



***Muxes at work: between community belonging
and heteronormativity in the workplace***

Gender expressions in the context of a local and globalized
economy in Juchitán de Zaragoza, México

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Disclaimer:

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Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>iii</i>
<i>List of Tables</i>	<i>vi</i>
<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>vi</i>
<i>List of Maps</i>	<i>vi</i>
<i>List of Appendices</i>	<i>vi</i>
<i>List of Acronyms</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>Abstract</i>	<i>viii</i>
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
1.1 Research questions	3
Sub-questions	3
1.2 Structure of the paper	4
Chapter 2 Background	5
2.1 The roles of women, men and muxes in the Isthmus	6
2.2 Muxes in the workplace: diversity of works and in-between occupations	9
2.3 The economy of Juchitán	10
Chapter 3 Research Methodology	12
3.1 Study Area: Juchitán de Zaragoza, México	12
3.2 Study Design	13
3.3 Interviews	13
3.4 Direct observation	14
3.5 Sample size	14
3.6 Sampling strategy	14
3.7 Role as Researcher	15
3.8 Ethical considerations	15
Chapter 4 Conceptual and Analytical Framework	17
4.1 Heteronormativity and gender expressions	17
4.2 Heteronormativity in the context of Juchitán	18
4.3 Heteronormativity at work	20
4.4 Intersections between social class and gender	22
4.5 Analytical framework	23
Chapter 5 Analysis and Research Findings	25
5.1 Overview of the interviewed workers	25

5.2 The complexity of the “muxe” identity	27
5.3 The idealization of intermediate occupations	28
5.4 Access of gender nonconforming muxes to the non-wage sector	29
5.5 Resistance of gender nonconforming muxes to the wage labor	33
5.6 Gender nonconforming muxes and “concealed homophobia”	35
Chapter 6 Conclusions	37
<i>Glossary</i>	<i>39</i>
<i>References</i>	<i>40</i>
<i>List of Appendices</i>	<i>46</i>

List of Tables

Table 1: Distribution of the economically active population by employment status	11
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List of Figures

Figure 1: Analytical Framework	24
--------------------------------	----

List of Maps

Map 1: Juchitán in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec	12
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List of Appendices

Appendix 1: Profile of interviewed muxes. August-September 2015	46
Appendix 2: People interviewed from civil society. August-September 2015	47
Appendix 3: Interview guides	48
Appendix 4: Photographs	49

List of Acronyms

COCEI	Coalición Obrera Campesina Estudiantil del Istmo (Worker-Peasant-Student Coalition of Tehuantepec)
INEGI	Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (National Institute of Statistics and Geography)
INAFED	Instituto Nacional para el Federalismo y el Desarrollo Municipal (National Institute for Federalism and Municipal Development)
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender

Abstract

Juchitán de Zaragoza, México, has been historically known as a commercial town dominated by hard working women. It has also become well-known because of “muxes”, a community of gender nonconforming people who have been frequently reported as “socially accepted”, in relation to other transgender communities at the national level. In this context, this research brings the narratives of muxes about gender and work. It seeks to make clear how heteronormativity creates and constrains room for *muxes* in the workplace, affecting their access to some types of jobs, in the context of a local and globalized economy.

The labor market affects muxes but also muxes affect economic activity, keeping the economy local against the pressures of globalization. What protects and supports muxes is the economy by and for the local population. The local economy, mainly built on *fiestas* and other economic practices, allows muxes to be independent, “hard-working” and productive. In a different way, the wage labor is for transgender muxes the heteronormative sphere of the labor market, but an open space for normative muxes and gays. In the end, the research concludes that muxes, depending on their gender identities and expressions, experience different degrees of heteronormativity at work.

Relevance to Development Studies

Development-sexuality intersections have to become explicit by making clear the ways in which power operates through heteronormativity. Otherwise, hierarchies between gender conforming and nonconforming people might be seen as “natural” rather than resulting from power struggles. By understanding how development is linked to sexuality we will be able to identify workplace inequalities that exclude transgenders from social institutions.

Keywords

Muxes, gender and work, heteronormativity, gender expressions, gender nonconforming workers.

Chapter 1

Introduction

In the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, the narrowest part of Mexico, there is a Zapotec community of gender nonconforming people¹ who are widely known as “muxes” (or ‘muxhes’). The origin of this word remains uncertain, although some people claim that it is a Zapotec word derived from the 16th century Spanish word for “mujer” (woman) (Gómez Regalado 2004: 2). Additionally, the word ‘muxe’ does not hold any derogatory connotations at all, and the Zapotec language embraces gender diverse people in its vocabulary (Flores Martos 2009: 312). The fact that the term ‘muxe’ is not derogatory is quite meaningful since language is constitutive of culture.

Muxes are males who display certain characteristics from both conventional genders; they are considered as a sort of ‘third gender’ in their culture, and combine roles assigned to both males and females. Although this community of indigenous origin² lives and works in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec –which represents the shortest distance between the Pacific Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico–, the present research will particularly be focused on muxes who work in Juchitán de Zaragoza, a town located in the Southeastern part of Oaxaca.

The indigenous culture of Juchitán has historically been depicted as more accepting of sexual diversity; a place where relations among genders are, to some extent, more horizontal. The media have broadly depicted Juchitán as a “gay paradise”. Anthropologists and researchers in general have stated that *muxes* are socially accepted and not discriminated against in their community (Chiñas 1992; Bennholdt-Thomsen 1997; Miano 1999); therefore, they experience less marginalization than other transgender communities at the national level.

The fact that in Mexico, a country known for its *machismo*, there is a region called Juchitán, in which women have a strong social position, attracted the attention of some researchers. Tamara Finkler, an anthropologist who has worked and lived in Oaxaca, wondered: “How could it be that, in a country like Mexico, which is world famous for its machismo, a transgender group seems to be not only tolerated but also positively integrated, respected and valued in a region called the Istmo of Oaxaca?” (Finkler 2008: 1).

The “social acceptance” of muxes has led to an idealization of Juchitán: there are a significant number of materials that have been published reinforcing the idea of a “Queer Paradise”, from documentaries to newspaper

¹ Gender conformity can be defined as behavior and appearance that conforms to the social expectations for one’s gender. So, for gender conforming men, this means behaving and appearing in ways that are considered masculine. Gender non-conformity, then, is behaving and appearing in ways that are considered atypical for one’s gender <<http://kinseyconfidential.org/gender-nonconformity/>>.

² Rather than referring to an “indigenous community”, I find more appropriate to call muxes a “community from indigenous origin/culture”, since the label of “indigenous” nowadays might be problematic because acculturation processes and globalization also play a role in this definition. As noted by Flores Martos (2012), some narratives about indigenous communities are likely to give the impression that the protagonists “do not seem indigenous” or “are no longer indigenous”. However, in terms of identity, 58.0% of people in Oaxaca consider to be indigenous, independently if they speak a native language or not (INEGI 2010: 85).

articles and magazines³. As a consequence, the celebrity of *muxes* has increased with their appearance in the most renowned media of the world (New York Times, CNN, BBC⁴); all of them supporting the idea of “social acceptance”.

However, the idealization of Juchitán as a “Queer Paradise” has been somewhat questioned, in the sense that gender relations and views on sexuality seem to be ambivalent and conflicting. In this regard, Miano (1999: 258) stated that “social ‘acceptance’ that muxe enjoy is not free of contradictions, forms of marginalization and even violence”. Additionally, some previous literature (Bartolo 2010; Mirandé 2012, 2015) suggests that *muxes* might face heteronormativity at work. In other words, regardless of being depicted as more “accepted”, *muxes* might also deal with contradictions and situations of marginalization in the workplace; put it simply, is the ‘social acceptance’ of *muxes* reflected in the workplace?

In a less oppressive context for gender nonconforming people, such as Juchitán, the answer might be addressed in a different way. Maybe *muxes* have something to say about how social roles or identities could explain processes of non-marginalization at work, or perhaps the research might reveal that this society is not as accepting as it has been depicted, and it only accepts *muxes* under certain conditions and only for some kinds of work. In the end, we might find that talking about “social acceptance” is problematic.

Nowadays, *muxes* simultaneously live in a local and globalized economy; in the same way, they live a local and globalized sexuality, in which, on the one hand, the “indigenous culture” has different understandings of gender and identities, and, on the other hand, the “modern sphere” brings new categories and trends of thinking. More precisely, it is not a rigid binary but a hybrid continuum in which “modern” and “traditional” notions melt together, and on the way there are different nuances and in-between positions.

Within the local and globalized economy, *muxes* do a diversity of works from both female and male areas. They are probably more known because of their work at traditional “female tasks” such as embroidery, sewing, cooking and trade. However, they also are dedicated, in a less extent, to male activities; similarly, they are engaged in the wage labor⁵, working as professionals. In these settings, the study seeks to find out if heteronormativity, in one way or another creates or constrains room for *muxes* in the workplace, and affect their access to employment. How gender expressions⁶, for example, affect their participation in the labor market or to what extent they are allowed to work performing non normative identities.

³ <<http://www.dossierpolitico.com/vernoticiasanteriores.php?artid=4515&relacion=dossierpolitico>>

⁴ <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/07/weekinreview/07lacey.html?_r=0> ;

<http://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2011/05/110330_mexico_muxes_oaxaca_juchitan_irm>.

⁵ Wage labor refers to the relationship between a worker and an employer in which the worker sells, for a predetermined period of time, their labor under a contract of employment and other formal arrangements, often in a labor market. There is a subordinate position of the worker who is embedded in a hierarchical structure, in which he has to follow formal regulations in order to receive a wage or salary (own definition).

⁶ The term “gender expression” refers to how people outwardly express their gender through their clothing, haircut, behavior, etc. Gender identity refers to one’s internal sense of gender. The two terms are not interchangeable (Movement Advancement Project et al. 2013: 1).

Since in Latin America transgenders⁷ usually have limited access to the wage labor and are engaged in sex work (Corrales and Pecheny 2010: 6; RedLac Trans 2014: 20), this research also seeks to know why muxes with female gender identity, in Juchitán, are engaged in a diversity of occupations other than sex work. What does this particular society have in order to allow transgender muxes to work on many and different occupations?

By studying the current situation of muxes in the workplace, we will elucidate either what the rationale is behind their “social acceptance”, or what kind of factors contribute to their marginalization. In this sense, it is relevant to make clear to what extent the workplace situation of gender nonconforming people in Juchitán differ from the dominant heteronormative model, prevalent at a national level, in Mexico, and in the rest of Latin America. The last goal, indeed, is to identify the sectors in which *muxes* have less access in the labor market, or how they are pushed into certain roles at work.

The present research consists basically of fieldwork done with muxes in Juchitán de Zaragoza. Although there are studies on women’s roles in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec (Chiñas 1973, 1992; Bennholdt-Thomsen 1997; Stephen 1998; Dalton 2010) and the political history of Juchitán (Campbell et al. 1993), the research on muxes is limited. Beverly Chiñas (1992) wrote a short chapter about them on her book, mostly focused on women; Bennholdt-Thomsen (1997) also devoted a chapter to muxes, but her research is also centered on women. The Italian anthropologist Marinella Miano Borruso, now deceased, wrote her doctoral thesis (1999) on muxes, a critical study that later on was published as a book (2002). From a literary perspective, Elena Poniatowska portrayed Juchitán as nobody else did; perhaps the now stereotypical depiction of the Zapotec town comes from her text “The man with the sweet penis” (2010). For his part, a muxe researcher, Elí Bartolo Marcial, who recently passed away, made public *Las otras hijas de San Vicente* (2010), an enlightening non-academic book about muxes *fiestas*. Additionally, there are some other authors that have published papers about this community (Gómez Suárez, Flores Martos, Mirandé). However, none of what has been written so far about muxes puts a strong focus on work and employment. In this sense, this study tries to understand an essential aspect of muxes lives, in a local and global context.

1.1 Research questions

How does heteronormativity create or constrain room for *muxes* in the workplace, and affect their access to employment, in the context of the local and globalized economy, in Juchitán de Zaragoza, México?

Sub-questions

What perceptions do muxes have about their accessibility or inaccessibility to different types of employments, according to their gender expressions?

⁷ The word “transgender” is used, in this research, as a term to refer *only* to male-bodied persons with female gender expressions.

What kind of differences, perceptions and experiences on heteronormativity are there between muxes who work in the local economy and muxes who are engaged in the wage labor?

What are some social expectations about the roles of *muxes* at work? How are they perceived as workers by muxes themselves and other people?

1.2 Structure of the paper

Chapter 1 provides the introduction, problem statement, relevance of the study, and research questions; Chapter 2 contains an overview of the preceding literature, since this is a contemporary research that requires having a solid background and understanding of the previous studies; Chapter 3 provides the methodological approach, and a relation of the interviewed informants; Chapter 4 includes the conceptual and theoretical framework; Chapter 5 provides the Analysis and Findings of the present research and finally, Chapter 6 ends with the conclusions.

