

Investigación joven con perspectiva de género V

Edición y coordinación:
Clara Sainz de Baranda
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THE FLESH WAS MADE WORD: RECLAMATION OF AFRO-LATINAS' BODIES IN ELIZABETH ACEVEDO'S *THE POET X*

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ABSTRACT:

Latinas in the US and African American women have been traditionally studied separately. Nevertheless, this paper analyses the appropriation of US Afro-Latinas' bodies and the strategies they employed to reclaim them through Elizabeth Acevedo's *The Poet X*. Although the teenager protagonist of the novel considers herself "*morenita*," rather than black due to her Dominican background; her body is simultaneously and paradoxically hyper-sexualized by racist discourses and called to chastity by the patriarchal Catholic doctrine presiding over her Dominican community. Despite racist and sexist forces and discourses, the protagonist re-appropriates the agency over her body by embracing her sexual desire, using a self-representative embodied narrative in her poetry, and performing it.

KEYWORDS: Afro-Latina, United States, racism, gender, body, slam poetry, embodied discourse

1. Introduction

Literary scholars have typically studied Chicanas/Latinas in the US and African American writers separately. While scholars in Latinx Studies look at Latinos in the US, they do not usually include Latinos of African descent. On the other hand, US black feminism usually focuses on the experiences of African Americans, disregarding the experiences of other black women in the US who also live a racialized femininity. There is a growing literature on Afro-Latina studies written both by Latin American and North American scholars who denounce the racism in Latin America and the Caribbean.

However, not much attention has been paid to Afro-Latinas in the US and their double diaspora. Afro-Latinas in North America are the inheritors of an original diaspora from Africa to Latin America as a consequence of the slave trade, and now they are the protagonists of their own diaspora having come from Latin America to the United States in the present or in prior generations. Indeed, New York is the place with the second largest number of Dominican people in the world, after Santo Domingo (Duany, 2011, p. 169). Thus, this paper explores the intersection of all these identities, that is, being an Afro-Latina in the US as expressed in literature.

As a relatively neglected field of study, much needs to be said about the experiences of Afro-Latinas and their representation in literature. In this context, this paper focuses on the literary depiction of Afro-Latinas' bodies. Even though many scholars, such as

Sander L. Gilman and Karen Sanchez-Eppler, have explored the cultural representations of the black female body, they are primarily concerned with the dominant images and stereotypes imposed upon it (Bennett and Dickerson, 2001, p. 4). In this way, further research needs to be done on black women's self-representations and cultural reclamation of their bodies.

Intending to respond to this critical neglect of Afro-Latina's self-representation, this paper explores *The Poet X*, winner of the 2018 National Book Award for Young People's Literature and the 2019 Pure Belpré Author Award for celebrating, affirming, and portraying Latinx culture and experience in the US.⁶¹ In this semi-autobiographical novel, the Afro-Dominican and New Yorker national slam poetry winner, Elizabeth Acevedo, tells the story of Xiomara, an Afro-Latin teenager, whose incipient body curves are problematizing her adolescence in Harlem (New York City).

This novel deals with Xiomara's evolutive process of self-representation as a poet. Through this metanarrative, the reader accompanies a fifteen-year-old Xiomara on her journey from echoing dominant images and stereotypes against Afro-Latinas in her discourse to developing and using her own voice to depict herself. In this journey, she also has to make difficult decisions that will confront her mother's will but will develop her own agency. She stops attending confirmation class, for which her mother signs her up, to go to the poetry club run by her Afro-Latina English teacher, Ms. Galiano, as they are scheduled at the same time, and starts dating Aman, a high-school classmate, despite her mother's opposition to date anyone until she is older. In this way, during her adolescence, Xiomara does not only develop her pubertal body, but also her agency over it.

2. Hypothesis

This paper claims that the bodies of Afro-Latinas in the US, and particularly Xiomara's body as a representation of them, are not only culturally conquered by racist and sexist discourses; but they can also be self-reclaimed by Afro-Latinas through performance, embodied discourse and the self-representation of their own sexuality and feelings. In this way, this analysis rejects to focus on the dominant images of black women's bodies that objectify them and rather focuses on the strategies that Afro-Latinas employ to regain agency over their bodies.

