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# Sexualities and Separate Spheres: Gender, Sexual Identity, and Work in Dominica and Beyond

*Bill Maurer*

In 1988 I wrote an essay on the conceptual vocabularies of sexuality and work in Dominica, a small island in the eastern Caribbean. That essay began with a critique of the public/domestic dichotomy in the literature on women in Caribbean development. The crux of my argument was that the way some researchers had deployed the public/domestic analytic naturalized sexuality by locating it in the “private” domain of procreation and thus removed from view the relationship between the devaluation of women’s sexuality and the devaluation of women’s work (Maurer 1991). I was attempting to outline the shortcomings of feminist scholarship that had explored Michelle Rosaldo’s (1974) proposal that the public/domestic dichotomy should prove a useful device for looking at gender inequality cross-culturally, and I was interested in bringing the dichotomy to bear on the issue of sexuality, a theme not explored in Rosaldo’s work or in any feminist work following in her footsteps.

This essay represents an attempt to rethink the utility of the public/domestic dichotomy for the study of the production of sexualities. The public/domestic dichotomy structures Dominican people’s understandings of both sexuality and work. But, since the dichotomy is hegemonic for both Caribbean peoples and the analysts who study them, it has tended to be used in Caribbeanist scholarship as a mirror of the “facts” of gender, sexuality, and work. Without really questioning these facts themselves, analysts ended up replicating the very essentialisms Rosaldo was trying to destabilize. Previous researchers who made use of the public/domestic dichotomy obscured the issue of sexuality, because they connected sex to reproduction as a matter of course. They also committed the error of overlooking the acts women performed in “public,” since they presumed all women’s work occurred in the “domestic” sphere, or, if per-

formed in public, nevertheless contributed mainly to the domestic sphere. I argued in my original essay that women's public acts seem to be devalued because *women* did them and not because they were conceptually linked to the domestic sphere. And I argued that the devaluation of women had to do with linkages between conceptualizations of their sexuality and their work.

Here, however, I too was caught up in the taken-for-granted logic of the public/domestic dichotomy. In attempting to show that domesticity alone could not explain the devaluation of women's work and by suggesting instead that constructions of women's sexuality told us more about the devaluation of women as *women*, I ended up taking the category "women" for granted and grossly simplified the structures and processes contributing to this categorization in Dominican and other Western postcolonial societies. As I take another look at my material from Dominica, I find I ought to attend more carefully to the kinds of work and sexuality that men and women were telling me about.

Men were primarily wage workers; women grew and marketed subsistence crops but for the most part did not earn a wage. Subsequently, men, in discussing their work, listed the occupations they were engaged in. Women, meanwhile, saw themselves as doing "only housework." Similarly, people talked about men's sexuality using a multiplicity of identity and descriptive categories, while the words and phrases people used to describe women's sexuality implied that women did not "have" sexuality or sexual identity apart from their relations with men. Why were men's sexualities and men's work described as things that men "are" and "have," while sexuality and work, as cultural categories, were rarely applied to women and, when they were, only came up in connection with women's relationships to men?

"Queer theory" emerging in literary fields and theories of performance that cross disciplinary boundaries draw our attention to the always-enacted nature of identity, the performative reiterations of preexisting norms that temporarily stabilize or render apparently immutable such categories as gender, sex, and sexuality (de Lauretis 1987; Butler 1993; Morris 1995). While this literature on sexuality has done a nice job of destabilizing the taken-for-granted categories of, say, "gay" or "lesbian" identity, it has not fully explored the connection between the performance of identity and capitalist relations of production. It has also paid scant attention to the formerly colonized world and the performative twists and turns played out by postcolonial subjects setting sexuality norms to new prac-

tices and new identities (but see Boellstorff 1996; Lancaster 1992; and Stoler 1995, for suggestive analyses in this direction). My contention in this essay is that the Dominica case helps us to see that the norms of sexuality-as-identity are historically and culturally specific and are bound up with the emergence of capitalism, wage work, and the reification of the public/domestic dichotomy that wage work engenders.<sup>1</sup> I write, then, in the spirit of recuperating Rosaldo's project of understanding and not taking for granted the doctrine of "separate spheres" in societies influenced by Enlightenment and Victorian social worlds (see Collier, this vol.).

### The Public/Domestic Dichotomy in Caribbean Gender Studies

The study of gender and work in the Caribbean has employed the public/domestic dichotomy as a tool for understanding women's and men's work and social status. Rather than using the dichotomy critically, many researchers simply took it as a handy way to reflect the lived realities they observed. The dichotomy has been taken in a positivist spirit that Rosaldo herself did not intend (Lugo, this vol.). Thus, gendered activities and identities are seen to fall into two spheres of activity. Activities in the public sphere "link, rank, organize or subsume particular mother-child groups," while those in the domestic "are organized immediately around one or more mothers and their children" (Rosaldo 1974:23). In much of the literature on gender in the Caribbean women's and men's work are described in terms of interconnected networks through which people carry out economic and social exchanges (Anderson 1986; Ellis 1986; Berleant-Schiller 1977; Safa 1986). Analysts use the public/domestic dichotomy, implicitly or explicitly, to delineate these networks and the positions of women and men within them. They maintain that women's place in networks is within the sphere of the household and that women, in conducting household activities, obtain a limited degree of influence in the public sphere through their affiliations with men.

