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IN SEARCH OF MASCULINITY

Violence, Respect and Sexuality among Puerto Rican Crack Dealers in East Harlem

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Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted while residing next to a crack house in El Barrio, New York, for almost five years, this article analyses how the social and economic marginalization of second- and third-generation Puerto Rican immigrants in the inner city has polarized violence and sexuality against women and children, both within the family and on the street. Traditional working-class patriarchy has been thrown into crisis by the restructuring of the global economy and the expansion of women's rights. Unable to replicate the rural-based models of masculinity and family structure of their grandfathers' generation, a growing cohort of marginalized men in the de-industrialized urban economy takes refuge in the drug economy and celebrates a misogynist, predatory street culture that normalizes gang rape, sexual conquest, and paternal abandonment. Marginalized men lash out against the women and children they can no longer support economically nor control patriarchally.

For several decades young African-American and latino men in the inner cities of the United States have been killed at considerably higher rates than soldiers in the line of fire during World War II. More inner-city African-American and latino men are under supervision by the criminal justice system than are enrolled in higher education (Mauer 1992). Although accurate figures for Puerto Rican males on the US mainland are usually not disaggregated in census statistics, their levels of violence and institutional incarceration probably parallel those of urbanized African-Americans. Policy advocates and community leaders specifically identify young, inner-city Puerto Rican men—the focus of this article—as being in a state of crisis (Pérez and Cruz 1994).

Public discussion of the problems faced by poor men of colour tend to fuel polemical, moralistic debates that blame the psychological deficiencies of pathological individuals or the social pathology of 'subcultures' (cf. *New York Times Magazine* 1994). US politicians and the media in the 1990s have largely responded with traditional 'family value' crusades. Individualist, blame-the-victim, and ethnocentric analyses of poverty and social marginalization are standard fare in the United States where social theory in the post-World War II decades has been traumatized by a McCarthyist terror of political economy and an 'all-American' tendency towards cultural essentialism or

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even biological determinist/racist interpretations of social inequality (see the critiques by Katz 1986 and the special issue of *Critique of Anthropology* 1993). Building on conservative interpretations of Oscar Lewis's (1966) culture of poverty concept, and Daniel Moynihan's denunciation of the black family (Rainwater and Yancey 1967), analyses of intrapersonal violence tend to be dominated by psychologists and social workers who focus on the inter-generational transmission of abuse within a therapeutic analytic framework. With notable exceptions (Feldman 1991; Sluka 1990), the growing literature by anthropologists on violence neglects the problems of the industrialized world. Instead anthropologists pursue their 'predilection for the exotic' by conducting participant-observation studies on the margins of the world economy, leaving little room for dialogue with other disciplines (see bibliographical review by Ferguson 1988).

Progressive, culturally sensitive critiques of the ethnocentrism and class-bias inherent in most discussions of African-American families notwithstanding (Burton 1991; Jarrett 1994; Stack 1975), paternal abandonment and domestic violence among the inner-city poor in the United States is a serious problem. To reach any understanding of why such large numbers of poor men are killing one another and are abandoning or abusing their progeny in the United States, one must set the debate in its larger social structural and political ideological contexts. Most obviously, the restructuring of the global economy has decimated the employment opportunities of the entry-level working class. This results directly in an exacerbation of the material crisis in the reproduction of the conjugal and even the extended family in the United States. As a matter of fact, the US Census Bureau's normally dry, impersonal statistical summaries uncharacteristically used the adjective 'alarming' in a 1994 report to describe the over 100 per cent increase in family poverty rates for young workers during the 1980s and early 1990s (DeParle 1994: A8). Parallel to these economic shifts, public sector services for the working poor have broken down in the context of an explicitly political hostility to the fate of the marginal (Wacquant 1995). Predictably, this has been accompanied by a rise in urban racial segregation and a polarization of cultural hostility across class and ethnic lines (Tonry 1995).

Working-class Patriarchy in Flux in East Harlem

The escalation of social marginalization in the United States has had grave consequences for how poor men 'do masculinity' (Messerschmidt 1993) as they take refuge in the underground economy and increase their levels of domestic and interpersonal violence. Traditional working-class patriarchy has been thrown into a prolonged material and ideological crisis as increasingly large numbers of men are unable to reproduce what some theorists, building on Gramsci (1991), have called 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell 1987; Messerschmidt 1993). Fewer and fewer men are able to find stable, unionized jobs that pay them a family wage with family benefits as factories relocate overseas in search of inexpensive labour. Unable to provide economically for their conjugal unit, they lose the material legitimation for demanding autocratic 'respect' and domineering control over their wives and children.