Chapter 2

Background

Is it fair to see *muxes* under Western eyes? *Muxes* are not homosexuals, they are *muxes*; historically their understandings of gender identity and sexual orientation have differed from Western considerations in this respect. Vrana (2007: 1, 5) wonders: “Is *muxe* a gender identity, a sexual orientation or both?” She prevents us from studying third-gender non Western cultures under ‘Western eyes’. “Observers want to understand the *muxe* in Western identity terms –they want to know who, or rather what, the *muxe* is. Male? Female? Gay? Transvestite? Transgender?” In this respect, it is understandable Vrana’s concern but, in practice, non-Western categories might need Western categories in order to be explained, since our mind-set has been already shaped by modern notions about sexuality, including “gender identity” and “sexual orientation” concepts.

“Muxhe” is a generic-umbrella word including non-dominant gender identities and sexual orientations adopted by biological males in the Zapotec culture. What we know, “under Western eyes”, as “male-to-female transvestite”, “male-to-female transsexual”, “effeminate gay” or “masculine gay” seems to be included within the category of “muxe” as long as there is also a strong component of ethnic identity.

A highly visible characteristic of Isthmus Zapotec populations is the *muxe*, or man-woman, a person who appears to be predominantly male but displays certain feminine characteristics. Many of these individuals seem to be what we in the United States would call transvestites, or cross-dressers. Some are what we now call “gay”, or persons who relate affectionately and erotically to persons of the same sex. In Zapotec culture the *muxe* fills a third-gender role between men and women, taking some of the characteristics of each of the other genders (Chiñas 1992: 108).

In fact, *muxes* are diverse, and their sexuality is expressed in a diversity of gender identities, gender expressions and sexual orientations. Consequently, there are many ways of being “muxe”; it is, actually, a spectrum, a rainbow of very different colors that are connected by a strong sense of ethnic and cultural identity.

Some feel comfortable in their male gender roles and dress as men; some dress as men but enjoy putting on makeup; some enjoy cross dressing occasionally and presenting themselves as women during *velas*⁸ and big beauty contests held every year; many are MTF transvestites living and always dressing as women (Finkler 2008: 8)⁹.

⁸ *Fiesta* of one evening’s duration within a longer celebration of three or four days. A *Vela* is a big community or family fiesta with traditional music, dance, food, and beer; this celebration is held in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.

⁹ Unless stated otherwise, all the translations from Spanish (and French) into English are mine.

On the other hand, in the early 70s David Rymph found a frequency rate of 6% male transvestism (*muxe*) in an Isthmus Zapotec village¹⁰ (Buvinić 1976: 59; Chiñas 1992: 112). Although this rough estimation is seemingly coherent, it is hard to know how reliable these types of statistics are because of the complex nature of “measuring” people with nonconforming sexual orientations and gender identities¹¹.

Concerning workplace issues, *muxes* apparently are distinguished by the type of work they do. Bennholdt-Thomsen (1997: 304) states that whether a man is socially viewed as a *muxe* is determined not only by the type of work the person does but also by his sexuality. In this sense, Stephen (2002: 43) points out that “people perceive them as having the physical bodies of men but different aesthetic, work, and social skills from most men. They may have some attributes of women or combine those of men and women”. In order to identify the different “skills” of *muxes*, in regard to men, and their “female attributes”, we should have a look at how originally emerged the sexual division of labor in the Zapotec culture, and then situate the position of *muxes* in this spectrum.

2.1 The roles of women, men and *muxes* in the Isthmus

One of the first persons in studying women’s roles in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec has been the anthropologist Beverly Newbold Chiñas. With respect to a Zapotec community, she firstly noted that “the phenomenon of machismo, so often cited as a male characteristic in Latin American cultures, seems to be largely absent in intra-group relations in Zapotec culture, where such behavior is evident, it is negatively sanctioned” (1973: 111).

Regarding the sexual division of labor, in the Isthmus, Chiñas pointed out that “men are the producers and women are the processors and vendors of the men’s production” (1973: 31). Some activities that follow this logic are, for example: making tortillas and *totopos* for sale (from maize), cooking fish and shrimp to sell them in urban markets, boiling sea turtle eggs and selling them. Chiñas observed that there are some exceptions in this logic; in certain occupations men themselves sell their own products (Chiñas 1973: 34). In addition, there are goods that can be sold without being processed, such as many types of fruits. Many years ago, in the Zapotec society studied by Chiñas (San Juan Evangelista¹²), the household was the basic production unit as well as the basic consumption unit, rather than being only a consumption unit, as it is in industrialized societies.

Moreover, Chiñas noted (1973: 34) that “women sell in essentially three contexts: the home, the streets, and the market place”, and it is unlikely to see

¹⁰ "Cross-Sex Behavior in an Isthmus Zapotec Village", paper presented at the American Anthropological Association Annual Meetings, Mexico City, 1974. In one group 6% of men between 16 and 25 are transvestites.

¹¹ Sexual orientation and gender identity are complex categories to measure within a given population, because of the fact that both are not visible. Actually what we can “see” from people is only gender expressions (which are not necessarily related to a specific sexual orientation) and bodily modifications, and what we can measure is how many people self-identify as “gays, lesbians, transgenders, *muxes*” or any other category of sexual diversity, leaving out the non-self-identified people with those categories.

¹² A Zapotec town located in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.

men selling in the market, so “the market places are overwhelmingly a woman’s milieu”. Chiñas concluded that the sexual division of labor was relatively strict, economic roles were generally complementary by sex, and women were in a position to control the household income, as a result of women’s processing-vending role.

The processing-vending role of women, and more precisely the sexual division of labor, explains why women were not known only as housewives but mainly as traders or merchants. “Juchitan women have not been reduced to a domestic role, neither in reality, because here there is no the notion of the housewife, but only of the housewife-artisan-businesswoman” (Bennholdt-Thomsen 1997: 22). Therefore, apart from the household, the second sphere that “belongs to women”, is the market. Additionally, the women’s position of being economically productive left room for them to be independent, and in a position to control the household income. The perceptions of Zapotec women as merchants had emerged:

Both men and women are convinced that women are better at buying and selling and handling money (...) The man who works as a laborer in the nearby crude oil refinery delivers his complete income to the woman, for her to manage it. In this way, a self-contained, women-centred economy of a very special quality has developed (Bennholdt Thomsen 2005).

On the other hand, male patterns seem to be similar to the national model. Men own authority and political power, this is, the decisions concerning the community are taken by them. In the field of production, they are usually fishermen and farmers but they are also traders, political leaders and intellectuals (Miano 1999: 11).

We have identified the household and the market as the first female areas; to some extent, the economy in Juchitán is in women’s hands, their work is valued and socially recognized. In the context of a clear sexual division of labor, between women and men, we can now recognize two spaces in which *muxes* are allowed to be part of, since *muxes* “assume traditional female roles” (Mirandé 2012: 509). In the first place, the household: “They take over the tasks of girls in a household and learn from their mothers skills such as cooking, embroidery, and cleaning that are associated with Zapotec women” (Finkler 2008: 9); and secondly, the market. “*Muxes* freely participate in the market, which, in Juchitán, is a female-dominated domain” (Finkler 2008: 9). In other words, the work of trader, merchant, socially constructed as a “female work” in the Juchiteca society, has been perceived as a space in which *muxes* are allowed to participate. Bennholdt-Thomsen (1997: 281) states that “because the market belongs to women, a man who dedicates himself to working in the market is defined as *muxe*”.

Besides the household and the business sphere, women play an important role at a social level, specifically in traditional festivals and celebrations. In the Isthmus, there is a full calendar of *fiestas*, including “Velas”, baptisms, communions, 15-year celebration, weddings, death rituals, etc. “Velas” are festivals or big fiestas, apparently from religious origin, carried out by people from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in order to celebrate their activities, their

products, their saints, their family names¹³. More precisely, a “Vela” is a “fiesta” of one evening’s duration within a longer celebration of three or four days; it is a big community or family fiesta with traditional music, dance, food, and beer.

Particularly in Juchitán, fiestas, celebrations and festivals are so relevant for local people that we cannot understand this culture without taking into account their “fiesta system” or system of festivities. This relevance is mainly given by two elements: fiestas are an essential part of the local economy¹⁴, and they are also relevant at a social level. On the one hand, there are some occupations that would not be as significant as they are without a culture of festivities. For instance, embroidery and sewing are essential for making traditional dresses; cooking, and the making of snacks are also relevant. On the other hand, sponsoring fiestas is a way of gaining social prestige, status and respect from the community.

It is apparent that sponsoring public fiestas is still an important means of gaining the highest respect of the community. Hosting private fiestas also adds to status and prestige, especially when food, drink, and music are abundantly supplied (...) A household need not accumulate wealth to gain respect. The ideal rather is to share one’s wealth for the benefit of the community, the ancestors, and the saints (...) To the people within the system it is the social ties which the fiesta system establishes and maintains that give life meaning (Chiñas 1973: 78).

Within celebrations and fiestas, women play an essential role because “they dominate the community socialization system, represented by festivals and rituals, in which they have an autonomous representation in relation to men, since they grab most ‘mayordomías’¹⁵ in most cases” (Miano 1999: 10). Since being a “mayordomo” represents honor and prestige, people who succeed in getting this position have a higher status in society. “Prestige does not accrue so much for hosting a private fiesta as it does for “making a good showing” at those the household must give in terms of number of invited guests and quantity of food, drink and music” (Chiñas 1973: 72). The most prestigious person is not the one who owns most, but the one who gives most (“prestige economy”).

In this sense, Miano (1999: 201 and 2010: 2449) points out that *muxes* have also a predominant role in the festivities system of Juchitán. They are the artisans who design and make embroidered female costumes for local celebrations; the designers who make confetti for *Velas*, large and traditional celebrations, and other kind of “fiestas”; additionally, they decorate parade floats. In addition, *muxes* are the choreographers for these events and for fifteen-year celebrations and anniversaries. Therefore, *muxes* work as

¹³ For example, Vela López and Vela Pineda (family names, celebrated in September); Velas with names of saints: San Vicente, San Isidro Labrador, Angelica Pipi, San Jacinto, La Asunción. In total, there are 26 Velas, from April to September (H. Ayuntamiento 2008: 44). The most important Velas are celebrated in May, but for *muxes*, the most important one is held in November: the “Vela of the Authentic, Intrepid Seekers of Danger”.

¹⁴ Bennholdt-Thomsen (2005) stated that “all together there are 628 street festivals celebrated in Juchitán: birthdays, weddings, and the initiation of the young girls for their 15th birthday...”

¹⁵ A system with religious connotation in which a “mayordomo”, host or sponsor is in charge of preparing, organizing and paying food, drinks, music for a fiesta or a “Vela”. Therefore, the way to gain social prestige and status is through festivals, specially “Velas”.

embroiderers, designers, decorators and artisans for the local celebrations, on a daily basis.

On the other hand, in the previous literature it has been mentioned that some *muxes* do “male occupations” such as public official and politician. For example, Mirandé (2014: 254) referred to men with traditional male jobs who identify themselves as *muxes* but do not dress like women in the workplace. Consequently, we need to find out whether this happens because of their identity (some of them might not feel the need to dress up in female clothes) or it is because certain workplaces are heteronormative.

In summary, we could say that in Juchitán the household, the market, and the festivities system are areas of action of women, and are predominantly feminine; on the other hand, the field, factory, political representation, and intellectual work are masculine areas. Muxes are engaged in the household, the market, and the system of fiestas, and to a less extent in masculine works.

2.2 Muxes in the workplace: diversity of works and in-between occupations

Apart from “female tasks” and some “masculine jobs”, it has been reported that *muxes* are involved in a significant variety of works, extending, for example, from artisans to teachers in schools (Mirandé 2014: 256). Finkler summarizes the diversity of *muxe* occupations.

As professionals, Muxes traditionally become good artisans, piñata makers, embroiderers, cooks, and pastry bakers and take care of the household, children and old and sick people in a family (...) Nowadays Muxes depending on their educational level, class and economic situation move into professions in all walks of life. Some become hairdressers or run beauty salons. Some work as lawyers, teachers, architects, politicians, sales persons or artists (2008: 9).

Stephen (2002) notes the potential attributes of *muxes* for doing different kinds of works perceived either as “female” or “male” works. For their part, Bennholdt-Thomsen (1997) and Mirandé (2012) argue that certain occupations are seen as “works of muxes”, because there is a strong division of labor that leaves room for allocating *muxes* into positions occupied neither by women nor by men.