Several Caribbeanists have pointed out that the public/domestic dichotomy seems to soften when women's activities in "public" are taken into account (Barrow 1986; Sutton and Makiesky-Barrow 1977; Gussler 1980). Many women's activities, the purpose of which is to maintain the household, are performed in the public arena. This public performance often has far-reaching public effects, "and the social system itself depend[s] on the ability of the female to be mobile, flexible, and resourceful, rather

than tied to a specific structure or role" (Gussler 1980:208). Women's economic activities, for instance, not only "affect" the public sphere but partially constitute it. And women's "household" work is about more than the household; we must examine the importance of so-called domestic activities to the political, economic, and social life of communities before jumping to the conclusion that such tasks enacted in public are domestic simply because the actors are female and the activities contribute to household maintenance (Berleant-Schiller and Maurer 1993:66).

Another problem with the Caribbeanist version of the public/domestic dichotomy is its neglect of sexuality. When taken as a positive reflection of social facts, and not a way to interrogate them, Rosaldo's initial formulation appears to rest on women's social role in bearing and, more important, raising children. This is rooted in Western logic, which links women and sex to babies and procreation "naturally" and which assumes women are mothers (Delaney 1991). When this logic is imported into feminist scholarship on women's work in "developing" societies, it gets rewritten in terms of a simplified version of the Marxist dichotomy between reproduction and production. Criticisms of the gender and sex assumptions of the reproduction/production dichotomy in Marxist theory are well rehearsed (Harris and Young 1981; Yanagisako and Collier 1987; Collier, this vol.; MacCormack, this vol.). The problem stems from the initial feminist conception of "sex" as the "natural" substrate on which "gender" is culturally constructed. The distinction intended between biology and culture has indeed been useful in establishing the arbitrary quality of gender and in combating essentialism (Mead 1935; Beauvoir 1953; Oakley 1972). The two terms, *sex* and *gender*, "serve a useful analytic purpose in contrasting a set of biological facts with a set of cultural facts" (Shapiro 1981:449). But they are limiting as well.

Donna Haraway and others have repeatedly made the case that, like gender, sex itself must be seen as "constructed and social" (Haraway 1986:85; Strathern 1992; Delaney 1991). The work of Michel Foucault has been extremely influential in redirecting studies of gender, sex, and sexuality away from the sex/gender distinction and toward the discursive regimes that empower this dichotomy. Judith Butler, drawing on Foucault, J. L. Austin's speech-act theory (Austin 1955), and a Derridean critique of it, has persuasively argued that, to explore the apparent "ground" of sex in Western conceptions of sex and gender, one must investigate the discursive relationships in which the category "sex" is embedded. When does sex as a natural category become important to people? How do people make sex a

material fact of their existence? When do they see it as determinative of other domains of social identity or interaction? The Dominica case suggests that people “make sex” and sexuality as stable, given identities only in certain contexts and under regimes of wage work.

### Women’s and Men’s Work in Dominica

Dominica is an island in the eastern Caribbean, located between the French islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe. Its inhabitants are English and French creole speaking, and the island gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1978. It is one of the wetter and more mountainous islands of the Caribbean, and, in part because of its climate and difficult terrain, Dominica has never experienced large-scale plantation development in quite the same way as the neighboring islands. Dominican agriculture is mainly carried out on small-plot family farms. Bananas are the chief export crop and, at present, the mainstay of the economy (McAfee 1991; Trouillot 1988; Yankey 1969).<sup>2</sup>

Most family farms occupy between one-half and two and a half acres of land. Inheritance of land is bilateral, and almost all farms are maintained by family labor. To prepare a plot for banana cultivation the men of a family will first clear the land using slash-and-burn techniques. Getting a plot ready for planting can take as long as a week. Men use pickaxes, plows, and heavy wooden tools called *louchettes* for digging and planting, and men work chemical and organic fertilizers into the soil. Once the banana plants are established their maintenance entails frequent applications of pesticides and fungicides. Both men and women do this, usually under men’s supervision. Women are responsible for weeding under the plants. Both men and women harvest the fruits. Women also sometimes work in the boxing plants scattered across the island to prepare the bananas for transport. Groups of men and some women come together to transport the boxed bananas by motor vehicles once every two weeks. These are brought to the dock and loaded onto the boats of the Geest Company. Men earn a wage proportional to the weight of the bananas they deliver.

Women maintain small plots of vegetables independently of the banana farms. Some women also raise small stock such as goats, rabbits, and chickens. They provide food for their households and for sale at the local market. Women produce almost all of Dominica’s vegetables and ground provisions, and women are completely responsible for the planting, care, harvesting, and marketing of their crops. Through their marketing activi-

ties women sustain the island's internal economy and maintain social networks that facilitate interisland communication. News frequently travels through the Saturday market. My landlady and I, for example, found out about a friend's nomination to town council at the market a good three or four hours before the nominations were made "public."

Women's agricultural activities are more labor intensive than men's, especially since women are also responsible for cooking, laundry, and other forms of housework. At the time of my research (1987) many rural women could not afford coal or cooking gas and had to gather wood for their kitchens. Gathering wood and brush took them as much as three hours a day, even though many women sent their children to carry out this task. Water was a problem for many rural women, too; in several areas women had to walk a mile to collect water and carry it back to their houses. Women washed laundry in nearby streams. Very few of the women I met had much time for leisure. Men, on the other hand, often were able to maintain their banana plots with time to spare for other activities. Domino matches were ubiquitous, and men spent a good deal of time at the local rum shop. Many also had the time to work on larger plantations or in some other form of wage work, such as transportation. Most men who grew their own bananas for sale to Geest thus were also wage workers for other employers. Women who worked in boxing plants were among the few women who earned a wage, and, since the work is seasonal, it was not a regular source of income.