At the same time that working-class patriarchy has been undermined economically by the restructuring of the global economy, women of all social classes have entered

the labour force in increasing numbers since World War II. Furthermore, major cultural and political movements have mobilized women across the globe. As feminist women of colour have noted, this women's movement has been dominated by an anglo-centric middle-class bias which defines emancipation in terms of individual rights and upward economic mobility (Acosta-Belén 1993; Mohanty 1984; see also Jaggar 1983). Nevertheless, throughout most sectors of US society, there has been an ideological dislocation in post-World War II forms of patriarchal social organization. Of course, the reorganization of family arrangements, the restructuring of gendered labour markets, and the transformation of ideologies around sexuality has been a highly uneven and political process. Furthermore, the fundamental ideologies that enforce male domination remain in place. Like patriarchal Luddites, resisting change, men often attempt to reassert their declining level of patriarchal control over women and children through violence.

In the Puerto Rican case, the change in power relations has been further polarized since World War II by a massive rurál to urban migration set in a hostile cultural context. The Puerto Rican experience is dramatic by world standards because of the island's colonial relationship to the United States (Meléndez and Meléndez 1993; Rivera-Batiz and Santiago 1994). Few peoples in recent history have experienced such rapid economic changes; such a diasporic emigration; or have suffered such intense social marginalization and cultural denigration (Bonilla and Campos 1986; Dietz 1986; Rodríguez 1989). A Puerto Rican case study, consequently, allows for a detailed examination of how major historical changes affect men and women differently. Puerto Ricans in the United States reveal the centrality of gender and sexual category alongside class and ethnicity in the social pressure cooker that historical experiences of domination and resistance always render so dynamic and painful.

Second-generation inner-city Puerto Rican men who participate in the underground economy offer a particularly poignant example of how social suffering is complexly gendered. For these reasons, when I lived with my family in East Harlem, New York during the late 1980s through the early 1990s in order to study street-level crack dealers, gender power relations—and specifically the relationship between interpersonal violence and masculine struggles for dignity—emerged as a central research focus (Bourgois 1995*a*).. In these pages I will explore how inner-city Puerto Rican men, who are confined to the margins of a nation that is explicitly hostile to their culture and no longer requires their labour power, reconstruct their notions of masculine dignity around interpersonal violence, economic parasitism, and sexual domination. Increasingly large proportions of frustrated, desperate men have taken refuge in a street culture of resistance that roots its material base and its ideological appeal in the growing drug economy, which offers a concrete alternative to exclusion from the legal economy and its anglo-centric culture. Through my ethnographic dialogues I hope to show that rather than being mere pawns of larger social structural and ideological forces, drug dealers who participate in street culture are active agents seeking dignity—even if violently and self-destructively. What might be 'explained' as individual psycho-pathology or dismissed as some kind of cultural essentialist machismo (see discussions by Paredes 1971 and Ramírez 1993) needs to be contextualized in history and understood as the expression of contradictory struggles for power and meaning.

The Historical Context

In the decades following World War II between one third and one half of Puerto Rico's population migrated to New York City in search of employment in factory sweatshops (Bonilla and Campos 1986; Bose 1986). They arrived at precisely the historical moment when these kinds of manufacturing jobs were leaving the industrialized countries as multinational corporations have increasingly sought out lower labour costs and more pliant governments throughout the Third World (Rodríguez 1989; Bourgois 1995*b*; Sassen 1991). This sets the stage for the dramatic changes in family structure and male power roles among second- and third-generation East Harlem residents. Coming primarily from the poorest sectors of society, and often arriving directly from sugar plantations, marginal family farms, or decaying coffee haciendas, definitions of masculinity among Puerto Rican immigrants are embedded in interpersonal webs of 'respeto [respect]' defined around gender, age, kinship, and community status. Puerto Ricans still often refer to the long-since urbanized descendants of immigrants from the countryside as 'jibaros', a term that is loosely definable as 'hillbillies' or 'country bumpkins'. In the classic 'traditional' setting of the family farm, the worth of the autocratic pater familias hinged most immediately on the larger community's perception of the respect accorded to him by his wife and her abundant children. Several generations later on the inner-city street, the idealized legacies of the hierarchies and prestiges that were formerly rooted in the rural family and in the personal hierarchies of small farming or plantation communities have been redefined into an explicitly misogynist and sexually violent street culture. The traditional search for respect has been radically transformed into a fear of disrespect. Unemployed or drug dealing/addicted men find themselves flitting homeless from one sexual relationship to another, without the protection of a family or an economically viable community.