A precondition for *muxe* identification with certain jobs is the existence of a clear sexual division of labor. Under these conditions, there are intermediate positions that can be best carried out by a third sex. One job that is defined as muxes’ work is the production of paper ornaments for large fiestas and *Velas*, or community festivals (...) Because of the sharp division of labor there are occupations that are in-between, not assigned to one sex or the other, and are recognized as the work of muxes. Although certain jobs are reserved for muxes, they are represented in virtually all walks of life (Mirandé 2012: 522 and 536).

Bennholdt-Thomsen (1997: 303) states that “also models for embroideries are often designed by them; this activity also has an intermediate location with respect to works of men and women”. We will further analyze if there are, effectively, “intermediate” occupations “reserved” for *muxes*. However, with such a diversity of types of work, mentioned by different authors, excepting ,

only, their relevant role in the particular festive system of Juchitán, it is not really clear what kind of works are considered “of muxes”. This ambiguity is reinforced by the fact that *muxes* “are represented in virtually all walks of life” (Mirandé 2012: 536). Therefore, the “in-between occupations” for *muxes* seem to be blurred and vague; more precisely, *muxes* do many types of work, including ‘male’ and ‘female’ ones, and they have very good positions in works that are relevant for the festive system of Juchitán.

It has also been stated by previous literature that few *muxes* engage in sex work. “Few Muxe are sex workers, probably because their community and cultural surrounding offers them opportunities to develop professional careers. Sex work is not needed to make a living or to secure survival” (Finkler 2008: 17). Finally, there are intersections between social class and work since class has been suggested to be linked to expressions of gender identity: cross-dressing is more accepted in lower sectors (Miano 2010: 2454), and the jobs of muxes would indicate their social class (Gauvin 2011: 27). These issues have further elaboration in the analytical framework.

2.3 The economy of Juchitán

The Isthmus of Tehuantepec is a transit area and trading route between North and Central America. Particularly, the town of Juchitán is a regional trade centre and strategic traffic junction; people from different regions of the Isthmus trade in Juchitán. Within the Isthmus, Juchitán is also the center of Zapotec culture and political influence. One of the most politically successful indigenous social movements in Latin America, COCEI, emerged in Juchitán in the early 70s by challenging the hegemony of the dominant political class.

The total population of Juchitán is 93,038 inhabitants, according to the 2010 Census; 48.59% are men and 51.41% women. The economically active population represents 36,238 inhabitants, of which 34,576 are employed; within the economically employed and active population, 14% is devoted to activities of the primary sector (agriculture, logging operation, livestock, mining, fishing); 9.29 % is allocated to the construction sector; 20.30 % to the manufacturing industry, 19.91 % is devoted to commercial activities and 37.68% to public and social services (H. Ayuntamiento 2014: 82).

Economically active men represent 67.46% of the total active population, and only 32.54% are women. On the other hand, not economically active men represent 27.6% and 72.4% of women appear as inactive. However, Miano (2002: 83) noted that a great part of the female population that appears as economically inactive are engaged in the informal sector¹⁶.

¹⁶ According to the INEGI, some common characteristics associated with the informal sector are: 1) the non-registration: the economic units are not registered under specific forms of national legislation such as tax or social security laws (failure to follow systematic accounting practices usually results in no registration of the activity); 2) the small scale of operations, which might derive from the low complexity of operations that can be carried out without the need for systematic accounting records (INEGI 2014: 3-5).

Table 1: Distribution of the economically active population by employment status, 2010

Economic participation indicators	Total	Men	Women	%	
				Men	Women
Economically active population ¹⁷	36.238	24.445	11.793	67.46	32.54
Employed	34.576	23.019	11.557	66.58	33.42
Unemployed	1.662	1.426	236	85.8	14.2
Not economically active population ¹⁸	35.196	9.715	25.481	27.6	72.4

Source: INEGI. Population and Housing Census 2010

The economy of Juchitán has been changing in recent decades, moving from an economy of small trade and subsistence, exclusively, to a large movement of capital and trade flows within the region (H. Ayuntamiento 2014: 85). In general, the main economic activities are trading, agriculture, and livestock farming; other activities such as fishing, craftwork and tourism are also relevant for the city. Not many years ago, the economic system of Juchitán was depicted as an economy of subsistence by Bennholdt-Thomsen (1997: 32-34); she argued that local people do not depend for their subsistence neither on industrial wage labor nor on the national and international markets; rather they depend on the consumption of produced goods, networks of reciprocity and solidarity, and a system of social prestige not grounded on accumulation but on the redistribution of wealth through community *fiestas*, which regulate redistribution exchanges; consequently, economic wealth is linked to social obligations (to some extent similar to *potlatch*)¹⁹.

For her part, Miano (2002) challenged the concept of “subsistence economy” since she argued that *juchitecas* fully participate in the modern market economy combined with a prestige economy, barter and exchange; she also questioned the concept of “reciprocity” due to the disproportionate social differences in the networks of solidarity and exchange. This research adheres to Miano’s position in the sense that people in Juchitán predominantly participate in the market economy but in combination with a local economy, represented by the community system of socialization (“fiestas”) and, to a less extent, by barter, exchange and other economic practices²⁰. Regarding the analytical framework, however, by “local economy” we mainly refer to the works derived from the system of *fiestas*.

¹⁷ People 12 years of age and older who worked, had a job but did not work, or were looking for a job when the survey was conducted.

¹⁸ People 12 years of age and older who were retired or pensioners, students, engaged in household chores or with a physical or mental permanent limitation that prevented them from working, when the survey was conducted.

¹⁹ See Mauss 1979.

²⁰ Such as “tanda”, a way of saving money. It is a sort of cooperatives in which a group of people contribute and distribute among themselves a fixed amount of money, weekly, fortnightly or monthly. They take turns and are organized by numbers; every time one different person from the group receives the money.

Chapter 3

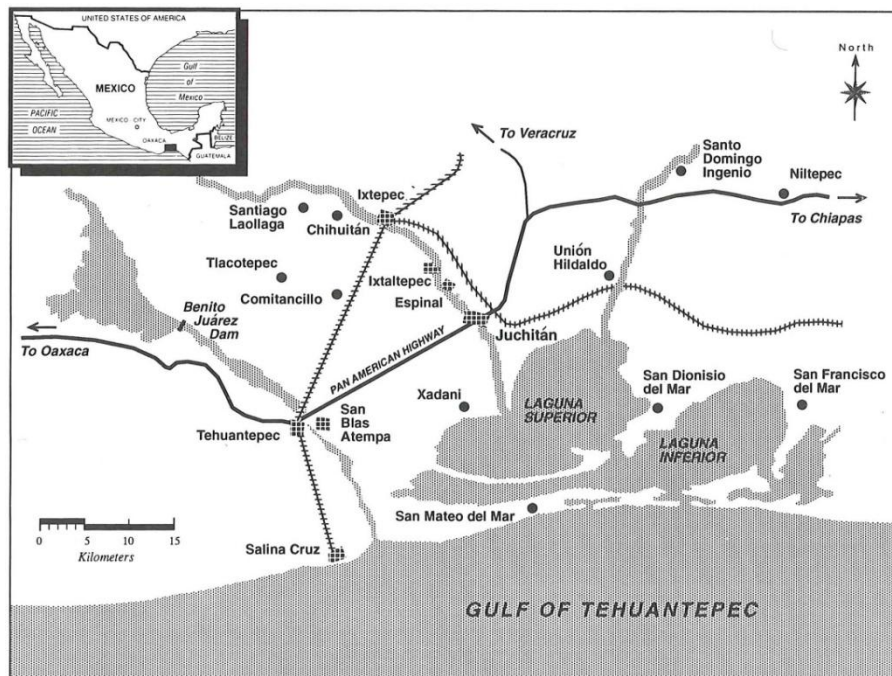
Research Methodology

This research consists of fieldwork done with muxes and other informants in Juchitán de Zaragoza, Oaxaca, México, over a span of one month (August-September, 2015). Additionally, the researcher has done another trip to Juchitán in the month of November with the purpose of having a deeper understanding of the culture and getting involved in the annual community events of muxes. The data collection has been done in the first trip. Besides primary data, this study has made use of secondary data (literature review).

3.1 Study Area: Juchitán de Zaragoza, México

The municipality of Juchitán de Zaragoza is located in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Oaxaca, Mexico. According to the 2010 Census, the municipality has a population of 93,038 inhabitants (INEGI 2011: 106-107). Juchitán is a municipal seat that has governing jurisdiction over 104 communities, or localities (INAFED)²¹. It is divided into one municipal head and municipal communities; the municipal head of Juchitán has 74,825 inhabitants and it is divided into 9 sections.

Map 1: Juchitán in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec



(Source: Campbell et al. 1993)

²¹ <<http://www.snim.rami.gob.mx/>>.

3.2 Study Design

The study employs a qualitative-method design incorporating direct observation and in-depth semistructured interviews. In addition, secondary data is used to have a context with historical and cultural background. Based on the objectives of the study, qualitative methods are the most appropriate. Firstly, the purpose of the study is to find out the subjective experiences of *muxes* in the workplace. Secondly, the research question does not seek to establish causal relationships or generalized patterns of behavior. For example, the study does not seek to find to what extent (or how many) *muxes* are engaged in embroidery or in any other particular occupation because such questions would require quantitative methods to be answered. Rather, the present study intends to explore the perceptions about *muxes* in the workplace. As stated by King and Horrocks (2010: 26): “The research question for a qualitative interview study should not, therefore, focus on establishing causal relationships or generalized patterns of behavior. What it should focus on is *meaning* and *experience*, with reference to a particular group of participants”.

Due to its qualitative character, this study does not aim to produce statistical representativeness. Rather analytical generalizations may emerge from the findings by using some theoretical concepts such as “heteronormativity”. In this sense, an analytical generalization might take different forms, as stated by, and always is grounded at a conceptual level (Yin 2014: 41).

3.3 Interviews

This qualitative research made use of semistructured and in-depth interviews based on interview guides with open-ended questions. As stated by Bernard (2011: 158), semistructured interviewing demonstrates that we are fully in control of what we want from an interview but leaves room to have some freedom. In this sense, an interview guide structured the conversations, but the respondents were allowed to bring up different topics; in other words, there is more information than the subjects reflected in the interview guide.

The criteria for eligibility included self-identifying as “muxes”, and having had some employment experience. Nevertheless, during the field work, I noticed that some self-identified “gay” people would bring more insight into how heteronormativity operates at work, mainly in the wage labor. Therefore, some gay people have been interviewed and in the end, this research is about gender nonconforming people and work in Juchitán, including muxes and gays.

All the interviews were conducted either in the interviewees’s workplaces or homes, or at local cafés and restaurants. The interviews ranged from thirty minutes to one hour. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, translated from Spanish into English and later coded for analytic purposes. The study has used the software AtlasTi in order to categorize the collected data; Atlas Ti has also been useful to extract and interlink data segments from different sources. Clarifications and follow-up conversations were carried out through e-mails, mobile messaging apps and social networks. The characteristics of the interviewees are summarized in Table 2 (Annexes).

My first contact in Juchitán de Zaragoza was a young lawyer and businessman, friend of some *muxes*; he would later become one of my key informants. Therefore, the very first good experience was to understand local culture with local people. I was always, and all the time, in contact with *Juchitecos*, not only hearing about their customs and traditions but also getting involved on them. The first *muxe* I met was Felina Santiago, who was actually my key informant's friend. Felina is a very well known leader and president of the *muxe* organization "Authentic, Intrepid Seekers of Danger" ("Las Auténticas Intrépidas Buscadoras del Peligro"). I was lucky that my friend's business was located just a few meters far from Felina's Beauty Salon, on 5 de mayo street. After my friend took me to Felina's salon, it was just a matter of time to meet more *muxes*; I noticed that was not difficult to come across *muxes*, not only in their workplaces but also in the streets.

3.4 Direct observation

Direct observation provided me insight into the taken-for-granted attitudes, behaviors or activities that could have gone unreported by participants. Rather than focusing only on narrative descriptions of informants, I had the opportunity to see and hear "what was going on" in the social setting. During the fieldwork, I tried to get involved into the culture as much as possible, apart from watching the informants in their usual environment of work.

For example, on the fourth of September, I attended the traditional "Vela López"; the next day, September 5, was held the most important celebration of the city. On the sixth of September, I attended the "Regada de la Vela López" ("The handing out of fruits"), a parade with colourful floats where the participant throw candy, cookies and household items, like utensils, to the crowd. This involvement in "fiestas" and other local celebrations allowed me to understand the particular system of festivities in Juchitán.

3.5 Sample size

The interviews were conducted with 34 informants: 23 *muxes* identified from snowball sampling, and 11 people from civil society identified from purposive sampling. The interviewed *muxes* work in different sectors, including independent workers as well as employees; *muxes* working in the local economy and also in the wage labor. People from civil society include business managers, public servants, political leaders and businesswomen.

