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The Gay Political City
(a translation of “La ciudad política gay” in *San Juan Gay: Conquista de un espacio urbano de 1948 a 1991* by Javier E. Laureano)

by
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Translator's Preface

Introduction

I knew from the moment I began my academic journey as a student at the Graduate Program in Translation that I wanted my thesis to reflect some aspect of Puerto Rican culture. It was not until I took the course *Traducción y Género* with Professor Jaime Santiago Cajigas, who briefly mentioned *San Juan Gay: Conquista de un espacio urbano de 1948 a 1991* as a resource on Puerto Rican queer history, that I realized that this subject was important to me, and that I could work with this text for my thesis. In this book, author Javier E. Laureano discusses, among other things, the importance of the creation of a Puerto Rican queer archive that focuses on the preservation and documentation of existing queer stories and materials, such as newspaper and magazine clippings, and makes them accessible for people to research, whether for academic purposes or as a way to connect with their history, before the material is permanently lost. I share the belief that we must protect these stories and make them available for newer generations. Translation plays an important role in the preservation of texts, making them more difficult to be expunged. At a time when LGBTQIA+ rights are being challenged once again, and gay and queer people in the United States and elsewhere are facing potential elimination of their rights, it is vital to write, read, share, and translate texts like these so that more people have access and can learn and relate to these stories.

About the Author and Text

Javier E. Laureano completed a PhD in History at the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus, in 2011. His doctoral dissertation titled *Negociaciones espectaculares: creación de una cultura gay en San Juan de 1948 a 1992* developed into the book *San Juan Gay: Conquista de un espacio urbano de 1948 a 1991*, which was published in 2016 by the Instituto de Cultura

Puertorriqueña, after Laureano had spent years of researching and writing about queer history. In *San Juan Gay*, the author reflects upon how discovering that other people who shared his sexuality throughout history, and how they had always existed, was so important to him, “Por eso creo que el proceso de autoidentificación y de afirmación de lo que uno es resulta importante en el contexto de una sociedad caribeña altamente conservadora” (29). The text captures the sense of looking for a place to belong that many gay and queer people experience, especially within conservative or reactionary societies. With this text, Laureano argues that there is need for a Puerto Rican Queer Archive because many personal collections of activists and members of organizations, such as Comunidad de Orgullo Gay, exist but are completely inaccessible to people without any connections to those who have kept the material, some of which has already been lost due to conditions such as humidity, and that the existence of an archive is not just a form of resistance but also the refusal to be invisible (324-325).

San Juan Gay is 370 pages in length and divided into seven chapters. Each chapter is then subdivided into sections that can, in many instances, be read independently from each other, which can be beneficial in longer, academic-style texts. Laureano documents, and often quotes, newspaper and magazine articles that are not publicly available and that come from the personal collections of people who have taken on the responsibility of safekeeping their own collective stories. Throughout the book, the author also includes interviews that he has conducted, and highlights the works of other Puerto Rican activists and researchers. Overall, *San Juan Gay* gathers different aspects of what it meant to be queer in Puerto Rico during the twentieth century. The ways in which transgender and gay people were treated by a conservative society and media, the locations and buildings that provided queer people the space to create community, how the AIDS crisis was dealt with and its impact on the island, and serial killer Angel Colón

Maldonado, who targeted gay men in the 1980s and is considered the only convicted serial killer in Puerto Rico, are some of the subjects discussed in other chapters that, due to the length of the text, I did not translate. Laureano mentions that this book is not a finished work, and that many themes and issues can be further explored. It is impossible to cover the complete history of LGBTQIA+ people in a single book, even if focusing only on Puerto Rico. The author writes in the first chapter of *San Juan Gay* that he wants his readers to interact with his work and challenge his findings, which is something I kept present as I worked with the text.

For this thesis, I decided to work with Chapter 4, which is over 22,000 words in its entirety. Due to the thesis word limit, I translated the first ten sections completely, as well as the first 2,000 words of the eleventh section, which total 12,469 words in Spanish, including footnotes. I chose this chapter due to the diversity of subjects discussed, which include the penal codes and laws that have been discriminatory against LGBTQIA+ people, the connections to the Stonewall Riots and the United States, how language was used, the impact of the different types of activism, how gay people were treated in Puerto Rican society, how gay people started and distributed their own newspapers and magazines, and the role of lesbians within the local gay movement.