Vivid memories of a rural patriarchy repeatedly surface in the idealized childhood reminiscences of the mothers of the crack dealers I befriended:

> Mrs Ortiz: What I liked best about life in Puerto Rico was that we kept all our traditions. And in my village, everyone was either an Uncle, or an Aunt. And when you walked by someone older, you had to ask for their blessing. It was respect.
>
> In those days children were respectful. There was a lot of respect in those days. My father was very strict. When a visitor came, my father only spoke to us with his eyes, because children were not supposed to be in the room. He would just look at us, and that meant we had to disappear; we had to go to our room. We weren't allowed to be in the same room as the older folks.
>
> I tried to teach my children a little of what my father had taught me.

Mrs Ortiz's son, Primo, the manager of the crackhouse where I spent much of my time, can no longer 'speak' to his children 'with his eyes' and expect to have his commands immediately obeyed. A man's oppressive power in his home in rural Puerto Rico was predicated upon his being able to work hard and provide materially for his wife and children. He was supposed to co-ordinate the labour power of his wife and children around the agricultural cycles and intermittent wage labour opportunities of the precarious semi-subsistence rural economy. In inner-city New York, the increasingly large cohort of male high school dropouts who are excluded from the new service

sector jobs that require a minimal education and which entail public subservience to anglo-dominated professional office culture have lost the material basis for the patriarchal family prerogative of rural Puerto Rico. Former modalities of male respect can no longer be achieved through a conjugal household or an extended kin-based community. Instead, the unemployed or drug dealing man lashes out at the women and children he can no longer support or control effectively. The memory of his grandfather's former power hangs heavily upon him as he harks back to a patriarchal 'jibaro' past he can no longer reproduce.

The Polarization of Domestic Violence

This was the case for Primo's father when he lost his job at a garment factory and became 'a nasty alcoholic (*borrachón sucio*)'. Primo's earliest memories of his father are of him beating up his mother. Worse yet, all the subsequent men in Primo's mother's life offered the growing boy a similarly brutal masculine model defined around physically victimizing women.

Primo: When I was a kid I never really liked'ed nobody to be with my mother. I didn't like any of her men, because I didn't like it when they would have fits, and hit her; get wild and beat her down.

There was this one guy when I was still a little kid in the seventies, named Luis, who was dating my mother. He would hurt her, just to hurt her.

One time he got wild on my mom . . . I was sleeping, and woke'd up.

My mother called the cops, and the mother-fucker grabbed a knife. My heart stopped. That was the only time I got up and came through for my mother. I stood in between after he had made a coupla swings.

Primo reproduced this cycle of brutality 15 years later when he too beat up his girlfriend in front of her children. Powerlessly struggling with his inability to hold a steady job and earn respect through economic faithfulness to his household, he had pursued the street male role of gigolo, and was living off a woman named Candy, who was one of the few female sellers in the crack dealing network I befriended. Primo pretended publicly to enjoy 'free loading (*cacheteando*)' on Candy's generosity and love for him. In fact, in private retrospective conversations Primo admitted that he was also in love. After several months of the patriarchal role reversal of being economically supported by a woman and forced to satisfy her sexual desires upon demand, however, he attempted to recoup his personal sense of male respect by the only means immediately at his disposal: public physical violence. Years later in crackhouse conversations, he emphasized his outrage over how his sense of masculinity was 'dissed' (disrespected) by Candy's violation of domestic roles:

Primo: That woman 'dissed' me. She was making so, fucking, much money. That bitch was making even more than I knew about. That bitch was no good. It was like the kids were all living without their mother. The kids were taking care of themselves. Her baby, Lillian, was less than a year old. Hell! Junior was the mother. He was changing the diapers.

And sometimes I felt sorry and shit, so I would do it. I was there, changing the diapers and she wasn't around!

Worse yet, Candy inverted patriarchal sexuality:

Primo: Plus, you see, like, when she would come home, she used to get in a mood, or something, and I didn't wanna BOTHER . . . It was fucked up, because she had grabbed a knife. (distant gunshots)

Upon leaving Candy's household following a violent break-up, Primo returned to full-time crack dealing. On slow nights he would provide me and the crackhouse lookout, Caesar, with detailed accounts of the final fight that ended his economically and sexually dependent relationship with Candy. The fight began when Primo refused to make love to Candy. This prompted her to accuse him of having outside girlfriends. It was almost as if Primo used the tape-recorded conversations in the crackhouse as therapy to resolve the confusion generated by the gender taboos that he had broken when he lived off Candy. He also needed to bond with his male friends in the crackhouse by celebrating his ability to triumph over a misbehaving woman. His description climaxed with how he managed to disarm Candy, in order to beat her more severely in front of her children:

Primo: As soon as she put the gun down—I don't remember exactly where she put it, but I saw her take out the clip—I went, 'Fucking Bitch!' (swinging both fists). And I mushed her.

I was pissed man. I shouted, 'Come on, Bitch! I'm not playing with you anymore.'

Philippe: What about the kids?