When talking about their work on their banana plots, men emphasized the heavy labor involved and the many stages of activity in the growth and production of bananas. Men often complained about their work and their lack of leisure time, although, as noted earlier, they had more of it than women did. In spite of women's hard work, meanwhile, most rural Dominicans did not put women's work in the same category as the banana production and other wage work of men (even though many of the activities involved in banana production were actually in the hands of women). When asked what they did for a living, many women involved in subsistence agriculture, cottage industries, or marketing first mentioned their activities in banana production and only with prodding would mention the other work activities in which they were engaged on a regular basis. Women did take great pride in their work, but many connected their work as a matter of course to that of their husbands. One woman told me, "the most important part of my work is having a family, and I grow my own things; it's very expensive in the market, and having the land I can do it

myself.” Yet, when I asked this woman what she did for a living, she replied that she was a “housewife.” Women’s household-oriented work was not seen as “real” work because it did not earn women a regular wage. According to one man, “women are involved [in productive activities] in that they are helping their men.” Women’s work thus was seen as complementary to and not separate from men’s real wage work.

Development programs in Dominica, until recently, have been aimed at banana production. Little attention has been paid to women’s agricultural activities. The attempts of women to succeed in new economic areas have been often thwarted by community attitudes. For example, women’s small stock production has traditionally been an important but small-scale affair. In one village a group of women decided to try their hand at raising pigs for sale to the surrounding villages on a more large-scale basis. They had received materials for the construction of a pig shelter from a local development agency, and four months later representatives from the agency came to check up on their progress. The wood and cement for the shelter’s construction was in the same place it had been left four months before. The women explained that they had not been able to convince any men to help them build the shelter because the men had seen their attempts at large-scale pig raising as “childish.” The women, meanwhile, had seen construction as “men’s work.” Furthermore, many men couldn’t bring themselves to view small stock production as “work” or comprehend women’s desire to raise pigs for cash and not in-kind services or goods. On the subject of small stock production one man told me: “it’s not work at all! After all, it’s just a matter of tethering your animal!”

Men’s wage work is what counts as real work. Women’s work, while made up of just as many if not more separate activities as men’s, has little value attached to it and is lumped together under the term *housework* even when such work takes women miles away from the household to market, the river, or the forest and even when it has little if anything to do with the “housework,” like pig farming for profit. In addition, their work is categorized as housework in spite of the fact that these activities have far-reaching effects beyond the household. Women are trapped by a mentality that accords only wage work the status of “work.” According to one man, a woman is only “really working . . . when she goes out and helps her man in the field.” Women’s attempts to break out of this mentality are dashed by the belief that all women’s activities are unimportant unless they contribute to men’s wage earning.

What let me, in my original essay, to come to a critique of the pub-



lic/domestic dichotomy in Caribbeanist research was that the relative levels of value attached to men's and women's work seemed not to hinge on recognized public or domestic spheres, in which real work is located only in the public. The marketing activities and small stock production of women are certainly enacted in public and, furthermore have real influence on political, social, and economic life of the island. It seemed to me that the devaluation of women's work and its lack of differentiation within the category "housework" resulted not from its location within a domestic space, the activities of which are limited to the maintenance of the household proper. Rather, this devaluation of women's work resulted from an articulation of the category "housework" to the category "woman." This is a product of the ideology of separate spheres, in which all household business is devalued. And its reiteration in a Caribbean context suggests that the doctrine of separate spheres has become hegemonic here.

It was this hegemonic character of the public/domestic dichotomy that Rosaldo called on us to grapple with. Previous researchers in the Caribbean took the dichotomy as a neutral reflection of what they observed in the field and not as part of a lived hegemony (with a few notable exceptions, especially the work of Martinez-Alier 1974, and R. T. Smith and his students; Smith 1988; Austin 1984; Alexander 1984). Thus, they did not explore further implications of the dichotomy for the devaluation of women and housework. One dimension not explored was sexuality.

### Sexuality in Dominica

I was fortunate during my fieldwork in Dominica to have been nineteen years old. I was able to talk frankly with people close to me in age about sex. I could not do this easily with older people, mainly because I was afraid that raising the topic would lead people to doubt my "seriousness" as a researcher and especially to question my morals. Even with my own peers, however, I was very circumspect when trying to elicit information on some of the sexual categories I had heard tossed about in casual conversation and in jokes. People who identified with the sexual categories I list here were circumspect, too, in admitting as much to a white man from the United States who lived in Goodwill, the solidly middle-class suburb of the capital city, with an elderly woman known throughout the island as one of the bastions of "respectability" and Christian virtue. I still struggle with how to write about sexuality in Dominica. It was this struggle that led

me, in 1988, to look only at “conceptual vocabularies” of sexuality and to avoid “sexual identities” or “practices” (Maurer 1991:13).

In Dominica people often label others according to their perceived sexual preferences. Men take on these labels as categories of identity. When I was in Dominica, the terms *gay*, *lesbian*, and *homosexual* were only just beginning to be used and then only in contexts that indexed the foreignness of the people and practices so labeled. AIDS had just hit the island as well, and in public forums like newspaper editorials and letters to the editor, and in the office of the Dominica Planned Parenthood Foundation (where I volunteered as a receptionist) many people expressed the belief that AIDS would not affect Dominicans since it was a “homosexual” disease and no Dominicans were homosexual.

