don't understand me wrong, it's not like I don't believe that you don't have sufficient money. Look, it's not an issue for me to pay. I just feel like that is something I need to do.

A similar situation happened to me with Juan David. We met at the Universidad de Antioquia to see a presentation together. When we went outside for a break, he asked me if I would allow him to invite me to a bowl of fruits. "Why?" I believe my answer came more abrupt than wanted and was ultimately unnecessary³⁹. Juan David seemed to be uncomfortable and laughed while looking away. "I don't know, I just... just wanted to invite you, it's not a big deal, and it's very delicious". I laughed "Oh well if you really want to. Thank you so much!". When he ordered and sat down next to the street to wait, he turned to me and asks: "Oh but please don't put that into your investigation⁴⁰".

This active experience of a small derivation of "usual" man and female behaviour caused a feeling of insecurity - what Freud (Freud, 2002 [1930]) might call "cultural uneasiness"(in Kingsbury 2016) Without Antonio or Juan David being able to explain why, they were feeling ashamed about it. Whereas paying for a coffee or a bowl of fruits are only small-scaled moments of "providing for one another", Lizandro told me about Encuentros of "Hombres como vos" that he conducted with a group of taxi-drivers, where those moments of cultural uneasiness took another dimension. These men shared their experience of the feeling of shame, when they were unemployed for some time and their wives took care of financial matters. They felt humiliated, if their wives asked them if they would like to go out to have a beer, and they would have to get invited by their wife. When Lizandro asked the men, how their partners positioned themselves to their unemployment, they all agreed that their wives never said

³⁸ slang for "bad", "stupid"

³⁹ I realized, that spending a lot of time focusing on gender-relations and re-evaluating my own position as a women in this context had created some sort of caution, and in my free time I also focused so much on detecting patriarchal behaviour, that I had become quite sensitive with things that ultimately were no necessary to be sensitive about.

⁴⁰ Of course later, I asked Juan Camilo for permission to use our conversation nevertheless

anything that would suggest that the men should feel ashamed about their situation. As José told me from his own experience, a deal-breaker for men in a relationship could always be that the woman earns more money than him. As Lizandro's stories of the taxi-drivers and the moments with Antonio and Camilo show, men however do not have concrete reason to be ashamed of when they are confronted with moments, in which their own position as a providing man is reversed. Despite their women's acceptance for such situations, they seem to feel ashamed for being emasculated, and the awareness of the feeling of shame reinforces such feeling even more.

Reading shame in a symptomatic way, Copjec's (2002: 128) definition of shame serves as a good reference to understand the men's embarrassment of these moments when gender-roles become "reversed":

"Shame is awakened not when one looks at oneself, or those whom one cherishes, through another's eyes, but when one suddenly perceives a lack in the Other. At this moment the subject no longer experiences herself as a fulfilment of the Other's desire, as the centre of the world, which now shifts away from her slightly, causing a distance to open within the subject herself. [...] In shame, unlike guilt, one experiences one's visibility, but there is no external Other who sees, since shame is proof that the Other does not exist" (Copjec 2002: 128).

Shame is therefore a highly inter-subjective affect in which the subject realizes its own nakedness in front of the Other, as the Other suddenly appears naked and incomplete itself (Tutt 2019). When I asked Juan David, why he did not want me to write about his invitation to eat a fruit salad, he was ashamed because he did not know the answer to it, except that he did not want me to present him as "that kind of man". Antonio, despite disliking it, holds on to the tradition of dating-rules, without knowing why, which creates, as mentioned above the feeling of "nakedness" - the acknowledgement that there is a lack in the Other. The big Other ensures the consistency of society, as he provides us with a whole symbolic system of signifiers, laws and references. Acknowledging, that the Other appears to be lacking, is thus traumatic, as society loses a certain sense of meaning. This thus also explains why so many men told me, that one of their biggest fears is the feeling of shame. What we can detect in these observations is an embarrassment to talk about their "heroic" acts⁴¹, that, sometimes nobody asked for. Those do not need to be big gestures, but also small things like paying for a cup of coffee. There is also the uselessness to feel ashamed in front of the other, because, like in my case, I never asked him to pay for this coffee.

Žižek's (2017 a) explanation of the pleasure of pain that I have already discussed in the section above, can serve as an explanation of this irrationality. Žižek often uses the ideology of Fascism as an example to explain an important component of this surplus-enjoyment extracted from pain. The ideology of Fascism is "based upon the purely formal imperative: 'Obey, because you must!' In other words, renounce enjoyment, sacrifice yourself and do not ask the meaning of it - the value of the sacrifice lies in its very meaninglessness" (Žižek 1989 a: 82). As such, the meaninglessness of the denunciation of enjoyment is crucial, when we try to understand the urge of being a "sacrificing" man, even though his sacrifice often is not asked and is even self-destructive. Further, comments like "This is just something I need to do", further give the sense that there is a depersonalized guilt that they need to pay off. This de-personalized guilt, so Žižek (2017 a: 13), is a case of pleasure in pain.

In this chapter I have discovered, why it is so difficult for men to escape or change the collective fantasy that displays the man as someone who always needs to be strong and in charge, without showing weakness and emotions. Many men are aware and suffer from this expectation and identify it as one of the reasons for the crisis of masculinity, which can result in (self-) harming behaviour. I have shown, that despite this consciousness, men keep on investing into this image, because it is attached to rituals in the appraisals. Those are ultimately informed by the need of men to sacrifice themselves in order to ensure the families and their own survival. While this is supported by the hostile environment that boys grow up in, it also deflects its endurance from a certain unconscious pleasure, that is caused by the renunciation of enjoyment. This paradoxical jouissance is the payment that the "exploited (the) servant, receives for serving the master, the return that makes us accept the framework of the social relationship of domination" (Kingsbury 2016). As such, heroic or self-sacrificial acts intertwine with the often-violent neighbourhoods of Medellín - creating a perfect ideology for men without questioning it because

⁴¹ Heroic acts can be understood as the acts of "providing" or "protecting", which can take different scales.

of the fear, that one might discover a lack in the Other. The question, why men insist on disavowing this non-existence of the Other which reveals itself in moments of shame could be answered by referring to Man's relationship towards the phallus. As he is fully determined by the phallic function, he also believes that he fully exists in the symbolic order. As such, Man believes that full enjoyment can be encountered and that full (masculine) subjectivity is possible. Thus, as the guarantor of the consistency of the symbolic order, the Other must be complete, in order to provide Man's illusion of full existence.

5. Men and the fantasy of Romance

“We as people of a society, where we are surrounded by women and men, we must take into account that we need a society that lives in peace where especially men respect women and their values. We especially as men must know that women are an essential part of our life, they are a complement for our life to be happy, women do not deserve to be treated as they are treated by [the] Macho society, they deserve much more respect than we do [...]”

(Written by a boy in one of the Encuentros, as a comment on sexism in Medellín)

In this chapter I will present a collection of conversations and quotes, that reflect how men position themselves in relation to women, and how they think about romantic relationships in their surroundings. By showing both perspectives of younger and older men, different constructs of fantasies about their (sexual) partners and their relationship will be laid out, which will inform, how women enter the psychic and libidinal economy of men. Departing from that, this chapter will also treat the difficulties that these fantasies create, and how they result in contradicting practices, which I will then analyse from a Lacanian perspective.

5.1. Men on the relationships with women in Medellín

When analysing the following interview-excerpts, it is important to note that all interviewees talk about their expectations in a heterosexual relationship with a woman, none of my participants ever shared with me, that they had another sexual orientation. As entry point for my interviews, I often asked the participants, what they liked about being a man in their society:

In different separate interviews:

Antonio: What I like, is that it's so much easier to enter in the labour market. I mean, it shouldn't be like that, but that's like that.

~

Juan David: Eh being a man.... but.. eh, that I can relate myself better within this society, because maybe they judge you less. [...] It seems that the society judges men way less than women. From the logic that a man can do things naturally, the society scandalizes women's behaviour way more than men's behaviour. Right? [slightly modified sentence structure for better understanding]

Me: Si... And what are the things that society could judge about women, that they would not judge about men?

Juan David: For example with the consume of alcohol. Or the.. the consumption of drugs. Right? Or talking with the other gender for example. This is like seen badly. [...] There is also something else I like about being a man that is, that I can enter the night calmly. See, I can go to any place calmly because I am a man. This we could say is something I like about being a man. That I don't feel tímido⁴² in places.

~

Me: What do you like about being a man?

Erwin: What?

Me: What you like about being a man?

Erwin: No no, I don't like men. I like women.

Me: Eh I mean..

Erwin: Wait, can you repeat the question?

Me: Ehm, I mean, what do you like about being a man, like yourself.

Erwin: Aah okay. Well I like that the man is educated, bien bonito⁴³, that he is a good worker, he is well organized, works, and me as a man I can salir adelante⁴⁴ and study. I can work and have a scholarship.

~

⁴² tímido = shy, rather meant here as “insecure”

⁴³ Bien bonito = pretty

⁴⁴ Salir adelante: translation like: get ahead, but a more accurate translation would be “to grow personally”

In my first meeting at *Hombres Amigos*, I also posed the question to Henry and Santiago, who were sitting together with me at a table:

- Me: So, I have a question and that is; what do you like about being a man?
Henry: I am proud to be a man, because I have a beautiful woman. So that makes me proud of being a man, but at the same time this is not a pride for me as a man but me as a person.
Me: So, the good thing about being a man is having a women?
Santiago lifted his arm, as if we were in school.
Santiago: Yes, women are fantastic! Men need women, for being happy.
Me: Ah, you believe women also need men to be happy?
Henry: Of course! They need someone who looks out for them. We men and women, we are complementary. A woman cannot be without the men, and men cannot be without women.
Me: And why do you think men need women?
Henry: (*Laughed*) Well look around, (*the men looked at each other and Henry made a gesture with his arms to point at the other men in the round*) A man without a woman is almost no man.
Henry laughed and Santiago smiled.
Me: What is so funny about that?
Santiago: Well, there is nothing funny about that. (*He was however still laughing*) It is just like that, for being a man, you need to have a woman.

~

Often, participants were also struggling to find an answer directly, or wanting to admit what they liked about their gender.

- Me: So, what do you like about being a man?
Juan: Eh pues how difficult, (*long pause*) I like my member.⁴⁵
(*laughed*) Eh eh well, I like women.
Me: That doesn't count (*laughing*).
Juan: (*Laughed*) I know..
Me: Why do you say that?
Juan: Eh pues eeh I don't know. [...] Men and women, that are dynamic things. Soo, I believe that women are a complement of the man, I think that maybe not only sexually you know but also in other things. But eeh, I don't know, what do I like about being a man?
Me: Maybe we can start with something then, maybe it is easier to say what you don't like about being a man?
Juan: Ah, yes. I don't like all this responsibility that the man has to take in his family. I don't like war which is made by men. I don't like how society is putting men into charge all the time.

When men talked about the things that they did not like about being a man, most often they related this to the societal rules that follow the logic of the "traditional" model, that concerns the reduction of men to an economic object, and women to a sexual object. What bothered them especially about that was the nature of relationships, that these "traditional" gender-roles enhanced:

(In separate interviews):

- Juan: You know here, a perfect husband or boyfriend is someone who is being able to pay the everyday life costs, who can finance some small presents, take you out for dinner, have a good car and a good house. It's much about the image you have. You know, in this world and this city it is all about that you are well dressed and have a beautiful woman. [...] I don't focus too much on money, also on the way of having materials. This makes me a very weird person, who does not fit into this system.

~

(As already partly mentioned in the chapter above):

- Me: So, is there something that you don't like about being a man?

⁴⁵ "miembro" = member, but it is a slang-term for penis

Antonio: Yes, so much (*laughed, pause*) Eh, what's there? That I have to pay everything. Like literally, if I want to go out with a girl it takes me to pay everything, everything absolutely everything. I have to bring her to the house, I have to talk to the parents, *tan, tan, tan* (slaps with his fingers on the table), I have to do all this process, as if it was a pact. As if the women don't enjoy it. Which is not true though. This seems to me very *bobo*⁴⁶ (bad) [...]

Me: Why do you think that is like this?

Antonio: In my neighbourhood, as I told you, there are many people eh who are still with this ancestral culture, that the man is the one who brings the plata, that the man is eh the one who has to work and support the children. You can see that a lot, but it's already changing, you know. But this type of man doesn't look for rational stimulation but only psychological stimulation, passionate stimulation.
[...] The woman's position is to look for the man who has the most money. That's like that. The more things you have, if you arrive in a very *bacano*⁴⁷ car or you arrive with more plata, or a bottle of whiskey, things like that, the woman will look for that. That's happened to me with a lot of women already.

Antonio then moved on to talk about the relationships within his family.

Antonio: My father and my mother used to fight a lot. Now it has gotten better. And I think it is, I guess because of what you called hegemonic masculinities. But I have thankfully a reflex not to copy this kind of behaviour.

Me: But what were your parents fighting about?

Antonio: About basic things. He wanted her to stay at home, giving her money to go buy things for the house. But it has changed a bit because now he reflects more and because of the conversation my brother and I had with him.⁴⁸

~

Juan David: Here, the man and woman they have this relation in which they don't focus on anything important. You know, the man prefers to go on the weekends out, and the woman prefers to be with her girlfriends. And eh, how can I say this, everything is about the man to work and bring home the plata, and then well, you can consume. But then he will also want to have an heir in the end, like a small version of himself. And if she does not want that, pues then (*made clapping hand movement*) *basta ya*⁴⁹. But it is the same for the woman. If he cannot provide for her anymore it could happen that she will leave him.

I also asked in the elderly group *Hombres Amigos*, how they would describe the “culturally standard” relationship in their society:

Marleen: So, what makes a husband here a good husband?

Henry: Well, if he works well and he can bring money home.

The surrounding sitting people all nodded.

Santiago: Yes, she [the wife] has to be able to trust you that you can provide for the family.

José came from the other corner of the room after talking to some other tables of the Encuentro and explained, that there had been another interesting discussion about, what the role of the woman had within this relationship. He asked Santiago and Henry, if they had some ideas about that:

Santiago: Well that is easy. It's for the sexual relationship and then having a son with her. We men are constant conquerors. See, we love pretty women, for her appearance you know. [...].

⁴⁶ slang for “bad”, “stupid”

⁴⁷ *bacano* = Colombian slang for “cool”, “awesome”

⁴⁸ In a later conversation, Antonio told me, that this relationship between his parents also got better because of the improvement of the father's health. He changed his work and is employed now somewhere, where he likes it way more

⁴⁹ *Basta ya* = enough now

Henry: It's all about the appearance. But if a man now has a woman and after a while, she will be not pretty anymore, then you will have another woman, who is still attractive.

Marleen: And what happens to the other women?

Santiago: Well, if there is love, then he will keep her for building a family.

Marleen: And the other attractive women, he doesn't love her?

Santiago: Well, he could! (*Pause*) But you know, this game works both ways. Women do the same, while we men look for her appearance, women look for the man with most money. And if she doesn't love the man with the money, she might have a man with less money, but that she can share her feelings with.

What is noticeable here is how men describe the relationship between man and woman as fragile, and seemingly not profound, as women and men can be exchanged easily with either more beautiful or richer versions of them. I turned to another table during that Encuentro, where Fernando and Rodrigo sat. Fernando seemed to be struggling with the manual work, his hands shook a lot and it looked like he could not manage to finish this artistic task. I came to help him to finish it and he mumbled: "This damn rheumatism".

Me: Do you think that a man needs a woman to be happy?

Rodrigo nodded.

Fernando: No, that is not like that. I have not had a woman my entire life, no family, no women, and I have been very happy. You know, men don't need women to be happy. I am here, if I go out to the streets I see my friends, I have many friends, I see a beautiful woman like you, then I am happy. I never needed a wife or children or a family to be happy.

Rodrigo looked at him and patted him on the back, then looked over to me and slowly shook his head.

Rodrigo: For me, all my life this has been a fear, dying alone without the woman I love at my side.

Other participants had shared with me as well, that their biggest fear was "Getting old without a woman who loves you" (Antonio), "being alone, without a partner, and maybe a family" (Juan David). I asked José in an interview about his view and experience on this seemingly fragility of relationships and the simultaneous fear, of ultimately not ending up with a woman. Based on his experience within the Encuentros he conducted with young and old men, but also his own life-stories he then told me:

José: We are together for not being alone. There is no real emotional connection. What searches a man in women and vice versa? The boys will say: Girls look for money, they are not interested in anything else. So, this becomes a patriarchal topic. It results in this logic that people will say: "Of course you don't have a girl because you don't have money". And for the women it is the same logic "Of course you don't have a boyfriend, because you did not make yourself pretty. So, the sense of live is having a husband who has money and pays your beauty-Operation, so you stay beautiful, and having a beautiful woman who is faithful and lets you do your things, who respects you and who is there for you. [...] So, the sense of life is this one: this exchange between man and women, which also permits the exchange to have a family.

Relating to this, many men talked about the rising importance of aesthetic operations, that had become quite popular in the last few years in Medellín.

Freddy: You know, this is quite a stereotype. Here there is this image of the Colombian woman who is beautiful. A woman with these huge boobs and big asses. Nobody can have a body like that. But it has become really popular, that in some regions in the pacific it is very easy to do the operations. So then many men will say: Do you want to be with me? Yes! So I will put you on my Moto, we will go together to Cali⁵⁰, eh and I will give you a present, you can get a breast operation. So then later you can get a credit and then get more. It becomes more and more normal that woman do that.

⁵⁰ Colombian city in the province of "Valle del Cauca"

~

Erwin: [...] You know, I think you can always work on how you look. Like I also go and work out so that I have nice muscles.

Me: Then what do you think about woman who do aesthetical operations?

Erwin: Yeah I know many women do it here. They want specially to have bigger asses.

Me: Do you like it?

Erwin: Why not? You know Kim Kardashian? Many girls want to look like her. So then for instance when girls they are 15 years old, they ask their parents to get a breast operation, you know, as a present for your Quinceanera.

Me: But with 15 you don't even know how your body will develop later?

Erwin: Yeah but they think that otherwise they won't be finding a guy. See, many boys they also look for women with those big boobs.

It is thus not surprising, that Colombia (there are unfortunately no concrete numbers about Medellín) is one of the most important places for plastic surgeries. Colombia ranks 9th in the world among the most frequently performed aesthetic operations, of which 83,3% are conducted for female customers (Campbell et al. 2019: 2). I had a conversation with Julio about this high degree of plastic surgeries that women conduct in Colombia and how much importance is given to smarten oneself up with Make-Up. Julio told me, that it was crazy how much such Make-Up could change a woman's appearance. He showed me some make-up art-videos, in which women showed, how they could transform their face into a completely different shape by applying plastic materials and a lot of different make-up layers. Julio told me, that this was something he was scared of:

Julio: Imagine, then you had a date with this beautiful woman and when she gets home with you, she will pull off all these layers and suddenly look eh look different and eh ugly (*He laughed*). You know or, you would only know how she really looks when you are already married to her. (*Laughed*) Aah qué pena⁵¹. Our world is a locura⁵².

He then told me about a story, in which a man sued his wife, for not telling him about all the plastic surgeries she had before meeting him. Apparently, in her "natural" state, she was a quite "ugly" women, which was particularly due to her big nose, that she however had changed within several plastic surgeries. When their first child was born, the child however had a big nose and the husband did not understand, how this was possible, as his wife was so beautiful, and he had a small nose himself. Julio was laughing about it, saying again "Qué pena". I am not sure, if Julio's story was true, which is however not of relevance, as it is rather his reaction towards it, that is telling it's own story.