3.6 Sampling strategy

The study has used a *snowball sampling strategy*; the researcher has initially relied on a key informant who has provided the first participants and these ones have recommended other informants. The interviews have been based on diversity and representativeness, as suggested by King and Horrocks (2010: 27). This criterion seeks to recruit participants who represent a variety of backgrounds and occupations.

The snowballing strategy might have introduced a form of bias into the sample, since participants may tend to recommend people who share their view of the phenomenon under investigation. In this case, as suggested by King and Horrocks (2010: 34), the biasing effects have been reduced by giving instructions about characteristics sought in other potential participants. For example, when I thought I had enough *muxes* who work in embroidery, I asked for *muxes* who run their own businesses.

People from civil society have been selected based on *purposive sampling* and *convenience*. The paper relies heavily on the voices and stories of *muxes* since the research question seeks to know about their personal experiences in the workplace. However, interviews to other people from civil society, such as public servants, have been conducted in order to complement the secondary questions. Additionally, they provided perceptions about *muxes* and a social context on the topic, from their respective fields.

3.7 Role as Researcher

This study recognizes knowledge as situated: socially produced, partial, embedded in power hierarchies, and produced within specific contexts and circumstances, rather than claiming “objective” knowledge (Rose 1997; Haraway 1998). The research is shaped by its situatedness and location in a historical moment; findings and interpretations are influenced by the researcher’s historical and cultural situatedness (Gadamer, as cited in Cerwonka and Malkki 2007: 22-23).

Positionality involves a process of thinking about how my position as a middle class, educated, “gay”, Bolivian, Spanish-speaking person might influence the process of research. I have been involved in “LGBT” issues for the last eight years, working with gender nonconforming people from my country and Latin America; I consider myself as a political ally of people who identify as transgender or who express their sexuality in non-normative ways; my background allowed me to have more insight about the researched topic, not only because of my previous work but also due to my own interests. I have always found quite problematic how the gender binary system operates at different levels. In terms of reflexivity, since as a researcher I am part of the knowledge production process, I have been perceived as a person with male gender expressions, different from many informants, but at the same time with similar interests regarding gender and sexuality issues.

3.8 Ethical considerations

The study has been based on informed consent, which is the act of informing the research participants “about the overall purpose of the investigation and the main features of the design, as well as of any possible risks and benefits from participation in the research project” (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009: 70). Informed consent also implies the voluntary participation of the persons involved and the right for them to have access to the final research paper.

In terms of language, from the total population of Juchitán, 63% speaks an indigenous language (mostly Zapotec) and approximately 4% does not speak Spanish (3,937), as of 2010 (INEGI 2011: 107). Consequently, there

have not been problems regarding communication with informants. I only came across one participant who could not speak Spanish well, but Zapotec; therefore, I was assisted by a translator.

Chapter 4

Conceptual and Analytical Framework

This chapter draws from literature on workplace discrimination against gender nonconforming workers; the conceptual framework is directly related to the objectives of this research.

4.1 Heteronormativity and gender expressions

In our daily life it is a person's gender that we use to distinguish women from men and men from women; "we do not look at people's chromosomes, genitals or reproductive behavior in order to tell their sex. We tend to use their clothes, their hairstyles, the way they walk and a whole host of other physical and behavioural characteristics that are not biologically given" (Crowley 1992: 58). How people outwardly express their gender through clothing, haircut, behaviors, traits, ways of speaking, walking, tones of voice, are "gender expressions". Whereas gender identity refers to one's internal sense of gender, one's psychological identification as male or female (the two terms are not interchangeable).

Gender expressions are part of ourselves; in one way or another we are always "doing gender" (West and Zimmerman 1987); we do gender at home, we do it in the streets and in the workplace. Nevertheless, depending on the gendered person, there are some types of expressions that might be rejected; some expressions that, in the eyes of a system belief, seem not to "align", accordingly. This system, "heteronormativity", in order to operate demands a binary division of sexes, genders and desires.

Within the heteronormative discourse there are two genders, feminine and masculine, organized and naturalized hierarchically, being masculinity as prior to and more worthy than femininity. The relation between sex, gender and desire is grounded on a heterosexual logic, what Butler calls "heterosexual matrix" (Butler, 1990: 151). For this belief system, sex brings about gender and desire. That is, a male body brings about a male gender and male desire which is assumed to be directed at a female subject. Or, vice versa: a female body brings about female gender and desire that are assumed to be directed at a male subject. In this sense, the "heterosexual matrix" characterizes...

...a hegemonic discourse/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality (Butler, 1990: 151).

This binary system requires that the subject recognize itself as female/feminine or male/masculine in order to become a subject. In other words, only if the subject fits into one of the binaries will be considered as such. In consequence, heteronormativity has a high and real impact on the lives of countless people who do not align with this structure, since it organizes society according to economic, cultural, political and social patterns grounded on institutionalized heterosexuality.

The taken-for-granted expectation that heterosexuality and gender identity follow from genitalia produces heteronormativity—even though in most social interactions genitals are not actually visible. People do not expect a mismatch between “biological” credentials and gender presentations but rather assume that gendered appearances reflect a biologically sexed reality (West and Zimmerman, as cited in Schilt and Westbrook 2009: 443).

Heteronormativity is socially produced; heteronormative behaviors can take vast number of forms in our daily experiences. Indeed, our lives are crossed back and forth by this system: from the simple fact of filling out administrative forms with only two boxes for “male” and “female” to heteronormative regulations of civil partnerships; from traditional ideas about gender roles to assumptions about people’s sexual orientation and gender identity.

In the workplace, there are different situations concerning heteronormativity. Closeted gay employees might hide their sexual orientation in order to avoid discrimination, and out gay employees might face harassment due to their “outside-the-norm” condition. For transgenders, their challenges are different, and bigger, since their gender expressions do not correspond to what people expect from them; in other words, their gender expressions “do not fit into” their sex, in regard to the heteronormative views. Male-bodied persons with female gender expressions disturb the beliefs of normative people. So they do it female-bodied people with male gender expressions. In sum, “heteronormativity designates a regime that organizes sex, gender and sexuality in order to match heterosexual norms. It denotes a rigid sexual binary of bodily morphology that is supported by gender and sexual identities” (Castro Varela et al. 2011: 11).

4.2 Heteronormativity in the context of Juchitán

Heteronormativity in the context of Juchitán has many sides; contrary to the common belief that the Isthmus of Tehuantepec is a non-heteronormative society, in which muxes are widely “accepted”, there are some practices that might contradict this principle. Their social role as caretakers of their parents, their type of relationships, their now restricted participation in *Velas*, their notions about femininity and their “female works”, are factors that might be interpreted as heteronormative. These practices, in fact, shed light on how heteronormativity has been embedded even in a less oppressive society for gender nonconforming people.

Initially, the logic of “allocating” transgender muxes into “female” tasks is heteronormative; since they are socially perceived as “women”, they have to do women’s works and have to fit into one side of the gender binary matrix. Likewise, while muxes’ siblings, at a certain age, get married and leave home, *muxes* are expected to stay with their parents and take care of them in their old age (Poniatowska 2001: 56; Miano 2002: 163). In my interpretation, it is not a coincidence that parents—in the traditional Zapotec model—, bear the responsibility only on muxes, since these ones might be seen as unable to form their own family units, in the sense of a traditional “nuclear family”. Therefore, even though muxes are socially seen as “women”, they are unable to reproduce and, thus have an own family unit. These heteronormative views may be linked to the fact that, as a general trend, muxes do not engage in long-formal

relationships (Gómez Suárez 2010a: 2392). In this regard, there are different narratives with contrasting arguments; some muxes might find long relations “boring”, others simply do not like them²², and the heteronormative interpretation is that potential partners of muxes are not accepted to live with them and their families²³ (see Bartolo 2010: 33); in this case, it seems that muxes found a place in the community but not the recognition of “sexual rights” to live a long-term relationship with a man. On the contrary, there is a relationship that is accepted in the Zapotec model. In the most conservative parts of Juchitán, traditional values on virginity prevail, and as a result, Zapotec women are expected to be virgins before marriage (Chiñas 1992: 51; Bennholdt-Thomsen 1997: 110-118). This understanding leads to a situation in which young men usually have sexual relations with *muxes*. “Because value is placed on female virginity and premarital sexual intercourse is frowned upon, *muxes* reportedly often introduce young men to sex” (Mirandé 2012: 521).

On the other hand, *muxes* consider their partners as heterosexual men rather than other *muxes* or gay men (Bennholdt-Thomsen 1997: 284). This belief is similar (or does it come from?) to the latino sexual system, in which the “status” of being considered homosexual or heterosexual is defined by sexual roles.

The Mexican/Latino sexual system is not defined by object choice but rather by the power exerted in the sexual relationship. According to this view, Mexican and Latino men are able to engage in sex with other men without impugning their masculinity, as long they retain the dominant *activo* or inserter position in the sexual act (Mirandé 2014: 251).

Because of these cultural understandings, there is an identity for men who engage in a relationship with *muxes*: the “mayate”, a man self-identified and socially perceived as “heterosexual” (Miano 2002: 154, 156). This model responds to a gendered structure in which there is a binary divide with a dominant male and a subordinate other, who “acts as a woman”. In other words, homosexual relationships are organized based on heterosexual patterns. “I would portray the Juchiteca society as heterosexual, because concerning sexual relations it clearly prefers the model male-female and also seeks to organize homosexual relations according to the heterosexual model” (Müller 1997: 268).

Additionally, in recent years muxes have not been allowed to participate in some important *Velas*, dressed as women (Bartolo 2010: 40, 65-66). In the community, tradition requires women to wear regional costume –a “huipil” (unfitted blouse with embroidered flowers) and “enagua” (skirt). Muxes have to dress as men, with “guayabera”²⁴ and black trousers, if they want to attend some traditional *Velas*. These new heteronormative rules currently questions the so claimed “social acceptance” since, some years ago, *muxes* “*vestidas*”²⁵ were not denied access to these *fiestas* (Miano 2010: 2455)²⁶.

²² See *Muxes: Auténticas Intrépidas Buscadoras del Peligro* 2005.

²³ In this respect, it is illustrative the interview to Paola López, a muxe with female gender identity, in the documentary *Las Intrépidas Buscadoras del Peligro* 2013.

²⁴ Traditional white shirt that men wear in *Velas*.

²⁵ Muxes dressed as women; muxes with female gender expressions.

²⁶ For more information watch the documentary *Muxes: Authentic Intrepid Seekers of Danger* 2005, especially the segments “Against Transvestites I, II and III”.

Finally, the notion about being “muxe” nowadays seems to appreciate more the ideal of looking like a “real woman” rather than being “half-a-woman and half-a-man”, or “neither a man nor a woman”. As Miano states (2010: 2454), new generations of *muxes* are reinforcing a binary order of genders, leaving behind local worldviews grounded on three or more different genders.

In summary, the fact that in Juchitán gender nonforming people are less oppressed –compared to the dominant mestizo culture, at the national level–, does not imply that there is no heteronormativity embedded into society. Rather there are other forms of heteronormative structures according to the local organization of gender and sexuality.

4.3 Heteronormativity at work

As it has been stated earlier, this study seeks to elucidate how heteronormativity affects the access of muxes to the labor market, in a setting characterized by a “traditional” sector and a “modern” one. Besides being engaged in “traditional” occupations –such as embroidery or sewing–, muxes are also part of the “modern” part, working as teachers or nurses, for example. However, a binary divide such as informal/formal or traditional/modern sector seems not only vague but subject to many definitions and interpretations. In this sense, I would refer to this issue by distinguishing muxes who work in the local economy and muxes engaged in the wage labor, which represents the modernized parts of the labor market.

Drawing on some previous narratives about muxes we can read between the lines that they might not be “accepted” if they do not follow certain rules at work. “Mandis explained that she could not dress like a muxe because she worked for the government in the Office of Tourism” (Mirandé 2012: 532). This example leads to believe that in certain workplaces some gender expressions are not allowed. However, there is a difference between marginalization grounded on gender expressions (referred to clothing, haircut, etc.) and sexual orientation (referred to one’s emotional and sexual attraction). The mechanisms of exclusion are different even though both of them are grounded on heteronormativity.

As noted by Ragins (2004: 36), sexual orientation is not visible and LGBs often face the decision to disclose or not their sexual identity in the workplace. “The invisibility of a gay identity leads to decisions about disclosure of the identity, possible disconnections between disclosure in work and non-work environments” (Ragins 2004: 61). Frequently, LGBs have to negotiate their “coming out” at work and put in practice diverse concealing practices in relation to their sexual identity. In this sense, sexual orientation is an invisible stigmatized identity. “A key feature distinguishing LGB groups from many other groups is the invisibility of their stigma”(Badgett; Herek, as cited in Ragins 2004: 62). In effect, sexual orientation stigma differs from gender and race stigmas, for example. LGBs always have the possibility to conceal their sexual orientation as a mechanism to protect themselves from harassment and discrimination; they have a number of strategies to hide their sexual orientation, even though these practices might be stressful.