In other contexts, however, people described men’s sexuality as a spectrum. At one end are people termed *gwo gwen*. These men are considered exceptionally virile and are known for their violent sexual conquests. In English *gwo gwen* means “fat wheat,” a reference to the *gwo gwen*’s supposedly abnormally large penis. At the other end of the spectrum is the *anti-man*, a man who openly rejects women’s advances and is loathe to engage in any sort of heterosexual union. “Anti-man” is a common insult among men. “Normal” men engage in sexual relationships with women exclusively and do not claim any special or extraordinary virility. I elicited the term *normal* only when I asked people what they would call a man who did not fit into any of the other categories discussed here. Normal men frequently work to assert their differences from *gwo gwen* and from “soft” men. A soft man is a man who has sex with one partner in a stable, monogamous relationship, a man who has fathered no children, who has fathered only female children, and who allows women to “push [him] around.” I was told that I was “soft” because I allowed my landlady to bring me to church every Sunday. *Soft* is also a term used to describe male sexual dysfunction and impotence.

Three other terms refer to men who engage in sexual relationships with other men but not necessarily exclusively. All three, like *gwo gwen*, are creole terms. A *mako* is a busybody who likes to work around the house and loathes fieldwork. The line between *soft* and *mako* is indistinct, but the term *mako* indicates a possible preference, though not an exclusive preference, for male sexual partners. Often, like *anti-man*, *mako* is used as a term of derision but probably more because of the implication of housewifery than homosexuality.

The other two terms imply a preference exclusively for male sexual partners. *Makume* is a creole word used by a woman to refer to the god-mother of her children (i.e., *ma comere*, my co-mother). *Tanti-man* is derived from the creole *tanti*, or “aunt.” A *tanti-man* is so called, as one grade school boy told me, “cos he’s just like your auntie.” Both *tanti* and *makume*, when applied to women, suggest a sexuality linked to male partners because, as I will show, all women are presumed to be sexual only in relation to men. When people apply these terms to men, similarly, they suggest a sexuality linked to male partners and defined only in relation to other men. The fact that a *makume* or *tanti-man* may have sex with another man is not central, however, to his definition as a community member or a person. What is more important is that he is “like a woman”; he is not considered subversive, aggressive, or creepy the way an anti-man would be. To say that a man is a *makume* or *tanti-man* is to give him the same status as a woman. As a Dominican intellectual told me, people are “very accommodating” toward *makumes* and *tanti-men*.

Because *makumes* and *tanti-men* are generally accepted by others in their community, other men will sometimes pretend to be *makumes* or *tanti-men* in order to develop close relationships with women they hope later to seduce. This was a favorite strategy of some high school boys I knew. According to one of their “victims,” “they put themselves in the position of women with the desire of getting them!”

All of the categories applied to women, meanwhile, imply a preference for male sexual partners as a matter of course. This is not to say that women do not have sexual experiences with other women in Dominica. Rather, men and women think about such experiences differently from the way they think about men’s sexual experiences. Indeed, they do not think of them as sexual at all (cf. Elliston 1995). Dominican creole provides the term *zami* for pairs of women who form a close bond that frequently involves genital contact. *Zami* is also used to refer to any pair of very close friends, male or female (from “les ami[e]s”). Unlike special terms such as *makume*, however, *zami* does not imply an identity but a condition of being in a relationship. One can be a *makume* without necessarily being in a sexual relationship with another person; *makume* defines a condition of being, independent of one’s social relationships. It is an essentialized identity. One must be in a relationship with another, however, in order for the term *zami* to apply; indeed, a creole speaker would rarely say that someone is “a” *zami* but, rather, that two people are *zami* to each other. In short,

male-male and male-female relationships involving genital contact imply sexuality and special identity categories (even if only “man” and “woman,”), while female-female relationships do not.

Other words used to describe women that have sexual connotations include *streetwalker*, *maquel*, and *malnom*. The term *wife* is used among members of the middle and upper classes who place high value on legal marriage (see Smith 1988; Lazarus-Black 1994). A man who has sexual relationships with a woman outside of marriage will often refer to her as “my woman.” Women follow this usage as well, as in “whose woman are you?”

A streetwalker is a woman who “acts like a prostitute,” attempting to trap men unawares and steal them from their wives or girlfriends. A *maquel* is like the male *mako*: she is a busybody who puts her nose in other people’s (sexual) business. A *malnom* is a woman who “acts like a man”—but does not engage in sexual relationships with other women. The term is supposedly derived from the French word for “bad [i.e., incomplete or improperly formed] man.”<sup>3</sup> A *malnom* is a well-organized woman often in some position of authority. Being called *malnom* is generally a compliment: to be a *malnom* is to be able to handle “men’s work” and “men’s responsibilities.” *Malnoms* are similar to *makumes* in that they effectively achieve the status of the opposite “biological” sex (in Dominican terms), yet, unlike *makumes*, they do not “have” sexual identities.

The public/domestic dichotomy inflects Dominican sexual categories, as in the term *mako*. Men who use *mako* as an insult stigmatize other men by associating them with the household. The terms used to describe women assume either that they do not have sexualities (*zami*, *malnom*) or that they depend on men for explicitly sexual expression (*streetwalker*, *wife*). Meanings attached to men’s sexual practices, preferences, and socially sanctioned masculinity, in contrast, are constituted in identity categories. Just as women are seen as “helping men” in the arena of work and not contributing to economic production in any other meaningful way, so too women are seen as dependent on men for sexual being, expression, or identity. And both women’s sexuality, when present, and women’s work are understood as extensions of men’s.