As the women's body represents her main resource in this cultural gender structure, it is foreseeable that women also enter into a dependency on the men's admiration for her body, in order to feel appreciated. In many cases that I talked with men about the topic of relationships between men and women, men told me, that women in Colombia are way more machista than the men themselves.

In separate interviews:

José: We have a lot of men here who are doing some practices of galantías⁵³, not piropos⁵⁴ because piropos don't work, but galantías, well, like saying very nice things to women, you know. And for what? To access the woman's body, maybe have a relationship with this woman. But to what extent they [the galantías] are true and to what extent women also seek that men make these efforts? [...] For example uhm I'm going to tell a story with a friend. Well, I have never been a man who promises things to women. Like nooo I am so in love with you, and I don't know what, and I love you for this and this. [...] Well, so I had a friend who I liked a lot and she liked me. But she told me she wouldn't go out with me because I didn't do that. She would tell me, promise me heaven and earth, how you feel about me, you know. But I didn't like

⁵¹ "To bad, or "what a shame"

⁵² Locura = madness

⁵³ Galantías cannot be translated directly, but refers to being gallant

⁵⁴ Literal translation: "Compliment", which is meant however are Pick-Up-Lines on the streets

that. “Do it!” And so we failed⁵⁵ because it's not... it's not my way, that's not my way, I don't like it.

~

As Antonio already mentioned above, he disagreed with the “ancestral” way of interacting with women – meaning having a relationship that is based on his financial and her beauty contribution.

Antonio: Most women are also adapted in this model. So if you want to talk to a woman and you get into a relationship in which she doesn't feel comfortable with, that's complicated too. If she's comfortable with me treating her that way (the “Machista way”), she's not going to be comfortable with the way I'm treating her. So already relating with her in that way is more complicated. Of course, I'm not generalizing, there are women who don't agree with that either, so you can also relate to that woman.

To the question, if Antonio was then indeed dating other women who were not agreeing to the how he called it “ancestral” dating-culture, and would for instance pay for their own meals during dates, his answer was however not clear.

Antonio: Well, you could. But these women are often also part of very certain circles, you know? And sometimes that can be *chèvere*⁵⁶ too. But sometimes also bobo.

Marleen: In how far bobo?

Antonio: I think it's because of the style they have, you know? You know, I really like it, if women dress feminine and all that. Sometimes then I feel, that these women don't care about that at all. Then I would make myself *bien bonito* and all that and will take her to a nice place, and eeh she comes there with eh well very different. Like, eeh you know just not so *bacano*.

That, what “can be *chèvere*” but also “sometimes bobo” about a woman who pays for herself was emphasized further during a talk with Julio, in which we discussed, what was important for him, when he was dating a girl. He told me, that he did not like it, when women were too greedy. Sometimes, as he experienced it in the past, on dates women would choose the most expensive drinks and order a lot of food, so that the date would become really expensive.

Marleen: Couldn't you just ask her to pay for her things on her own?

Julio: No, most women here are not like that, they don't want to do that.

Marleen: But not all of them?

Julio: No no, of course, I don't want to generalize this. I also know women, who want to pay for themselves. I like that.

Marleen: But then, you still also go out with those women, who expect you to pay everything?

Julio: Yes, yes.

Marleen: And then it however bothers you if you have to pay for everything?

Julio: Yes. But see, it makes sense, because the women also spends a lot of time and money on making herself pretty for the date. And, look as well, men are making life hard for women all the time. And women are not always treated the way they should be.

Marleen: And you, do you make yourself also beautiful for dates?

Julio: Of course. I will put on a nice *camiseta* (shirt), sometimes earrings and maybe get my beard shaved in the barbershop. But I think that that is not the same as for women.

Marleen: And the women that you were on dates with, that payed for themselves, was there a difference in how they look?

Julio: Ah, I see what you mean. Well, to be honest, sometimes those women they are more feminist you know, so sometimes they don't pay that much attention to all that.

Marleen: Does that bother you?

Julio: Hmm, eh well I mean we all love beautiful women right? That is just part of our nature.

What Julio and Antonio reflect here, is that it seems to be a decision that men have to take: Either, they want to date a women, who is following the “traditional” model, which offers the “whole package” of

⁵⁵ orig. “fracasar” in this context: breaking up

⁵⁶ *chévere* = Latin American slang for: great, awesome

a beautifully styled women who lets the man pay for her drinks, or they date someone, who wants to pay independently, but however does not pay attention to their physical appearance. It seems, as if those two attributes (beauty and financial independency) – to say attractive women and so-called feminists could not go together. I observed this “divide” a lot, which I will further show in the following chapters. It appeared in many situations, particularly when it came to the enactment of “traditional” male and female behaviour and the possession of the belonging characteristics of men and women (see 5.2.).

As described so far in this chapter, men detect a high fragility and superficiality in their relationships and interaction with women in general, which expose women to a constant pressure to either “stay or become more beautiful” (if needed with the help of plastic surgeries), while men need to find the financial means to provide for these beautiful women. This creates frustration from the men’s perspective, but there is a difficulty, to bring about change. In the following section, I will lay out how they envision their perfect woman and ideal relationship instead.

5.2. The ideal woman

For that, I will start with a situation that happened to me in the second month of my stay, which captures the moment, when I met Erwin for the first time. That day, I was sitting at the metro-station at San Javier (Comuna 13), waiting for a friend who came about an hour too late. In order to hide from the sun, I sat in the shade of a small tree where Erwin sat down next to me and asked, if I had a reservation for a Graffiti Tour, as he is a guide himself. I told him that I was not here to go to the Graffiti-tour, but that I was waiting for a friend. Like this, we started to talk more intensively. After a while, a girl came closer who had been standing there already for some time. She held an umbrella in her hand and, as Erwin told me later, she is also giving tours at the Graffiti Tour. Her name is Sheyla, she is 20 years old and lives, as Erwin, close to the station of San Javier. She and Erwin know each other already for some time, many guides at the Tour see each other daily, so there is a bond between them. She showed Erwin something on her phone. He nodded. We introduced us to each other and talked a bit about Germany and how much she liked German tourists that come here to Comuna 13. She went over to a man who was selling some items like cigarettes, chewing-gum etc. When she came back, she looked upset but also amused.

Sheyla: Look Marly, do you see this man there? (*pointed at the man*)

Marleen: Yeah, what’s up with him?

Sheyla: Marly, I went to ask him for a cigarette, and he asked me if I would go home with him. You see Marly, he thought I was a prostitute.

Marleen: O wow.

Sheyla: Do I look like a prostitute Marly?

Marleen: Don’t know, I don’t know how prostitutes look like here.

Sheyla: (*Laughed*) They don’t look like me Marly. Prostitutes they don’t have class.

Marleen: I see. Well, don’t bother him then.

Erwin: Sheyla dejala with your locuras.⁵⁷

Sheyla: (*She made a kissing mouth towards his direction*) Estos loquitos here.⁵⁸

Marleen: (*Laughing*) Would also be a cheap prostitute if it’s only for a cigarette, don’t you think?

Sheyla: (*Laughed*) True Marly, so true.

Erwin had been quiet, but he laughed nervously and seemed to feel uncomfortable with the situation. After some minutes:

Sheyla: So, you know Marly, older ladies, they have so much more experience. Women who are older, they know much more about men and so they are better in bed than us.

Marleen: What do you mean?

Sheyla: I mean, if I would want to make a real present for my friend Erwin here, I

⁵⁷ Sheyla, leave her with your craziness

⁵⁸ “those crazy people here”, loquito = cute version of crazy people

would get him a prostitute that is older, and experienced. Not someone young. You know, we girls (*pointed at me and her*) we don't know much in bed.

Erwin: Sheyla, what are you saying. Let the poor girl!! (*He turned his head away*)

Marleen: (*Directed at Sheyla*) Ah I see. Yeah I guess you're right.

Sheyla: See, so for a man, for having the best for him, he needs an older Senora, who knows how the job is done. You know and the beautiful girls, like you and me, that is for love later, and having dates and all that.

Marleen: But you know, don't you think that counts the same for men? I mean, that older men are better in bed than younger men, who don't have experience?

Sheyla blushed and looked over to Erwin. Erwin turned his head around; he was smiling but shuffled his head in his phone. I wondered, if these two might have shared a romantic history, but I never dared to ask one of them. Sheyla leaned towards me and said (*so that Erwin could not hear it*):

Sheyla: Between the two of us, niñas entre niñas⁵⁹, yeah you are right. An older man, who has more plata, and more experience, yeah, he is better in bed than a young boy, you know like him. (*Made gesture with her head towards Erwin*)

Marleen: Yeah, that's what I mean.

Sheyla: You know I had a boy once, he was young, I was his first, it was bad, I tell you!

Marleen: I see, well everybody has to learn first, right? Nobody is perfect from the beginning. But what has this to do with plata?

Sheyla: Ah you know, older men, they already have better jobs, so they have more plata.

Marleen: Yeah but what does this has to do with that he is better in bed? For me, plata and sex don't have anything to do with each other.

Sheyla was quiet and is looking up, as if she is thinking hardly. After some seconds, she smiled, then leaned even further towards me, as if she was about to tell me a secret and then whispered:

Sheyla: Yeah, between us, you are right actually. Those are other things.

I received a message that my friend arrived. Erwin, Sheyla and I kissed goodbye. When my friend and I passed by Erwin and Sheyla again to get to his moto, Sheyla pushed her arm against my friends' arm and said: "Take good care of her man!"

Erwin and I spoke about Sheyla again when we talked in an interview about his perception of how a good relationship was imagined in his Comuna. We talked about, what I have already mentioned above, the superficiality between men and women, and how money as an exchange for sex / family was often challenging for both men and women.

Erwin: I don't want a woman who only wants me for the money. I want someone who loves me because look, if you don't have enough money, she doesn't love me anymore or what? But then you are in love with her and then she leaves you.

Marleen: Then, what for a relationship do you want instead? What would be a perfect? girl for you?

Erwin: Eeh pues that she has an attitude you know. And that she has *the beauty*. And fé (faith). You know what fé is, right. Something that gives you a connection to god. [...] You know, I don't really like the women here in la comuna, or even in Colombia so much. I want a beautiful woman you know maybe from Italy. Or the United States, you know.

Marleen: Why?

Erwin: Look, you remember Sheyla? She is pretty and all, but all she ever does is talk about sex. You know, when she was talking to you about this thing with the prostitute and the money. You know, a friend told me that she sometimes even eh what a shame to tell you this, but that she and some tourists sometimes se echan un polvo⁶⁰, you know. That's just ... no, no I don't like this.

⁵⁹ Girls between girls

⁶⁰ colloquially= They are having a fuck (having sex)

In this section, we can recognize Erwin's imagination, of how a perfect relationship would derive from the "superficial" one that he has criticized before. Similar responses were observable with other participants, when they talked about their ideal of a relationship.

In separate Interviews:

Marleen: ⁶¹So, then what are the things that are important for you in a relationship, if it is not for the materialistic things?

Juan: For me it is security. It is the person who it is, that they love me for who I am. I want to really have knowledge about that person. Have an ambience, be creative, have free time to do things that you like. So, in a relationship first you have to know how to survive as a person, so that after that you can offer this survival to the other person. This would be my perfect image. But until now I am not so sure about what I really want, because I am still young and until now eh I don't know much about life.

~

Antonio: If I want to be with a woman it's because that woman inspires me, inspires to do things in every way. Because she stimulates me visually, I love the way she thinks and yeah, that's what I like. Well, it's a lot of things. But in comparison to how people see it in my comuna, let's say all they want is a hot woman, as they call it.

Antonio then explained me, that for these reasons, he did not relate a lot to the girls from his comuna.

Antonio: In el Poblado⁶² the women are different, more educated you know, they are more eh cultural. So talking to them is a bit more bacano. [...] If I talk to a girl from la comuna [here] they will talk about "ooh cool we went to this party and took this, and this, and look at the foto ta ta ta ecetera ecetera. So to my mind that is really bobo.

~

Henry (*From Hombres Amigos*):

Look values are the most important. We think the main value we have is plata. But let me tell you, this is not true. There is love, education, work, the personal war⁶³, confronting oneself with life.

~

Thus, it becomes clear, how men envision themselves in a relationship, that is characterized by more profundity, in which both partners indeed know each other and their interaction is not materialistic. Important here is to notice that the women in this relationship is beautiful, selfless and pure (as Erwin describes it as "close to God"), which then brings out the best in the man to *salir adelante*. To visualize and specify this more in-depth, I will refer here to my experience of my second participation in the Encuentro of *Hombres Amigos*.

As some men asked José in the first Encuentro, if he would bring me as well for the next meeting, many men seemed to be very happy that I showed up there a second time. They came smiling, shaking my hand, giving me kisses and hugging me. During the first exercise of the Encuentro that José had prepared, in groups of four or five, the men were supposed to write down sayings, poems or famous lines in songs that characterize men and women. While I was helping a group of men to write down their results, from another table, Henry and Santiago came over to me and told me that they had written a poem for me. They insisted that I would read it out loudly, so that the other men could also hear it.

*Your hair is golden like wheat,
It goes like the waves over the sea
Engram(?) of when your soul as
an angel that emanates breeze, heat and
someone to my heart.*

*Tus cabellos dorados como trigales,
van como las ondas sobre el mar,
Engram(?) de cuando tu alma como
un ángel que emana brisa, calor y
alguien a mi corazón.*

*Your serenity gives me great peace.
The spontaneity in your gaze is like the perfume I
sense from your skin.*

*Tu serenidad me da mucha paz.
La espontaneidad en tu mirada es como el perfume
que siento en tu piel.*

⁶¹ (Look above: Relating to the topic that he does not consider himself as a materialistic person)

⁶² District of Medellín, with the highest economical stratum

⁶³ lucha personal = rather meant as personal development

<p><i>It's a miracle to know that with me is an angel who I love, who will not abandon me. Thank you for coming today.</i></p>	<p><i>Es un milagro saber que conmigo esta un angel que quiero, que no me abandone. Gracias por venir Hoy.</i></p>
--	--

I thanked them for their kindness and felt flattered, even though I was also a bit ashamed and I believe I blushed, while all men were looking and smiling at me. José then rescued me from all the attention, by starting to read out loudly, what each table had written for their exercise. Most of the poems, sayings and songs were similar to the one, that Santiago and Henry had written for me. José explained that many times when women appear in artistic expressions, women's beauty is central, and the artists romanticize everything women do. By that, an image of women is created, that equals the women to an angel-like - almost para-natural figure. On the other hand, the only times that men appear in poems or songs is when they are worshipped in war, or because they are crying over a woman, who has left them and has broken their heart. Whereas one has to acknowledge, that the form of art has changed a lot from their generation to what younger people listen to nowadays, the topic of the woman with a perfect body and a seductive spirit is still a main theme of many Reggaeton and Pop-songs (more on that below).

To further point out how men imagine or talk about women I will refer to one of the Encuentros that I visited with Ana. In this meeting, boys between 15 and 20 years showed in a game their spontaneous associations with women. This game is called "Stop-Game". The task for the boys in this game was to create and fill out a table with two columns, one with the category "Man", and the other with the category "Woman". Like in the game *City-Country-River*, an initial letter was given, with which the boys had to form in a limited amount of time a word for both columns. After the first person found a word for each column, he has to shout "Stop". In group, the boys then had to present the words that they had written down. Here, I will present only a selection of letters that the boys presented in class:

For the letter P:

- "I have Patriarch for men, Preciosa (precious, beautiful) for women"
- "For men: Poderoso (Powerful), for women: Princesa (Princess)"
- "For men: Perrito (Doggy), women: Primordial"⁶⁴
- "For men (*the boy laughed and looked left and right to his neighbours*) I wrote pene (Penis) (*all boys around him snorted with laughter*), and for woman I wrote Pura (pure)"

For the letter A:

- "I have agresivo (aggressive) for man, and amor (love) for woman"
- "I wrote animal for man and árbol (tree) for woman"
- "I put agresivo (aggressive) for man, and amorosa (loving) for woman"
- "Ambicioso (ambitious) for man, amor (love) for woman"

This is just a small selection of results from the stop game, in other classes the selection of words was different. A pattern however was, that usually, the boys would choose one positive and one negative term for each letter. If there was one "positively" loaded term on the women's column, the men's term would be almost every time negative. Whereas this research does not focus on quantitative data-collection, these results were however quite interesting to observe. It was for instance noticeable, that boys often associated women with terms that describe them in a "pure" way. Whereas nobody mentioned "love" for men, in almost every class that we played the Stop-game, boys would write "love" or "loving" into the women's column. The same counted for the term "primordial", which was in almost every school the most often chosen term for the letter P for the women, followed by the choice "pure". Of course, if we look at the Stop-Game, we don't know, what their words indeed express for the boys. However, the basic strategy of this game, to come up very quickly with terms that pop up in your head, is a good way to see, what the mind spontaneously associates with certain pictures (Dubbels 2011).

5.3. Theoretical considerations on the fantasy of romance

To make sense of this chapter, we can conclude primarily the following: Despite that men already in a young age feel pressured and frustrated about the societal expectation concerning the role of men and

⁶⁴ Primordial = primary, essential, fundamental, paramount

women in a relationship, they still all share the fantasy, that a fully satisfying (sexual) relationship is possible, in which the feminine and masculine compliment each other harmoniously. By believing, that finding a loving partner will lead to the achievement of full happiness, men fall, following Žižek (1996), “prey to an imaginary fantasy”, which promises full enjoyment. Important here is to remember, that the subject is convinced by the Other, that the symbolic order is a medium for the achievement of this full enjoyment. The desire, caused due to this entrance into the symbolic order, which represents the ways that men want to inhabit society, gets therefore substituted into the goal of achieving a sexual accomplishment with another person. A coherent society or a complimentary relationship (thus the symbolic order) promise happiness and enjoyment. The wish for such a relationship however meets an impossibility. Such impossibility is caused by the many antagonisms that people face in their realities that are often characterized by difficult circumstances.⁶⁵ Many men in my observation claim, that these antagonisms are mostly because women seem to be captured within the logic of the gender-role-distribution and expect the men’s “traditional” enactment. Ultimately, the underlying reason is however that the symbolic order which stages the desire for a fulfilling interaction between men and women is a fiction and is in the end not a medium for providing such fulfilment.

For making sense of this further, one has to look more closely on how the boys and men really envision this complementary interaction (or even relationship) with women. When Erwin talks about his dream woman, he underlines that he does not want a woman who is vulgar and reveals her sexuality, unlike Sheyla. Therefore, he claims, that he will probably not find his ideal woman in Colombia. What he is looking for is a beautiful and loving figure who is pure due to her belief to God - someone who is immaterial. The term immaterial needs some more clarification at this point, because it has to be read both in a literal sense, but also in an indirect way. In a literal sense, Erwin, like most of the other participants, claims that he doesn't want to be desired by a woman only for the material security he could give her. What he wants, is that she loves him for who he truly is. The same can be observed with Juan and Antonio. Juan wants to find a woman who knows everything about him and loves him for (or despite?) that. Antonio does not want to go out with girls from his own neighbourhood, and rather wants to find someone from the “upper” class, who is more educated and can therefore appreciate less materialistic aspects of one another. What is crucial here is that all three believe that beyond their symbolic title as man - the provider, there is something inside of them that makes them worthy of love (Žižek 1996). That is what fantasy ultimately is about; There is the belief in the fantasy of romantic love that distances itself from the idea of possession and material and sexual exchange – thus that exists outside of a material world. For a more indirect reading of the wish for an immaterial woman, we should take a look at the difficulties of meeting a woman who is not interested in the men’s money. As claimed by Antonio and Julio, this difficulty is that these women are not so much focused on their physical appearance. As shown by the interviews, there is an ideal of beauty that has a high importance when talking about women.