Primo: The kids were there in the room all nervous, I guess they were crying . . . Put it this way: the children knew their mother was wrong, but I was hitting their mother, and they wanted to jump on me. When I saw their faces, I knew that I had to be prepared for them, too. I was ready to like, block their swings.

Vulnerable Males

In contrast to the legitimation that Primo constructs for his violence against Candy, Primo condemns his own father's violence toward his mother and sisters. He explicitly sees his father as a failure; he was never able to respect him as a patriarchally socialized child should:

Primo: My father's a sick man now. He's got diabetes. He's a chronic drinker; and when he gets drunk he gets violent. So its like he's no fucking good, so why be with him? That's why my mother had to say, 'Hike!' (grinning abruptly and jerking his thumb over his shoulder like a sports umpire calling an out)

And every time I would see my father, once they were separated—'cause they were never divorced—it was every other week. And he was just like not correct. Always with a beer in his hand. Always drunk and crying. We were kids. We were thinking 'Fuck you. I don't care'. He used to buy us candy. And we used to be chillin' with our candy. And then he used to come to me, and ask, 'Is your mother with anybody?' I don't remember my answers but I probably used to say 'yes', or whatever. He was drunk and stupid.

Maybe he regretted the things that he did. And he could have been better off. I don't remember really too hard. And then he collapses, shakes. I used to hate that.

This particular detail of Primo's father collapsing in a shaking fit of jealousy when his son tells him about his estranged wife's new lover refers to a Puerto Rican psychosomatic medical condition known as *ataque de nervios* (Lewis-Fernandez 1992; Guarnaccia *et al.* 1989). These 'nervous attacks' usually afflict women, and are associated with jealousy, abuse, and/or failure in love. The fact that Primo's father might engage in such a feminine expression of angry vulnerability in front of his children and close friends illustrates the sense of male impotence he must have felt as a failed labour migrant in the United States. He would respond by beating up the nearest vulnerable female, whose respect he was no longer capable of commanding.

Primo: Then he used to start off fighting with my sister, the oldest one. Later, she would hit me.

Ultimately Primo recognizes that he too is a failure as a man. He specifically identifies this in biological terms as a 'male thing'. In Primo's poignant description of how several generations of men in his immediate lineage have all been crushed, one can discern the gender-specific experience of social marginalization in the Puerto Rican diaspora:

Primo: I tell you Felipe, I gotta check myself out. 'Cause like I was telling my mother, in my family, it goes like this: all the men are bugged . . . My mother's oldest brother is bugged. He stands in the window talking to himself . . . My mother's other brother—another uncle of mine—he just walks along like a zombie, and he don't look at nobody. I'm his nephew and his godson. He writes some script, it look like shorthand, but it is absolutely no fucking shorthand. He writes in his notebook and scribble scrabble on the notebook. But the guy has his job. He keeps his job. He keeps his place, but he is out of his mind . . . If you look at him walking down the street, he look like a bum. He just walks straight, looking down. He's bugged . . . I remember when he wasn't bugged. He and my mother went to Puerto Rico, when he wasn't bugged. You know, I tell my mother I got a feeling that all the people in my family, I mean all the guys, are gonna snap one day in the future. I think about myself in the future and I'm gonna be bugged . . . But for some reason, somehow, my grandfather wasn't bugged. My grandfather passed away, he wasn't bugged, he just died.

Significantly, none of Primo's sisters—he had no brothers—were involved in the underground economy or even participated in street culture's violence. They all either worked full-time at entry-level jobs in the service sector (i.e. managing a McDonald's, attending customers in a clothes boutique, and working as a nurse's aide in East Harlem's municipal hospital) or were married in long-term relationships raising young children. Primo's pride in his sisters' success illustrates, not only how rigidly women's roles are defined, but also, once again, how differently women are affected by the experience of growing up poor in the inner city.

Primo: You know my mom's good! She raised up three beautiful daughters that didn't fuck up . . . Maybe they got married early and bullshit, but there's nothing about drugs in the streets. They know what's good and wrong. My sisters ain't violent. They not in the street—none a' that.

Conjugal Stability and Legal Employment

In contrast to their often bravado behaviour and explicitly misogynist diatribes, most of the two dozen crack dealers who I befriended admitted to aspiring to an ideal-type, middle-class, nuclear family. In fact, many had actually lived in stable households with the mothers of their children for significant periods of time. This usually occurred during their periods of stable, legal employment. The complex interrelationship between joblessness, personal pathology, family instability, and structural vulnerability in the labour market came up frequently in our conversations. The following account of the relationship between employment and drug use in Primo's life illustrates the interaction between personality and social structure in the construction of masculine subjectivities.