### Waging Sex: Accounting for “Sexualities”

My analysis of 1988 stopped here, with the conclusion that Dominican “conceptual vocabularies of sex and work are similarly structured” (Mau-

rer 1991:17). In this section of this essay, however, I will consider the public/domestic dichotomy as an analytical tool to help unravel why Dominican men got to have sexualities (and be sexual), while women, outside of their relations with men, did not.

Much of my reanalysis derives from problems I have had with the literature on sexuality that I have become familiar with since my initial fieldwork. Many of these problems are personal, though they also relate to epistemological concerns that I cannot easily separate from personal ones. Like most feminist anthropologists trained in the 1980s, I have come to articulate strong anti-essentialist accounts of gender, sexuality, and race. Yet anti-essentialist renderings of sexuality never seem satisfying to me, in part because of my own rather essentialized understanding of my sexuality and sexual identity as a gay man. Like many white gay men in the United States, I have always understood my identity to be given, stable, and perhaps “natural.” Indeed, constructions of white gay male identity as natural explain not only the persistence of claims about the natural, or “genetic,” causes of sexuality and the concept of “sexual orientation” itself (as opposed, perhaps, to “preference” rendered as chosen and changeable) but also the willingness with which many gay men believe scientific claims for the “discovery” of biological causes of sexuality (see Hegarty 1997). I had felt a disjuncture between my sense of identity and sexual being and my epistemological and political rejection of essentialism. The literature on sexuality from an anti-essentialist perspective never seemed to explain adequately the persistence of essentialism as a hegemonic stance in Western societies (but see Fuss 1989; Butler 1993; Sedgwick 1990; Gilroy 1993).

Historical studies of gay and lesbian identities rely on tropes of the public that do not match up with my own sense of identity (D’Emilio 1984; Freedman and D’Emilio 1988). John D’Emilio’s influential “Capitalism and Gay Identity” has been especially provocative for me. In his narrative of industrialization and the transformation of family life D’Emilio argues that, as capitalism pushed men out of the home into the factory, men came to associate in groups independent of the household procreative unit and began to disarticulate sexuality from procreation. Central to D’Emilio’s account is the new public world invented in industrial capitalist relations of production that separated “home” from “work.” He writes that gay identity came into being when individuals interacting “outside the heterosexual family” could “construct a personal life based on attraction to one’s own sex.” He starts from the dubious assumption that sexuality and procreation were once articulated as a matter of course and that sexuality

existed somehow as a domain of feeling and acting before the advent of capitalism, even though his argument is explicitly concerned with refuting this assumption. “By the end of the [nineteenth] century,” he writes, “a class of men and women existed who recognized their erotic interest in their own sex, saw it as a trait that set them apart from the majority, and sought others like themselves” (1984:105).

D’Emilio’s argument aims to upset the claims of other historians of “homosexuality,” who are often taken to be essentialists, who find evidence for “gays and lesbians” throughout history, from the Greeks to the present, and in all cultures (see Boswell 1980; Cavin 1985; for critique, see Halperin 1990). D’Emilio aims to question the category of “gay identity,” or homosexuality, itself. Yet he does not explore the category “sexuality” (or “identity,” for that matter) and does not question whether and why certain acts are deemed sexual in any particular place and time (Elliston 1995). For instance, he writes of how World War II thrust same-sex groups together where “men and women *already gay* [found] an opportunity to meet people like themselves” and that “others could become gay because of the temporary *freedom* to explore sexuality that the war provided” (1984:107; *emph. added*). But how did people come to be “already gay,” according to this argument, before they interacted in exclusively same-sex publics? And what constituted the sexuality that these people now had the “freedom” to explore? How did they “become gay,” for that matter? D’Emilio simply writes that they made “decisions to act on their desires.” This statement not only leaves desire unanalyzed, but it flies in the face of the experience of gay and lesbian people who feel they had no conscious choice in forming their sexual identities and seek out explanations in biology. D’Emilio’s account falls short when we attempt to explain why many gay people’s (and especially white gay men’s) common-sense understandings of their sexualities are essentialist in nature.

The rhetoric of “choice” pervades D’Emilio’s history: “Capitalism has created the material conditions for homosexual desire to express itself as a central component of some individuals’ lives; now, our political movements are changing consciousnesses, creating the ideological conditions that make it easier for people to make that choice” (1984:109). It is not surprising, then, that he holds up the ideal of “personal autonomy” as the goal toward which gay and lesbian movements must strive. D’Emilio’s stance reflects a troubling recuperation of the liberal political subject, who supposedly owes nothing to society for its identity and social standing (Collier, Maurer, and Suarez-Navaz 1995). Furthermore, by highlighting

choice again, it fails to explain the hegemonic essentialisms according to which many people live their lives and forge their struggles.

Like many (but not all) gay men and lesbians, I grew up “knowing” that I was gay and was raised in relative isolation from other gay people. I did not “discover” my latent sexuality only after entering into gay public spaces. Joan Scott discusses the fetishization of experience in accounts of the discovery of identity when she analyzes Samuel Delany’s autobiographical work, *The Motion of Light in Water* (Scott 1992; Delany 1988): entering St. Mark’s bathhouse for the first time, Delany is overcome by the “undulating mass of naked male bodies, spread wall to wall” (1988:173), and this experience brings him to gay identity and politicized consciousness. The assumption that coming into a gay public awakens the homosexual difference within oneself creates the illusion that desires and identities are self-evident “inherent attributes of individuals” (Scott 1992:25). Where do individuals get these “inherent” attributes in the first place? How does sexuality become a thing “inside” a self, or constitutive of a self (Halperin 1990:26)? Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*, volume 1, is concerned with precisely this question: how, historically, a category of acts that spoke nothing of the inner soul came to be seen as indicia of inner, immutable character—how the person who committed sodomy became the homosexual (1978:42).