Throughout the text, Laureano's writing ranges from very academic and formal, to more personal and informal. I attempted to follow Laureano's style in the overall translation while maintaining a balance between both registers. Because of Laureano's prevalent academic writing style, my target audience is college-educated people in the United States, and particularly those of Puerto Rican descent living outside the island.

These sections of Chapter 4 include two quotes that were published originally in English and that Laureano does not translate into Spanish. The first one is:

Some 100 persons marched from Luis Muñoz Rivera Park in Puerta de Tierra to Liberty Park in Condado. The march was headed by Cristina Hayworth, a veteran of the 1969 Stonewall riot in New York City.

In June 1969, police raided The Stonewall, a gay bar in Greenwich Village. The action grew to riot proportions when the gays struck back, forcing police into the bar, which was later set afire.

The second is:

Rioting continued far into the night, with Puerto Rican transvestites and young street people leading charges against rows of uniformed police officers and then withdrawing to regroup in Village alleys and side streets.

The first quote is from a *San Juan Star* article, while the second quote is from John D'Emilio's book *Sexual Policies, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States 1940-1970*.

The footnotes found in my translation are part of the source text except for numbers 43, 46, and 49, which I added for clarification.

Translation Challenges

As indicated, Laureano's style ranges from being academic to also being quite personal and direct. Repetition occurs quite often in the text, which is ultimately effective because of how Laureano has divided the chapters and given the importance of communicating certain themes. I did not change repeated phrases or terms that relate to the overall content of the book, such as when he writes "Comunidad Orgullo Gay (COG)" in each section and, instead, I attempted to maintain his style and used "Gay Pride Community (GPC)" because I think it is beneficial for the

audience in case the sections are read individually. The author also refers to the Stonewall Riots as an “anchor” and a “common reference point” multiple times throughout the text, which I also maintained. Another example of Laureano’s writing style is his use of the word “intervenciones,” which I rendered as “interventions” in English.

An overall challenge in this translation is the use of terminology specific to LGBTQIA+ people, which varies from place to place, and from group to group, even within queer spaces. For this reason, I used GLAAD’s Media Reference Guide, which, although mostly intended for journalistic and media coverage of LGBTQIA+ people and issues, provides guidance in the identification of appropriate terms, as well as explaining why some should be avoided and are no longer used. In this guide, GLAAD (the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Discrimination) recognizes the importance of self-identification and how people should, first and foremost, be asked how they personally identify, and that the guide does not represent all the different ways LGBTQIA+ people identify.

One of the main issues that recurs throughout the text, beginning with the first page, is that of the word “homosexual.” Throughout the text, the author uses the word “homosexual” to refer to gay men, but also as a general term for gay and queer people—although he also uses the word “queer” occasionally, such as on page 207, and in other instances, such as in Chapter 7. While the use of “homosexual” is correct in Spanish, the anglicism “gay” has become a commonly used synonym that even appears in the *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española* and is also sometimes rendered in the plural as “gais.” In English, however, “homosexual” carries a negative, medical connotation and GLAAD calls it an “outdated clinical term considered derogatory and offensive” and advises against its usage (Glossary of Terms: LGBTQ). I translated this term by using the word “queer” when the author is talking about a

general, broad group of people, and used “gay” when he talks specifically about gay activism in Puerto Rico during the 1970s and 1980s, as well as when he is specifically writing about gay men. The author makes an important distinction between the Gay Movement, which he describes as an activism that has focused on making marginalized LGBTQIA+ people fit in within a heteronormative society and adapting to meet societal expectations, and the Queer Movement, described as a movement that has focused on the acceptance of what is considered different and not “normal,” which the author states had fewer local roots. Although there were instances in the text where it could have been applicable to use the word “queer” instead of “gay,” I believe it is important to highlight the difference within movements that the author discusses. I have kept the word “homosexuality” throughout the text in the instances where Laureano is referring to homosexuality and heterosexuality as two different sexual identities, as well as in the quotes that deliberately include such medicalized, discriminatory language.