For transgenders and other gender nonconforming people, it is not possible to hide their gender identity since this becomes self-evidently through

gender expressions. “While there is evidence that transgender and LGB individuals both experience discrimination, there are important differences between those who identify as transgender (one’s psychological identification as male or female) and those who identify as LGB (one’s sexual orientation)” (Law et al. 2011: 710). The visibility of their gender identity, as transgender individuals, may exclude them from different social settings since they are considered “abnormal” in the gender binary arrangements, which constraint room for individuals who do not align with one extreme or another. Therefore, the bodies and gender expressions of nonconforming people may become an obstacle for getting formal jobs.

Transgenders make workplace discrimination visible; nevertheless, not all transgenders do it because transsexuals actually aim to align with a binary framework, which we will refer to as “the gender binary matrix”. For this reason, transsexuals –who already ended their sex-reassignment process–, do not dismantle the hegemonic forms of gender. Whereas many transvestites fall beyond the binary framework, not adhering to any particular extreme concerning female or male poles but rather circulating between these poles.

Transsexuals are completely tied to the binary gender model (Butler 1990) and they seek to transform their bodies according to one of the possible binary definitions of gender (a male or a female), as if those were the only existing possibilities. They want their bodies to entirely follow such model, not challenging or questioning the binary and excluding definition of gender (Moulin and Pádua 2015: 6).

Bodies that best fit the binary gender matrix are also the most valued; on the contrary, bodies that transit among genders without situating themselves in one of the two extremes, are marginalized; the same goes for gender expressions: those who do not align to the binary gender matrix are devalued, and vice versa. In this sense, “normative transgenders” would be perpetuating oppressive understandings of gender, while non-normative ones would be challenging gender hegemony. In practice, transgenders who wish to “challenge” hegemonic heteronormativity in the workplace might end up falling into one pole of the binary matrix. Schilt and Connell (2007) found that individuals who cross over at work find themselves either anchored to their birth gender or firmly repatriated into the other pole of the gender binary. This is, rather than adopting “in-between” identities, causing gender trouble (Butler 1990) individuals who cross-dress tend to align with one extreme of the gender binary matrix, since they feel socially pressured. “The potential of transgender/transsexual people to undo gender at work can be constrained by their real-life need to keep their jobs, as well as the slow-to-change gendered organizational cultures of most workplaces” (Schilt and Connell 2007: 598).

West and Zimmerman note that gender goes beyond individual traits and expressions; it is actually constructed by social interaction: rather than only being a property of individuals, gender is also done in social situations. “A person’s gender is not simply an aspect of what one is, but, more fundamentally, it is something that one *does*, and does recurrently, in interaction with others” (West and Zimmerman 1987: 140).

Through social interaction children learn that only two social identities are available, being a girl or a boy; they appropriate gender ideals and then it starts a “*self-regulating process*” as they begin to monitor their own and other’s conduct

with regard to its gender implications” (West and Zimmerman 1987: 142). Binary gender arrangements are reinforced when they grow up in different settings, beginning with the family and extending to the school and the workplace; in this sense, gender binary expectations are constant constraints. Thinking of gender in this way shifts our attention away from the individual towards social interaction, where gender can be seen as an “achievement”. In order to explain this process, West and Zimmerman (1987: 127) refer to “sex category” as the social designation as either “male” or “female” in everyday interactions, independently of one’s sex; additionally, they understand “gender” as the management of conduct grounded on one’s assigned sex category. “Place in a sex category is achieved through application of the sex criteria, but in everyday life, categorization is established and sustained by the socially required identificatory displays that proclaim one’s membership in one or the other category”. As noted previously, we mainly refer to these identificatory displays as “gender expressions”.

4.4 Intersections between social class and gender

As argued by Wright (1997: 119), the structure of gender relations helps to understand different class positions. Particularly, the way gender sorts people into class locations represents a clear interconnection of gender and class; in this sense, why certain class of gender nonconforming people occupy jobs with particular characteristics is not accidental. On the other hand, Wright also notes that is possible to conceptualize class as a sorting mechanism of people into gender locations. This is, for instance, how male-bodied individuals of a certain class position occupy specific gender locations. Therefore, gender and class relations must be seen as reciprocally affecting each other.

Muxes have very different occupational and class distributions in the labor market of Juchitan. Expressions of gender identity have been suggested to be linked to social class. Miano (2010: 2451, 2454) found that cross-dressing is more accepted in lower sectors. “Transvestism is tolerated in the popular sectors, but not in the middle and upper classes”. As a result, Miano noted that a great part of the transvestite *muxe* population is concentrated in the suburbs of Juchitán, in the south of the city, where mostly poor people live; it is in this area where more people speak Zapotec and individual and collective life is very attached to tradition; whereas from the center to the north of the city, families traditionally have a good economic position or social status: *muxes* in these sectors are professionals, stylists, teachers, public servants or traders, and men mostly engage in ‘ritual transvestism’; this is, they only dress as women for some special occasions. This situation indicates that in the dominant social strata of Juchitán, the dominant appearance of the “homosexual” is masculine (Miano 2010: 2451). The narrative of a masculine *muxe* illustrates very well how class and gender intersect in Juchitán.

Muxes from slums dress as women on a daily basis, but in other places, muxes who have a study, a preparation, only do it for celebrations (...) and dress beautiful and elegant clothes, they like it but they only dress as women

only in celebrations; they have education, I don't think they consider dressing as women every day"²⁷.

If families from low-class sectors are more accepting of transgender *muxes*, and upper and middle-class people do not react in the same way (opposing their children to have 'effeminate' behaviors), consequently, the latter have assimilated the heterosexist national culture. As a result, in middle and upper class sectors, men who have sex with other men might identify themselves as "gays" rather than "muxes". This gender and class locations would be reflected at work, unveiling a complex setting.

The jobs held by muxes indicate, most of the time, the social class to which they belong. Stylists, dressmakers, embroiderers, decorators, choreographers, cooks, bar owners/employees and sex workers come from low-class sectors. Over the past thirty years, certain muxes pursued higher studies and they succeeded in having a place into the political arena and social movements, as in the most liberal professions such as those of teacher, lawyer, business manager, etc. In consequence, muxes have increasingly been engaging in the elite class" (Gauvin 2011: 27-28).

The question, in this respect, is if masculine muxes are so because they already belong to the middle-class, or rather, middle-class muxes have reached this position because of their masculinity. If gender and class relations have to be seen as reciprocally affecting each other, we might conclude that there is a mutual relationship. In the labor market male gender expressions keep gays and masculinized workers "globalized" rather than "local". Likewise, female gender expressions might keep muxes "local" rather than "globalized". Gender nonconforming muxes could access the wage labor if they masculinize themselves. Nevertheless, in some cases, they are not precisely in a dual rigid setting since they are able to be "local and globalized" by performing different identities and having occupations in both sectors.

4.5 Analytical framework

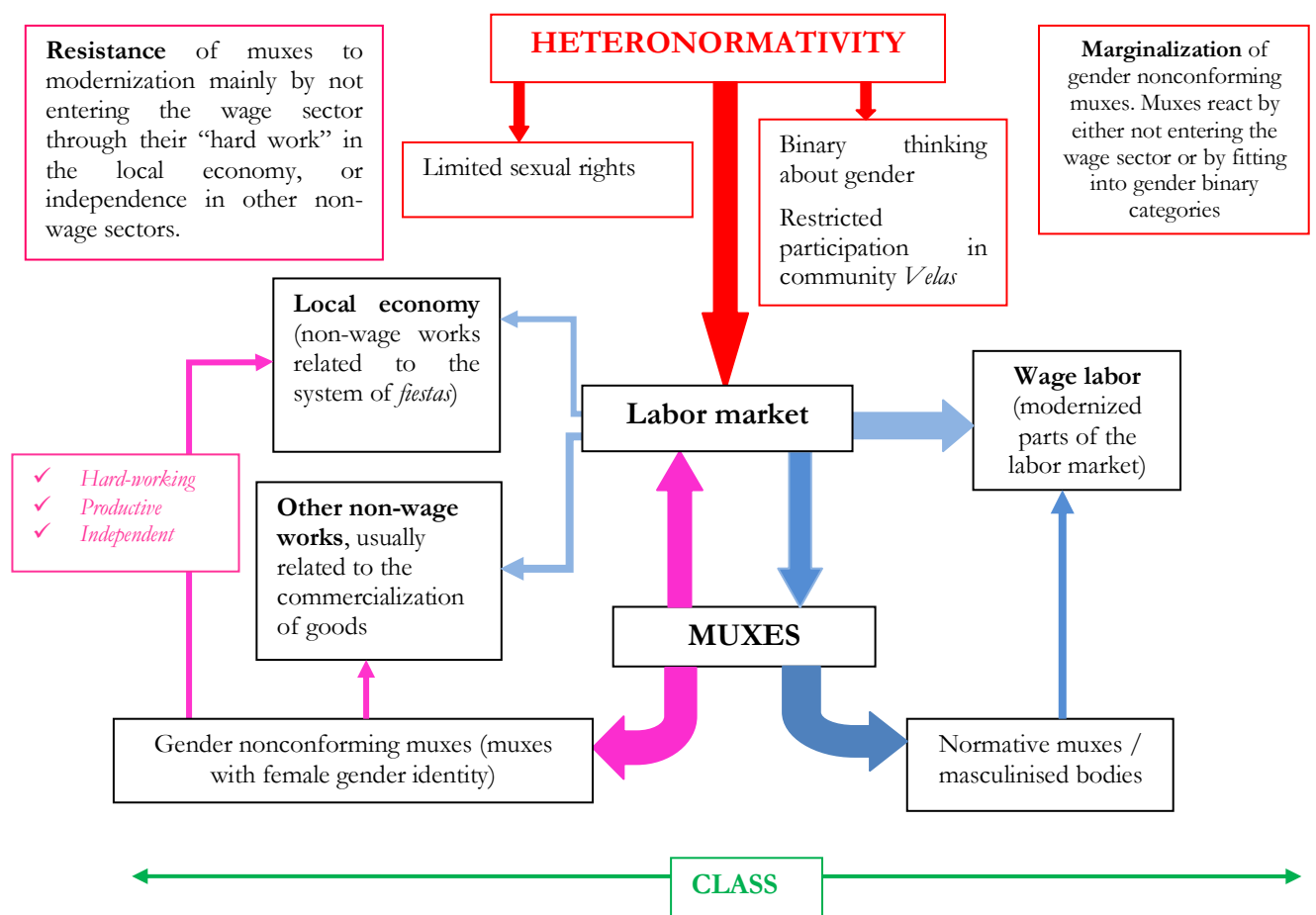
The labor market of Juchitán includes the local economy, other non-wage works and the wage labor; the local economy is represented by works related to the system of *fiestas*; other non-wage works includes commercial activities not directly related to *fiestas* but that fall into the "informal" economy; the wage labor represents the modernized parts of the labor market. Heteronormativity constrains room for muxes in the wage labor by rejecting those who do not align with the binary gender matrix, but leaves room for normative muxes and masculinized bodies; gender nonconforming muxes react either by not entering the wage labor or by masculinizing their bodies. On the other hand, heteronormativity leaves room for muxes in the local economy and other non-wage sectors; heteronormativity does not obstruct the participation of those who are gender nonconforming; however, it affects other spheres of life such as the system of socialization by restricting the participation of muxes in community *fiestas* ("Velas"); by fostering the gender binary thinking of muxes (who adhere to an idealized female figure), and by limiting their sexual rights as well. What protects and supports gender nonconforming muxes is the local

²⁷ Oscar Cazorra in *La Vela de las Auténticas Intrépidas Buscadoras del Peligro* 1999.

economy (and other non-wage works): an economy built on fiestas and trading by and for the local population. In sum, the labor market affects muxes but also muxes affect economic activity, keeping the economy local against the pressures of globalization.

Finally, class is represented by a cross-cutting arrow since its interconnection with gender dismantles a societal structure in which gender nonconforming muxes do not generally occupy the professional-middle class jobs of the wage labor, space reserved for gender conforming individuals. The following analytical framework has been built to interpret the findings, which are part of the next chapter.

Figure 1: Analytical Framework



Chapter 5

Analysis and Research Findings

“In Juchitan, anyone can talk to you about muxes because they are part of our lives, part of what we do, part of what we eat, part of what we wear”
Armando Gutiérrez, resident of Juchitán

Initially, we present an overview of the interviewed workers; additionally, some clarifications are provided in respect to the category “muxe”, and the spectrum of works that muxes do; more precisely about the proposed idea of “intermediate” or “in-between” occupations (Bennholdt-Thomsen 1997; Mirandé 2012); my findings will challenge these notions. Finally, a relation of the findings is given by focusing on the research questions.