Primo: I was 19 when I had my kid. He was born in '83, on May 20-something. We were teenagers going steady—me and Sandra. I had found a job and stayed steady with her. We got a crib, and I was making good money . . . I was a good nigga', boy. Every penny that I used to get was for my hobby, which was radio CB-ing. She got pregnant. We didn't really want it. But then I told her, 'I'm just as responsible as you are, so if you keep it, I'll take the consequences.' So she kept it. It's too bad. But that's all right . . . And I wasn't selling drugs or doing nothing. I was a goodie, goodie. I had money in the bank, I had money in the house. Sandra never suffered. She was big, and pregnant, and fat . . . When Papito was born I was working at US Litho. I was a good nigga'. I had good hours. I was working from 4:00 to 12:00 at nights . . . I was a hard worker, I was into that overtime. Whatever they give me, I gonna work. I want to bring money to the house . . . This is how I stopped sniffing (cocaine): one day, my son wanted to play with me. I was in the rocking chair, and I didn't want to play with him. It was like, 'Leave-me-alone' type shit. And I was thinking about it, and I realized it. I noticed my son was growing up. Plus I bled one time . . . I said, 'Nah, this can't be.' This ain't me, 'cause I'm always lovable with my kids, singing songs, little school songs that I learned when I was a kid in school . . . I used to sit in a rocking chair, reading him his ABCs and numbers, just to keep his mind busy. You got to read to your kids when they're little, like even when they're only months old, so that they always got things in their brain . . . Then at work they changed my hours to 2:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. I said, 'I can't handle them hours; I have a family.' . . . I used to fall asleep on the job; 'cause I had my son. And this girl, Sandra, my son's mother, had found work off the books. And as she was leaving, I was coming in, and my son was on top of me. He wanted to play. He already slept, you know, so I couldn't sleep . . . And that's when I started fucking up. That's when I started smoking 'woolies' (marijuana cigarettes laced with crack), and I was drinking a little. I was staying up all day, and then I didn't want to go to work . . . Man, it's like, oh, God! I used to come from work; I didn't know whether to go to sleep, or hang out and sleep later. And my son, was there, wide awake; he was two, and wanted to play with me. So they fired me because I was falling asleep on the job. They said, 'We have to let you go because you have a family, and I know you want to be with your family, because you have these hours, and we can't switch you back to the daylight hours. We need somebody for these hours, where you don't seem to fit in.' . . . They were firing everybody; just looking for reasons. It was like business was bad . . . After that I went AWOL smoking crack.

Primo acutely felt his failure as a father—and as a man:

You know, Felipe? Now my son is 6 years old. It gets me sad when I think about shit like that . . . It's like, I'm not there for 'im. Just like my father was never there for me . . . And my son loved being with me. Sometimes I was always fixing something in the apartment. So this kid, he used to grab the tools, and just start hammering things, like, look at me, and start trying to do the same thing. I love that shit . . . That's why I used to cry a lot when I first left my son. It was only a couple months after they fired me at US Litho . . . I used to go to the bathroom and cry like a bitch. 'Cause I knew I was leaving soon and that meant: no more kid . . . But you know what, man! I believe in . . . I believe that when you're with someone, and you have a child, you should make the fucking best of it, whether you're doing good or not. You gotta make a commitment; like a family thing, like old-fashioned.

Philippe: What the hell are you talking about?!

Primo: It always seems like I'm full of shit when I say things like that, 'cause I don't support my kid, but that's because, I . . . right now, I'm not supporting my son, but . . . Matter of fact, you know last weekend, when we were talking one time about the last time we had cried, that's the last time I teared, was last weekend. I was thinking about my little nigga'. I was supposed to keep him for the weekend, but I called too late. I fucked up. It was a hassle. (Perking up again) Matter of fact, I remember my father once saying to my mother that he used to cry, because he misses me, because I'm his only son. Now I feel bad, 'cause a few days away from today, it's Papito's birthday, and I'm not gonna give him anything. I don't got the money.

Philippe: You wouldn't rather have those 25 dollars you just paid for the dope (heroin) and the perico (cocaine), to spend on your son's birthday present instead?

Primo (sniffing from a packet of heroin): Well . . . I'll definitely get him a present. I love that nigga'.

Stable legal employment for both spouses is crucial for enabling young men to begin defining masculinity around sharing in the material and emotional reproduction of children. The problem is that most of the legal jobs available to high school drop-outs in New York City are not only poorly remunerated but are also considered to be feminizing. This is because the service sector, specifically office support services in the finance, real estate, and insurance (FIRE) industries, have been the fastest growing employers since the 1970s. Most of the supervisors at the lowest levels of the service sector are women, and street culture castigates males who are publicly subordinated across gender lines. Typically, in their angrier memories of disrespect at work, many of the male crack dealers refer to their female bosses in explicitly sexist language, often insulting their body parts, and dismissing them with street slang and sexualized curses. They often describe their female supervisors as having male sexual organs and they describe themselves and the other men around them at work as being effeminate.