⁶¹ www.acevedowrites.com/about

3. Methodology

This paper analyzes from an intersectional feminist perspective Elizabeth Acevedo's novel *The Poet X*. Although there is a significant lack of scholarly studies about Afro-Latinas in the US, this paper uses the only two volumes that have been dedicated to Afro-Latinx communities in the US so far, *Afro-latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the US* (Jiménez-Román y Flores, 2010), and *Afro-Latin@s in Movement: Critical Approaches to Blackness and Transnationalism in the Americas* (Rivera-Rideau, Jones y Paschel, 2016), to frame Afro-Latinx's common experiences and to explore the different conceptions regarding race in the US and Latino America and Caribbean. However, as a result of the lack of publications that specifically address women's experiences within these volumes, existing studies of the black female body by black American scholars have been used. Although these studies address specifically the experiences of African Americans, many of their arguments are valid for my analysis of other racialized corporealities.

This paper firstly explores Xiomara's self-understanding of blackness by framing it within the racial perception that the Dominican community has. Secondly, it addresses both the ways that Afro-Latinas' bodies are culturally conquered and reclaimed to evidence that Xiomara progressively gains agency over her body. Afro-Latinas' bodies are on one hand hyper-sexualized by racist colonially rooted discourses and on the other, called to chastity by the patriarchal Catholic ideology in which Dominican communities are involved. However, this paper also studies the corporeal practices (making the body desiring, discursive and performative) that Xiomara uses to link her agency and body after centuries of disassociation, and which, therefore, reclaim the latter from oppressive narratives.

4. Results

First of all, it is necessary to understand Xiomara's self-definition as "*morenita*," rather than as black, as people like her would typify in the US (Acevedo, 2018, p. 59). Although "*morenita*" means "little tanned girl" and therefore one could think that it refers to brown or mixed-race people, Latin Americans use the terms "*mulato*" and "*pardo*" for that, and reserve "*moreno*" and "*prieto*" for dark-skinned blacks (Cruz-Janzen, 2010, p. 171). "*Negro*" (black) tends to be used to describe objects, rather than people (García-Peña, 2015, p. 10-11). Indeed, in the Dominican Republic, there are 90% Afro-descendants, but only 4.13 percent designate themselves as "black" (Gates, 2020).

In the Dominican Republic, the term "*negro*" is avoided because it carries the signifier of slavery and foreignness. Concerning slavery, in 1608 when the Spanish colonizers moved to richer lands of New Spain (now Mexico and the US southwest) after exploiting Santo Domingo, some of the slaves both African and Taino (natives Americans of the Caribbean) escaped to the mountains (García-Peña, 2015, p. 12-13). These free mixed-race communities eventually started to use other names, such as *Indio*, to assert their difference from both European colonizers and African slaves as they were aware of the implications of their skin color in the context of colonial Santo Domingo (García-Peña, 2015, p. 12-13). Nowadays, Afro-Dominicans still define themselves as *Indios*, or simply, as Dominicans to reject blackness and avoid the oppressions linked to it (Gates, 2020).

On the other hand, for Dominicans, blackness is associated with the foreignness of Haitians, the people with whom they uneasily share the island of Hispaniola. When the Spanish colonizers moved to New Spain, the French colonized the western part of the island to which they call Saint Dominique. However, at the beginning of the 19th century, the black slaves rebelled and expelled the French from the west giving birth to the nation of Haiti. When the newly formed Haitian state occupied the Dominican Republic from 1822 to 1844 to end the European rule and slavery there, the Dominican Republic, in order to assert its independence and obtain the favor of the United States, emphasized their racial and cultural distance from Haiti (García-Peña, 2015, p. 14).

Although the Dominican Republic had large numbers of Afro-descendants, it created a Dominican identity based on a distinct Hispanic and Catholic heritage that distances them from Haitian blackness (Paredes, 2019, p. 2144). Indeed, during Trujillo's dictatorship (1930–61), African religious and cultural practices were banned, the term "*indio*" was made the only official race/color category in order to whiten the population, and Jewish WWII refugees were accepted as immigrants to "improve the race." Thus, being "*negro*" stopped being a matter of ancestry, as it is in the United States.