D’Emilio is right to locate the emergence of gay and lesbian identities within a world in which industry separates home from work. As Marx (1844) pointed out long ago, in commodifying time and demanding its sale on the labor market, wage work leaves workers’ with only their “home” life in which to develop their “real selves.” The domestic sphere becomes the site of the reproduction of the labor force but also the reproduction of sentiment, feeling, preferences, interests, and identities. To Marx this separation of the public world of work from the domestic world of identity caused one of capitalism’s most trenchant forms of alienation: since, in Marx’s conception, to be human is to realize oneself in one’s labor, the development of a sense of self outside of the context of (wage) labor was a profound alienation from humanity’s true “species being.” Put another way, wage labor, in offering nothing but drudgery, offered nothing to the construction of a truly human self. Marx wrote that in this context of alienated labor, people falsely craft their “true” selves from the “animal functions” they get to carry out at home: in “eating, drinking, procreating, or at most in his dwelling and dressing up, etc.” (1844:74).

The construction of the domestic under capitalism is certainly more

contradictory and complicated than Marx realized—and there is a lot more to dressing, eating, sleeping, and fucking than “animality.” Here, however, I point out only one such contradiction (cf. Collier, Maurer, and Suarez-Navaz 1995). The domestic, in becoming the site where people realize their selves, is also the site for the formation of interests and preferences. But interests and preferences crucially shape affairs in the public realm. Indeed, through the domestic, the “private” sphere of the economy gains the abilities, preferences, and predilections it requires to function as a market. Market transactions enacted in public are still private in that they operate (supposedly) outside the sphere of state regulation and in that they emerge (supposedly) from people’s natural preferences and interests.

In her coauthored essay “Is There a Family?” (1982) Rosaldo discusses how the private and the “family” came to be co-constructed in the nineteenth century. Her analysis suggests that D’Emilio’s tale of capitalism and gay identity is nearly on the mark—but fundamentally backward. Rather than viewing people as “realizing” their “gay identities” in the public sphere of work, now separate from the domestic sphere of heterosexual reproduction, as D’Emilio has it, Rosaldo’s insight into the mutual constitution of public, domestic, and private, together with Marx’s insight into the creation of identities under capitalism, leads to the conclusion that the private sphere of individual identity formation is primary in the creation of sexualities held to be immutable, unchosen, and unchangeable.

Although she did not discuss Foucault in her work, Rosaldo’s thinking in “Is There a Family?” resonates with Foucault’s identification of the “great strategic unities which . . . formed specific mechanisms of knowledge and power centering on sex” in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (1978:103). Foucault argues that these “unities” worked to create sexualities as new modes of experience under capitalism. They included: (1) “hysterization of women’s bodies,” whereby the female body is first analyzed as full of sexuality then placed within the purview of medical practice and pathologized and next “placed in organic communication with the social body (whose regulated fecundity it was supposed to ensure), the family space (of which it had to be a substantial and functional element), and the life of children (which it produced and had to guarantee, by virtue of biologico-moral responsibility lasting through the entire period of the children’s education”); (2) “pedagogization of children’s sex” whereby children were rendered naturally sexual and at the same time their sexuality was seen as “contrary to nature”; (3) the economic, political, and medical “socialization of reproductive behavior”;



and (4) a “psychiatrization of perverse pleasure,” as the homosexual emerged as a “species” of being (104–5).

These strategic unities generated “four privileged objects of knowledge, which were also targets and anchorage points for the ventures of knowledge: the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, the Malthusian couple, and the perverse adult” (Foucault 1978:105). All of these came together in the construction of the family and a system of alliance—of “marriage, of fixation and development of kinship ties, of transmission of names and possessions” (106; cf. Collier 1988)—as the main site for the regulation, reproduction and deployment of sexuality:

[the family’s] role is to anchor sexuality and provide it with permanent support. It ensures the production of a sexuality that is not homogeneous with the privileges of alliance, while making it possible for the systems of alliance to be imbued with a new tactic of power which they would otherwise be impervious to. The family is the interchange of sexuality and alliance: it conveys the law and the juridical dimension of the deployment of sexuality; and it conveys the economy of pleasure and the intensity of sensations in the regime of alliance. (Foucault 1978:108)

In volume 2 of *The History of Sexuality* Foucault further explores the notion of “experience” upon which sexuality as a domain of desire and identity depends. He writes that his project was to discover “how an ‘experience’ came to be constituted in modern Western societies, an experience that caused individuals to recognize themselves as subjects of a ‘sexuality,’ which was accessible to very diverse fields of knowledge and linked to a system of rules and constraints” (1985:4), and he directs his inquiry toward the following question: “What are the games of truth by which humans come to see themselves as desiring individuals?” (6). The following represents an attempt at an ideal-typic model of the “games of truth” actors engage in as they work under regimes of wage labor.

To reword Foucault in more Rosaldean terms, the domestic is the interchange of the private and the public. Under capitalism people buy and sell things in markets.<sup>4</sup> One of the things people sell is their labor, an abstract, objectified quality they feel they can possess and alienate. But this alienation is troubling. Notions of the individual as a proprietary subject, one who owns and controls his or her body and capacities, are central to the capitalist conception of personhood and the alienation of labor. But when people sell part of their capacities in the form of wage work, they also risk

selling themselves, since the capacity to labor and to possess one's person are central to full personhood (hence the arguments that women and children were not full persons since they were possessed by others—men—and the fruits of their labor belonged not to themselves but to their husbands and fathers [see Pateman 1988]). People, in other words, not only *feel* that they can possess and alienate their labor; they are in fact *compelled* to do so, and this is an unsettling compulsion. In order to preserve the feeling of a self that capitalism encourages, labor, therefore, must be conceptualized as alienable in a way that other capacities are not. Indeed, the capitalist conception of labor calls forth supposedly intrinsically inalienable capacities (like childbearing) and objects (like babies) as well as purportedly inherent attributes (like tastes and desires) as central to personhood in a way labor supposedly is not (Radin 1987).