5.1 Overview of the interviewed workers

As Appendix 1 shows (Annexes), interviewed workers are on a list including occupations, gender expressions and self-identification. From twenty three workers, fifteen are engaged in the non-wage labor, six in the wage labor, and two in both the wage and non-wage sectors, simultaneously. Pedro-Enrique (“Kika”), for example, runs a Beauty Salon and at the same time he is a public servant, thus, he is engaged in both the non-wage labor and the wage labor. Concerning workers in the non-wage sector, a number of them are owners and run their own businesses, independently of having male or female gender expressions. Others are clearly involved in works related to the system of fiestas, such as embroidery, sewing or parade float decoration.

From all the interviewees, eighteen self-identify as “muxes”; four as “gays” and one as “bisexual”; this distribution does not reflect at all how identities are dispersed into society; it is simply the outcome of the snowball sampling strategy for this particular research. Within the workers who self-identify as “muxes”, some have female gender expressions (feminine) and others male gender expressions (masculine). A number of muxes (under the box “Predominant gender expressions in daily life”) are classified as having “In-between gender expressions”, which is referred to workers who outwardly combine both male and female characteristics²⁸; this is, for example, muxes who wear a long “female” hairstyle and “male” trousers.

All the workers who are engaged in the wage labor have male gender expressions, independently of their self-identification as “muxe”, “gay” or “bisexual”. During my field work, I could not find muxes with female gender expressions working in the wage labor, except Binniza who actually works for the Municipal Office of Public Policies for Sexual Diversity, which is a position

²⁸ Clothing, hairstyle, behaviors, traits, ways of speaking, walking and tones of voice that can either be classified as predominantly “feminine”, “masculine” or “masculine and feminine”

related to human rights and, therefore, it is expected to be an open space for all kinds of people.

Muxes who are in the non-wage sector have different gender expressions; however, all muxes who do not adhere to any particular extreme of the gender binary matrix belong to the non-wage sector; they keep circulating between the two poles, and rather than adopting a clear female gender identity, they are gender ambiguous; the non-wage labor leaves room for them to perform in non-normative ways.

On the other hand, muxes do a diversity of works; rather than looking at them as embedded in a one-single-activity position, we should see them as “multilayered” workers. This multiplicity becomes more visible in muxes engaged in the local economy and other non-wage works; what characterizes them is their multifaceted condition at work since they simultaneously do many types of works. For instance, Marina-Aníbal sells bread, she is a baker, but she also works as an embroiderer; when she has available time, she trades different products, so she is a merchant. For her part, Lambert makes confetti and ornaments with balloons for local *fiestas*; she also works as a dance coreographer, parade float decorator and soothsayer; when she needs more money, she is also a sex worker. Therefore, the complexity and diversity of occupations of muxes should not be reduced to a narrow classification of works; they concurrently do many types of work in order to make a living. Mística, for example, might be the archetypical merchant muxe in the local economy.

I know to do everything; I’ve started with my mother, helping her to sell because my siblings had to attend school so I had to work as a domestic. I used to sell peach jam, iguana, fresh cheese; I sold everything that my mom did... I used to go to fiestas to sell... then I started to do business since I realized that trading was getting me ahead and I kept on doing businesses. Then I bought a potter’s wheel, I started to make ornaments, knitting (...). Right now I sell jelly, I collect money, I sell perfumes, I organize *tanda*, sell bags, umbrellas, clothes, everything... I sell everything, apple, candy, I just bought turtle, and I already have in my fridge turtle eggs to sell... As a child my mother taught me to sell, to be a trader (Mística, businessmuxe, 08.25.2015).

On the other hand, Julio César is a lawyer and, at the same time, a barman. Wil is a painter, a school teacher and a physical trainer. The question is: should we situate them into the “formal” or “informal” economy? Some of them are in both spheres simultaneously, but the statistics and official reports only take into account their “formal” occupations, even though they might earn more money from the “informal” sector than the “white-collar” jobs. “Honestly we earn more in the informal sector, selling our artwork, our work, doing what we do” (Wil, 08.27.2015). Because of these overlapped positions, an analysis between muxes who are engaged in the problematic “formal/informal” division would have blurred the study of this complexity.

Muxes who are engaged in the wage labor probably tend to diversify less their activities, since their main occupation is attached to a rigid schedule and they have less time to engage in other works. However, people in Juchitán frequently get involved in any kind of business activity. “You will find women engaged in business, regardless of what they do, many of them perhaps are professionals, and you will find many muxes that might be professionals and they are also engaged in the informal business” (Wil, 08.27.2015).

Consequently, one single person might be involved in many works to make a living, becoming a many-sided worker and surpassing common notions about “informality” and “formality”.

5.2 The complexity of the “muxe” identity

Blending processes between globalized and local sexual identities have been occurring and, as a result, the current understanding of the “muxe” identity is intertwined, many-sided and even ambiguous. Basically, “muxe” means different things to different people. Therefore, the assumption that muxes “identify as a third gender rather than as *hombres y mujeres*, and distinguish themselves from gays” (Mirandé 2015: 21), is not really correct nowadays; rather, more complex processes of mixed and many-sided identities are occurring. To make clear this statement, the use of the category “muxe” might be classified as follows:

- a. As a generic-umbrella term to designate biological men with different gender identity and sexual orientation who are born in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and have a strong sense of local identity, including traditions, celebrations, costumes and Zapotec language. Interestingly, this use does not make any difference between “sexual orientation” and “gender identity”; they are, in fact, integrated and with no boundaries, in relation to the modern divide. Therefore, in Western terminology, “muxe” is used to designate some “gays”, “transvestites” or “transsexuals”. There are people with gender nonconforming identity or sexual orientation who are born in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and do not consider themselves to be “muxes”.

It is not only about sexual orientation but it goes far beyond: we are part of a society, part of a culture in which we are proud of our customs and traditions, we have our own identity, speak our own language (Felina, 08.20.2015).

- b. As a term used to designate specifically biological men with female gender expressions, this is mainly what we call “transvestites”, “cross-dressers”, “transenders” and “transsexuals”. This use seems to be more frequent in the gay urban community to designate “the others”: transvestites, transsexuals and effeminate men, in opposition to the masculine urban gay identity.

I consider myself to be gay because the word 'muxe' is synonymous with the word 'woman', a person who wants to look like a woman; therefore, I am 'gay' because I'm more masculine, I'm not effeminate (Cándido, 08.29.2015); Being muxe means to feel like a woman, to do things of women, and dress as a woman (Paola, muxe with a female gender identity, 08.21.2015).

- c. “Muxe” sometimes is used as a generic term used to identify any “gay”, “transvestite” or “transsexual”. In this definition is not apparently relevant if a muxe self-identifies with the Zapotec culture. “To me it means the same, being gay, being homosexual and being muxe” (Francisco, 09.03.2015); “Being muxe is... many call it ‘gay’, others call it ‘queer’, in Zapotec language is muxe, so it is a synonym” (Oscar, 08.21.2015).

Therefore, when we talk about “muxes” in the Zapotec culture, what definition are we referring to? And are we really aware of the complexity of using labels? For example, Julio César identifies himself as “bisexual” but he is seen by his friends as “muxe”; moreover, how do you call the people who do not mind being identified as “gay” or “muxe” indistinctly?, and they consider these words to be synonyms. And someone who is a self-identified “gay” at work and claims to be a “muxe” at *fiestas*? “People everywhere categorize themselves and others; this is one of the most fundamental aspects of human language and meaningmaking. But the ways in which these categorizations are made, and which categories come to have effects in the world, are never neutral” (Valentine 2007: 5). In effect, even a self-identified muxe who is seen as muxe by others might differ in his understandings of what it means to be a “muxe”.

5.3 The idealization of intermediate occupations

There are no activities that could fit the notion of “intermediate” or “in-between” occupations of muxes. Rather, there are perceptions that many muxes predominantly get involved in specific activities, which are also done, to a less extent, by women and men.

The works of muxes related to the system of *fiestas* have been pointed out as examples of “intermediate” occupations of muxes (Bennholdt-Thomsen 1997: 303; Mirandé 2012: 522). Actually, the “in-between occupations” are rather an idealization of a pretended third-gender position in the workplace than a concrete fact.

Hypothetically, there are works not occupied neither by women nor by men, which are those related to the system of *fiestas*, i.e., the production of paper ornament, including confetti, for large fiestas and community festival. In this sense, some narratives rather than allocating muxes into “reserved” areas for them, try to emphasize their predominance in certain types of works. “People here make use of these ornaments for weddings, 15 years, baptisms, *Velas*... there are many [muxes] who are dedicated to this activity and also to decoration of floats, for *regadas*²⁹... Not many women make paper ornament, confetti, usually gays³⁰... (Vicente, 09.06.2015). Women and men barely get involved in *fiesta-related* works; however, there are some of them who do it. “There are boys who make ornaments because it is a work, not a shame; in the past, people used to say that it was only for muxes, only for muxes, but now because of the economic situation they do everything...” (Lambert-Binniza, 09.02.2015).

If confetti work is apparently a predominant activity of muxes, and to a less extent of women and men, there is an activity that appears to be only done by muxes. Parade float decoration is the art of making ornaments for floats, commonly displayed in “*Regadas*”; these floats are trucks that carry a platform, decorated with ornaments. This activity seemed to be specific of muxes

²⁹ Parades which are part of a three or four-day celebration, including *Velas* and other *fiestas*. Like *Velas*, *regadas* extend from April to September.

³⁰ Note that this informant makes use of the term “gays” as to signify “muxes”; this use belongs to our third definition of “muxe”.

because of some “logical explanation” related to the “lack of physical strength of women” and the rejection of men to do “works of muxes”.

The work of floats is not performed by women because it is hard, it is something that we have to make an effort; men could do it, but they do not it because they think people would say they are muxes, but they could do it because it is required strength to carry things, load them up to the floats, put nails, and disassemble it (Darina, 09.01.2015).

While some other people tried to convince me that this activity was a “work of muxe”, the idealization of an “intermediate work” suddenly broke down when muxes who do this kind of work made a simple clarification: they usually hire men to assist their work.

Women do not do it, but men yes because sometimes we cannot put nails and we pay men to place the platform on the float; when I have to decorate one float I do it alone but when I have two, three floats on the same day, I have to pay to other guys, and tell them how to place it (...) women don't do it because it is a heavy work but men yes... Men are not going to put the flowers, but they will put the platform, and we are going to decorate it (Lambert-Binniza, 09.02.2015).

In addition, there are some narratives that find possible that a heterosexual couple be in charge of parade floats. "The floats are also made by women, and men help them, the couple, the couple is dedicated to do that" (Pedro Enrique, “Kika”, 09.04.2015); “from my own experience, it's balanced, i.e. there are women who are dedicated to that and go with their husbands, cousins and do the job, because it is a very heavy work, and there are also muxes who do it, it is a shared occupation” (Diego Armando, owner of a paper ornament business, 09.02.2015). Moreover, the occupation of “parade float decoration” is a seasonal work, performed only when *Juchitecos* celebrate “Velas” (some weeks between April and September). So, muxes who are dedicated to this work have other occupations, which actually are their main sources of income.

The notion of “intermediate/in-between occupations” of muxes is only an idealization of “how it should be”, according to the original sexual division of labor. Although there is a space for them regarding works related to fiestas, these occupations are also done by men and women, to a less extent. Whether a man is socially viewed as muxe is mainly determined by his sexuality and, to a less extent, by the type of the work he does: men who do works related to *fiestas* “might be” more likely to be seen as muxes. Conclusively, it is not possible to place muxes only in “intermediate positions” since many of them are multilayered workers dedicated simultaneously to different types of works.

5.4 Access of gender nonconforming muxes to the non-wage sector

In non-wage occupations –such as those of the local economy and other commercial activities–, there is room for muxes with female gender identity; muxes do not face heteronormativity in the workplace, since they are part of the community through their “hard-work”, productivity and independence.

According to direct observation, several gender nonconforming muxes are engaged in the local economy and do not depend on the wage labor for their subsistence. “Here it is easy to find a work as a muxe, in other states it is not...”

(08.21. 2015) is the first statement of Paola, a skilled cook who feels comfortable with her position as a muxe in the local economy. She has been cooking for twelve years and learned it from her mother; like her there are countless muxes who are involved in the “informal economy”, and might be hidden under the category of “not economically active men” in the official statistics.