Despite the fact that Xiomara never defines herself as black due to her Dominican background, she is aware of the racist gaze her body is exposed to. In the poem "How I Feel about Attention," Xiomara recognizes this racist "stare" over her body (Acevedo, 2018, p. 48). She is conscious of the constructed component of racist and sexist discourses by calling them "myths" and "distorted stories" (Acevedo, 2018, p. 48). However, she also warns that the discomfort she experiences when being looked at, as a result of these discourses, is real (Acevedo, 2018, p. 48). It is important to notice

that she emphasizes her subject position by saying "I." While other girls might feel flattered by boys' attention, Xiomara feeling scrutinized through the lens of racist and patriarchal discourses, considers that this male gaze operates as means of slaying and conquering her body (Acevedo, 2018, p. 48). In this way, she fantasizes about being a "Dominican Medusa" to transform into stone those who look at her (Acevedo, 2018, p. 48).

As an Afro-Latina, Xiomara's incipient curves are intersectionally sexualized due to both her racial and cultural origin by dominant racist discourses. Colonialism conquered female bodies just as it did territories. Indigenous and enslaved African women were not only physically exploited—women were commodified both as workers and bearers of new slaves—, but also culturally abused by the imperialist narrative that classified them as animals, uncontrollably sexual and wild (Lugones, 2010, p. 743). The "Jezebel" stereotype portrays black women's excessive bodily attributes as signs of hypersexuality and animality (Collins, 2004, p. 119-148). This narrative of dehumanization and sexualization encouraged and justified rape and sexual abuse. However, the exploitation, objectification, and fragmentation of colored female bodies did not end after slavery and colonization. In its different formulations like neocolonialism and capitalism, the dynamics of oppression in race/class/gender/sexual relations keep on working to create bodily hierarchies and structures of power.

Capitalism and imperialism are both patriarchal and structural exploitive systems that rely on the "ownership" of colored bodies to make profit (Benard, 2016, p. 2). Nevertheless, as Foucault claims through the concept of biopower, modern systems no longer use physical punishment, but exercise control through social constructions. Capitalism and neocolonialism no longer use slavery, military force and other clear ways of physical violence as imperialism did since the idea of control is less tolerated, but imperialist cultural coercion, such as the narratives of hyper-sexualization over Latinas and black women, prevail in the social consciousness.

This persistence of negative narratives of Afro-Latinas' bodies is seen in poems such as "Unhide-able" and "It's Only the First Week of Tenth Grade." In them, Xiomara quotes others who describe her body as "big" to the point that is "too much for a young girl" like her (Acevedo, 2018, p. 5, 46). These poems echo the Jezebel stereotype of an excessive black female body and its socially constructed connection to hypersexuality, as the girls call her "Ho. Thot. Fast," and the boys whisper to her ear that they know what girls like her want while they pull on her bra strap or squeeze her ass (Acevedo, 2018, p. 5, 46, 218). Acevedo shows that the sexualization of black female bodies

persists as a justification for the abuses against them. Boys feel entitled to do it because the curves of her body are read as signs of invitation and consent.

Other boys call her "*mami*" (Acevedo, 2018, p. 50). The term "mami" or "mamacita" is used in Latin and Caribbean cultures to express that a woman is hot. The fact that he uses such an ideologically loaded Spanish word to address Xiomara does not only sexualized her, but also makes clear that he can perceive her Afro-Latina identity. It is worth noticing how Afro-Latinidad is recognized for sexual purposes, while rendered silent and invisible for many others. For instance, if one googles the term Afro-Latina, porn videos appear on the first options of the search. However, when using databases such as *Scopus* the number of critical articles that use this term is very low thus evidencing the poor scholarly attention given to Afro-Latinas and their literary production in academia.

Xiomara dates all these instances of harassment and offensive names from when she grew breasts and got her period. The fact that she does so shows clearly that at the beginning of the novel she blames her body for being the cause of others' behaviors: "my body was trouble" (Acevedo, 2018, p. 194, 151). Xiomara has internalized from patriarchal society its defense mechanism of blaming the victim, rather than the perpetrators of harassment. In this way, Xiomara wants to fold her body "into the tiniest corner" she could hide in (Acevedo, 2018, p. 47). The fact that she says "for me to hide in" clearly points to the disassociation of her body and her agency. Xiomara does not wish to hide, but rather to hide herself "in" her folded body, implying that her body, being appropriated by society and its cultural constructions, is not an integral part of herself. In this way, while her excessive body takes space and is visible to everyone, her agency is removed from it and does not have any room left: "when your body takes up more room than your voice" (Acevedo, 2018, p. 5).