The public/domestic distinction handily resolves the dilemma that some parts of the self can be sold and others can not by requiring that salable items be sold freely on the open market. Aspects of personhood not related to alienable labor are relegated to the domestic sphere, but here those aspects of personhood that are not alienated are conceptualized as fundamentally inalienable—they become private, and the domestic becomes the space outside of the market, where people who would otherwise be slaves to wage labor can be free to express their real selves, those aspects of selfhood that make people who they “truly are.” At the same time, those private aspects of personhood constructed in the domestic are also central to market transactions—they are also private in the economic sense—since these private capacities are what people sell on the market, and these private predilections are what determine people's purchasing. In the domestic space people forge their inner, or true, selves, and are “free” to act out their “desires.” In public they sell their labor, a thing deemed inessential to their inner core yet shaped and tempered by it. Of course, these conceptions of personhood, public, domestic, and private are precisely what the labor market needs: subjects constituting themselves as individuals with natural differences in abilities and propensities, constituted in the domestic space, which tempers their laboring capacity and which can be sold in private exchanges on the free market. Markets encourage people to think of themselves as having natural differences that set them apart from others; labor markets demand such different abilities as qualifications for jobs (see Collier, Maurer, and Suarez-Navaz 1995; Macpherson 1962).

Whereas D'Emilio views the public sphere as capitalism's contribution to the creation of gay identities, I would thus place emphasis on the inter-

change of the domestic in activating the private as that which people hold to be the preserve of the true self. The domestic and the private in liberal market societies, in which people make “selves” for themselves, with inner capacities, inner drives, and inner desires, seems more crucial to the formation of identities deemed essential than the public.

In Dominica the model of subject formation in capitalist societies just sketched out is, of course, inflected by Caribbean colonial history. First, however, a brief review is necessary: rural Dominican men are more involved in the wage workforce than women; men think of themselves as having sexual identities; women do not “experience” sexuality except through relationships with men. Even when women engage in relationships with other women that may involve genital contact, people do not necessarily interpret this as sexual activity or as evidence of their sexuality. Men and women, meanwhile, also devalue the activities and people who spend their time within the sphere of the household (cf. Rosaldo 1974). Jane Collier has observed a similar devaluation in her work with Spanish villagers in the 1960s, who felt that “work” meant only “work for pay.” As a result, she writes, “it [was] difficult for women to find words for talking about what they were doing when they clean[ed] their homes, [made] their family meals, or [grew] food for family consumption” (1992:169). Women who did not participate in the market “appear[ed] to lack the means of establishing a social identity” and instead “appear[ed] to be dependents rather than full persons” (170). Much the same could be said for the rural Dominican women discussed here.

It is significant, however, that all of the identity terms used by people to discuss and label sexualities or sexual behavior (and some relationships, like *zami*) are creole, save two: *anti-man* and *streetwalker*. The English derivation of these words speaks to Dominica’s particular colonial history as a French island taken over by the English in 1792 and governed by British colonial officials well into this century. Of all the terms *anti-man* and *streetwalker* are unquestionably derogatory. There is no place in society for individuals so labeled. Not only do the terms have some origin in Dominicans’ understandings about and animosities toward their English-speaking masters (Trouillot 1989) but also in English colonial capitalism’s promotion of a comprador class of local rulers. To be labeled “anti-man” or “streetwalker” is to be labeled not just as outside of society but as outside of creole society, that is, to be “foreign.” Ana Alonso and Maria Koreck (1993) discuss a similar construction of foreignness among men in northern Mexico who engage in genital relationships with each other but

do not conceptualize themselves as gay or homosexual. As they describe, there are specific terms and identities for men who play “active” and “passive” roles in anal intercourse, but men who play both are called “internationals,” “a term which indexes the ‘foreignness’ of practices which are more like those of American gays than the ones” they discuss in their article (119). They speculate that the internationals have been influenced by U.S. gay culture and gay liberation movements in Mexico. Similarly, the anti-man and streetwalker category may be local response to a perceived foreignness and a historical imaginary of the creation of sexualities in the context of colonial domination (as does the increasing use of the terms *gay*, *lesbian*, and *homosexual* in the context of the AIDS crisis).