Caesar: I lasted in the mail room for like eight months at this advertising agency that works with pharmaceutical shit. They used to trust me . . . But I had a prejudiced boss. She was a fucking ho' (prostitute). She was white. I had to take a lot of shit from that fat, ugly bitch, and be a wimp . . . I didn't like it but I kept on working, because 'Fuck it!', you don't want to fuck up the relationship. So you just be a punk . . . Oh my God! I hated that head supervisor. That bitch was REALLY nasty. She got her rocks off on firing people, man. You can see that

on her face, boy. She made this one fucking guy that worked with me cry—and beg for his job back . . .

The changing high-tech, office service jobs of the post-industrial, globally-linked economy offers few opportunities for young men from the inner city who have dropped out of high school. Not only do young men have difficulty politely taking orders from women, but they often consider it to be downright emasculating to have to run and fetch coffee for their work-place superiors and, worse yet, to have to deliver their services with a cheerful smile. Consequently, even when they endure in their positions as messengers, copy machine operators, or mail room clerks they tend to develop reputations for having 'bad attitudes'; this further limits their opportunities for upward mobility in office place hierarchies.

Primo never bought Papito, his 7-year-old son, a birthday present. In fact, he did not even go to visit him that week. Coincidentally, during these same days my preteenage neighbours, Manny and Angel, forced me to witness on my tenement stoop the flip side of the father/son generation gap. Eyes sparkling, Angel told me proudly, 'I'm going to see my father this weekend.' His little brother Manny immediately responded with his eyes dull and sad, 'I'm not gonna see my father; he's in jail.' As if by script, just moments later we saw another little boy, my neighbour's 3-year-old son nicknamed Papo, shrieking with delight. A 20-year-old man swaggered up almost embarrassedly to hug the little boy, mumbling affectionately '*Ay mi hijo* (Oh my son) God bless you!' The mother watched, revealing no emotion. Papo's father had just been allowed out of prison for the afternoon on a drug rehabilitation/work-release arrangement. An hour or so later, little Papo was screeching again, but this time in anguish. His father had to leave in a hurry to report back to prison before dusk. The superintendent of our tenement later explained to me that Papo's father was the person who had burglarized Papo's mother's apartment two-and-a-half years ago when Papo was only 6 months old. Papo's father had known the apartment was empty because he was supposed to be meeting his infant son in the park at the time. His new girlfriend served as look-out while he stole the VCR and television from out of his son's apartment.

Investing in Promiscuity

Sexual conquest and promiscuity represent another important forum for redefining masculine dignity in street culture that is related to the imperative to glorify one's economic parasitism on the mothers, lovers, wives, and children one can no longer support (Anderson 1989; De la Cancela 1986). Primo's look-out, Caesar, was most adamant in celebrating sexually his inability to maintain a family. Unable to reproduce the patriarchal aspirations of his grandfather's generation within the context of a nuclear family and an extended kin-based community, he concentrated his male energies into macho one-upmanship and sexual belt-notching. He worked hard at exaggerating his sexual promiscuity and hard heartedness:

Caesar: We's just like those green sea turtles that be in the Galapagos. Those turtles get out of the shell, and they run to the sea, and they never know who their parents was . . . They go through their whole life. Then they bone somebody or they get bone't. They have kids and they never see them . . . I don't feel guilty about the kids I got thrown around out there,

because I have no heart Felipe. I'll fuck anybody, anytime. Besides these bitches is crazy nowadays.

Primo also sexualized his notion of male power. One late night after finishing his shift at the crackhouse, I accompanied Primo to visit a social club to drink bootleg liquor. Swigging from his drink and giggling, Primo waved at three women who were playing pool together. Feigning an old-fashioned Puerto Rican rural accent, he said in Spanish, 'Look how well my women get along with each other (*Mira como mis mujeres se llevan bien*).'

At the time Primo was under pressure from his probation officer to find a job. A New York City Narcotics Circuit judge had given him a two-to-four-year suspended sentence for selling crack to an undercover agent. One of the conditions for his supervised freedom was that he find legal employment. As he plotted which one of 'his women' he was going to spend the night with, I purposefully reminded him that he had to call the employment office early the next morning if he did not want to be sent to prison. Primo simply changed the unpleasant subject and took refuge in his sexual promiscuity.

Primo, (sombrely): Oh shit, Felipe, you're right! But you know what? (chuckling) Out of all these bitches hanging around, I take that one (pointing to Maria) . . . (sombrely again) This has happened to me before. One day in front of the Game Room, I saw a legion of girls on the corner (chuckling again). Like a herd of girls talking to each other. And when I looked, I said, 'God damn! I had all of them.' It was my ex-wife Sandra, Candy, Maria, Jaycee, and I think some other girl that I don't remember.