The appropriation of Afro-Latinas' bodies has also to be understood as part of the influence of Catholicism in these communities. Catholicism is closely linked to Dominicans as they promoted it together with Hispanidad as a way of *othering* Haitians who they associated with their French heritage and their syncretic beliefs including African *vodun*. However, Hispanidad and Catholicism does not only separate Dominicans from Haitians, but also links them with colonialism. Catholicism acted as a powerful instrument of the Spanish colonizers to religiously subdue the subaltern societies. Thus, Latin American feminists consider Catholicism, being linked with colonialism and patriarchy, to play a negative role in reading Afro-Latinas' bodies and sexuality in more positive and emancipatory ways. This is a distinctive point between

African American and Afro-Latin feminisms that warns of the dangers of black American feminists appropriating Afro-Latinas' voices thus obviating their differences. Although there are some black feminist and womanist critiques of patriarchy, sexism, and homophobia in black churches, in general terms African American authors depict religion in a more positive way since the Protestant church has often been instrumental in channeling the social and political struggles of the community (Manigault-Bryant, 2018, p. 175).

As the name of Xiomara's mother, Altagracia (high grace), points out, she incarnates Dominican femininity by being very devout. However, Xiomara's name which means "who is ready for war", highlights her identity as someone who challenges the status quo (Acevedo, 2018, p. 7). For example, in "God," she complains about how holy trinity doesn't "include the mother," in "Church Mass" about how girls should wait, obey and not be to like Delilah or Eve, in "During communion" about why God gave her life if she could not live it the way she wanted to (Acevedo, 2018, p. 14, 58, 59, 57). In an attempt to show her radical disagreement with the Catholic doctrines she entitles one of her poems "Talking Church," as an irreverent allusion to the expression "talking shit" (Acevedo, 2018, p. 132).

Xiomara believes that there is no room for girls in Catholicism, especially for girls like her, who are "*morenita*, big and angry" (Acevedo, 2018, p. 59). Living in the US might have contributed to Xiomara's awareness about her blackness, since although racial hierarchies are a reality in Latin America, blackness and the mobilization against racism are constantly underestimated and erased. Thus, she complains about the fact that neither Mary, nor the angels look "*morenita*" like her (Acevedo, 2018, p. 59). In addition to this, Xiomara wonders what her position within the church is if Catholicism's only role available for women is to be an "impregnated virgin." Furthermore, since she is black, she cannot perform the virginal role because her only worth seems to be "under her skirt" as blackness is associated with hypersexuality (Acevedo, 2018, p. 59, 14). Also, by using the word "impregnated" rather than "pregnant" Xiomara points to the role of passive recipients that women are assigned within the Catholic faith.

Xiomara cannot renounce the Catholic conquering of her body so easily. Catholicism, being part of the Dominican identity, is closely linked to her community. As Alma Itzé Flores (2019) claims, for Latinx in the US, the ties to religion are cultural (p. 196). The poem "Church Mas" starts by portraying the Latino atmosphere of the Mass: "the church ladies singing hymns to merengue rhythms" and "Father's Sean mangled Spanish sermons" (Acevedo, 2018, p. 58). However, any confrontational act in a "*¿qué*

dirán?” (“concerned with what other people say”) Latin community, as Xiomara’s is — as it is shown in poems like “Rumors Has It” and “People Say” (Acevedo, 2018, p. 22, 64) —, is not only a personal risk, but also a betrayal to community standards of living (Saborío, 2012, p. 124). In this way, she is trapped between a patriarchal Latino culture which does not represent her, as there are not “*morenita and angry*” women like her, and an alienating US one that rejects her both for being Latina and black and seems to make her decide between her Latino and African roots.