The Dominicans I interviewed in 1987 cannot be said to have inhabited a timeless, exotic, or closed world cut off from the rest of the planet before that time. The fact that many nonderogatory sexual terms are creole points to the significance of a history of contact and interaction with the rest of the creole Caribbean. Dominica was a forgotten place to colonial capitalism in many ways, never home to profitable plantations or mercantile ports of any significance. To many Dominicans their history is one of simple peasant life, quiet and undisturbed until the advent of tourism late in this century. But during the nineteenth century many Dominicans were subject to the disciplines of the colonial state (Trouillot 1989). And from the late nineteenth century and well into the twentieth Dominicans from the predominantly creole-speaking regions in the north of the island (especially the town of Vielle Case, a sort of creole cultural center) participated in “a worldwide process of [labor] valorization in a manner independent, at least in part, from the rest of Dominica, through contacts with the French colonies” (Trouillot 1988:41). I am suggesting that these interactions generated not just a new way to think about labor but also a new way to conceive of the person and that this has encouraged the reproduction of the sexual social identities described here.<sup>5</sup>

### Conclusion

In her last essays Michelle Rosaldo (1983, 1984) explored the Ilongot “self” as a foil to the Western self. Her work on Ilongot notions of self and feeling led her to Enlightenment and Victorian dichotomies with which she had initiated her feminist project. In the West, she argued, guilt and shame are emotions that serve to protect a self seen as interior and full of asocial passions, desires, and impulses from the often conflictual demands of a

society that more often than not thwarts such desires. Guilt and shame keep inner selves in line with social order while at the same time providing a means for inner selves to maintain their integrity. The Western view of the self “holds that impulses harbored deep ‘inside’ our selves will ultimately be reflected in our acts”; for us guilt and shame “regulate a problematic inner self” (1983:142). For Ilongots, in contrast, guilt and shame, or what we would gloss as such, help order “a world where the resentments of the past can be resolved in a good moment’s practice.” For Ilongots “a person’s history is thus not determinant of an identity that is continuous over time; it is instead a set of resources to be used in the establishment of a generally fluid and negotiable social life” (149).

In the same two articles Rosaldo suggested that selves and feelings vary from culture to culture. In her work with Jane Collier she attempted to map out relationships between different organizations of inequality and different conceptions of selves (Collier and Rosaldo 1981). Jane Collier has continued this project in the context of market societies. She characterizes market rationality as figuring social status based on notions of achievement through individual effort. Whether or not markets actually determine people’s social status, people who think in terms of market rationality act as if they do and find it natural. Collier discusses the practices that codify “individual” characteristics and qualities—filling out application forms, submitting to performance reviews, receiving school grades, and taking job entrance exams. Judith Butler (1993) might say that these practices, which call upon the person continually to reiterate their supposedly inherent or natural attributes (including things like “sex” or “race” indicated by ticking off a box on a form), in fact are constitutive performances, creating the materiality of individual identities in the act.

The argument is not that wage work in any simple fashion “determines” the production of sexualities but that there is “a sort of ontological complicity” between identity and social world (Bourdieu 1981:306). The fact that rural men in Dominica sell their labor more often than do women does not “cause” them to possess sexualities. But wage work, the kind of private sphere it encourages, men’s ideas of essentialist selves and sexualities, and women’s ideas of dependency and lack of sexuality are deeply consistent and coherent within the overall structure of a colonial and post-colonial emergent capitalism as modeled here.

Markets and the liberal theories undergirding them are also related to my own contradictions in “feeling” essentially gay yet articulating anti-essentialist theories of sexuality. In her last published work Rosaldo (1984)

suggested that the dichotomies of Western social thought obscure more than they reveal about the constitution of the self. Thinking about capitalism and Enlightenment social thought has helped me work through an understanding of sexuality that accounts for its “essentialness” and “naturalness” to many for whom sexuality is an aspect of lived experience. It has also suggested a politics—powerful yet unsettling. Questioning the basis of identity construction would mean taking apart the liberal subject and its capitalism, going beyond the self we currently live. I do not believe that any transcendence from our own subjectification is possible (Visweswaran 1994), but I wonder whether interrogating the construction of “real selves” can momentarily interrupt the repetitive discourses through which we make our worlds and our identities stable, fixed, and real. And I wonder whether, in spite academic and political talk of split, fragmented, and multiple subjectivities, we are truly prepared to follow Michelle Rosaldo, who called on us to move “beyond a set of classic answers that repeatedly blind our sight to the deep ways in which we are not individuals first but social persons” (1984:151).

#### NOTES

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1. Before the recent advent of Queer Theory numerous gay and lesbian scholars speculated about the capitalism/homosexual identity nexus (see, e.g., Altman 1993; Weeks 1986). D’Emilio was an important contributor to these debates. As much as this essay criticizes D’Emilio, it is also an effort to recuperate the strand of theorizing in which he participated.

2. The ethnographic present in this article is 1987. Since that time the country has undergone significant changes, particularly in light of European Community actions that changed the relationship between the United Kingdom and Caribbean banana exporters as well International Monetary Fund “structural adjustment” programs that decreased social spending and threw more peasant proprietors into new kinds of competitive market relationships. These changes have especially impacted women’s agricultural production. I have not carried out fieldwork on this problem, but, for an updated account of women’s agricultural work, see McAfee 1991.

3. This is according to my friends at the Dominica Planned Parenthood Association. They explained to me that the term *malnom* is a contraction of the creole for

“bad” or “imperfect” (*mal*) and “man” (*nom*, from *un homme*). According to them, it does not derive from the French term *nom* for “name.”

4. Here I am engaging in the practice of model building, not the recounting of historical “truths.” Part of the purpose of this essay is to provide a model of market societies that can help to explain the production of “sexualities” taken as inherent attributes of individuals. On ideal-typical model building in social analysis, see Collier 1988.

5. In a recent essay on sexuality and definitions of the good citizen in Martinique, David Murray (1996) discusses recent usages of the term *makume* that approach the U.S. definition of *gay* and that subject men so described to derision, violence, and exclusion from full participation in the “cultural” world constructed by elites to delineate Martinican from French “nationality.” I would suspect a similar shift of meaning has occurred in Dominica, equating *makume* with *gay*, since the time of my fieldwork, especially given media attention to the AIDS epidemic and stereotypes of AIDS as a “homosexual” disease.

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