In Lacanian theory beauty has the function of disguising the truth of sexual difference between women and men (Fink 2016: 128 pp). What he means by “the truth” is the Real. By that, sexual difference stands for impossibility and antagonisms, thus, the Real. The truth would thus be a disruption of the illusion, that a woman is “a lofty, pure, spiritual thing, but rather something quite material and, indeed, scatological, smelly, and disgusting” (Fink, 2016: 128 pp). Beauty as such masks an ugly reality, because if we would indeed see the truth behind beauty, we might find something that is not beautiful at all. Here I would like to recall Julio’s imagination of a horrible date, in which the women could appear as very beautiful, but as soon as he would take her home and see her real appearance, she would turn out to be an “ugly” person, with a nose that is too big.

Beauty therefore appears more closely linked to the real (the reality of sexual difference) and suspends desire. Unlike one would commonly assume, beauty therefore does not increase sexual desire, it is rather the opposite; the more beautiful the women (the object), the less we are able to pursue sexual desire. Lacan follows the idea here, that real beauty needs to stay untouched. There is thus a division between beauty as perfection and the sexual part of a beautiful women, which is more closely related to the Real. We see a shift from the real to the symbolic, in which drives (like sexual drives) are suspended by

⁶⁵ Therefore, Žižek (1996) and Lacan (in Fink 2016) argue, that a good relationship manages to deal with Real differences, thus deconstructs the symbolic ones. This makes us understand Lacan’s notion “there is no sexual relationship” better.

desire. In this moment, beauty and desire become mutually bound up in fantasy. Desire gets caught up in the pursuit and preservation of the beautiful idea, and it would lose its state of purity if one would intent to obtain sexual satisfaction with it. This becomes recognizable, when we listen to the characteristics that the men give the women (as for instance in the poem of Henry and Santiago, or Diego's declaration of my beauty), making her into a Lady or goddess, a loving, self-sacrificing mother figure, that hides all traces of her being a desiring female. A woman needs to be pure and untouched by anything that is not pure in order to keep the illusion of her immateriality and with that the real (of sexual difference) alive (Flink 2016: 131). When Sheyla starts to talk to me about prostitutes and sex, Erwin interrupts her several times to leave me alone with it - maybe because as he envisioned me as a foreign woman as more pure than her (as he explained me before that he wanted an Italian woman).

As such, the rising tendency for women to have plastic surgeries, that are often financed and requested by men, can be understood as an attempt of men, to cover up the “ugliness” about the truth of sexual difference between men and women. By that, they can sustain the desire and the illusion, that the woman is a medium for him to relate himself to the lost object of enjoyment - to *petit objet a*. As this desire does not seek satisfaction, because what he really wants is to postpone the (ultimately impossible) satisfaction of desire, the real intention of men is to reduce her to a partial object – a fetish and by that the cause of his desire. While desiring in itself is nothing wrong, the intent to capture beauty has turned into an obsessive way. With a broader view on the development of society, I have observed, how this desire for beauty has corrupted into a sort of *jouissance* for beauty-surgeries and overuse of beauty-products on dates. The supersizing of body parts, as the breast and the bottom has become an obscene development (thinking about, how already 15 years old girls request a surgery of their breasts), as perceived by many of my participants. We can see, how desire makes space here for drives of (sexual) gratification. If we consider, how the appreciation of beauty would usually ask for staying untouched, the artificial way of “beautifying” the female body makes space for men to permit themselves a degree of satisfaction with that “impure” women, while keeping on desiring a woman that is indeed flawless and sustains the desire of full enjoyment. Drive addresses itself in this case to the Other as a silent witness, “to a mute presence which endorses the subject’s *jouissance* by way of emitting a silent sign of acknowledgment, a “Yes” to drive.” (Žižek 1996). This ultimately causes difficulties for men, as it continues the persistence of this superficiality in relationships or interaction in general, as it reduces women to their physical appearance, which is a price men literally have to pay for. As such, men struggle to interact with women in a way that overcome this exchange, which they suffer from. It also contributes to the endurance of the “traditional” fantasy about masculinity and femininity, as the two are standing as relational concepts to each other. As shown above, men keep on investing into the fantasy, that a full masculine identity can only be achieved by the “possession” of a beautiful women, for whom he needs to provide. In the structure of this described struggle we can recognize Žižek's concept of *fetistic disavowal*. Due to man's full determination by the phallic function, male sexuality tends rather to fetishism than female sexuality. While man develops many strategies and idealizations to encounter the lost enjoyment, he becomes excessively attached to certain parts of the woman, that become a substitute for *objet a*, while the fetishist then “misses the bigger picture” (Taylor 2014: 93). In my observations I have show, how men do not want Woman for whom she really is, but for her appearance and her inability to provide for herself (as described above, I will refer to this attributes of a woman as the embodiment of a “Mamacita”⁶⁶). “Mamacitas” thus become a fetish, which allows men to enjoy woman in a different way – as a medium for satisfaction which is the work of drive. As such chasing the fetish prevents men to see the real antagonism, that “there is no sexual relationship” as phrased by Lacan, meaning that there is no coherent gendered identity, that would complement femininity and masculinity as two opposite principles that together exhaust the full (sexual) possibilities. At the same time, as I have shown in many examples, men (unconsciously) pretend as if they are not invested into this fetish. Many claim, not to want a woman who is such a Mamacita, that would reduce their relation to an exchange of money and beauty. They also know, that many of these women are reinforcing their beauty by using a lot of beauty-products or having surgeries. However,

⁶⁶ Mamacita is a term for a good looking and sexy woman, an expression for “Babe”. My reference here is mainly chosen to summarize a woman to the two binary attributes; Her (sexual) attractiveness which she emphasises (by Make-Up but also Surgeries) and her inability/expectation in the men's financial support.

despite claiming not to appreciate this focus on (fake) appearance (or, as Julio even says to fear it), they need it in order to enjoy women. This is a good example of the double meaning of fetishist disavowal which Žižek explains as the following: “They know very well, how things really are, but still they are doing it as if they did not know. The illusion is therefore double: it consists in overlooking the illusion, which is structuring our real, effective relation to reality. And this overlooked, unconscious illusion is what may be called the ideological fantasy.” (Žižek, 1989 b: 32-33). Men Really know, that women’s beauty is appearance and that a Mamacita will not give them what they truly desire, but they pretend as if they did not see that, so that they can continue investing into the ideological fantasy of a true masculine identity that would be complemented by a beautiful woman who (financially) needs them, even though it bothers them as well.

To finalize this chapter, I would like to remind, that even though, in this thesis I have mainly focused on the fantasy of the interaction between men and women, and principally out of the male perspective, it is important to refer to the position of women as well. Because what is observable in my examples, in talks that I had with participants but also in literature on women in the society of Medellín (as for instance Baird’s work on girlfriends of gang-members⁶⁷) is that women also take part in the construction of the social of Medellín in a very sexualized way, which is not only reducible to the wish for having a relationship of men and women. One could write a complete thesis about the way, how women are also involved in this sexualized conceptualization of femininity in society. From my observations, they partly do so as it offers them certain advantages. Sheyla for example is aware of the link between her sexuality and the benefits it could give her in life. However, she does not try to hide that sex can be an exchange for money. While she therefore has a reputation by certain of her fellows to be a prostitute or “cheap”, she embraces this position as a possibility of liberation from a society, that is somehow hypocritical when it comes to prostitution. As such, Sheyla and Erwin serve as exemplary demonstrations of the asymmetry of relationships, and with that their impossibility. Žižek’s own words put it in the best way:

“A man stupidly believes that, beyond his symbolic title, there is deep in himself some substantial content [...], whereas a woman knows that there is nothing beneath the mask - her strategy is precisely to preserve this ‘nothing’ of her freedom, out of reach of men’s possessive love...” (Žižek, 1995 a).

In the following chapter I will show, how men’s desire for a “true” relationship meets further moments of antagonisms and confusions, that will further emphasise the ambiguous nature of the gendered system of power in Medellín.

⁶⁷ Baird, A. (2015): *Duros & Gangland Girlfriends: Male Identity, Gang Socialisation and Rape in Medellín*. In: AUYERO, J., Bourgois, P. & SCHEPER-HUGHES, N. (Eds), *Violence at the Urban Margins in the Americas*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

6. Spotting antagonistic practices in the fantasy of Romance & Machismo

Central to this chapter is the detection of antagonisms and irrationalities that are concerning the fantasy men have talked about above - related to their romantic relationship to women. This somehow stands in a contradiction to a collective ideal of manliness – meaning (I am using Carlos words here) “that mafia culture here all over Medellín, of the proprietor⁶⁸, who accumulates women.” A focus of this chapter will be put on two different dimensions of this contradiction:

The first section will observe, how boys and men are invested in the practice of the “Piropo”. By integrating some of my own personal experiences with those kinds of street-pickups, I will show how they cause frustration and lead to moments that harm both men and women, but are still deeply integrated into daily behaviour, that bears some unconscious enjoyment.

In the second section, I will highlight the conflicting nature between men’s desire to be in an honest relationship with their romantic partners and the difficulty of loyalty, as the accumulation of women seems to be a symbolization of manliness.

6.1. The Piropo

As mentioned above, the *piropo* is a common form of approaching women in public. Piropo is directly translatable as “compliment”, but in Medellín, when men used the term, they meant to talk to a woman on the street with a pickup-line. José described the act as a “legitimate” and “validated” medium between men to woo women. I believe, it is important to make a distinction between piropos that are done in open public spaces as the street and rather closed settings, as for instance at bigger gathering of friends, or at a dance night in a club. While in closed settings, the piropos are done to directly flirt with a woman by asking her for her phone number, on the streets, the piropo is more a way of simply commenting on the women who walk by them with a pickup-line. This chapter will mainly focus on the latter, thus piropos on the streets. As José explained to me, the piropo is informed by the assumption, that the seduction or approach of women is subscribed “naturally” into the men’s body and is therefore something entirely his responsibility. This assumption is rooted in practices that go way back. I for instance learnt a lot about traditional dances, in which the all recurring theme are men who try to woo the women with all means, while she stays indifferent and expects him to try harder to convince her. In this tradition we can also recognize the active participation of the women in this seduction game. Lizandro explained in his own words the logic of this responsibility of seduction:

Lizandro: So, I’ll be at any interaction on the hunt, to conquer, or to perform a piropo.
I’m always, when I go out, as if I wear glasses, I’m a man. If I don’t do it [talk to a woman], or I’m shy, that doesn’t give me status. So if you don’t have that social skill, possibly as a man in your adolescence you’re going to suffer a lot because the pressure is very high, because what you learn from childhood is that you have to take the initiative and that you have to convince her, you know that you have to flirt.

I experienced Piropos in public places in many districts of Medellín that I visited and also during any time during the day. Often, men just stood at the sidewalk, in supermarkets or on the metro, looked at me and said: “Hola Hermosa!”⁶⁹. Older men (around sixty and older) rather asked me “Hola mi niña, por donde vas?”⁷⁰, whereas younger men used terms like “He Mamacita”, “Hola linda”, “Preciosa” or “Hola Princesa”⁷¹. In most of the cases, I was not bothered by those piropos, as they were often neither discomforting nor difficult to ignore. Leaning on my own experience but also by seeing other women on the streets that received piropos, I noticed that many men did not even wait for a reaction of the woman. They just passed by, did a piropo and without turning around to see what she would say continued to walk.

In one of our interviews I asked Erwin, if he does these kinds of piropos as well.

Erwin: Ah, yeah sometimes yes.

Me: And was there ever one time, that a person reacted positively?

Erwin: Ja, many women, yes. For instance, if there is a girl on the street and I say”

⁶⁸ “tenedor” = someone how accumulates, “having things”

⁶⁹ Hello gorgeous

⁷⁰ Hello, my girl, where are you going?

⁷¹ Mamacita = term for a “hot” women, “linda” = cutie, Preciosa = Precious, Princesa = Princess

Halo eh, Bebe, Hola Mami, hola linda". She will pass by and will laugh "ehehe" (*Made his voice higher*). She liked it. But then, this will already make her think, "Ui this Muchacho liked me". So, she will go with some thoughts and if she comes back, well, I can give her my number. That is how it goes here.

Me: But did that ever happen to you, that she came back and gave you her number?

Erwin: No, that never happened.

Me: But do you think it will ever happen?

Erwin: Mm, I don't know. Maybe not. Because maybe she will think she doesn't know me you know. But also, sometimes you know woman can be very arrogant you know? Like they are better than others. So, then that is not that you know *bacano*⁷². But (*made hand-movement*) that is my opinion and I am only talking about me.

Me: Claro. So, how would you react if a girl would do a piropo to you on the streets?

Erwin: Aah I would like that. But this doesn't happen here. [...]

Me: Do you think, that there are also women who feel molested if men do those piropos?

Erwin: Yeah, like I said, sometimes maybe they will be like "eeh I don't know this Muchacho, why is he talking to me." You know, sometimes, there are some guys, who are very rude. They will be like "heee sabes que es puta"⁷³. This man is a man who doesn't respect, he is machista and rude.

I can only assume, what Erwin meant, when he called men as "rude". While many times, men just said their piropo in a friendly way, I experienced certain piropos as well that were less rhetorical and kind. Sometimes, after I did not react to the men, they shouted "bitch", "Eh bitch, you can at least talk to me" or built themselves up in an intimidating position and yelled something like "Eh" after me. The piropos also became physical sometimes and for me personally transformed from some empty catchphrases into real street harassment. It happened to me two times that I walked home in the evening already close to my home in Laureles⁷⁴, while it started to get dark, when somebody grabbed my arm and pulled me to the sidewalk. The first time, I was very scared and did not respond anything. He asked me "He Hermosa, what's up?", and let me alone after I tore my arm free. The second time a man grabbed my arm on the street, I yelled at him that he shouldn't touch me. I pulled my arm away from him and took some fast steps away. He made a declining hand gesture and yelled "Oh mujer, relajate"⁷⁵ and then spat on the ground towards my direction. After I was already almost around the corner of the street, I still heard him screaming "Putal!" after me and I walked faster to get home, while being scared that he would know where I live. After this moment, I came home and met Julio and Emmanuel standing in the kitchen. Upset I told them what happened outside, and Emmanuel replied:

Emmanuel: Well, nobody likes to be rejected like that.

Marleen: What?

Emmanuel: Yeah, you yelled at him, he probably just wanted to be nice.

Julio: Noo, no, he cannot touch her!

Marleen: But what kind of women would react to such a piropo in a positive way?

Emmanuel: Well some women appreciate it! [*long pause*]

Julio: No but Marleen, if you don't want people to touch you, you have every right to say no.

Emmanuel: Look, you are foreign, you are beautiful, people are just curious to see who you are, and they want to tell you that you are beautiful. Don't take it as something negative.

Marleen: But he yelled puta after me.

Emmanuel: But you also know how to put in scene your *petit figura*, right?

Marleen: I know how to put in scene my *petit figura*? (*I made a gesture down my clothes that were to my mind not very provocative, even though later I realised that I wouldn't have mattered what type of clothes I would have worn to justify Emmanuel's comment*)

⁷² Slang for great

⁷³ Eehh you know she is a bitch

⁷⁴ A Neighbourhood in Comuna 11

⁷⁵ Oh, relax woman!

- Emmanuel: Yeah, you know, women just also enjoy it if someone is making you a compliment. *(long pause)* Look, there is a very fine line that can be passed really easily between being cariñoso⁷⁶ and inappropriate. You know therefore we also now have a law, and you can go to prison for three years.
- Marleen: For what?
- Emmanuel: For sexual assault.
- Marleen: Ahh I see. And what is assault for you?
- Emmanuel: If somebody rapes you for instance. Or is being physically violent.

This makes visible how violence in everyday-life situations is naturalized. Such toxic behaviour did not have to do much with trying to “pick up a woman” on the street, but rather as a way to demonstrate power. Many of the people that I talked to about piropos downgraded the violence that it inherits, arguing that “those are only words, that want to charm you” (Emmanuel’s choice of words). Often men told me that my experiences were so striking for me because they present a clash of cultures. A few hours later that evening (above), during dinner, Emmanuel referred to our earlier conversation, apologizing if he had not taken me seriously enough. He explained to me then, that people are simply more interested in me due to my foreign appearance and that Colombian women did not mind these Piropos, but rather enjoyed them, which however should not be an excuse to touch people on the streets, which he emphasized twice.⁷⁷ His argumentation is however not a reflection of what much research, and my own talks with women in Medellín have shown. Following José, Lizandro, Ana and several surveys conducted by human rights associations (for example: SSH 2014: 47⁷⁸), many women in Colombia experience these kinds of practice on a daily basis and feel violated in their personal space and security.

- José: It happens a lot that women are scared and then they stop passing by places where men have done bad piropos. I know many cases when they [women] get off the bus and then they pass through here *(made hand gesture)*, and then here they will receive a piropo, so then what they do is they go like this *(made curve with his hand)* to go on the other side of the street so that she doesn't have to pass by this man.

~

- Lizandro: So here if I see a woman on the street then the men say their comments and sometimes they say “no but if I don't tell them vulgar things that's no violence because that doesn't make anybody feel bad” but what the women answer if you ask them is mostly “I would prefer that they don't tell me anything, because I don't know them, I don't know who he is, and it also generates a feeling of insecurity.

Often, I also sensed some hurt feeling when men talked about the negative reactions of women towards their comments. Similar to Emmanuel's and Erwin's position (“Nobody likes to be rejected like that!”; “Sometimes women can be arrogant”), I read the following comment of a boy in one of the Encuentros. The task was to write about a stereotype that they wanted to change in Medellín (as already mentioned above):

- “The stereotype that I want to end is that humanity reacts towards men as if they are all impulsive persons. What I want to change is that beautiful (linda) persons on the street react towards us as if we would be rude (grosero)”.

⁷⁶ Kind, loving

⁷⁷ At this point I would like to mention, that I do not want to argue that there are no women at all who would appreciate these piropos. Even though the following would need more intensive research on the piropo from the perspective of women in Medellín, I can imagine that women can also feel flattered about a nice compliment that is said in a certain way on the street, without any further consequences. As I have experienced it myself, I often did not mind certain comments. In some cases, especially when older men would tell me “Hola mi niña” I smiled at them and there was nothing “threatening” about it. The narcissism nature of the piropo could therefore be encounterable on both the men's and the women's side. As Emmanuel refers to it above, there can be thus a fine line to cross.

⁷⁸ SSH = Stop Street Harassment commission

Relating to this, José shared with me some insights about an Encuentro that he organized with a group of boys in a college. He asked the boys, who were all between the age of 16 and 20 years, whom of them already did a piropo to a girl on the street one day. Most of the boys raised their hands and said yes.