Furthermore, Xiomara’s refusal of religion will not only defy her community, but her devoted mother in particular. Although Xiomara is surrounded by a Catholic community, it is her mother’s duty to bring her up in the light of religion. In her project, Flores (2019) concluded that daughters inherit religion from their mothers (p. 202). Under patriarchy, it is women’s role to raise children according to established values since motherhood does not only reproduce individuals, but also dominant systems (Spillers, 2009, p. 465-476). In this way, Altagracia tries to keep her daughter on the right Catholic path. For example, when Xiomara has her period for the first time, Altagracia tells her off for having used a tampon. For her, only “*cueros*” (bitches) would do so as Altagracia relates tampons with deflowering, and according to the Catholic doctrine, a woman must be a virgin until marriage (Acevedo, 2018, p. 39). Thus, through Altagracia, Catholicism culturally conquers Xiomara’s body, since after the reprimand Xiomara wishes “for the bleeding to stop” (Acevedo, 2018, p. 49). Again, the body, and in this case, the natural act of menstruating seems to be the one to blame, rather than the social constructions that negatively affect it.

This is just an example of how difficult Xiomara’s puberty is since her body starts showing what her Catholic mother considers to be sources of temptation. Indeed, Altagracia tells Xiomara that she would have to pray so her body did not get her into trouble (Acevedo, 2018, p. 151). Nevertheless, Altagracia does not only conquer her daughter’s developing body, but also her developing adolescent sexual desire. Altagracia does not want Xiomara to date anyone, so Xiomara has to keep from her mother her relationship with her classmate Aman. However, when Altagracia finds Xiomara kissing Aman, Xiomara is punished physically —standing on her knees while the floor is covered on rice— and psychologically —no phone, no leisure time, etc. Thus, as Xiomara claims, her mother turned her special kiss with Aman into an ugly act (Acevedo, 2018, p. 194). According to Xiomara, both her mother and Church transform into “dirty” what it “feels so good” (Acevedo, 2018, p. 131).

Nevertheless, Altagracia's attitude might not only be read as a vehicle for dominant and oppressive discourses. Some black mothers choose to be overprotective to ensure the survival of their kids, since encouraging them to confront oppressive conditions would probably mean to expose them to risks (Collins, 2000, p. 183-184). Being aware of the patriarchal and racist narratives against black female bodies, Altagracia might just want to protect her daughter from possible problems. Thus, she might not necessarily blame Xiomara's body as the cause of possible abuses, but blaming Xiomara of not being careful enough regarding her body and its implications.

However, Xiomara does not need more distance from her body, she does not need to be protected from it. It is precisely by though embracing her body that she will reclaim it. In the poem "The Last Fifteen-Year-Old," Xiomara narrates her sexual evolution. In the past, her body was hyper-sexualized, but she did not show any sign of sexual libido, again showing the dissociation of her body and her agency: boys gave her sneaky looks and wanted to kiss her, although she did not want to kiss them back (Acevedo, 2018, p. 151). However, once she met Aman, who does not like her for her body, as she was afraid of all men would do, Xiomara wants Aman's "fingerprints all over," and "some of these things [men want to do to her body] done" (Acevedo, 2018, p. 151, 146). For the first time, Xiomara is the subject rather than the object of desire. Desire is, therefore, a source of power that should be embraced (Lorde, 2007, p. 53-59).

By representing her desire in her poetry, Xiomara challenges the existent dominant narratives of hypersexuality. One might think that talking about desire reinforces these hyper-sexual narratives and stereotypes. Indeed, the cult of secrecy or ideology of dissemblance —avoiding openness regarding personal emotions and sexuality—was believed by some black women, such as the members of the National Association of Colored Women, to be the only way to achieve respectability (Hine, 1989, p. 915). Altagracia's own version of the cult of secrecy, what happens "in house stays in house," threatens Xiomara if she dares to be personal in her poems (Acevedo, 2018, p. 344). However, *The Poet X* shows that this ideology of dissemblance is not effective for respectability. Xiomara's initial strategy of self-imposed invisibility by hiding in big sweaters, by avoiding interactions and by practicing silence did not work as her body kept being "unhide-able" and the comments that link her body to hypersexuality did not stop (Acevedo, 2018, p. 151). Furthermore, showing affect separates Xiomara from the animality she has always been linked to.