The information of the INEGI does not reflect rates of “informal” and “formal” sectors in Juchitán, but according to local perceptions, the informal economy is still predominant, and would be ranging from 60 to 80%. The statistics of the INEGI do not reflect either how many people are engaged in *fiestas* or derived works. Nevertheless, “through empirical observation of jobs in Juchitán, it is possible to say that a considerable part of the active population in the city is dedicated to *fiestas* or to derived activities” (Michel 2006: 76). In this sense, how influential is the system of *fiestas* in the local economy? It is difficult to have statistics that measure its level of influence, but a municipal report is conclusive in this respect.

Derived from the public consultation at the Forum for Sustainable Economic Development, the city of Juchitán de Zaragoza has survived thanks to the economy of *fiestas*, because due to this system bonds of solidarity and reciprocity are generated, in which activities strengthen and maintain a significant number of occupations, causing many families to obtain permanent income (H. Ayuntamiento 2014: 79)

Fiesta-related works fulfill the lack of “formal” jobs in the city, as it represents a source of constant income for people direct or indirectly involved in the community system of socialization.

In Juchitán everyday there are about 10, 15 celebrations, every day of the year we have fiestas in Juchitan, mostly in May we have more than a week full of Velas, celebrations, lavadas... Fiestas in Juchitan bring many informal jobs such as buying food, ornaments, local attires, smiting, music, snacks, waiters... It is when money circulates the most in our town... Without fiestas we would definitely go bankrupt as a society because we don't have formal jobs since firms have left Juchitan due to political issues... (Jesús Manuel Cruz Muñoz, Director of Economic Development, Municipality of Juchitán, 08.25.2015).

Muxes participate in the local economy with important works such as design, embroidery and sewing of traditional dresses, ornaments for festivals, and decoration of floats because “the economy of Juchitán moves around *fiestas*...” (Felina, 08.20.2015). In this sense, some people link the “social acceptance” of muxes to their work in “traditional” occupations. “Muxes are welcome here because they are involved in the community, they like to make traditional dresses, embroidery; their community involvement is great” (Lucia, 08.22.2015). Therefore, the “community involvement” of muxes has to do with their economic and social roles; the *fiesta-related* works are widely recognized by society since they are relevant for the functioning and reproduction of the community system.

Due to the prestige economy, the *fiesta-derived* occupations are more valued than others; embroidery, sewing and parade float decoration are high valued works because of their relevant role in the community system of socialization. Prestige economy is not only related to the amount of money a sponsor spends on fiestas but also to showing off expensive attires, for example; the more

expensive someone's dress is, the more status is gained. In this sense, Müller (1997: 274) underlines the prestige of muxes occupations within the traditional local economy. Nevertheless, not every muxe is involved in the traditional economic sector; that would be oversimplifying the spectrum of their occupations. The "community involvement" of muxes who work in *fiesta*-related occupations does not explain the "acceptance" of muxes who are engaged in other types of works. Other perceptions about muxes might give us more insight into this issue.

Muxes were accepted from the beginning for being hard-working people; since the market is dominated by women, *Juchiteca* women are hard workers, and when they see you also like to work, you enter this world (...) A muxe who does not work is not accepted by women ... As women at that time were those who made the decisions... up to now they have a singular presence (Felina, 08.20.2015).

From Felina's statement, it is possible to draw two perceptions on muxes. Firstly, muxes are seen as "hard-working" people and secondly, muxes are expected to contribute to the economy; they, like women, are expected to be "productive". Bennholdt-Thomsen (1997: 281) already heard the common perception about women and muxes as "hard-working".

We often hear this opinion on a particular muxe or muxes in general. They are considered extremely hard-working, and this concerning female occupations. Juchitecas, for their part, are known as hard working, an attribute explicitly recognized and praised by men. When a man meets these criteria, then people say that "he knows to work as a woman" and is praised for it.

It is interesting how this notion of muxes being "hard-working" came into the field work several times. "Our muxes are very hard-working people, that's the concept we have about them" (Vidal Ramírez, 08.25.2015); "most muxes here are hard-working, they look for a job to help their families" (Vanessa, 08.28.2015). If women and muxes are considered as "hard-working" people, men are perceived as "lazy", "dependent" and irresponsible (Gómez Suárez 2010b: 76; Stephen 2002: 44).

Bennholdt-Thomsen (1997: 301-302) states that matrifocal societies create an institutional space for male "homosexuals" identified with women³¹. Therefore, the perception of muxes as "hard-working" people might stem from the valued position of women in the Isthmus. According to the original sexual division of labor, women were in a position that allowed them to be productive by engaging in trade and handling the household income, without being relegated only as housewives. The social perception of muxes as women created room for them to enter the "female sphere" and work in "female tasks"; it also allowed them to "inherit" some "female attributes".

Similarly, "productivity" of muxes means that they are expected to contribute to the *household* and have an active economic role. "If you are a muxe and you openly claim you're a muxe but you're not an economic

³¹ However, she also prevents us from establishing a causal link between male "homosexuality" and matrifocality –or the valued women's position in Juchitán–, since there are many forms of social treatment of "homosexuality" which, in turn, are influenced by the type of social relations between the sexes; in this sense, there are "homosexualities" rather than a single type of "homosexuality".

provider, you are not economically active, then you will not be accepted into the family” (Wil, 08.27.2015). In the same way, muxes participate in the local economy with expectations of being productive to the *community*. “I realize that people only accept us when it is convenient for them; when we do a work for them (...) People take us from that side, and make use of us for convenience, that’s why they accept us” (Marina-Aníbal, 08.22.2015). Therefore, one condition for being part of the community is “being productive”, which in fact demonstrates economic involvement.

Muxes are also seen as “independent” workers, in the sense that many of them do not depend on somebody else for their subsistence, do not receive an income from a company, do not have a boss and have time at their disposal; in sum, they do not depend on wage labor.

The muxe-women³² have the role of being more women, and are muxes who work, they set up their own businesses, for example, there are muxes who make totopo, food, or make the traditional clothes of Juchitán, or do their “tanda”, they seek the ways to be the owners of their work... this is, they don’t depend on a job or a company; that’s why here in Juchitán there are a very few muxes who work in a store, in a company and receive a weekly or monthly wage (Francisco L., 08.25.2015).

The perception of muxes as “independent workers” involves all of them who are engaged in the non-wage sector; this sphere is mostly represented by occupations of the local economy, and others associated to “female tasks”. These works are not attached to a rigid schedule, or an institutional structure, have no workplace rules, no dress-codes, and no employers to give orders, since there is no a hierarchical organization of work. In terms of gender as “social interaction” (West and Zimmerman 1987), there are other types of interaction in this sphere; there is no interaction with workplace colleagues; no interaction with employers or managers. Muxes are “free” from institutional arrangements.

Usually, most muxes have their own businesses and very few work for a company (...) Perhaps it is because of their individuality, of wanting to work on their own business and not be dependent on somebody else... I think it also has to do with education, knowledge, because if you ask me if I've seen muxes working in courts, no... since there are no [transgender] lawyers here (Julio César, 08.25.2015).

In Juchitán, 12.5% of people, 15 years of age and older, are illiterate; 54.8% have not studied beyond primary school; 17.2% have intermediate-higher education and 14.8% have higher education (from every 100 people, 15 have some degree in higher education) (INEGI 2011: 107). Although lack of schooling might be seen as a “general trend” of the population, rather we have to focus on the “privileged” characteristics of those who have access to education and therefore, to professional jobs; transgender muxes are not part of this group.

In summary, the space of muxes is the non-wage sector, represented by the local economy and a variety of commercial activities; they enjoy the “female” attributes derived from the relevant position of women into society.

³² Muxes with female gender identity.

Muxes are “part of” the community under the expectations of being *hard-working* and *productive*. They have room in the local economy since it is a space that allows them to be *independent*; it is a sector not organized by formal and hierarchical structures. Likewise, since the position of women has created room for muxes, they are welcome in “female tasks”. Particularly, they have access to works related to the system of *fiestas*; without this cultural system there would not be occupations such as embroidery, parade float decoration, confetti making, and others. In addition, because of the position of women as merchants, and the identification of muxes with women, muxes have access to the market and are easily assimilated as merchants as well.

5.5 Resistance of gender nonconforming muxes to the wage labor

Muxes with female gender identity, according to their perceptions, do not have easy access to the wage labor since they face heteronormativity; they react either by resisting entering this sphere or by fitting into the gender binary matrix in order to have access.

“It's not easy to get a job as muxe” says Mitzari, a muxe with female gender identity who works as a seller of traditional clothes at the central market of Juchitán. While in the local economy people buy and sell for themselves, trade by and for the local population, in the “modernized” parts of the economy, other conditions prevail. Although there is a municipal law³³ that protects sexual diversity from discrimination grounded on “sexual preference”, and the Political Constitution has also an article in this respect³⁴, heteronormativity is entrenched in workplace institutions, as it is a hegemonic system (in Gramsci’s usage) that goes beyond the exercise of legal power, since it has become embedded in culture. “In the formal sector there are muxes but work dressed as men, not as women ... Here in Juchitán I have not seen a muxe working dressed as woman” (Marina-Aníbal, 08.22.2015); “well, I do not know muxes like that [dependent, employees transgenders] only muxes who work for themselves and do not work with other people” (Abel-Ninel, 08.22.2015).

Gender binary thinking is rooted in social institutions, and as a result, the general expectations dictate that biological sex defines a person’s gender identity. The “modern Juchitán” has been settling down with heteronormative rules, including dress-codes, that constraint room for muxes with female gender identity.

It's not easy to get a job as muxe because companies ask for identity documents which come with the name of man, and when they see us dressed as women they say: 'Oh, I'm sorry but we cannot hire you... if you bring short hair, and come dressed “as you are”, you will be accepted. In fact, I asked for a job at “Farmacias del Ahorro” (a local drugstore) and my documents were rejected because they wanted me to have my hair short, and I've got it long

³³ Article 9 of the *Bando de Policía y Gobierno* (Municipio de la Heroica Ciudad de Juchitán de Zaragoza 2015).

³⁴ The Article 1 of the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States prohibits discrimination based on “sexual preferences”.

(...) Although it may not appear but there is homophobia (Mitzari Toledo, 08.23.2015).

Juchitan is no longer a city without large companies and supermarkets; currently, there is a significant number of them which represent the “wage labor”. The “traditional” Juchitan has been leaving room to the “modern” one, in different sectors, but perhaps it is more noticeable in the food industry. Some years ago, companies that sell non-perishable goods from industrial origin could not settle down into the city, due to political issues and collective independence of local people (Bennholdt-Thomsen 1997: 32). According to the narratives of the field work, during the last years, transnational and major companies have been settling down increasing, as a result, the wage labor.

Nowadays, there are already big companies, companies from other countries which sell their products here; for a long time, local people disagreed with that idea, they didn't want Bodega Aurrera, Soriana³⁵ to come because we did not eat those things with plastics [coverings of processed food] (Pedro Enrique, “Kika”, 09.04.2015).

As stated earlier, gender binary arrangements constraint room for individuals who do not align with one extreme or another; the bodies and gender expressions of nonconforming people become an obstacle for getting formal jobs. “Dressed muxes are not accepted by employers. I would say this is because what people might think about the company” (Francisco L. 08.25.2015). Muxes react by either resisting entering this space or by fitting into the gender binary matrix in order to have access as normative workers.

Firstly, muxes with female gender identity usually reject working in the wage sector. “The companies require people from both sexes, male or female, they do not ask for transvestites who want to work... That's why nobody asks for a job in companies like that” (Francisco R., 09.03.2015). However, besides being a “resistance” or “rejection” to the formal sector, it is perhaps that muxes feel “protected” in the local economy. “Because of the type of occupations I do, I have never looked for a job in stores” (Lambert/Binniza, 09.02.2015) argues a muxe-woman who works as a parade float decorator, confetti maker, coreographer, soothsayer, among other occupations.

On the other hand, there are previous narratives of muxes who became normative workers in order to access the wage labor. Rather than challenging hegemonic gender norms, muxes in the wage sector adhere to normative gender performance. In other words, the essentialism of binary distinctions is not challenged; muxes do not “undo gender” (in the sense proposed by Deutsch 2007). “Felixia is a forty-something muxe who teaches third grade at a nearby town, also dresses in regular male attire (...) because of his profession, he cannot dress like a muxe (Mirandé 2015: 19-20).

Francisco claims to dress “as woman”, but only for *fiestas* and family meetings; at work she dresses male attire. Francisco works as a customer assistant at a very well known company in Juchitán, which has branch offices at a national level; she claims to be the “favorite worker” of his employers who, by the way, know that she is a muxe.

³⁵ Big supermarkets that settled down in Juchitan over the recent years.

I consider myself to be a muxe-woman, I dress as woman in festivals, events, and in family parties (...) I work in a company called 'Chocolate Mayordomo', which is from Oaxaca, I only assist customers and sell chocolate; I do not depend on myself, I depend on the company; I've studied accounting (...) My boss knows I'm muxe, the deputy manager also knows it, I'm their favorite, from here Juchitán, since I'm the only muxe from Juchitán working for the company (Francisco, 08.25.2015).