José: So, I asked them: “So for those who have raised their hands, for how many of you did this piropo work?” And nobody said yes. So, why do we do it? If we know that there is eh, eh that the success that they have is zero. Why do we keep on doing it? So, the boys answered: “So eh it’s because *hay que* (one has to) demonstrate to the girls that we know that they are beautiful, that eh eh that well, like that’s why we tell them that they are good right?”

Lizandro also addressed the topic of the piropo in several of his Encuentros in schools:

Lizandro: I think that's a type of galán⁷⁹, it's a certain galán that is part of that model of man, that hegemonic model that has to be ready, you know. Because, well, in many cases I ask them: "And you liked that girl?" "I didn't like her but I had to say things to see if she would give me the cell phone, or if I would maybe achieve something with her, a meeting, you know, those kinds of things".

Here we see, that the piropo is not only about the perspective on approaching a woman, but, as mentioned above, has to do with the attribution of masculinity.

José: So, this is a form of violence, as well for instance for the cases of the other men, because we also don't do anything when a man is violating a girl in this form. Because we, we then become quiet and just pass by, and we are also laughing, so really this is what we do.

Looking at Piropos and the reaction of peers thus further informs the logic of this inherently unsuccessful practice. Particularly with younger men (around 20 years old) I observed how Piropos were “performed” in groups, which I experienced as particularly discomfoting. Andrea⁸⁰, a Colombian friend of mine told me:

It is like, I often feel so ashamed, as if I did something wrong. Even though men sometimes say nice things. But when they are in a group, then they get so weird, you know, they laugh like they were 12 years old, nudging each other, giggling ... But then I don't say anything because I think they are 4, and I am alone you know.

The following talks with José and Carlos give insights to understand better the logic of being within a group to do a piropo:

In separate interviews:

José: Many times, those piropos are also a type of validation. But not only in groups, because men do it as well when they are not in a group. But it is a topic of .. eh what is this expression ... this is a topic to demonstrate the manliness in front of las guapas⁸¹, that is a feature of this hegemonic masculinity, to pick the prey.

Marleen: Pick the prey?

José: Ja, like looking for this topic of the predator you know?

Marleen: Ah yes, I understand.

José: So it is also this topic of demonstrating superiority towards the women, and to show of his eh his security. It's to demonstrate that I am sure. I am so sure that I can tell any girl that I like her etc. and show that I am sure of myself. To demonstrate that I am beautiful or that I am bien parecido⁸², strong eeh I can demonstrate, and I can be liked by any women.

~

⁷⁹ in this context the Spanish term galán is not quite clear, it however could be interpreted as *lover, admirer, beau*

⁸⁰ Andrea and I met during a Trip that I did in the first week of my stay.

⁸¹ the pretty ones

⁸² nice to look at

Carlos: When they go out on the street, it's like they've grown up to be men. Right, to prove it to the other men. [...] So we have to ask ourselves, what is my perspective? What I think is, the man who does it is because he feels like a hunter and because women are potential prey. So that's what I feel is an act where the woman is in a place as I say of inferiority and is like a trophy, like an object and that's why she is part of the culture eh like the narco-aesthetic, like that mafia culture here all over Medellín, of the proprietor⁸³, who accumulates women.

6.1.1. Theoretical notes on the piropo

In this section, I have presented the piropo as a naturalized act that reproduces itself as a cultural practice of conquering women. While many men call these acts *galantías* and as a strategy to talk to a woman and letting her know that they are interested, they are however also a medium to create and reproduce existing gendered power-structures in the public space between men and women. As such they expose women to (indirect) violence and the feeling of insecurity daily. While one motive of the piropo is thus enrooted in the fantasy of romance, another one is the proof of one's own masculinity. Due to pressure of groups, men aim to convince others and themselves that they are masculine enough. Being able to talk to a woman becomes a source of self-validation and ultimately symbolizes the illusion of superiority of men. A crucial component is, that this happens in public spaces. It seems, that the presence of other men or passengers is not a constraint for such piropos, but rather a demonstration of men's right to use public space the way they want to.

What is contradictory however, is that those piropos usually do not lead to any success. Despite knowing about the high chances of failure of this practice, men however keep on doing them. Ironically, some men do not even wait for the response of the women, because they already expect its failure. Whereas some men claim not to care about this, the rejection however seems to be hurtful and betraying for others, which sometimes results in (passive) aggressive and (verbally) violent behaviour. It is somehow a feeling of humiliation to be rejected. It contradicts with the fantasy of real manliness. A man who cannot seduce a woman and conquer her is not a real man. José puts this emasculating process into words, explaining that in extreme cases, this can become a motif for a femicide:

José: So, this woman who is beautiful, who is my objective, becomes an object of desire that everybody sees. If I lose this, it is like losing this trophy, right, because it is this, losing a trophy that I could have had. And if I lose this trophy, that means for me that I have failed. Failed as a man. Lets for example take some cases, in which men have murdered their girls, because they have ended the relationship. Because, who is the one, who can end the relationship, it is the man, not the woman. Because the man cannot fail in front of a woman. You know, nobody rejects me. So, in this case, me as a man, I am this superior figure, how can I permit that a woman rejects me?

It thus remains questionable, why men keep on investing into the practice of the Piropo that is somehow quite narcissistic but is executed often so banal that they are neither expected to end in success, nor can serve as masculinizing factors. Particularly ironically is that sometimes, men do not even want to talk to women who they don't find especially attractive but do it anyway and sometimes feel hurt afterwards. If the end-aim of the piropo thus is not achievable, why repeating this self-destructive practice?

Lacan and Žižek can give an answer to this question by focusing on the very repetition of the act. The piropo is a sort of ritual that is performed over and over again, alone, but also with other men. It is somehow integrating the male community through the performative act of this collective ritual - sometimes pushing each other, smiling or celebrating each other for doing it. As the sometimes even passive-aggressive manner of doing the piropo is designed to miss its end-goal, the participation in this ritual therefore creates a satisfaction that does not aim the achievement of its ultimate goal. Lacan calls this "gain-of-pleasure" or *Lustgewinn*⁸⁴, which operates through repetition:

⁸³ "tenedor" = someone how accumulates "having things"

⁸⁴ ultimately meaning Jouisance, Lacan uses many terms for describing jouissance as "Surplus-Enjoyment", "Libidinal drive", *Lustgewinn*

“One misses the goal and one repeats the movement, trying again and again, so that the true aim is no longer the intended goal but the repetitive movement itself of attempting to reach it. One can also put it in terms of form and content where “form” stands for the form, the mode of approaching the desired content: while the desired content (object) promises to provide pleasure, a surplus enjoyment (jouissance) is gained by the very form (procedure) of pursuing the goal.”(Žižek 2017 a: 152).

This ritual changes the register from desire to drive. The desire itself is pure - meaning the objective to meet beautiful women who enter into the men’s psychic economy as a fantastic object of desire. In contrast to that, drive (jouissance as such) always involves a kind of (unconscious) satisfaction, expressing itself in repulsive rituals and repetitive movements that obtain its satisfaction at any price (Žižek 1996). The piropo itself therefore generates gratification not only despite of its failure, but indeed because of it - independently of the men’s well-being, them feeling hurt or pressured by their peers. The source of failure is thus experienced as a source of excessive pleasure which creates an obstacle to desire at the same time. The fantasy that by seducing a beautiful woman, one’s masculinity is proven, and one has approached the possibility of finding love, gets magnified/complemented here by another pleasure, that goes beyond the principles of subjectivation and symbolization. This disruptive practice, that is causing the reproduction of “toxic”-behaviour – meaning the daily intimidation of women and pressuring each other, nourishes from this unconscious drive that seeks satisfaction, and as Žižek (1996) puts it “always finds its way”.

Leaning on what has been discussed in chapter 5 about the ideal women, I would like to finalize this section with a thought to give another explanatory reflection on the endurance of the irrational piropo. If we would assume that a woman would indeed react to a piropo proactively and would give a man her phone number or something similar, how would the man interpret such a reaction, and what would this mean for his idea of romance? Because as we have seen in the chapter before, the fantasy of femininity is sustained by the idea of purity of the woman. Looking at the tradition of men and women in dances, in which the woman requires that the man puts more effort in his seduction to be worthy to be accepted by her, indicate, that a woman who would indeed appreciate such a banal piropo is too easy to have – or, as my observations about Erwin’s position towards Sheyla have shows, - somehow cheap. A real pure woman would not feel flattered by a pickup line like this. The piropo as an active strategy of failing the successful encounter with the woman on the street is thus guaranteeing the sustainment of the fantasy of the woman’s purity.

6.2. The irrationality of loyalty

“You know, the process has started, this dream to fall in love, it can cause positive feelings. But in everyday life it is still very difficult. If a boy would say “This weekend I don't want to go out with my friends to the bar but I want to spend it with my girlfriend”, then the friends will already mock that guy, asking him if his girlfriend has taken control over him.” (Lizandro in an interview)

This section departs from the fantasy that has been mentioned in chapter 5, which emphasises men’s desire to be in a “true” relationship with their romantic partners, that stands in a conflicting manner to the assumption, that manliness is proven by the conquest of women.

José explained this assumption as followed:

Marleen: Then where does the idea come from that it's fine if men can be with more women?
 José: There are several things, right, that explain this topic. First, sex, the topic of property because I, I can have property and I can accumulate this property. But they, [the women] don't have possessions and cannot accumulate it. [...] But all this is part of this mentality that men appreciate you if you can have more women. The more women I have, the more men I am.

In the following I will highlight, how the collision of these two fantasies leads to irrational and contradicting practices that involve disloyalty and peer-pressure. This serves as a demonstration of the fragility and incompleteness of every symbolization of a masculine identity. As an introduction, I will

refer to an exercise that I have mentioned already before. This exercise was conducted in one of the Encuentros in a group of boys that Ana conducted. They had to write down a stereotype that they were affected by and would therefore wish for a change:

- “I would like that the stereotype in certain things did not exist but in the sense that, for example that all we are perros⁸⁵, unfaithful. I would like that first the people gave themselves the task to know more the men and to discover that not all the men [we] are this way [...]”.
- “I would like to end the stereotype that [they] have of us men, being unfaithful and that we mistreat and don't appreciate women.”
- “[I want to end the stereotype] that all men are equal, i.e. bad, unfaithful, all men are aggressive and like to fight”

In my interviews and observations I tried to find substance to this stereotype about infidelity, which seemed to bother many young men.

In separate interviews:

Erwin: Eh men here are all different, right. There are good ones and bad ones, right. Me, I don't eh like eh, with women I don't like to put on los cachos⁸⁶.

Marleen: What does los *cachos* mean?

Erwin: Cacho is if I for example am with you and then afterwards in the night, I am with another one. That is to say, that for me the men, like, if I for example, sorry for using this example, if I am your partner, you are in the house and I am outside working, I am helping you with things. Being respectful right, like a man. Salir adelante as a couple. There are some who do not do that. There are some that do bad things⁸⁷. O sea⁸⁸, that they don't respect the women and go out with others, you know. That is not for me. Because you know I have feelings, you know what are feelings?

Marleen: Yes.

Erwin: I have feelings as a man for the woman.

Marleen: But there are many people here who are not faithful?

Erwin: Yes, a majority of the men here are very perritos (*Laughed*), they are very rude. Because they don't respect. And often, friends will judge you if you are only with your girl you know. They will be like “Eh, is it the woman who hits you at home or what?”.

Erwin points out here the attribution of peer-pressure within this faithfulness-discourse of men. The following interviews will emphasise this account:

Juan David: If I would be in the nightclub now with my friends, or well maybe acquaintance and then there comes a girl in the club and I could have a eeh pues a chance with her, like to go home with her, they [the friends] will expect me to take that chance, also if I have a girlfriend. I don't like that.

~

Julio: Imagine now there would be a girl in a club, and she would dance with me and then try something with me. Like for example try to go out with me or ask me if I wanted to buy her a drink and go outside for a bit, you know eh, para darse picos (*to kiss*)⁸⁹, and I would say no, I don't want to, because I have a girlfriend, the girl will tell everyone that I am maluco⁹⁰, you know? And my friends will say that too. It is really eh pues bobo.

Marleen: And did you ever cheat?

Julio: Pues... what a shame to say that... (*Pause*)

Marleen: No no, I am not to judge at all Julio.

⁸⁵ Perros = dogs, which is often used to refer to a man who is behaving badly

⁸⁶ poner los cachos = in a literal sense: “to put on horns”

⁸⁷ “Hacer maldados” = literally *to make curses*, means: bad things

⁸⁸ that is to say (oftenly used filling-word)

⁸⁹ Expression for first hook-ups between people

⁹⁰ Slang for “Gay”

Julio: Pues, eh si, si si. I am not justifying anything, but it is hard.

~

Lizandro: You know, the process has been started, this dream to fall in love, it can cause positive feelings. But in everyday life it is still very difficult. If a boy would say “This weekend I don't want to go out with my friends to the bar but I want to spend it with my girlfriend”, then the friends will already mock that guy, asking him if his girlfriend has taken control over him.

~

This pressure is not only noticeable for the younger generations, also older men like Macha reported about it, who has been married for many years:

Macha: Men cannot say no, if there is a woman that wants something from you. She will say that you are weird for not wanting. “You are a man, you have to take your chance” (*made his voice deeper*). But I don't always want to say yes to every woman. I have a right to say no.

A conversation with Enrique showed, how strong this indirect “code of conduct” can even be informing individual behaviour despite one's own consciousness about its “destructivity”.

Marleen: You have told me, that you are Machista in a way.⁹¹

Enrique: Ah, I don't know if this is bad now or not.

Marleen: No, this is not for judging anything.

Enrique: Ah good. That I don't accept it if the woman has more men. So, just me. For example, if my girlfriend sleeps with another one, then already (*made gesture with his hand to symbolize "Stop"*). You know eehh [...] I will confess everything to you here (*laughed*).

Marleen: But this is for both parts, like that for you, you also cannot have more women, or is that only for the woman?

Enrique: That is only for the woman. Me, yes, I had, have until today two relationships at the same time.

Marleen: Ah but the woman cannot?

Enrique: No, the woman cannot. (*Laughed*) Egoistic, right?

Marleen: And where do you think that eh...

Enrique: Because of what I told you, because I have Machismo-parts, you know, macho-parts. [...] But in this moment of my life, I want to be with a single person. Because I am tied. And besides that I have hurt women, I gave them pain. Because they had many expectations in me and when they learnt that there were others, they left. So, that's why it doesn't seem fair for her, fair for her life, fair for life and above all also for myself, so no, it doesn't seem fair.

When I asked him, what he didn't like about being a man, his answer came quickly:

Enrique: What I don't like about being a man is this Machismo. That what the society has been guilty of [...] This Machismo is part of what I just told you, that I don't accept that my woman sleeps with another man. [...] I don't know how that is in Europe, but I think, if a woman in a society sleeps with other men while being in a relationship, its because of the heart. Its not for the sex, but only because she loves him, that's what I have learnt in my life as man.

~

In a talk with José:

Marleen: So, where does this idea come from that men can cheat, but women can't?

José: This happens a lot with the militaries, who don't accept that the woman or the wife is unfaithful with him and takes the decision to go. Because if the wife is unfaithful, what does that mean for this military man? That another man is more man than him.

These interviews thus show a double standard. It seems as women need to stay faithful, while men give themselves the permission to be disloyal as long as it happens in a certain context without doing too

⁹¹ Leaning on a conversation that we had on the way from the Metro-Station to the University

much harm. We encounter a contradiction between the moral or ethical stands on values like loyalty and the awareness of the destructiveness of their behaviour, and simultaneously the pressure that is exercised to however break those stands. The following observation on a night out gives an insight on why the resistance towards this peer-pressure is not very powerful:

It was a Friday night, Erwin had asked me after our interview, if I wanted to join him and some friends into a club in his Comuna. After having a drink in a bar, we went around 11p.m. to a small nightclub in a cellar, quite close to the Metro-Station San Javier, where we met three other friends of Erwin (Juan, Camilo and Santiago). All three of them live in Erwin's close neighbourhood around the electronic stairs. Santiago is the oldest of them with 24 years, Camilo and Juan are Erwin's age (21). The atmosphere in the club was relaxed, there were many people and it was very hot. Erwin told me, that he had met Camilo and Santiago, because Juan was going out with his house-neighbour. In the club, Santiago told me that it was a good spot to meet people on the dance floor, because "people are just chilling here and get loose". That people were getting "loose" was surely due to the Reggaeton, Salsa and Colombian popular music, that was played in a very high volume, but certainly also due to the many drugs that were circling around the club. Both men and women were consuming cheap products of cocaine (at least that is what Santiago explained to me), and drinking *Aguardiente Antioqueño*, a Colombian liquor. After a while of dancing, a conversation repeated itself, that I already had in other nightclubs in Laureles before. Due to my bad Salsa-dancing skills, Camilo suggested me to teach me some steps. While we danced a bit, he started to pull me closer to him and his hand went from my hips more closely to my butt. I politely pulled myself away from him.

Camilo: Relax Hermosa, we're just dancing.

Marleen: You know, I think I will go sit down for a bit.

Camilo: Why? You are not interested in Colombian men?

Marleen: That's not it, I just don't want to.

Camilo: Do you have a boyfriend or what?

Marleen: Yes, that too.

Camilo: Oh, I respect that then. Well he is a lucky bastard.

After a while, he came back and handed a beer over me:

Camilo: You know, is he eh pues your boyfriend here? Like eh in Colombia?

Marleen: No, he is in Spain.

Camilo: Ah you are Spanish too?

Marleen: No no, like I said, I am German.

Camilo: Aaah yeah. Well, but if he is not here, you can still dance with me.

Marleen: Sorry but I don't eh eh ... I don't know what is the Spanish word for it, but like I don't have anything going on with other men.

Camilo: Aah no noo, chicas⁹² don't do that of course.

Marleen: I don't know about chicas, but I don't.

Camilo: Yeah I respect that, you and your Muchacho in Spain. I just think, that he is not here, he wouldn't know.

I left Camilo to talk to Erwin, as I was starting to feel uncomfortable with the situation. After some while I went to the bathroom and when I came back, Erwin was standing with Juan and Santiago at the bar, talking about something and giggling.

Marleen: What is up?

Santiago pointed at a girl, who was standing on the other side of the room.

Santiago: We think she likes Juan.

The girl stood in a group of two other girls and they were laughing and dancing in a circle. The boys started to analyse her, that they really liked how she dressed and encouraged Juan to go over and talk to her. He seemed insecure about it, but they were all laughing and giving each other little punches on the shoulder, clapping their hands together and laughing and giggling. Erwin told him, that he should go for it, and explained, that the girl had already looked over several times. The three men became quite excited. Santiago took out a bill of 10.000 pesos, made a handclap with Juan and by that gave him the money into his hand, a move, that Erwin explained me later, was a gesture between friends to help each other out with money, but in a way that doesn't draw too much attention. "Go buy her some nice

⁹² Chicas = girls

Aguardiente Juan”. When Juan left the group to approach the girl, Erwin and Santiago were smiling - seemingly satisfied with their work. They clapped each other on the shoulders and made some handshakes. I did not observe the situation further, because I had ordered an UBER to go home, so that it wouldn't be too late to arrive at home. However, the week after, I met Erwin again, because I booked a tour with him through the Graffiti-Tour. On our way I then asked him, how things ended with Juan and the girl in the club.

Erwin: Ah, eeh with the girl, eeh well no nothing. She didn't want to, one has to respect that.