Another issue in the text is the use of the initialism “LGBT,” which is similar to “homosexual” in terms of how its usage varies in different locations and by different groups. In Puerto Rico, this initialization is commonly used, standing for “Lesbianas, Gays, Bisexuales, Transgéneros, y Transexuales.” However, this initialization can be considered outdated due to the inclusion of the word “transexuales, or “transsexuals” in English, which is also an issue in other parts of the text. GLAAD says that the term “transsexual” is:

An older term that originated in the medical and psychological communities. As the gay and lesbian community rejected homosexual and replaced it with gay and lesbian, the transgender community rejected transsexual and replaced it with transgender. Some people within the trans community may still call themselves transsexual. (Glossary of Terms: Transgender)

This explanation highlights why the term should be avoided, and the importance of self-identification. Because there is no specific person self-identifying with this term in the text, I used the more commonly accepted “transgender.” Since this word also represents a problem in terms of the abbreviated form, and because “LGBTQ” is also used in Spanish, I used this version in my translation so as to be as inclusive as possible. There are other versions of this initialism that are used, such as LGBTQ+, LGBTQIA+, and LGBTQ2S+, but I chose to use the most similar to the one used by the author because I consider this to be a personal choice, and because there is no official consensus on a specific rendering. Similarly, the text also includes the word “travesti,” which I translated as “cross-dresser,” following GLAAD’s explanation: “This activity is not drag. It is a form of gender expression and not done for entertainment purposes. Be aware of the differences between cross-dressers, drag queens, and transgender women” (Glossary of Terms: Transgender). However, I did maintain “transvestite” once in the target text due to its appearing in a quote that was originally published in English. I translated the word “transformistas” into “drag artists” instead of “drag queens or kings,” since the source text does not specify who the artists were or how they identified.

The use of slurs and epithets represented a similar challenge because such forms of verbal disparagement vary greatly between countries, languages, and people—even within the same communities and spaces. Some slurs carry different meanings simultaneously and can be translated in different ways or into the same word in the target text. For this text, I left the words in Spanish and placed my translations within parenthesis. Since this book is specifically about Puerto Rico, I think it is important to maintain that element and provide a parenthetical translation rather than erase a word in Spanish and insert another word in English that is not used locally.

Other Challenges

One particular challenge was finding an official translation of any of the Penal Codes of Puerto Rico. I found a version of the Penal Code of 1902 used by the Puerto Rico Bureau of Supplies, Printing, and Transportation in 1937 that includes both a Spanish and English version of the Penal Code and it is the text used in my translation for Articles 278, 283, and 286. However, the third item in the English translation of Article 283—which is incorrectly listed as number four—is incomplete and says: “4. Writes, composes, stereotypes, prints, publishes, sells, distributes, keeps for sale, or exhibits any obscene or indecent writing, paper, or books; or,” while the Spanish version is complete. I added my own translation to the one included in this edition:

3. writes, composes, duplicates, prints, publishes, sells, distributes, keeps for sale, or displays any writing, obscene or indecent paper or book; or designs, copies, etches, paints, or prepares in any way any obscene or indecent painting or print; or shapes, chisels, casts or makes by any other means an obscene and indecent figure; or [...]

I felt this was necessary as the translation included in the Penal Code published by the Puerto Rico Bureau of Supplies, Printing, and Transportation is missing a significant portion of the text.

The demographic statistics included by the author presented a challenge in terms of research. In the section “Stonewall: A Complicated Milestone,” Laureano writes:

According to the United States Census Bureau, at the end of the 1960s, 916,608 people of Puerto Rican descent lived in New York; the population of the island during that time was 2,712,033 and New York State’s population was 18,237,000. Almost a third of the Puerto Rican population lived in New York City by the end of the 1960s, while the city’s population had a significant percentage of Puerto Rican immigrants.