Therefore, while the wage sector constrains room for gender nonconforming muxes, it opens room for masculinized muxes. "Muxes-hombres", "gays" and other masculine and masculinized identities have access to this "formal sphere" since they do not challenge the gender binary matrix. Disproportionately, male identities populate the wage labor relegating non gender nonconforming muxes to the local economy. "I have a gay friend who is an accountant, works for a Bank, gay friends who are doctors, nurses, engineers, architects..." (Julio César, 08.25.2015).

Gender expressions determine if muxes are "allocated" in the local or globalized sector. Mitzari, a transgender muxe, wanted to access the formal sector but she could not do it because she was refused due to her female gender expressions. Another muxe, Francisco has to become masculine in order to work in the wage sector. Additionally, there are some others who are simultaneously part of both the local and globalized economy; these ones are usually masculine since it is easier for them to fluctuate in both spheres. Most transgender muxes resist entering the wage labor, since gender expressions dictate the position of muxes at work; being "effeminate", non-normative undermines their options in the labor market.

5.6 Gender nonconforming muxes and "concealed homophobia"

Muxes might be excluded from the workplace with, in appearance, subtle and non homophobic arguments. The concept of "concealed homophobia" has emerged during my reflections about how female transgender muxes deal with "formal jobs" when they apply or have formal job interviews. Concealed homophobia signifies how mechanisms of discrimination that are not evident, or clearly seen, function in the workplace. It is when an employer does not tell a transgender directly that she will not be hired because of her gender identity, but gives her other arguments in order not to employ her; the employer can also delay the process by giving different excuses to the applicant. This excerpt reflects very well the idea:

There is a controversy because companies if you're gay and you're not effeminate you are accepted, but if you're effeminate they delay the process to hire you... They don't tell you face-to-face, they say 'we will call you' or 'you have to take another test, we will let you know the day', which actually does not come, since they prolong the process (...) Acceptance is not total because there is still discrimination for being effeminate, you almost cannot find formal jobs" (Cándido, 08.29.2015).

Another experience I have had during my field work was with the head of Human Resources in a big local company who gave me an off-the-record interview and told me that it is a policy of the firm not to hire men dressed "as women", but they do not say it, since it is not "politically correct" to talk about

it, and whatsmore, it is not even written anywhere but the hierarchical personal of human resources know. How do we call these attitudes and behaviors? Nowadays, since in México and other countries there is legislation on discrimination against sexual diversity, employers are not able to openly marginalize any social group. So we need a term that reflects all these situations in the workplace. “Concealed homophobia” might reflect this subtle discrimination in the workplace. The problem with “concealed homophobia” is that even if we are aware of its existence, the difficult lies in the lack of effective research tools for investigating such behaviors.

Chapter 6

Conclusions

Muxes, depending on their gender identities and expressions, experience different degrees of heteronormativity in the workplace. Muxes with female gender expressions who work in the local economy and other non-wage sectors have a place in the labor market; they are “part of” the community under the expectation of being productive; they also enjoy social perceptions as “hard-working” and “independent” people, and their works associated to the system of *fiestas* are valued by society. Nevertheless, they experience heteronormativity in other spheres of life, such as their allocation in “female tasks”; their restricted participation in *fiestas* (“Velas”); their ideals of femininity; their relationships organized on heterosexual patterns, and additionally the unclear recognition of their sexual rights, concerning the social acceptance of their partners.

Consequently, contrary to the common belief that Juchitán is a non-heteronormative society, in which muxes are widely “accepted”, there are practices that contradict this principle. Rather, regarding the dominant mestizo culture, at the national level, there are other forms of heteronormativity embedded in Juchitán, which do not affect the access of muxes to the local economy. The system of *fiestas*, trading as a local tradition and the independence of the non-wage labor allow gender nonconforming muxes to have different options in terms of jobs. Since they have a variety of options to choose from, it is not necessary for them to engage in sex work. In terms of identity, in this sector, a number of muxes do not adhere to any particular extreme of the gender binary matrix and they keep circulating between the two poles; rather than adopting a clear female gender identity; many of them are gender ambiguous.

On the other hand, the “modernized” parts of the labor market constrain room for gender nonconforming muxes, who do not have easy access to the wage labor since heteronormativity is embedded in “formal” structures. Muxes react by either resisting entering this space –which seems to be the most usual reaction–, or by fitting into the gender binary matrix in order to have access as normative workers. In this sense, bodies and gender expressions of nonconforming people become an obstacle for getting jobs. Additionally, muxes might be excluded from the wage labor with, in appearance, subtle and non homophobic arguments (“concealed homophobia”). However, the wage sector opens room for “muxes-hombres”, “gays” and other masculine and masculinized identities since they do not challenge the gender binary matrix; they adhere to normative gender performance rather than challenging hegemonic gender norms. In sum, male identities populate the wage labor relegating non gender nonconforming workers to the local economy.

In relation to the complexity of the “muxe identity”, we conclude that rather than being a “third gender” identity, the current understanding of “muxe” is intertwined, many-sided and even ambiguous, as a result of mixing processes between globalized and local sexual identities. A similar complexity has been reflected in regard to muxes as workers; rather than looking at them as embedded in a one-single-activity position, we should see them as

“multilayered” workers; since many of them are dedicated simultaneously to different types of works. In addition, there are no activities that could fit the notion of “in-between” occupations; rather, we found that there are perceptions that muxes predominantly get involved in specific activities, which are also done, to a less extent, by women and men.

Glossary

Ayuntamiento: Municipal government.

Fiesta: Celebration, festival or party, sometimes with religious connotation.

Confetti. Decorative colorful squares of paper with designs cut into them; paper shreds thrown in celebrations.

Huipil: Woman's traditional unfitted blouse; it is usually embroidered with flowers.

Istmeña, istmeño: A native inhabitant of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.

Juchiteca, Juchiteco: The inhabitant of Juchitán de Zaragoza, Oaxaca.

Lavada de Olla: A celebration held the day after the *Vela* also with dance, food and music. It literally means "washing of the pots (or pans)"

Machismo: Excessive concern with proving one's maleness.

Mayordomo: Sponsor of fiesta.

Non-wage labor: It refers to the labor in which a worker is independent and not subjected to a subordinate position into a hierarchical and institutional structure. In order to earn money, the worker does not have to sell their labor to an employer; he earns money on his own, in different ways; whether running a small-scale business or a large company (own definition).

Regada: A parade with ox carts and floats where the participants throw candy, cookies and household items, like utensils, to the crowd. *Regadas* are part of a three or four-day celebration, including *Velas* and other *fiestas*. Like *Velas*, *regadas* extend from April to September.

Tanda: A sort of cooperatives in which a group of people contribute and distribute among themselves a fixed amount of money, weekly, fortnightly or monthly. They take turns and are organized by numbers; every time one different person from the group receives the money; it is actually a way of saving money.

Totopo: An oven-baked tortilla of cracker-like-character.

Totopera: A woman or muxe who makes and/or sells totopos.

Transgender: The word "transgender" is used in this research as a term to refer *only* to male-bodied persons with female gender expressions.

Vela: Fiesta of one evening's duration within a longer celebration of three or four days. A *Vela* is a big community or family fiesta with traditional music, dance, food, and beer; this celebration is traditional in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.

Vestida: A man dressed as woman; a muxe with female gender identity.

Wage labor: The relationship between a worker and an employer in which the worker sells, for a predetermined period of time, their labor under a contract of employment and other formal arrangements, often in a labor market. There is a subordinate position of the worker who is embedded in a hierarchical structure, in which he has to follow formal regulations in order to receive a wage or salary (own definition).

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List of Appendices

Appendix 1: Profile of interviewed muxes. August-September 2015

No.	Informant	Occupation	Predominant gender expressions in daily life	Self-identified as
1	Cristal	Cook, owns the restaurant "Cenaduría Cristal", in Section 8	Female gender expressions	Muxe
2	Felina	Hairstylist, owner of the Beauty Salon "Estética Unisex Felina" / President of the "Authentic, Intrepid Seekers of Danger" (Muxe organization).	Female gender expressions	Muxe
3	Paola - "Palo"	Cook of tamales and snacks / clothes seller	Female gender expressions	Muxe
4	Oscar	Businessman, owns a hotel "Lidxi na Auria", a ballroom called "Salón Cazoria", and other businesses.	Male gender expressions	Muxe
5	Marina-Aníbal	Baker, artisan, embroiderer, merchant.	In-between gender expressions: feminine and masculine.	Muxe
6	Abel-Ninel	Burger and hot dog street vendor, bread seller, embroiderer	In-between gender expressions: feminine and masculine.	Muxe
7	Mitzari	Embroiderer and seller of traditional clothes at the central market	In-between gender expressions: feminine and masculine.	Muxe
8	Nelson	Fish street vendor	In-between gender expressions: feminine and masculine.	Muxe
9	Binniza	Co-Director of the Municipal Office of Public Policies for Sexual Diversity in the Municipality of Juchitán de Zaragoza	Female gender expressions	Muxe
10	Mística	Businessperson, merchant, trader, sells different products	Female gender expressions	Muxe
11	Francisco	Customer assistant at "Chocolate Mayordomo", salesperson	Male gender expressions	Muxe-mujer
12	Julio César	Lawyer, barman	Male gender expressions	Bisexual
13	Wil	School teacher, painter, physical trainer, owner of a body fitness center.	Male gender expressions	Gay
14	Vanessa	Seamstress, confetti maker, makes ornaments with paper shreds	Female gender expressions	Muxe
15	Cándido	Accountant at the "Casa del Pueblo Itsmeño"	Male gender expressions	Gay
16	Ernesto	Engineer, employee in a company that works on license plates for cars	Male gender expressions	Gay
17	Darina	Seamstress	Female gender expressions	Muxe
18	Jesús Armando, "Chuchín"	Cook and cantina owner	Male gender expressions	Muxe
19	Lambert-Binniza	Parade float decorator, confetti maker, coreographer, sex worker, soothsayer (fortune teller), she also makes ornaments with ballons for parties	In-between gender expressions: feminine and masculine.	Muxe
20	Francisco	Dental assistant	Male gender expressions	Gay

21	Reyna Victoria	Totopera (totopo seller), makes totopo and other kinds of tortillas.	Male gender expressions	Muxe
22	Pedro Enrique – Kika	Director of the Municipal Office of Public Policies for Sexual Diversity in the Municipality of Juchitán de Zaragoza. / Stylist, owner of a Beauty Salon	Male gender expressions	Muxe
23	Vicente	Businessperson, owner of a grocery store	Male gender expressions	Muxe

Appendix 2: People interviewed from civil society. August-September 2015

No.	Informant	Occupation
1	Lucía Gallegos	Businesswoman, trader
2	María	Human Resources Department, company of Juchitán
3	Diego Armando	Owner of a paper ornament business
4	Manuela López	Cook
5	Armando Gutiérrez	Lawyer, businessman, key informant
6	Gerardo	Human Resources Department, company of Juchitán
7	Maribel Ramos	Cook, owner of a restaurant
8	Jesús Manuel Cruz Muñoz	Director of Economic Development of the Municipality of Juchitán de Zaragoza
9	Vidal Ramírez	Director “Casa de la Cultura”, it is the most important Cultural Arts Center or Community Center.
10	Marco Antonio López Sánchez	COCEI leader (COCEI, a political organization of Juchitán)
11	Gonzalo Jiménez López	Historian, he has written a book about the history of Juchitán.

Appendix 3: Interview guides

Muxes

1. What does it mean to be a muxe? Who is a muxe?
2. What type of work do you do?
3. In your perception, what kind of work do muxes do?
4. When did you start working on this occupation?
5. Why do you work on this occupation?
6. What were your previous works?
7. What is your level of education?
8. What do your parents do for a living?
9. Do you think that it is easy to get a job being a muxe?
10. Have you experienced discrimination in the workplace?
11. How do your colleagues treat you in the workplace?
12. Is there a work that neither women nor men do, only muxes?
13. Do you have a partner, or a stable relationship? (Can two muxes form a couple?)
14. Does your relationship affect in any way your situation in the workplace?
15. Do you know of any muxe who has been discriminated against in the workplace?
18. What kind of roles does a muxe have in the family?

People from civil society

1. What kind of work muxes do?
2. What do you think of muxes as workers? What are their characteristics or skills?
3. Is there a work that neither women nor men do, only muxes?
4. Do you know of any muxe who has been discriminated against in the workplace?
5. What kind of roles does a muxe have in the family?

Appendix 4: Photographs

(by Pablo C. Vargas)



Muxe embroiderer



Muxe seamstress



Muxe merchant



Muxe cook