Marleen: Yeah, of course.

Erwin: But it was funny no?

Marleen: Yes, the night was interesting.

After a while, I asked him:

Marleen: But isn't Juan together with that neighbour of yours?

Erwin: With María? Ja ja.

Marleen: But then why did he talk to this girl in the club?

Erwin: Aaah es un pequeño perrito (laughs)⁹³.

Marleen: But you and Santiago you also wanted him to talk to her, no?

Erwin: Yeah but see that was all just for fun (*para divertirse*). When you are in the club at the party you know.

Marleen: Okay. I was just confused, because I thought you didn't like it if men are perritos like that.

Erwin: That's right. But when you are at the fiesta, sometimes you do what you want.

Marleen: You as well?

Erwin: Eeeh I don't understand.

Marleen: I mean if you are on a fiesta, if you have a girlfriend, so you also do what you want?

Erwin: No no, that's what I eh I already said, I don't like that. Just, Marly, in a fiesta like that, don't take it as something bad. Sometimes, you just want to enjoy life. And Juan is a good Muchacho. I don't want to be the person who is going to judge my friends. Like I told you that eh, you have to respect the other and his decisions.

6.2.1. Theoretical Considerations on the irrationality of loyalty

I chose these interviews and observations, because they reinforce how masculinity is symbolically defined with the ability of relating oneself to women that however collides with the fantasy of true love. Men must prove that they want and can conquer any women - independently from them being in love with their girlfriends. The outcome of this are practices of peer-pressure - pushing each other into approaching women and actively discrediting those who don't. Problematic is to see, how it clashes together with ethical ideals, such as loyalty and love in their relationship, but also with the unwillingness to always having to say yes to every woman. Often, as Juan David told me, “they [friends] will tell you that you should go to a party with them. And if you say you don't want to because you want to stay with your love, they will tell you, that your girl forbids it to you and they will laugh at you”. Enrique's attitude on dating several women at the same time shows exemplary, how he feels internally conflicted about it - knowing that he is hurting both the women and himself, but however does not give up this behaviour. Erwin dislikes it when men are “perritos” but is pushing his friend into cheating on his girlfriend. These are examples of fetishistic disavowals at the finest. Men acknowledge the wrongness about their participation in this system of disloyalty, but pretend as if they have not seen it, following the logic of “I know very well I am hurting myself and the other, but I still do it”.

My evening in the club is a good example to understand, where peer pressure distracts its inherent power, that makes young men keep on investing into those acts of conquering women on parties despite having a partner. To start, it is important to refer back to what has been discussed in chapter 5; When women enter into men's psychic libidinal economy as fantastic objects of desire, the ideal woman is unconditionally loyal to her boyfriend. That women are always loyal is of course just an illusion, as

⁹³ “he is a little doggy”

women betray their boyfriends (maybe) as much as vice versa⁹⁴. Men however pretend not to see that it is just an illusion and create excuses and exceptions to keep this illusion alive. This justification can be as simple as arguing, that if nobody sees it, it does not exist. Or, in the case that a man indeed knows about the betrayal of the women, it is explained with the purest of all reasons; Love. While women thus stay in this position of providing honesty and loyalty, it is easy to ironically refer to men as “perritos”, as Erwin does it when talking about Juan. His indirect joke provides a medium to hide that his friend has violated his value system. This way of joking makes it seem as if cheating is an unpleasant but also entertaining nature of men that can excuse them from moral obligations. As such, Erwin maintains a certain distance towards the symbolic law, in this sense the importance of loyalty, by not fully identifying with it. On the other side he undermines the system effectively by his unreserved identification with it (Žižek 1995 b). Žižek (1998 a) refers to this behaviour as an inherent transgression. For him, transgression - imagined or real forms of enjoyment which seem to contradict with prevailing ideas or laws that control social or moral behaviour, - are built into all societies. It is a way to agree that everybody can “dance off the rack” - breaking the law, and enjoy activities that are not acknowledged in public life, such as indulging in alcohol or drugs, visiting prostitutes etc. (Kul-Want & Piero 2011: 74). As such, in Žižek's words, the inherent transgression describes “the notion that the very emergence of a certain 'value' which serves as the point of ideological identification relies on its transgression, on some mode of taking a distance towards it - the gap is original and constitutive, it is inherent to the symbolic order as such.” (Žižek 1998 a: 3). As such he argues that every ideology is characterized by taking a distance to the Law and by that demonstrating that it does not have to be taken too literally. Men identify with values as loyalty in a relationship, but the value seems to function “at a distance”. It is not so much important that this value is present in persona, it is enough to believe that there is an ultimate guarantor of it. In other words, they presuppose loyalties existence because they assume that their girlfriends or someone else clings to it (Žižek 1998 a: 4).

What makes this inherent transgression so strong, is the factor of enjoyment that lies in its core. According to Žižek (1995 a: 55 pp):

“The deepest identification that holds a community together is not so much an identification with the Law that regulates its “normal” everyday rhythms, but rather identification with the specific forms of transgression of the Law, of its suspension (in psychoanalytic terms, with the specific form of enjoyment).”

While the boys are in the club, they are excited about their friend being unfaithful to his girlfriend. There seems to be an enjoyment of calling out men ironically as “*perritos*”, which generates a feeling of unity and makes them enjoy the scenery in the nightclub. There is a certain social enjoyment in breaking the rules together as a group of men. In the same context we can also recognize the Lacanian twist to the inherent transgression, which concerns the danger of taking the position of authority, by embodying the Law (Kingsbury 2016: 8). When I asked Erwin afterwards, why he would be participating in such a practice, he says he does not want to judge his friends. As such, he wants to avoid the risk of being called out to be too prude, by referring to the wrongness of this rule-breaking. This connects to the subject's need to stigmatise the Other as an ethnic “fundamentalist”, in order to negotiate some sort of distance towards it. Thus, despite Erwin's judgement on cheating, he also does not want to “disappoint the ordinary people” (Žižek 1998 a: 4).

To conclude, the men I interviewed seek for a complementary relationship with an ideal woman, and therefore feel pressured and even discomfort of their peers, who talk them into cheating on their girlfriends. Contradictory to that, they however keep on cheating and pushing each other to be dishonest with their girlfriends, because their identification with honesty and respect for women relies on how they together enjoy its inherent transgression. It shows the perfectly functioning male subject of this ideological fantasy: the Identification with the man as an honourable figure, who respects and is respected - supported by ironic distrust in practical jokes as Erwin calling his friends out to be “perritos”. It goes in line with the acknowledgement, that this is “Just for fun”, - all men are human and have their moments of weakness and are deep-down warm-hearted men. This ultimately makes them part of a machinery that justifies it for men to have more women, which is grounded in their libidinal attachment to the inherent transgression.

94 Concrete data on this is however difficult to assess.

7. Women's betrayal

In this chapter, I will further lay out the ambiguity of men's relationship to women in Medellín, which also stands in a conflicting position to the fantasy of the ideal woman that compliments the masculine identity. Leaning on observations and analysis of how women appear in artistic works, there is a tendency to mistrust women, as they could always result to be a prostitute or ultimately breaking the men's heart. This finally also leads to the assumption that the identity of the "strong & providing man" is endangered by women who do not accept to be subordinated by this man. The result are attitudes of blaming and scapegoating and even misogyny of women who are called feminists.

7.1. The danger of women

In the third month of my stay, Ana asked me, if I wanted to help her at an event that was organized by the Alcaldía. It was a street event, also called a "*red carpet*" event, in which many tents and attractions were put up for both adults and children who live in this neighbourhood. All attractions had a particular theme that was focused on mental health, family-cohesion, solidarity between neighbours etc. There were food and drinks, games, a stage with music and theatre, and informative stands, in which the participants could interact with each other in small puzzles or competitions. Ana was asked by the Alcaldía to create a space, in which participants could talk about hegemonic masculinities – as part of the program "Hombres como vos". I helped her to install all the materials. Ana put up a chair, on which she wrote in big letters "Solo hombres" (Only men). We taped a variety of black-and-white pictures on the table, which portrayed many different men with different emotions and in a multitude of situations, such as a man who dances, a man who cleans or cooks or a man who cries. After one or more men sat down at our stand, she introduced the program "Hombres como vos" to the participants. Then she continued with activities that I already knew from her Encuentros in the schools – depending on the age of the participants.

At one point, there was a young man, who sat down with his little son, and introduced him with the words "And this is Alejandro, a very special man". The boy and the father were so adorable together, Alejandro throwing a balloon down the table and his father picking it up even after the 7th time, so that I constantly had to smile at the two.⁹⁵ After Ana explained him what the program "Hombres como vos" was about, she talked to him about the different roles and stereotypes that men have grown up with and showed him the pictures on the table. He pointed at a picture in which a man cleans the kitchen and said:

Him: Yeah, since I live here in this neighbourhood with my brothers, we do all of this, you know, cleaning and cooking, everything.

Ana: Do you think that there are some works that are only for men or women?

Him: (*nodded heavily*) Yes cierto, of course.

Ana: So, what is a job that is only for men?

He looked around for some while.

Him: This is a bit complicated.

Ana: And a job that is only for women?

Him: Yes. I think that only women can work as a prostitute. Like... selling their bodies.

Ana: Do you really believe that men cannot do that? That there are no male prostitutes?

He smiled and laughed and then said: "Yes well maybe but I don't know".

Closely after he and Alejandro left, a man of about 36 years sat down at our stand, followed by a boy of 15 years who was accompanied by his girlfriend. Ana suggested to play the STOP- game. The version that she brought to the event was a modified version, in which the participants had to find words for women and men, that had to fit into 7 given categories, as for instance profession, colour

⁹⁵ It made me realize how I was captured in a very biased fantasy of my own. I had entered in a logic in which I was surprised to see that there was a father playing with his son, as if it was an extraordinary thing to see - away with my aim to be unbiased in my thesis.

and gender-role. After playing one round with the letter P, Ana asked the adolescent and the man to compare their results. The younger boy seemed embarrassed and insecurely looking at his girlfriend while reading out his words. “For the section profession I wrote president for man, and prostitute for woman.” He and his girlfriend laughed.

The term prostitute appeared many times, when we played the STOP-game. In a school-class in an Encuentro, in a group of boys about the age of 16, the most dominant words for the “woman”-column for letter P were Prostitute, Puta (Bitch) and Perra⁹⁶. In the men’s column, most often used words were Papa, Precioso (precious) and Padrecito⁹⁷. For other letters, dominant terms for the woman’s column were “Manipulator”, “Cheater” or “sloth”. That day when we played the game, a boy asked, what this exercise was good for. Ana explained, that it is a strategy to see “what kind of words spontaneously pop into our heads, when thinking about gender”. After the game was done, Ana asked the boys to read out loud their results. After some shared their words, Ana asked:

Ana: What differences can you recognize? What is the idea to be a man? Do you think that they comply with the adjectives that you wrote down?

One boy looked upset about Ana’s question. He raised his hand:

Boy: I thought we were just playing a game here?

Ana: Yes but playing can also allow us to express what we could maybe not in other ways.

Boy: Si, but if we are playing right now and you say it’s just a game, I don’t feel like I have to justify why I wrote down the words I wrote down.

Ana: Nobody has to justify themselves. It is just an exercise that wants to evoke some reflections.

By the end of the lesson, all boys had to hand in their working sheets. Due to the boys strong reaction I payed specific attention to his paper, when revising them afterwards. He wrote:

Letter	Hombre (Man)	Mujer (Woman)
T	Tierno (loving)	Tramposa (Cheater)
P	Potencia (Poteny / power)	Prostituta, Pecadora (Prostitute,Sinner)
M	Mujeriosos (Womanizer)	Manipuladora (Manipulator)

His responses were not particularly different to the rest of the other boys, he however felt the need to emphasise, that these answers did not reflect his real opinion. In the following interview with Erwin the theme of prostitutes recurred:

Marleen: Do you think that there are advantages here in Medellín to be a man, or also advantages for women?

Erwin: Yes yes, for example, for them⁹⁸, if they don't have plata, it is more easy for them, because eh because for example sometimes they sell.. eh you know like their bodies. Like eeh prostitutes. You know, this is easy money, that they sell their bodies to men.

Marleen: Ah okay so this is easier for women.

Erwin: Yes. And for men it is selling drugs.

Marleen: Women do not sell drugs?

Erwin: Aah well yeah sometimes, but they will hide them for instance in their braw, like between their breasts.

Later in that interview Erwin and I talked about the possibility, that a woman could work while her husband stays at home:

Erwin: Look, I know some people where the women would do some small business and the man would support her in that but I don't like that so much.

Marleen: And why not?

⁹⁶ refers to a women that sleeps around a lot

⁹⁷ Like daddy

⁹⁸ Ellas = women

Erwin: Because look, it is also dangerous here for women. You will never know, maybe some Muchachos will be in contact with her and then she will be working in a dangerous place, and maybe eh sell her body.

Within these observations resonates a certain suspicion that any woman could ultimately work as a prostitute. Ana once resumed this difficulty quite adequately:

Ana: It must be quite hard for men to believe that all women could be prostitutes, you know, if you are in love with a woman, and you always have in your mind that she might also just sleep with anybody else or could any time be selling her body. It must be hard for a boy, to find trust then.

This suspicion creates a certain fragility for relationships, as we have seen in Erwin's interview. Departing from that, I observed an anxiety that resides in relationships, which is often translated into a romantic longing in poems and songs. Remembering the poems that we have analysed in my second meeting of *Hombres Amigos* (see chapter 4), there is a recurring theme, that portrays men who beg their women not to leave them. ("It's a miracle to know that with me there's an angel whom I love, who won't abandon me") There is a current reminder, that any women could always leave the man, and leave him with a broken heart. One evening I went to a night in a dance-bar with my flatmates in Laureles and a song of the Mexican pop and ranchero-singer Alejandro Fernandez was played. Many people shouted out loudly when they heard the song and jumped up. Many seemed to know the lyrics from the whole song. In the refrain, many were shouting "MATALAS" (Kill them) (see below), and people held each other's shoulders and moving their bodies together from left to right. Men held their bears to their chests, as if they were singing an anthem, cheering to each other, forming their faces as if they were Alejandro Fernandez themselves.

Amigo qué te pasa estás llorando
Seguro es por desdenes de mujeres
No hay golpe más mortal para los hombres
Que el llanto y el desprecio de esos *seres*
Amigo voy a darte un buen consejo
Si quieres disfrutar de sus placeres
Consigue una pistola si es que quieres
O compartes una daga si prefieres
Y vuélvete asesino de mujeres
Mátalas
Con una sobredosis de ternura
Asfíxialas con besos y dulzuras
Contágialas de todas tus locuras [...]

Dude, what's wrong with you? You're crying.
I'm sure it's because of women's disdain
There is no more deadly blow to men
That the crying and the contempt of those beings
Dude, I'm gonna give you some good advice
If you want to enjoy its pleasures
Get a gun if you want
Or buy a dagger if you prefer
And become a woman-killer
Kill them
With an overdose of tenderness
Asphyxiate them with kisses and sweets
Tell them about all your crazy stuff
(Source: LyricFind. Alejandro Fernández, 2003)

The song entails a double meaning. The initial idea of its lyrics seems to be to *kill women*. This however is only possible through an overdose of tenderness, flowers and kisses. The song is already over 18 years old, but both young and older people (men and women) were singing it. This theme keeps coming back also in more recent songs, as for instance in Maluma's song "No Se Me Quita" (feat. Ricky Martin). Even though these are just songs, they represent a certain fantasy of romance, in which men suffer, because a woman broke their hearts. Observable is here, how in these songs, women are portrayed as unreachable "beings", that become traitors if they have broken the men's heart and are no longer worthy of the men's love. At a Salsa-party in Laureles I once heard an old song (from 1956), called "Mala-Mujer"(Bad Woman), by Sonora Matancera, which summarizes this portrayal precisely:

Recordando tu querer y pensando o lloraba,
 Mira que yo tengo que fe que yo nunca te olvidaba, (2)
 Mala mujer no tiene corazon (4)
 Matala (4) No tiene corazon mala mujer (bis)
 Pensaba que me querias y tu nunca fuiste buena,
 Las cosas que me decias sabiendo que me enganaba (2)

Remembering your love and thinking or crying, See
 that I have to believe that I never forgot you (2)
 Bad women, she has no heart (4)
 Kill her (4), she has no heart, this bad woman.
 I thought you loved me but you were never good. The
 things you were saying to me knowing that I was
 engaged (2)

(Source: LyricFind, Sonora Matancera, 1956)

These observations indicate some sort of surplus enjoyment. The men present themselves here as helpless lovers who suffer because of the way that a woman treats them coldly, but in this very suffering is some kind of melancholy that they enjoy all together. In these kind of moments in which men come together at the parties, when they read poems and sing songs, there is a tradition in which all men hold each other, against the women. Curious about this is, how men portray women in a superior position, even though, as research and my observations show, in the Colombian and generally patriarchal society, women possess much less power than men. Lacan (1974) assumes, that this happens, because “Man asks to be deprived of something real.” (cited in Fink 2016: 137) These men were in Lacan’s view asking to be deprived of immediate sexual satisfaction so as to attain something else, so as to focus on something else – namely, love and what one gives and receives in love. Here, the Lacanian concept of “Courtly love” resonates. In short, Courtly love is a tradition of lyric poetry, that mainly thematises the prohibited relationship between a knight who desires a married lady. As she is married, the love cannot be consumed, and as such, Lacan describes, how there is a shift from the real (the satisfaction of sexual drives) to the symbolic order, in which the fantasy of love is elevated exclusively to the level of desire. Therefore, the very structure of courtly love is inscribed by an ultimate impossibility of achievement. What is striking about this, is how the Lady in courtly love is portrayed. She is often described as an idealized fantastic figure who is not encumbered by any prohibition and is able to fully enjoy all men (Žižek 1995 b). She is the object a, thus inaccessible. As such, the Lady is a subject of the Real. By portraying her thus in idealized forms (emphasising her beauty) we recognize a coping strategy to deal with the Real which is traumatic. Relating this back to what has been discussed in section 5.2. we also come to partly understand Alejandro Fernandez song from a psychoanalytical perspective; Because why can women only be killed by tenderness and kisses? As described in chapter 5, there is a wish for an immaterial woman, someone who exists outside of the material world, meaning reality. A bullet or a knife thus cannot do the job to kill the woman, as her love and status are immaterial. The question that remains is thus, what needs to be killed inside of the woman, which makes her so dangerous? As a theoretical thought, we could combine the observations and considerations from chapter 5 and 6, with a special regard to the description of the fetishistic disavowal of the Mamacita. Men need such a Mamacita, in order to sustain the ideological fantasy, that a coherent masculine identity is possible to be achieved, even though they actually know, that a woman with these attributes of the Mamacita will ultimately not provide this coherence, and simultaneously also pretend not to be invested into this fetish. When Julio and Antonio describe the difficulties of going out with a woman who appears to be a feminist, we recognize the struggle of this fetishistic disavowal perfectly, which can be displayed by Kraus (2001: 13) quite precisely: “There is no unhappier creature under the sun than a fetishist who longs for a woman’s shoe but has to make do with the whole woman.” (as cited in: Taylor 2014: 93). Men thus don’t want to deal with the whole woman, someone who they could develop feelings for and possibly be heart-broken – they prefer the fetish. The reason for that might be, that men know, that due to woman’s symbolic relationship to the phallic function she remains outside of the laws of symbolization, or as Lacan put it referring to her symbolic status “woman does not exist”. As a reminder, this has nothing to do with the biological gender, but all happens on the level of symbolization. Unlike man, she is just the result of socially imposed codes and expectation, which creates somehow a mystery around her, that expresses itself in excess⁹⁹ (of beauty?) and lack (of commitment to love?) at the same time. Striking for a female person (Kraus’s whole woman) is that, in her symbolic immaterial non-existence, is dangerous for men, because it would ultimately take away men’s point of reference within his ideological fantasy of masculinity. Without the divide between masculinity and femininity, the

⁹⁹ As woman, unlike man, seems to have access to the lost enjoyment

masculine identity cannot be sustained. Maybe, such an acknowledgement is what these men thus fear the most, which makes woman dangerous to him.