Philippe: How'd that make you feel—good?

Primo: No. It felt'ed weird. (Noticing Caesar eavesdropping eagerly through the blasting music) No, it felt'ed good, then weird . . . I'm telling you Felipe, I got a golden dick. All my cousins be that way (slapping Caesar five). We all got golden dicks.

Gang Rape

Toward the end of my residence in East Harlem several of the crack dealers with whom I had developed my closest relationships admitted to having been gang rapists in their adolescence. The gang literature in the United States, written primarily by criminologists and sociologists only occasionally mentions rape (Campbell 1991; Huff 1990). It is usually presented as an initiation ritual and it is sometimes noted that this violent act serves to bond the boys homoerotically and misogynistically (Bourgois 1995*a*: ch. 5). Participating in gang rape is one of the ways youths achieve their manhood.

All these ritualized dimensions—coming of age, mutual bonding, and ritual initiation—apply to the accounts of adolescent gang rape provided by the crack dealers. Primo, for example, had difficulties becoming sexually aroused when his companions would begin to rape one of the girls in their network. He felt humiliated and excluded when they sent him home for being 'too little' to join in their sexual violence.

Primo: Back in those days I was younger. My dick wouldn't stand up. It was like nasty to me; I wasn't down with it. I can't handle that. So they be goin' upstairs with a girl, and of course

they already knew that I'm not going to be down with it, so they ask me (in a hostile voice), 'What'cha gonna do man? Go home or what?' . . . So fuck it, the best thing I could do is break out. 'See you guys tomorrow'; or else, I just wait downstairs in the bar, or something.

Primo gained acceptance from the older boys that he admired by becoming an active accomplice in their gang rapes.

Primo: I wasn't really with it, but I used to act wild too, because the bitch is gonna have to pass through the wild thing. And sometimes, it could be me acting stupid with a bat or something, so that she has got to stay in the room with whoever is there . . . Sometimes the older guys, they would play the nice role for awhile with the girl, but once they get that piece of pussy, she gets dished. It's like psshhht, pssht (making slapping motions). She gets beat down: 'I own you now, bitch.' That was back in the days. Nobody is with that shit no more. Pussy is too easy to get nowadays.

In addition to emphasizing the ritual dimension to adolescent gang rape and its particular frequency in the youth gang context, it is important to understand public rape within the same context that I have presented domestic violence. Gang rape is an extension into the public domain of males trying to reassert the anachronistic patriarchal power relations of previous generations that have been undermined by shifts in gender power relations. As girls increasingly carve out more autonomous roles in public male-dominated settings, boys lash out violently. They legitimatize their sexual violence against young teenage girls, claiming that they are 'teaching them a lesson'. As a matter of fact, the street expression for gang rape is 'to run a train on a bitch'. Sometimes the expression is modified into 'training a bitch', as if the assaulted person were a dog being taught a lesson, or a new trick. Primo, who was aware of my horror and anger over his accounts of gang rape, often argued with me to try to make me—and any future reader of these tape recorded dialogues—understand the street's dichotomy between worthy and unworthy rape victims:

Primo: Put it this way, Felipe, these bitches were young, dumb, and full-a-cum. If they are hanging out too much, and they start seeing that we are wild, and if they are still hanging out, then we know that we can take them.

Philippe: That is some sick shit you're saying. You motherfuckers were nothin' but a bunch of perverts.

Primo (frustrated): I mean look at their attitude; if they hang out too long, believe me, then they know what's happening. If the girl is gonna hang then she's gonna get dicked. I mean these bitches, they would just keep hanging out, and hanging out. They be coming back to the bar everyday, so then we know that they really want a dick . . . They would take the bitch aside, because we had her *confianza* (trust). By then it was easy to force her into doing it with all of us . . . Besides the bitch get smacked, or something, if she don't.

Philippe: That's rape, man. Don't you understand?

Primo: I mean the way I remember it (speaking directly into my tape-recorder), I was so fucking young. I looked at it like, most likely, whoever never came back to hang out at the club, passed through some trauma, and it's gonna be hidden within their life, for the rest of their life, and they're never goin'a hang again. Instead they go home, and chill the fuck out, and keep a dark secret for the rest of their life. (Looking at me defensively) I used to feel sorry,

sometimes too, for them . . . But some bitches was more suitable, and used to just come back and hang. 'Cause I guess it was like they was on the streets, and they passed through their first shit, and now fuck it: '*Voy a hangear*' (I'm going to hang out).

Philippe (interrupting): Come on, man, get real! Nobody likes going through that shit.