Although the author cites the United States Census Bureau as his source for the number of people of Puerto Rican descent living in New York, I was unable to find that exact statistic in either the 1970 census or the 1980 report. I did find an article by Jorge Duany who provides that same number and also cites the Bureau but was unable to find an exact governmental source. I changed the number to 817,712 because it is the statistic included in a 1970s Census Subject Report titled “Puerto Ricans in the United States.” I was able to verify through Census records that the population of Puerto Rico is correct. Finally, Laureano rounds up from 18,236,197 to 18,237,000 the total population of New York State, and because the author does round up the other two numbers, I used the number as it appears in the census report.

Another issue is that Laureano includes a quote by Grozny Román who says that the name of Luis Vigoreaux and Lydia Echevarría’s popular TV show is *Dale que dale que es domingo* and that it aired on Channel 2, however, the correct name and network according to newspaper articles are *Dale que dale en domingo* and Channel 4 (WAPA-TV). Since Laureano is quoting Román, I decided to add a translator’s note with the correct information. Additionally, the author states that the Stonewall Riots took place in the early morning of June 27, 1969, while the correct date is June 28, 1969, according to sources like the Library of Congress and David Carter’s *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*. Similarly, Laureano states that a group of members of the Gay Pride Community traveled to New York City to participate in a march to commemorate the Stonewall Rebellion on June 29, 1975. The correct date is June 26, 1975, according to various photographs, such as one found in an article in *W Magazine*.

In addition, I changed some of the names used by Laureano for clarity and accuracy. On page 206, Laureano does not use the official name for “The Quilt,” which is the AIDS Memorial Quilt; then, beginning on page 204, the author writes “la Parada Puertorriquena de Nueva York,”

and “El desfile puertorriqueño de Nueva York,” which I changed to the “National Puerto Rican Day Parade in New York,” the event’s official name; finally, on page 208, Laureano writes about an endorsement from the “Community Network for Clinical Research on AIDS (Puerto Rico CONCRA),” however, the name appears to have changed over the years therefore, I included the organization’s current name in parenthesis (Community Network for Clinical Services, Research and Health Advancement). I used the names as they appear on each organization’s website, as they are still active.

Other minor clarifications and corrections were made where deemed necessary on the basis of thorough research.

Conclusion

LGBTQIA+ people continue to face significant struggles as they advocate for the freedom and legal protections that cisgender and heterosexual people are granted by the government by default. In the United States, while some legal battles seemed to have been won with the Supreme Court’s ruling in the *Obergefell v. Hodges* case—which legalized same-sex marriage in every state—recent efforts by conservative groups highlight how little has changed in terms of the legal protections offered to queer people. Some of the issues that LGBTQIA+ people are currently facing in the U.S. are: the likely challenge to the *Obergefell v. Hodges* ruling before a Supreme Court with a conservative majority; the government limiting access to appropriate healthcare for trans, nonbinary, and gender non-conforming people in many conservative states—where their existence is also being criminalized in a variety of ways—forcing those who are able to leave to move to more accepting states; the banning of books that include themes that might relate to queer people, making it far more difficult for people to find stories of their own

experiences; and the criminalization of drag shows and queer spaces. Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri, and Florida are among the states with the most bills recently filed that directly impact the lives of queer, trans, and gender nonconforming people (Shoenbaum).

At a time when the persecution of queer people has significantly increased once again, Laureano's research and the translation of this text will enable those who are currently facing discrimination to connect with their communities through history and the documentation of stories that were published by independent newspapers and magazines. Laureano's *San Juan Gay* is an important text in the documentation of Puerto Rican history and activism, bringing together decades of information in a single book, which is why the translation of this text is so important, since it provides a look into what activism was like outside of the U.S. during this seminal period. The text enables readers from the U.S. to consider LGBTQIA+ activism from beyond their own experience, while providing them with relevant cultural and political context that they might not have found otherwise. The author also highlights the impact that U.S.-based queer activist groups have had on Puerto Rican activists and how it led to making this marginalized community visible, as well as to changes in the law and how queer people were portrayed in different types of media. *San Juan Gay* casts a highly informative light on the particular relationship that Puerto Rico has with the U.S. in terms of the movement and how that has played a significant role in queer rights activism on the island. Furthermore, *San Juan Gay* serves as a reminder that there is queer history before and after Stonewall, and—although the Stonewall Riots will continue to represent a pivotal moment in queer activism—that there are more queer stories to be remembered within and outside the U.S.

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