Once again, we thus recognize, how the portrayal of women in this case is a way of disavowing, that men are embedded in a structure of power, characterized by an opaque network, that is not comprehensible for them.

7.2. The feminist who steals enjoyment

In this section, I will further discuss, how men's impossibility to make sense of the gendered network of society leads to acts, that transform women into the scapegoats of this impossibility. I will show these moments of scapegoating, in which men invest into the fantasy, that "feminists" are the subjects to blame for threatening their logic of understanding their gendered universe. The following collection of observations indicate, how, what men call "feminists" are portrayed as a rising threat:

In October, Ana and I visited an Encuentro in a school class by boys of the age of 16 to 18. After Ana explained the program of "Hombres como vos", a boy raised his hand and asked:

Boy: Is this course organized by a feminist movement, that has a feminist agenda?

Ana: No, the Alcaldía has nothing to do with the agenda of feminist movements.

The boy nodded his head while smiling, and said "Aah, thank you". It was interesting to think about, why he made the connection between the program "Hombres como vos", and the interest of a feminist movement – regarding that the objective of this gender-based program is the reduction of homicides and suicides of men and the improvement of their mental well-being.

Another day, the 27th of October (2019), I was in a mall in Conquistadores¹⁰⁰. That day, Claudia López was elected as mayor of Bogotá, the first female mayor in the capital in general and besides that the first openly female homosexual mayor in whole Latin America (theguardian, 17.12.2019). When the results were final, many people spend in front of the TV's that are hanging at many spots of the mall. I observed how several groups of men (between 30 and 60 years) were angry, one of them sitting down next to me, looking at me, shaking his head, saying (more to the table in general than towards me personally): "Those radical feminists! Where will we end with this?"

In some further interviews I detected other reactions towards feminist-movements:

Antonio: The majority of the feminists, what I think from my point of view, is that they want to not change the position as the men are, but then put themselves on top. Because they consider that the men are on top of them, because they are stigmatized, you know, they are understanding that they're underneath.

During my interview with Enrique, we talked about the manifestations in November 2019, that I have mentioned already before (Daniels in the Gardian, 2019). In Medellín there were many different groups demonstrating, among them also feminist groups. During our interview, Enrique told me, that he was at the manifestation with a female friend, who was joining a feminist group:

Marleen: Did you feel comfortable there with all these women?

Enrique: Yeah, no.

Marleen: Why not?

Enrique: Eh because eh it seems to me as if it goes to the other extreme. It goes to the other extreme, so like the other extreme. It seems to me that Machismo, and Feminism is a female Machismo. That's what I think. Because feminism is already that I can't say to you, "You have very pretty eyes" because I'm already harassing you. Right? If I look at you, it's like ah no, it's like I am already harassing you with my gaze. So, that's why I say that it's going already in the other extreme. So, that the men can no longer be gallant. That's why (*long break*). For example, I can tell you "You have very pretty eyes, you are very pretty! And I say this from my heart at this moment. But if a feminist would hear that, it seems that I'm flattering you, to later get you into bed, it's an example. So that's where the gallantry gets lost. For example, you can't open the door of a taxi for a woman so that she can enter, or give her the

¹⁰⁰ Neighbourhood close to the city-centre

hand when she leaves, because I'm a feminist, I am capable of doing it alone. So, yeah, I don't know, it goes into the other extreme.

He then asked me about my personal experiences with extreme feminism in Germany.

Marleen: Hm, well what I don't like is that women are so harsh with each other you know? Like they criticize each other so much, blaming other women for dressing up wrongly, saying the wrong things, going out with the wrong men. I feel like, if women want to fight for women's rights, they should firstly support each other, instead of making life difficult for each other.

Enrique: Aah, maybe that is why at the movement, my friend did not want to wear a skirt. Because it was so warm outside and none of these women were wearing a skirt.

~

In November 2019, there was a song released, called "El Violador en tu camino" (A rapist in your way), written by the Chilean feminist collective "Las Tesis". The song addresses men, politicians, the police and the media, accusing them of domestic, state, individual and structural gender violence. It also entails a dance-choreography, which women have been performing together on the streets - wearing black ties over their eyes (Deutschlandfunk Kultur, 2019). The reactions towards this movement were quite diverse. The choreography and the song went viral very quickly around the whole globe, it was performed in many Latin American cities, as well in cities in the USA and Europe. However, there was also a strong counter-reaction as for instance in Mexico, in which men of a soccer team started to dance in a ridiculous way to it. In an interview with José, he referred to this song:

José: And the reaction of the other men was to make fun of it and make parodies about everything. Like the football, comedian, journalist. Well, many men have done this as a defence mechanism, so like mocking the slogan. So the thing is that men have made parodies of that, and so we talked about it with some friends, to understand exactly that, this resistance that men have against feminist fights. O sea, this is the fear that the women could reach a place where they (the men) cannot exercise any domination anymore, so then they made fun of the feminist fights. Right? So, eh us friends we payed especially attention to this mechanism of men to say, that we are not going to give you this space as like we will not observe how the privileges that I have eh.. how I will have to see how I lose them.¹⁰¹

This mocking reaction towards feminists reminds of many of the reactions that arose in Europe and the USA in October 2017, after the Hashtag- #metoo was used the first time. Similarly to the song "El violador en tu camino", the #MeToo reached the globe very quickly, but also earned a lot of criticism and counter reactions, particularly by men.

José: For example, with the theme of #MeToo, what happened is 'Aah it turns out all of them were violated, and I don't know they only remember this now and so on' so that's where they act as if they were not knowing about these practices. And why they ignored these practices, because this is something that I can feel guilty about. Maybe I did it [...]. And when I begin to work on the subject of masculinities, of course, the question arises, and I feel guilty about certain actions. [...] There is something and it is, since children they have taught us that the man is on top right. So when we grow up, saying that we have to seduce women, we have created some little harassers, insisting on women, insisting and harassing them and harassing them until the woman agrees and many times the woman agrees, not because she wants to agree but because they are not going to let her if not.

I also observed many spontaneous situations in which a certain ironic and mocking tone was used when referring to feminists, or in general, people who would address gender-inequalities¹⁰². Quite in the beginning of my stay in September I went with Ana to a school, in which we were in a class with about 20 boys between the age of 16 and 20 years. We played a game with them, in which Ana placed a lot

¹⁰¹ Slightly modification for better comprehension due to grammatically wrong sentences

¹⁰² The understanding of what feminism actually is, seems quite diverse, and can already start with a woman who wants to pay dinner for herself, as we have observed Antonio's and Julio's choice of words when describing "these kind of women"

of different items and toys on a table and then wrote on three different chairs: “Girl”, “Boy” and “Both”. For the game, boys were supposed to plan a birthday-party for a boy and a girl. They thus had to decide, how to distribute the different toys for either the girl’s or the boy’s party. Objects were for instance little cars, dolls, cooking-sets and house-tools. When the first boy was chosen to pick out one object and put it either to the girls or boys chair (or deciding he wanted it to be for both parties) he chose a cooking-pan in doll-size and placed it on the chair for girls. A murmur went through the class-room and a boy jumped a bit from his chair and said while making his voice very high “Aaah how sexist you Macho!” - in a ridiculous manner, putting one hand on his hip and the other one in the air as if he was imitating somebody who was teaching a lesson. Regarding how he disguised his voice I believe it was supposed to be a woman. His neighbours and a few other boys giggled loudly and tapped him on the shoulders and the boy in front laughed as well - shrugging his shoulders and sitting down on this chair giggling. Their behaviour can be interpreted in different terms. It can be understood as a way of making fun of those, who would raise a complain about sexist behaviour, or someone, who would be overreacting in regard to statements, that might not really be sexist. Simultaneously, I also saw their reaction as some sort of defence mechanism. By already commenting on the choice of the toy-distribution, calling it out to be sexist in an humorous way, they anticipated a possible unpleasant discussion about the game afterwards, and gave an answer to it right away (even though in the framework of the program *Hombres como vos*, such a conversation would have never happened, as Ana never judged the boys in regard to their attitudes and comments).

Another day, I spent home with my flatmate Julio and one of his friend, who showed me some songs of Colombian Reggaeton-artists like Maluma and J.Balvin. They played a song of Maluma that is called “Cuatro Babys”. In the chorus Maluma sings/raps:

Estoy enamorado de cuatro babies	I'm in love with four babies
Siempre me dan lo que quiero	They always give me what I want
Chingan cuando yo les digo	Fuck when I tell them,
Ninguna me pone pero	None of them ever complains.
Dos son casadas	Two are married
Hay una soltera	There's a single woman
La otra medio psycho y si no la llamo se desespera	The other half psycho, and if I don't call her, she gets desperate

(Source: LyricFind, Maluma – Cuatro Babys, 2016)

As Julio and his friend knew that I was doing my research on the topic of Machismo, they had called me already a “feminist” a couple of times, even though I never told them that I was a feminist. When they showed me this song they started giggling and pushing each other around:

Julio: Don't show that to your feminist friends.

Julios friend: (*laughed heavily*) Yeea they will not like it AT ALL.

Julio: (*disguised his voice higher*) This is so Machista!

They both laughed and danced to the music. After that, Julio showed me a video of the “Movimiento Machista Nacional”¹⁰³, in which leader Edilberto Barreto (in *EL ESPECTADOR* 2016) talks about the threat of manhood by the equality-policies of the government. In this video he quotes “The state's persecution of man. It's since more than 50 years that there has been no legislation passed for men. Legislation has been passed for women, Indians, homosexuals, blacks, but not for men”.

Julio: (*Laughed*) And, what do you think?”

Marleen: About this video?

Julio: About the Machista Movement.

Marleen: What do you want me to say?

Julio and his friend laughed.

Natan: I think that you hate it.

Marleen: Okaay...

Julios friend: Noo, seriously, of course this is very weird this movement. It is just a reaction

¹⁰³ The Machista Movimiento national (national Machistae movement) is a movement, that was initiated by Edilberto Barreto, which has its claim to fight for the rights of men (more concrete of the macho) in Colombia. (*El Espectador*, 2016).

- towards all these radical feminist movements.
- Marleen: Are there many people who follow him?
- Julio: I don't know.
- Marleen: What does radical feminism actually means to you?
- Julio: Eeh you know, if a woman now wants to be so independent from a man, that she would not even accept his help you know. And then they portray men as responsible for everything that is bad.

There was one Encuentro in a school that I went to with Ana, that she, instead of with boys, conducted with the teachers in this school. The topics of the Encuentro were very similar to the ones, that Ana conducted usually with the younger boys. During a talk that Ana gave about the problematic of social constructs that define a certain behaviour as masculine and feminine, a teacher raised his hand:

- Him: What I find problematic and shocking, is that the girls nowadays start to copy boy's behaviour, taking drugs, talking in a rude attitude, being rude, copying the way that men dress. That is something that I think is very complicated.

Macha mentioned a similar concern:

- Macha: You know what is really concerning is that women also have started to become more violent. They are copying masculine behaviour.

He then told me about an attack that happened early that week, in which two girls, one 13, the other 16 years old, met each other to fight out a conflict about a boy that they both liked. It resulted that the 13-year-old girl murdered the older girl, as their fight escalated and nobody was willing to stop it. Macha was shocked, how women were suddenly "as brutal as men".¹⁰⁴

This reflects how there is a fear, that increasing women empowerment have the effect, that women transform into men.

- Freddy: On the other hand, many women look for more autonomy and start behaving a lot like men. That's a mistake to just copy men. They go into the tramp to copy everything and lose their feminine identity. Then they will do the same mistakes like the men.

These observations have indicated a sense of anxiety that concerns the development of women, who, as they describe it "become more like men". There is a fear that men and women might switch the hierarchical structure of gender - putting women "on top" of it. Observable is here, that this development is often described by the increase of female violence. Men do not refer to a general rise of violence of the society, it seems that violent women are way more worrisome than violent men. Particularly feminists, as they are the embodiment of female power are considered as a threat – despite that there is little knowledge on how to define feminism. From my observations, the category "feminist" can be applied to every woman, who is not acting "traditionally". An explanation for this fear, as key informants who work in the field of masculinities like José have told me, is the danger to lose privileges, that are inscribed into the "higher" position of men in the gendered hierarchy.

However, regarding my observations, this does not function as a full explanation. I perceive that the most fundamental fear about the rising "female power" portrayed by so-called feminists is that it represents a threat to men's ideological fantasy of masculinity and femininity. A change in the symbolization of women's attitude automatically means a change in the symbolization of men as well. The fear is detectable that women could lose their femininity, or better men's fantasy of femininity, by acting, behaving and dressing like men, and thus, losing the attributes that would make her the perfect complement to him. Their masculine identity thus needs this Other (the imagination of the "traditional" woman), to affirm itself. Therefore, (radical) "feminists" become an enemy, because they betray a piece of allegedly Colombian culture these men say they are attached to. The ideology of patriarchy has served as a source of identification, to obscure the social antagonisms that are inscribed into the logic of our symbolization. Those women have appropriated too much of the men's cultural role in the gendered power-system, thus have stolen parts of their illusion of identity, and simultaneously, they betray the culture, as they redraw themselves from the position of the women who accepts her submissive position, which would however be crucial for men's identity to function.

¹⁰⁴ Apart from a newspaper article about this attack, I don't have any reference to verify this story

As the symbolic order functions as a referential system, our enjoyment is always imbricated with the Other's enjoyment, so that we can never enjoy on our own; so Žižek (1996) claims that most often we enjoy by envying the Other's enjoyment. Hating the feminists can be therefore explained by the envy and anxiety that they themselves cannot enjoy because the Other (the feminists) have stolen it. The feminists become "thefts of enjoyment", and only by eliminating them, men can recover the lost enjoyment. What is betrayed and stolen here is the "objet petit a", the promise of enjoyment, thus the Real, that was however actually never there (Žižek 1996).

In the way how men and boys use parodies and make fun of feminists is a certain enjoyment, that unites them as a group, threatened by an enemy that is menacing their identity as men. There is a certain enjoyment in together hating these feminists that are not letting them be "galante" anymore, or that change "the way how things are". In Lacan's terms, this enjoyment of a feeling of togetherness against a common enemy is a way of experiencing jouissance. This sense of unity is however a fiction, that only intends to mask the lack and instability that underlies any identity. The process of scapegoating is therefore a handy act to promise the possibility of wholeness and unity, following the logic that as soon as the scapegoat is destroyed, unity is recreated. Žižek underlines how this type of scapegoating permits the group perfectly to avoid the confrontation with its own contradictions, by projecting them onto a stereotypical Other (Kapoor 2014: 1130). By pretending that feminists in the MeToo debate are being extremists and ultimately discriminate men, as José mentioned, men do not have to engage with their own actions that they might feel guilty of, and ultimately also disavows that they are inherently insecure about who they want to be in relation to the women.

8. Containing fantasies of otherness

Relating the previous section to the final ethnographic chapter, especially crucial is here to understand the feeling of betrayal and stealing of cultural attributes of the fantasy men have about masculine and feminine identity. In the following, I will show further inconsistencies of the gendered structure of power that are created by men's fantasies on "other" masculinities – as for instance "softer" men. As I have shown in chapter 4, in many moments of the daily life men are invested into the fantasy of the Macho-Man, which provides a source of masculine identification that has persisted over many generations. Important to the attachment to this fantasy is its production of cultural norms that entail certain codes of behaviour. Central to this is the clear distinction, who can be called a real man and who can't. As already shown in previous research, there is a constant peer-pressure and discrediting of men, whose behaviour differs from these codes of cultural norms. Different influences play together that make this peer-pressure so effective. In chapter 4 I have shown for instance, how men are attached to certain enjoyments that are grounded in irrational beliefs, pleasure in pain and traditions. Thus, while men and boys recognize how this fantasy is inherently problematic it is however difficult for them to let go of it.

The program "Hombres como vos" aims to embrace a more liberal attitude of masculine "Otherness", in order to undermine this peer-pressure. In the following chapter I will show, how this objective translates itself into a pattern of how men relate themselves to such "other" masculine images. I will analyse boys and men's reactions to exercises in class that present "alternative" masculine models. Based on that I will indicate that men's relation to otherness represents a coping strategy with the inconsistencies in the gender structure. As such, the aim to liberalize different "models of masculinity" bears a certain risk to result in repressed tolerance or political correctness. More about this risk will also be further discussed in the following section "Final Reflections".

As already mentioned, Ana executed in many classes in colegios an exercise that is called "La mitad de Juan". Looking back to chapter 4, in which I have shown certain boys who commented on this boy, I have detected a lot of tolerance towards boys that are like Juan. However, what many of these comments also entail is a certain explanation for this "Otherness" – mainly that Juan must be homosexual:

Selection of comments of an Encuentro:

- "Juan parceró (my friend), leaving the closet¹⁰⁵ this is nothing bad, but talk to your parents first, like this you can solve many things".
- "The society, every day is judging people, who are not to blame for how they are, who feel attracted to their own sex. In this literature [they] show us how [they] discriminate Juan because he likes to play with girls and likes to be with them. We cannot take them their right of who they are. Above all, liberty for all and that the freedom to express oneself how they wish!" (*slightly adjusted for readability due to grammatical mistakes*)
- "This account shows me what happens in the everyday life in which some men do not show who they want to be because of fear that [they] will judge them. I am not in favour of homosexuality, but I also do not judge it because everybody has to be how they want to be and that people should not fear what the other people say about him".

In another Encuentro in the same school, the boys watched a film called "Billy Elliot", in which a young boy wants to become a ballet-dancer instead of a box-fighter, for which he faces many difficulties in his childhood. The task for the boys was to analyse different models of masculinity in the film – embodied by different actors. For Billy Elliot, some boys wrote that his sensibility and emotionality, and his urge to be a dancer must derive from the hard upbringing he had. Due to his violent childhood, the loss of his mother and his abusive father, he has developed this behaviour that is "weird" (they often used the term *raro*). This weirdness is however by almost all boys tolerated and they advise him to

¹⁰⁵ "Salgar del closet" → outing yourself as a homosexual

pursue his dreams, despite what other people say. Others also assumed that Billy Elliot must be gay, and one boy asked in class, if he might be mentally disabled. We can thus detect that, while they acknowledge otherness with an open attitude, they develop certain explanations for it.

For illustrating further, how men deal with such “other” types of masculinities, I will share my observations of a *fiesta del barrio*¹⁰⁶, which was supported by the Alcaldía as a project-component of the program of “Hombres como vos”. Central to this project was the possibility for local artists of different comunas of the city to apply for a funding for an artistic project which treats the topic of hegemonic masculinities. Different groups of comedians, dancers and musicians applied, to execute their project that would promote the message, that the program “Hombres como vos” wants to spread. For comuna 14 there was a musician group that won with their proposal. They organized a big event for the neighbourhood, in which different artists were invited to come together and perform different presentations that promote the liberalization of different models of masculinity. In sessions before hand, all participants had come together and taken part in sensibilisation-sessions that were organized by the programme.