Primo (speaking slowly): Well . . . It was their decision, Felipe. I mean, the first time, maybe they weren't into it. Sometimes there be tears in their eyes. They didn't want to be forced.

Caesar (laughing at Primo's confusion and my anger, grabbing the tape-recorder from me): But they were forced; but they liked'ed it; and they come back for more; 'cause they're with it. They just get used to the fact: 'We own you now bitch!'

Philippe: You motherfuckers are sick! (Loud gunshots in the nearby background followed by the sound of someone running).

Primo (running to peek through the door at the noises outside): No! You gotta understand Felipe, even when they say no, they're loving it.

Despite their rationalization of their violence against women as patriarchal justice, they ultimately considered the women they abused to be a reflection of their own sense of internalized worthlessness.

Primo: We used to talk between each other, that these women are living fucked up, because they want to hang out with us . . . And what the fuck we got to offer? Nothing! We used to wonder.

Caesar: We don't be doing nothing! Bitch be stupid to go with a nigga' like us.

Individual Responsibility and Social Structural Victimization

It is impossible to present ethnographic dialogues on experiences of oppression and social marginalization without conjuring negative images that risk re-enforcing racial- and class-based stereotypes. An open, uncensored discussion of masculinity in street culture risks creating a forum for the public humiliation of the poor and powerless. Chicano cultural critics have long since noted how anglo perceptions of latino machismo reflect deep-seated historical prejudices (Paredes 1971). This is exacerbated by the fact that ethnocentric assumptions are so unconsciously ingrained in the public 'common sense' that descriptions of extreme social misery and brutality such as those presented in these pages are interpreted as a cultural reflection of a particular ethnic community—in this case Puerto Rican immigrants in the United States. Obviously, such an 'airing-of-dirty-laundry' interpretation runs counter to the theoretical and political arguments of this article, which are opposed to cultural essentialist explanations for human action. The same applies to any interpretation that claims women on the street and in the household have provoked male violence against themselves because of their demands for greater rights. That kind of blame-the-victim perspective not only glorifies the stability of previous patriarchal status quos, but also overly individualizes the long-term macro-structural transformations in gender relations that are occurring across the globe. As has been the case historically for all major power shifts between antagonistic groups, the complicated process whereby women are carving out a new public space for themselves is rife with contradictory outcomes and human pain.

As I noted in the opening pages, this is exacerbated by the fact that the fundamental status quo that enforce male domination have not been altered. As many feminist theorists have long since noted, many of the struggles and achievements of women in the past decades have been framed in terms of individual rights that ultimately largely mirror or invert patriarchal models of 'empowerment' (Butler and Scott 1992; Jaggar 1983). On another theoretical plane part of the problem with understanding experiences of oppression and resistance—whether masculine or not—is that, as Jefferson (1994) notes, the relationship between personality and society is poorly understood. Agency/structure relationships are usually presented in dualistic terms—if addressed at all (see theoretical critique by Giddens 1991). Sexuality, family organization, gender-power relationships, and the cultural construction of intimacy are crucial issues affecting the minute details of our daily quality of life. In many respects they remain taboo subjects for ethnographers who are under an unconscious mandate to present positive images of the people who they study and live with. Quantitative survey researchers have never had any direct access to these complex dimensions of daily life since most people conceal their intimate experiences of violence, sexuality, substance abuse, etc. from even their closest friends—let alone outside interviewers or survey researchers.

There is no definitive solution to the complex problems inherent in the politics of representation of intimate ethnographic conversations across racial and class-based lines. The men in these pages often behave in cruel and violent ways, not only against the women and children in their lives but also against themselves. Despite the risks of writing this difficult material for outsiders to read, however, I feel that if I failed to confront it—especially the most painful dimensions of misogyny and sexual violence in street culture and in individual action—I would be colluding in the sexist status quo. While all of the crack dealers are victims from a social structural perspective, they are also agents of destruction in their daily lives. They wreak havoc on their loved ones and on their larger community. Of course, from an analytical perspective the particularly brutal forms that masculinity has assumed on the streets of inner city USA—where crime rates, murder rates, and incarceration rates are the highest in the entire industrialized world—is ultimately a reflection, not just on the political economic model of the United States but rather of the fundamental lack of basic human rights among the socially marginal in the United States—most notably the lack of individual freedom, access to health care, shelter, education, and public safety by inner-city residents. The polarization of formerly rural-based patriarchal masculine subjectivities toward greater public violence, widespread sexual abuse, and overt economic parasisitism on inner-city streets are merely symptomatic expressions of these basic political and cultural inequities. Behind the most gruesome of the crackhouse conversations evoked in these pages lies the massive public and private sector breakdown that has occurred since World War II in most US inner cities, and the de facto apartheid ideology that legitimates a public 'common sense' tolerating rising levels of immiseration among the working-poor.

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