The *fiesta del barrio* took place on a Saturday afternoon, in an empty football-field. There was a big stage, stands of food and around 70 people arrived to celebrate. Among the artists that presented their work that day was a dancing school. During the event, the owner of this dancing school shared with the audience, that the reason that they were participating at this event was to show, that everybody can be part of a dance group and try out different dances.

Owner: Because you all know that dancing is not only for women but can be for men as well. Dancing is a way of expressing ourselves and there is no restriction of gender to do that.

During their presentations, mostly women were performing a variety of dances, from belly-dances, Salsa to Twerking. There was one man who was part of that group. While he danced an Arabic belly dance, he was dressed in a skirt and wore a lot of make-up. During the presentation I saw a familiar face in the crowd - an artist that I met already in the sensibilisation courses some weeks before. I went over to greet him.

Marleen: Will you also be presenting something today?

Jaime: Yes, yes, I will. Let's see though what this will bring.

Marleen: How do you mean? Are you nervous?

Jaime: (*Laughed*) Nervous? No no mi nina (my girl).

Marleen: Will you also dance?

Jaime: Dance? Me? Like this? (*Pointed to the stage*) Noo no no. That's not for me.

You know, the only dance for men I can do is leading the women let's say during a nice Salsa song. But that's it!

He pointed at the dancing man:

Jaime: He is a great dancer, right? You know, I think *those* people, they just know how to dance!

Marleen: He is incredible!

Jaime: You know *men* like *me* (*Pointed at himself and emphasised the two words “men” and “me”*), we could never do that. There is so much involved, the movement and so on, but especially *la mirada*¹⁰⁷ (*He took his two fingers, pined at his own eyes and then towards my eyes*).

Jaime and I still observed the dancer for a while. When his presentation was over and he left the stage, another man was waiting for him – handing him over a bottle of water while giving him a quick kiss on the mouth. When he put his arm around him, Jaime quickly looked away, stood up and said, that he would go to get something to eat. While I do not know much about the dancer who performed at this *fiesta del barrio*, with, potentially his boyfriend, it was however clear, that Jaime was convinced that he was homosexual. This acknowledgement somehow seemed to give a justification, why he was so good at such an “extraordinary” dance, which *men like him* could never do. We can thus recognize how for

¹⁰⁶ “Neighbourhood-party”

¹⁰⁷ The look, the gaze

Jaime, the message of the dance-schools owner rather meant, that “dancing is not only for women, but can be for *homosexual* men as well, which should be tolerated”.

Tolerance towards homosexuality is however only a recent development. In the class of the college in that I mentioned above already, the boys were supposed to talk about the biggest changes between their - and their grandparent’s generation:

- “That you know there are now Malucos¹⁰⁸ in Colombia”.
- “That people can be homosexual now”
- “My grandfather told me, that they could not say eh that someone is eh gay”.

However, despite this agreement that homosexually is accepted in society, it is still difficult to address it and to talk about. I detected many actions that were about homosexuality which presented the difficulty and confusion for boys to find their own position towards it. An example of that was an observation I did with a lot of younger boys in school. In class, some boys were very physically touch-intensive. They touched each others’ arms, leaned their heads against each others’ shoulders, caressed each others hair or held hands. Showing such physical affection between men is quite unusual, especially for boys, as José explained to me. Men usually do not do that, as they are afraid that somebody might call them gay. This physical and even tender interaction of the boys in class, so José interpreted them, were demonstrations of their own heterosexuality.

José: You know its a way of demonstrating that they are so manly that they can do this without anybody thinking that they are gay.

At this point, I should also recall, that such physical contact among men also becomes visible in moments in which men go out to bars and clubs. Remembering how men laid in each others arms while singing songs together is in this context not considered to be an act of homosexuality. The role of alcohol in these moments seems crucial as being drunk often counts as a reason or an excuse for exceptional behaviour. Tenderness between men is thus not unusual, but often expressed in implicit contexts.

In one class in a colegio I observed a conversation, that almost escalated. The boys were analysing the story of Juan and one boy explained that he assumed he was homosexual.

Boy: I think we should accept that but I am definitely not in favour of homosexuality. I believe evolution did not intend that for us.

Boy 2: You know that there is scientific proof that the ones being homophobic are usually the ones that are homosexual, right?

Boy: What? What are you saying to me? (*Builds himself up*)

Another observation I made was the attachment to irrational beliefs concerning homosexuality, that Enrique told me about:

Enrique: You know, I am not sure if this could be interesting for your investigation, but my friends they always tell me that I shouldn’t tell my son “Hijo, mi amor¹⁰⁹”, because it could make him eh homosexual.

The idea that an education could transform a man “gay” even worked on more abstract levels. José told me about a time, in which he got two cats, one male and one female. For the male cat he bought a pink cape that he put on the cat’s head. When his family members saw the cape, they reacted by telling him, that he was transforming the cat “gay” by letting it wear these kinds of clothes.

Another few moments that let me think further about this “new” tolerance towards homosexuality in Medellín appeared with Erwin and were based on simple misunderstandings, that I have already partly showed above already. In one of our first meetings, I for instance asked him, if he liked to go out to bars and clubs:

Erwin: Yes yes, I like that. But often I go alone. You know, because girls don’t like to go with me to those clubs, and actually I don’t like to go with girls to clubs.

Marleen: You also don’t go with amigos?¹¹⁰

Erwin: What?

Marleen: I mean with amigos, with men.

¹⁰⁸ Colloquially speaking: homosexual

¹⁰⁹ Son, my love

¹¹⁰ Amigos as the male form of friends, thus it is clear that we are talking about male-friends.

Erwin: Me? No no no that is not for me. (*Waved heavily with his finger*)
 Marleen: I don't understand.
 Erwin: Wait, what did you mean?
 Marleen: I just meant if you go out with your male friends.
 Erwin: Ah, (*laughed*) no, I don't have any male friends, like I said, that is not for me.
 Marleen: You don't like it to be friends with men?
 Erwin: Noo I mean I like girls.
 Marleen: But... I am not talking about that, I just mean friends, not boyfriend girlfriend. You know, like, "eeh parce".
 Erwin: Aaaah, now I understand, I am sorry. Well yes I have some amigos, yes. And we also go out together sometimes.

This misunderstanding occurred three times. It made me wonder, why it was so important for him to emphasise that he was not interested in men romantically. I therefore asked him in another meeting about his position towards homosexuality.

Erwin: Well, yeah yeah, that exist, I know some boys that are born like this, you know, gay. (*He emphasised the word gay in a different way, while lowering his voice*)

Marleen: And what do you think about that?

Erwin: Noo no, one has to respect everybody and everything.

As shortly before, we had talked about the topic of the piropo (see chapter above), I therefore asked

Erwin:

Marleen: What would you do if a man would do a piropo to you?

Erwin: (*laughed*) Nooo no no that is not for me. I would tell him, eeh chico you didn't understand something well here.

Marleen: Would you be upset if that would happen?

Erwin: Yeah.

Marleen: Why?

Erwin: Because he might think that I am gay. Or like eh others that are around.

Marleen: What would happen if somebody thought you were gay?

Erwin: Well, it would change a lot. You know, then eh people will say things. Like eh they will bother you.

Marleen: Why do you think that?

Erwin: I don't know, eh maybe it is because gay men they dress different, and they talk different sometimes too.

Marleen: And people don't like that?

Erwin: No, I think they don't.

Marleen: And you?

Erwin: Like I said, I respect everybody. You know, if men want to wear women's clothes or pink and all that, for me that is no problem. Marly, one has to respect everybody, that is very important for me. I think that is what is missing here in Comuna 13, respect.

When I asked Erwin, how he would react to a piropo by a homosexual man, I had been inspired by an exercise, that José had told me about in one of our interviews. In an Encuentro with some boys in a school, he once did a little experiment (as already mentioned above) in relation to the topic of the piropo. The objective of that was to make them understand the consequences of their piropos for girls – so to create a mutual understanding how “it feel” to be on the receiving end of a piropo. He introduced the boys to three different scenarios, in which they had to imagine, to be receiving a piropo on the streets themselves. In the first scenario they had to think, how it would make them feel, if a young pretty girl would say a pickup-line to them on the streets. The boys mostly answered, that they would like that a lot and that they would give the girl their phone number. For the second scenario, they had to imagine, what would it be like for them, if that person doing the piropo was an elderly lady. The boys were laughing, and some answered, that it would be very weird and uncomfortable, while others claimed that they would find it funny or adorable. For the third case, José asked the boys, what would happen, if a homosexual man would do this piropo on the. The majority responded very negatively and said they would be aggressive if that would happen and would insult and punch this man.

We thus see, how homosexuality meets officially a degree tolerance, but just, as it seems at a distance. In one interview with Antonio he told me that the Colombian society is not ready for this very liberal and free mode of expressing sexual orientation and gender, as presented by the European model:

Antonio: The government has always told us that the model that Colombia has is traditionalism, that it is not developed and that we must do some efforts, and I don't know what. They wanted to accept that all the new genders, that all homosexuals and everything is accepted. But then there is a contradiction between what the region¹¹¹ wants and what the people really want.

He explained me, that he would be in favour if couples of the same sex could get married and have the same status as hetero-sexual partners, but that if he would ask his father or many other people, they would believe that it is inherently wrong.

Antonio: You know if my father would see me with another men, holding hands, he wouldn't accept it.

After our interview, when we went on the street to wait for a bus he stumbled:

Antonio: Eh, Marleen, can I eh ask you a question?

Marleen: Claro.

Antonio: Do you like women?

Marleen: Eh like romantically?

Antonio: Yes

I laughed, I did not see this question coming.

Marleen: No, I think I like men.

Antonio: You think?

Marleen: Yeah, quite sure. I also have a boyfriend.

We both laugh and there is a break of silence, but it is not an uncomfortable silence.

Antonio: I think until now I like women. (I nod and there is a longer break)

Marleen: Why did you think I am homosexual?

Antonio: I don't know, just because you are such a strong person and so independent, and you eh you are interested in topics like homosexuality and feminism. And you have this particular way of looking at men and dressing up, you know? I hope you don't take it as something bad that I thought that.

This shows, that there is confusion about people, who do not share some of the cultural characteristics that are assigned to the binary gender roles. José summarized this confusion quite accurately:

José: You know this is all such a double moral. We accept it, but not for us and our family. There is this eh this constant fear that someone judges us for homosexuality. We say "aah yeah I have a homosexual friend" to show that we are tolerant. But the truth is, that we don't know what homosexuality actually is. They confuse homosexuality with gender eh you know. If I like men, it means I have to behave like a woman. It is expected that gay man have to behave feminine. And that gay woman have to behave masculine, because they are attracted to women. And if they don't, then there must be something wrong with them.

Thus, when boys are questioning their masculinity, they simultaneously question their heterosexuality.

Juan David: You know, I think, the part of coming out as a gay man is the most difficult. After that, it is so much easier. Because you eliminated this possible eh how can I say that, this possibility of being gay. Then its out there, basta. So all this eh this speculation and so on is over. And people do not want to be openly against homosexuals, well, at least like on the streets. So then they will leave you alone.

Marleen: So then you think, men who are openly gay have it more easy?

Juan David: Easy is maybe not the right word. But then you know all this anxiety is gone. You are gay and basta. Then maybe, if somebody will ask you "Eh are you gay or what" you can say "Yes" and then maybe he will give you a comment but then he will leave you alone.

¹¹¹ With region Antonio means the Colombian government

I had an interesting moment in regard to Juan David's remark, when I visited a hair-dresser close to my flat in Laureles. During my haircut, my hairdresser Alexander and I had a little chat, in which he asked me what I was doing in Medellín.

Marleen: I am doing my Master-thesis here. And I am investigating Machismo here in Medellín.

Alexander: That sounds interesting. And how is it going so far?

Marleen: I think it is going well.

Alexander: How nice. But you know, Medellín is not that machista.

Marleen: No? You don't think so?

Alexander: No, at least not for me.

Marleen: Hm. I felt that it can be. I have experienced a lot of things that I perceived quite machista.

Alexander: Maybe that is because you are a girl.

Marleen: How do you mean?

Alexander: I mean, because you as a foreign and beautiful woman are also interesting for a man who is a Macho. Me, as a homosexual man, I am not really interesting for someone who is machista.

Marleen: Oh I haven't thought about it in that way before.

Alexander: (*Laughed*) You can put that into your thesis!

Marleen: Right! (*Pause*) Are homosexual men here not machista?

Alexander: (*Laughed*) Good question. But eeh no, not the ones I know at least.

Our conversation unfortunately got interrupted by some other clients but I thought a lot about it afterwards, because it caught me by surprise that a homosexual man would state not to be affected by Machismo. From my observations, calling each other "gay" in groups of boys and men is often central to strategies that are being used to discredit each others masculinity. What many men seem to fear most, is the suspicion of others to appear homosexual to them. Following Juan David's comment, the actual declaration that someone is indeed homosexual decreases this tension, as if it creates somehow a state of exception in which other rules of signification for the masculine identity apply, that don't serve anymore for validating or discrediting masculinity¹¹².

Part of the gender-program "Hombres como vos" is the aim to promote alternative models of masculinity. This chapter has shown that, when boys and men position themselves towards other men's masculinity that could be considered as "alternative", there is often an urge to justify why these men are "different". Different categories are used to describe men's "otherness", which happens both in respectful and discrediting ways. As assessed in many of my observations, such categories of men's otherness most often get reduced to a binary distinction of men's sexual orientation, but are also sometimes related to psychological problems, as for instance caused by a traumatic childhood or mental disabilities. "Feminine" attributes are correlated to homosexuality; "Masculine" attributes belong to heterosexual men.

By that, certain symbolic containers are constructed for different expressions of masculine identities. To understand the urge for such a construction it is crucial to point out, that they are informed by fantasies about otherness. Imagining that we can describe otherness with terms provided in the symbolic order serves us to make sense of the different people in our network and their interests. Because that is ultimately the function of fantasy - it stages and organizes our desire for constructing a fulfilling identity by telling us, what we are for others and our society. Searching for small details in others, as for example "la mirada", the ability to dance extravagantly, or a way of dressing, serve for the creation of the signifying container of homosexual men, who become a fantasmatic other. It is somehow a strategy to cope "with the fact that we are originally decentred, part of an opaque network whose meaning and logic elude my control" (Žižek 1996). To title others as gay, is thus the only way of making sense of real differences in symbolic terms.

¹¹² At this point I want to emphasise, that with these observations I do not want to give the impression, that the homosexual community in Medellín and in Colombia does not experience homophobia. Following the reports of human-rights associations and research centres (Oettler 2019), there is still a crucial struggle for gendered peace, and people experience homophobic violence and discrimination frequently.

As mentioned above, the uncertainty about somebody's sexuality or knowing why he or her behaves in "an alternative way" makes boys and men anxious and insecure, because it confronts them with aspects in themselves that they do not understand. While there is "officially" an open attitude and tolerance towards homosexuality, in moments of confusions (as for instance Erwin's recurring misunderstanding), the unconscious fear reveals itself, that somebody could misunderstand his heterosexuality. Such fear and insecurity are being used by peers to pressure each other to behave more "masculine" and influence boy's education. The fear, a "too loving" style of education could make one's son homosexual, reinforces the believe, that expressions of love and feelings are registered as signifiers of femininity and emasculate men. The creation of the fantasmatic other (here the imagination of a gay man) thus seems to be needed, in order to be sure about one's own masculinity. It is a strategy of coping with the anxiety that is caused by the eluding control of knowing what others want from us and who we are for them. That is ultimately also the "functioning of such an ideology in the case of our [in this case the men's] everyday sexism and racism: the problem of both is precisely how to 'contain' the threatening inside from 'spilling out' and overwhelming us." (Žižek 1996). This "threatening inside" that Žižek refers to in this quote is the truth about the Real, which is the impossibility to ever find an identity that subjects can fully relate to. Men's fantasies about others are thus functioning as ways to confront the Real – they provide a distance between the symbolically defined reality and the traumatic impossibility to ever fully encounter a masculine identity. Such a fantasmatic other is needed to create a coherent masculine ideology that can function as a source of identity. As long as a "feminine version of men" exists that can be detected as homosexual, the fantasy of a purely "masculine" male identity can be sustained. Thus, we come to understand also the obsession of the boys and men when they talk about homosexuality; it seems that they must have an opinion about it, that "secures" their own tolerance but above all their positionality within the topic of sexual difference. The question remains, why this masculine identity is so dependent on the definition of (sexual) Others. Ultimately, it can be answered by Lacan's notion of the relationship of all subjects to phallus; it is all symbolic, and Really does not exist.

9. Conclusion

In this thesis I have observed and interviewed different boys and men in Medellín in order to understand the difficulty of overcoming what previous theorists have called the crisis of masculinity. This crisis has been described as a difficulty to live up to a hegemonic model of masculinity, which results in harmful practices for both men and women. These practices are often also referred to as “toxic masculine behaviour”. The aim of this thesis was to study this crisis from a different angle, and to discover, how psychoanalytical theory can inform a rethinking of it.

In this thesis-report I have therefore observed daily acts and listened to different perceptions of men, that can be described as toxic masculine behaviour. As an example, I have detected, how men invest into practices like the piropo – which is perceived by many women as street-harassment. The piropo serves as a medium to proof one’s own masculinity but also to fantasise about finding true love. By constantly failing to achieve both of these aims, as men are usually rejected by the women, they are frustrated and sometimes react in (passive)-aggressive ways. This simultaneously reproduces an image of masculinity that appropriates the public space to dominate women. Another self-harming practice is the constant peer-pressure that pushes men into being disloyal towards their girlfriends. It is seen as particularly masculine to be able to conquer many women, and there is a constant discrediting of men who don’t want to participate in that. Whereas I have captured several perceptions of men who claim to suffer under this peer-pressure, as it prevents them from having honest relationships with their girlfriends, they however also participate in these acts of pressuring each other. Further, while men pretend to believe that women in general do not cheat on men, there is a residing mistrust towards women. In romantic songs and poems, they express in a sometimes-obscene way the threat that a woman could break their heart. A particular source of this fear seems to be the suspicion that women could be (secretly) working as a prostitute which makes her both impure and not trustworthy.

There is thus an inherent difficulty when it comes to relating themselves to other men and women. As such, we come to understand that if we want to explain the investment into these practices and beliefs we need more than a discursive analysis on the societal construct that inform them, because those ultimately do not capture the incompleteness and inconsistencies of the gendered system of power. Therefore, in order to understand why men keep on investing into practices that are inherently difficult for themselves I have shown that it is necessary to address the libidinal attachments to them, that are registered in the unconscious. This is where the Lacanian approach of psychoanalysis offers a crucial lens. In the unconscious, desires and drives reveal themselves in an unfiltered way (Kapoor 2014). There are certain rituals, like performing a piropo, going to the club with friends to break the rules together, or visiting a prostitute to toughen up, that draw on an inherent source of obscene enjoyment. This is the obscene underside of an ideological edifice, as Žižek (2009: 138) puts it: “The law itself needs its obscene supplement, it is sustained by it”. There is a pleasure in repeating certain traditions over and over again, that might cause pain, but fulfil a drive that always finds satisfaction in its own obscene way. These traditions do not necessarily need to entail a deeper meaning, they exist for the fulfilment of drives, as constant attempts to recapture the traumatic loss of enjoyment that subjects experience when entering the order of symbolization.

The irrationality of these traditions does not matter – even though men and boys are aware of the meaninglessness they actively disavow it. Žižek’s term of fetishist disavowals comes to mind here: they know very well about the destructivity and contradictions of their actions, but they do them anyway, because holding on to these irrational beliefs provide a sense of jouissance. As such, the perceived lack in the Other is acknowledged, but they pretend as if they did not see it.

Exemplary, we can observe how men invest into the imaginary fantasy of romance – the desire, that a fulfilling relationship will bring them true happiness as a man. This fantasy meets a very confusing and inconsistent social reality. Women are being imagined in idealized ways, so that there are no women in their environment that could ever fulfil these criteria. That is exactly the function of this fantasy, because by constantly failing to find their ideal women, the fantasy and its desire can endure. There is nothing fundamentally wrong about desiring (De Vries 2007) and surely this fantasy of romance is shared in many societies globally. However, in Medellín we can observe, how this desire gets corrupted during

the attempts to compromise it, which causes irrational conducts that express themselves in toxic behaviour. If we look at the ways in which men often tend to blame women for the failure of romance (as mentioned above in songs and poems), we thus recognize how misogyny is the work of toxic drive that disrupts the desire of romance. Lacan shows how beauty often becomes an embodiment of the idea of love (Fink 2016: 128). With a broader view on the development of society I have observed, how this desire for beauty has become rather an obscene way of intending to capture this perfection of a women's appearance. The desire of a beautiful woman corrupts and ends in some sort of jouissance for supersized aesthetic surgeries and overuse of beauty products, that men (in)-directly pay for¹¹³. There is a switch, in which desire is suspended by drive, that seeks (sexual) satisfaction. This ultimately causes difficulties for men, as it creates a superficial exchange between men and women, that they claim to suffer from. Such women, who are characterized by their beautiful appearance (that might be partly the result of beauty products and surgeries) and their "dependency of men's financial support" (I have referred to these women with the term *Mamacita* above before) become an object of fetishism. Chasing the fetish prevents men to see the real antagonism, which is that "there is no sexual relationship" as phrased by Lacan. Thus, men need a "Mamacita", to disguise that their fantasy of a masculine ideology is incomplete, in which masculinity and femininity would be clearly registered in the symbolic order – providing complementarity and wholeness. At the same time, as I have shown in many examples, men (unconsciously) pretend as if they are not invested into this fetish. Many claim, not to want a woman who is such a Mamacita, that would reduce their relation to an exchange of money and beauty. We thus encounter a double meaning of fetishistic disavowal, which is theorized by Kuldova (2016) quite nicely. Men Really know, that the Mamacitas beauty is appearance, and that she is not providing the fulfilment of a coherent identity that compliments femininity and masculinity, but they pretend as if they did not see it, which allows them, to enjoy women anyways. As such, the disavowal serves as an ideological device, by a process of delusion that is commonly shared in the social. Simultaneously men also pretend as if they are not invested into how things appear to be by disavowing their attachment to the fetishistic object (the Mamacita). It is thus somehow a way of pretending to pretend (Kuldova, 2016), (Žižek, 1989 b). An important remark about this doubling of fetishistic disavowal is, that the way how things appear do matter in the end, as Žižek (1996) puts it: "You can have your multiple dirty fantasies, but it matters which of them will be integrated into the public domain of the symbolic law, noted by the big Other." Looking at many chapters in this thesis, we can recognize, how this ideological fantasy of masculinity and his Mamacita are indeed integrated into the public domain in the symbolic law, as it has been shared by many men over many generations (inscribed in the very logic of patriarchy). We can thus recognize, how wanting a Mamacita becomes one of the many antagonistic acts that men do, while trying to create a coherent ideology in which the masculine identity is stable, that however hurts them.

As such, we realize, that the gendered reality that men are living in is not about the achievement of a hegemonic model. Looking at all the inconsistencies and irrational conducts, the frustration and anxieties that men have shared, we can rather see, that this hegemonic model does not exist. The gendered system of power is inherently incomplete, and this causes a lot of confusion. Feelings of shame and frustration emphasise, how this absence of a source of identification is traumatic. I quote here, how Macha explained this trauma and its implications:

"We are a pueblo perdido¹¹⁴, we don't have an identity. And that is why we are so vulnerable to manipulation. You know, I see how the young people have so much good will, there is a change happening if I see my daughter who is searching for a world that is better. But we don't have an identity. So, we really have to be carefully, not to be manipulated, and to try to get this identity by things that [they] have sold us."

While in this thesis I have not spoken about the active political influence on the creation of a gendered identity (which we can only assume is what Macha means when he refers to "they"), Macha's analysis on the vulnerability of manipulation is precisely, what my observations have shown; Because the acknowledgment of this impossibility to construct a stable male identity exposes men to a state of a crisis, with which men are confronted everyday. It leads to a constant urge to invest in a variety of

¹¹³ Either indirectly by paying for all expenses during a date, or in a direct way, by really paying for her surgeries.

¹¹⁴ „a lost village“

different fantasies, in order to disavow this horrifying acknowledgement of the Real. Thus, ideological fantasies of how to imagine a real masculine role model serve as sorts of illusions, that promise that it is possible to find a model of masculinity that works.

As such, we understand why it is so difficult for boys and men to let go of the prevailing ideological fantasy of patriarchy, because it has provided a source of identification over many generations. Men need the fetish of the “Mamacita”, because she fits perfectly into this fantasy. Further, previous concepts and accounts of my key-informants in Medellín have explained the endurance of the Machista ideology with the necessity for survival within the often-violent neighbourhoods of Medellín. There is the idea, that a man needs to be unemotional, strong and a hard worker in order to provide for his family and survival. This, however, is not enough to explain the endurance of this ideal, which many boys also identify as the reason for the crisis of masculinity. By unveiling unconscious attachments to it I have detected that even though this model of masculinity is perceived as the source of suffering, it simultaneously serves as a pool of pleasure in pain, that they enjoy. It is a surplus-enjoyment (or *jouissance*) that makes men to feel proud about being a Macho-Man, even though, due to the socio-economic changes, this man meets a reality that requires something else than just a hard-working individual of a family that possesses all the power and legitimacy. The way how men are confronted with shame is proof that they unconsciously know about the uselessness of their attachment to this fantasy. Once again, we recognize the double fetishistic disavowal as mentioned above, that disguises the real impossibility of the creation of coherent subjectivity among men and women.

The result of this impossibility is the construction of a society that clings on to certain sources of identification, while admitting how they are self-destructive. I have shown in this thesis, how boys and men are highly critical of the ruling idea of masculinity in Medellín, and they are aware of how much they suffer from it. However, despite their rational criticism of it, they disavow their criticism in practice, and are invested into ideological produced fantasies. As fantasies promise enjoyment and cause desire, men are thus attached to this ideological “masculine” reality through the enjoyment of the (obscene) conducts I have described in this thesis. Those are aspects in life that are serving the fulfilment of a certain fantasy, but simultaneously recover a small left over of *jouissance* (drive). Therefore, boys try to recapture the (illusionary) fulfilment of a male identity. Ultimately, full subjectivity is however never possible. Acknowledging that creates a lot of anxieties and practices of scapegoating and blaming others that seem to experience this full enjoyment. This finally also explains the fantasy that evolves around women who steal men’s enjoyment. It is an easy explanation of why, despite all the symbolic categories that are created, men ultimately still do not encounter this enjoyment of full subjectivity. It is the feminists, the “others” who are to blame for this, because they are not the Mamacitas who would appreciate the signifiers that men believe are making them men. The same counts for other men (men who appear “softer” or who are/appear homosexual), who threaten the consistency and coherence of the ideology of masculinity that entails the fantasy of a masculine identity that works. The crisis of masculinity is thus not about a lack of signifiers that men have for “other” ways of expressing masculinity. It is really about the lacking signifiers men have for themselves. The ideological fantasies that they are invested into then serve to fill in the gap of signification for their own representation (Zizek 2015 b).

To conclude, I therefore argue, that the crisis of masculinity is exactly this; The acknowledgment that there is no hegemonic masculinity. Toxic masculine behaviours are symptoms of the Real – the impossibility to construct a masculine identity. By detecting these symptoms, I have documented empirically in this thesis, how a psychoanalytical approach can inform a rethinking of this crisis of masculinity, that enhances our understanding of the struggle of being a man who invests into behaviours that put him into the state of a crisis. To finalize this thesis-work, I want to emphasise with some final reflections, why this reconceptualization of the crisis of masculinity is so crucial, and what are implications it barriers for bringing about a true transformation.

10. Final reflections

By acknowledging that the inherent problematic of men's struggle can be traced back to the impossibility of constructing a stable male identity, we come to understand, that only by changing the discursive categories and social constructs on gender this crisis of masculinity cannot be solved. Because it will ultimately not change the traumatic experience, that there is no model of masculinity that indeed serves as a source of identification and it also does not address the libidinal attachments through which men are attached to the gendered reality which is all through ideological in the form of fantasy. Even though, this might sound like a small difference in formulation, it is based on a different ontological assumption on reality and has crucial impacts for coping-strategies with it. If gender-programs like "Hombres como vos", intend to facilitate different expressions of a gendered identity it ultimately aims for enlarged tolerance towards otherness. While, as already mentioned above, there is no need to discuss the unacceptability of discrimination of others, such a tolerance or political correctness could however result in something that Wolff (et al, 1965) have called "repressive tolerance". Žižek (2017 b) has argued in an interview, that such tolerance is just a form of self-discipline, which doesn't really allow us to overcome the real problem of it (by "it", he refers here to sexism and racism). Tolerance does not solve but just regulates it. In Chapter 8 I already showed, how for instance the acceptance of homosexuality is somehow a repressed acceptance.

If the ultimate aim of gender-liberalization is the postmodern tolerant attitude to a multi-cultural and multi-gendered society, a pluralism of "ways of life", we might encounter, what Rancière (1995) refers to as the "bad surprise" that might be the consequence of postmodernisms aim to create a society that marks the "end of politics" (as cited in Žižek 1996).

To illustrate this bad surprise, I will share how Macha described the revolution, of becoming, what he calls "the new masculinities". These new masculinities do not dominate women and respect one another, and are thus "loving and better men". For visualizing this, during the meeting that I attained with the Amanadero de Manes, Macha told us a story. In his story, he talks about a world that is populated by vampires who drink blood. One day, however, there is a little vampire who, unlike the others, starts to drink water. This change of attitude caused a lot of problems for him, but with time more and more vampires see the benefits of drinking water. Macha then refers to the inherent meaning of the story, men as water-drinking men, who are starting to change the paradigm of masculinity. He ends his story by saying, that he hopes that one day, all vampires will drink water and that day they will never speak about drinking blood again. While we understand the underlying message of Macha's little story, we can detect a difficulty. Because it already sets out a glimpse of what might happen when we reach a point of liberalization of all symbolic categories that exist for gender and condone the "sexist" or "Macho" Other. At this moment we take away the substance of our fantasy of the Other – thus the details that have allowed us to make sense of ourselves and others. We are left alone with our lack of consistency and the result of it might be the triumphant comeback of a pure, unfiltered sexist hatred of the Other, bursting out all obscenity that has been censored before (Žižek 1996). Because "any 'real' Other is instantly denounced for its 'fundamentalism', since the kernel of Otherness resides in the regulation of its jouissance," (Žižek 1996). What is meant is thus the return of the Real, the inherent antagonisms and the ultimate impossibility to make sense of one's own identity and the differences between one another. Such antagonisms have been repressed, but "burst out" in obscene ways like open misogyny, racism and hatred for the pure sake of the enjoyment it brings. "The 'real Other' is thus by definition 'patriarchal' 'violent'," (Žižek 1996) never a tolerant or politically correct Other. It is the vampire's "real" nature to drink blood. The water-drinking vampire has lost its substance, the obscenity of its inner nature has been covered up. So that is the ultimate problem in intersubjectivity; "to what extent are we ready to accept the other (our sexual) partner, in the real of his or her existence?" (Žižek 1996). Žižek thus claims, that for subjects to survive, a minimum of the real, even though in a somehow contained way is needed. So, as such, the liberalization of gender construct takes away the traumatic kernel of the Other by reducing it to an sterile entity, that condemns and forbids all its surplus. Therefore, Žižek (2015 a) explains in an interview that we need to exchange and address a small proportion of obscenity, when we want to enter into real contact with the other. This can happen for example by using obscene and dirty jokes. Even though in his interview, he does not refer directly to gender-relations, he for instance explains, that racism or ableism can hardly be overcome by being politically correct:

“Of course racist jokes and so on can be extremely oppressive, humiliating, and so on. But the solution I think is, to create an atmosphere or to practice these jokes in such a way that they really function as that little bit of obscene contact which establishes true proximity between us. [...] I remember when I was young [...] when I met with other people from Ex-Yugoslavia Republic, Serbs, Croatians, Bosnians and so on. We were all the time telling each other dirty jokes about each other. But not so much against the other. We were in a wonderful way competing who will be able to tell a nastier joke about ourselves. These were obscene racist jokes. But their effect was a wonderful sense of shared obscene solidarity.” (Žižek 2015 a)

Thus, instead of trying to promote some politically tolerant attitudes towards different ways of expressions of gender and sexuality, an aim should be to create an atmosphere, in which men and woman can really find an exchange between each other that allows to address the amounts of obscenities that exist in society.

As an example, I would shortly like to refer to a dynamic that developed itself between Juan David and me. After the moment, that I have described in chapter 4.2., in which we found ourselves in an “awkward” moment in regard to who was going to pay for the fruit-bowl, I told him about a phenomena that often happens in Germany, when men and women go out and pay for a meal or a drink.

Marleen: In the end, I think many women in Germany do appreciate it a lot, when a man is paying for her drink, but they are too focused on proving, that they don’t need it and that they do not want to invest into this traditional gender-rule, so they will not let the men do it. See, so when it comes to paying, there is always this “German-payment-dance”¹¹⁵ between men and women. Every time the question is who will pay, both boy and girl will pick out their purse and then they will be like (*I made my voice higher in an exaggerated tone*): ‘No I can pay. (*with deeper voice*) No leave it, I will pay. (*higher voice again*): Nooo I will pay.’¹¹⁶ And then this will go on for hours until the waiter will go away.

We both laughed. Of course it was an exaggerated presentation, but the message was clear.

Juan David: You know here, we also have a weird payment-dance. Women always start to play with their hair, looking around the room or checking their phone when the bill comes. You know, as if they did not notice that the waiter is waiting for the man to pay.

Marleen: Ooh, yeah some girls do that in Germany as well.

After that, we developed a running joke, every time it came to the moment to pay for something. We both started to play with our hair (which for him with his very short hair looked even more ridiculous), looking away until we then switched to the “*German-payment-dance*”, fighting in an exaggerated way about who was allowed to pay this time. Ultimately, we then agreed to either pay separately or in turns, and if someone would invite the other, we could honestly appreciate it. What this small example shows, is how we both overcame the challenges of finding our relationship within this antagonistic and inconsistent system of gender-relations in Medellín, by directly addressing it and somehow making fun of it. By mocking the fetish of the Mamacita, who pretends not to notice that she “sells her beauty”, and simultaneously making fun of the very fantasy of two individuals who need to emphasise that they can and want to pay, we addressed a certain degree of obscenity of the relationship between men and women. Simultaneously it was a nice way of showing, that the solution to detach oneself from this antagonistic relationship is not by shaming women and men to accept to be invited for something, that would somehow discredit woman’s independency, or take away a man’s masculinity. This little ritual between us, thus satisfied somehow a drive, that was redirected in a productive way. It made him and me overcome the desire to fulfil the “conventional” gender-role-enactment.

Therefore, as Kapoor’s (2017: 2669) puts it: “Radical transformation [...] requires more than changing the discourse or the power/knowledge frame [...]; it requires, critically, also attending to people’s libidinal attachments”. Thus, the real challenge of gender work is not, to create gender relations that are politically correct and tolerant. It is, to refer back to Macha’s story, not enough to educate or discipline the vampire to give up drinking blood, but it is really about getting rid of the vampire in ourselves, thus change society itself. How this is possible is answered by Lacan’s idea of “traversing the fantasy”, taken

¹¹⁵ I used my two fingers to put my choice of words as “quotes”, as it is an own work creation that came to my mind in this moment. It is no real term that exists in Germany.

¹¹⁶ As if a boy and a girl would be having a conversation, but in a very overacted way.

on by Žižek. What is meant by traversing the fantasy, is that the subject need to become aware, that there is no big Other that guarantees the symbolic order, and, as Žižek (1996 a) puts it, “becomes ‘cause of itself’”. What that entails, is that firstly, men need to be aware of the inconsistencies in reality that shape their understanding of masculinity. They need to come to the understanding that the fantasy of masculinity is an imaginary one – a fiction. To achieve such an enlightenment, boys and men have to address the amounts of obscenities that promise a glimpse of the Real, as corrupted desires that are registered in the unconscious. In Medellín this translates itself into a necessity that men recognize their obsession of other’s enjoyment, that of homosexuals, feminists and everybody that embodies otherness somehow, and manage to detach themselves from it. For that, men also need to confront themselves with their own fetishistic disavowal and desire and in that sense stop looking for someone who ensures their existence in that someone’s desire (Žižek 1996 a). This identification of the antagonisms and ultimately the lie that men invest into when holding on to the Machista-fantasy are important steps to traverse this very fantasy, and to construct a masculinity, that is truly transformational and re-defines the concepts of masculinity and femininity.

Similar as Žižek (2019) has described it in an interview, such a change requires cultivating forms of femininity and masculinity that are courageous enough to deal with the truly antagonisms in society that cause toxicity as a symptom. This should not imply an idealization of certain images of femininity or masculinity, but that of acknowledging that society is traversed by antagonisms, and that femininity and masculinity are no natural concepts, but defined by commonly shared fantasies. There is a need to find a true redefinition of what it means to be a subject (man, woman, gay ...) in this society, that is embedded in such a poor, unequal and violent environment (DeVries 2020). This demands to invest into a community, in which femininity and masculinity can be conceptualized in a way that manages to deal with the true inconsistencies of the social, which is so highly sexualized in Medellín. Because any relation is founded on a contradiction, which is why “there is no sexual relationship”. True change thus manifests itself in the redefinition of society and with that, ultimately the very redefinition of sex. We should ask ourselves the question: How can we become sexual beings in a different kind of society that does not rely on an external big Other, that defines the idea of how to identify as a subject with fantasies as “real men and women”, but a society that becomes “cause of itself”?

Whereas in this thesis I have not delved deeply into concrete ideas how such an establishment of courageous and transformational gender identities can be translated in directive actions, I hope, that my findings can set an impulse for finding ways of Really challenging the so called crisis of masculinity, which is ultimately only the symptom of a broader structure of power, that is libidinally invested.

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Maluma (2016): Quatro Babys. Produced by Santana the Golden Boy. Album: Cuatro Babys. Featured artists: Bryan Myers, Noriel, Juhn, Trap Capos.

Sonora Matancera (1956): Mala-Mujer. Album: Sonora Matancera.