Ms. Galiano introduces Xiomara into this new strategy to respectability by encouraging her to write poems about herself (Acevedo, 2018, p. 344). In this way, Ms. Galiano becomes the female model her mother is not. Although Altagracia is a hard-working woman, she does not have enough agency since, for example, she did not choose who to marry. Ms. Galiano does not only give Xiomara tips about writing, but also shows her activism and agency over her body by wearing her hair naturally (Acevedo, 2018, p. 37). Besides Ms. Galiano, Xiomara discovers a black female genealogy on the internet that includes black female slam poets and singers, to whom she dedicates a poem entitled "Asylum" to show that these figures are her particular sanctuary as they represent her better than the virgin and the angels, and therefore, can serve her as models (Acevedo, 2018, p. 82-83). Thus, as the black feminist scholar Rachel Quinn (2015) claims, the internet becomes for Xiomara "a bridge for transnational relations" (25-44).

In one of her school assignments, Xiomara praises the Afro-Latina artist Nicky Minaj specifically for combating the cult of secrecy by celebrating in her songs her curves and her sexuality (Acevedo, 2018, p. 180). Indeed, one of the first poems in which Xiomara celebrates her body by smiling when looking at her butt is named after Nicky Minaj and Beyoncé's song "Feeling Myself" (Acevedo, 2018, p. 92). However, although Xiomara celebrates Minaj and Beyoncé's bodily representations and draws from their example by representing her recently reclaimed sexuality and desire in her poems, Xiomara recognizes that Minaj has been criticized for being "overly sexual" in videoclips like "Anaconda" (Acevedo, 2018, p. 180). Indeed, scholars such as Benard (2016) claims that the image of Nicki Minaj, caged, in chains [in "Anaconda" music video], displaying, and singing about her prominent buttocks in no way differs from the 19th-century display of Sarah Baartman—the African woman who, due to their large buttocks, was exhibited as a freak in show attractions in 19th-century Europe (p. 6). On the other hand, scholars like Janelle Hobson (2005) seek to get over this reading by considering the agency of these women regarding their identity, image, and sexuality in mass media and pop culture (p. 141-178).

Through the journey, Xiomara experiences in the novel and thanks to these female models (Ms. Galiano, Nicky Minaj), Xiomara realizes that she needs to create alternative self-images in order to challenge dominant images of black women. Self-representation can redefine patriarchal and racist cultural constructions, or at least, expel them from Afro-Latinas' own cultural representations. Indeed, in this second part of the novel, Xiomara's voice silences the stereotypes of Afro-Latinas that she

previously echoed in her poems. Thus, Xiomara inscribes herself in the long tradition of black women that, according to Bennett and Dickerson (2001), have restored their bodies and subject positions through language (p. 9).

Xiomara does not only “write the body,” as the post-structuralist French feminists claim is necessary, that is, writes about her body to challenge dominant discourses and move from an objectified position to a position of full subjectivity; but she also writes with the body to make a full reclamation of it by showing that a corporeal epistemology and art are possible. By writing through her body, she does not only claim, but proves wrong the Platonic dissociation between mind and body and the idea that the body can only be associated with animal drives. In “Holding a Poem in the Body” Xiomara challenges this Western separation of mind and body.

Xiomara’s body becomes a site of artistic production as she creates a poetic puzzle with the pieces that have been made of her body (butt, boobs) (Acevedo, 2018, p. 79). By becoming discursive, bodies are not just sets of different parts, but integrative instruments of subjectivity (Louis, 2001, p. 162). Thanks to poetry, it is no longer about the textuality of Xiomara’s body, that is, her body as a tabula rasa, a recipient of meaning for dominant racial and gender discursive regimes, but rather about the embodied discourse of her texts as Xiomara writes from the experiences and knowledge she obtains through her body. In this way, the biblical passage that entitles the second section in which *The Poet X* is divided —the word was made flesh— is reversed. Through embodied discourse, the word was not made flesh, but the flesh was made word.

This is just one of the examples in which writing is presented in opposition to religion. Not only the poetry club run by Ms. Galiano and the confirmation class take place at the same time, but while Catholicism means listening to commands, writing involves articulating her own voice (Acevedo, 2018, p. 111). In addition to this, writing gives Xiomara what religion was supposed to. It does not only provide her a way to spirituality and reflection, but also a community, which is formed by the members and the audience of the poetry club and the Nuyorican café where she recites her slam poetry. In fact, Xiomara claims that words “connect people” and “build community” (Acevedo, 2018, p. 287). Xiomara chooses her own way to spirituality and community, rather than accepting what religion and family impose upon her. Furthermore, writing grants Xiomara a place to be beyond the church —the Nuyorican café and the club.

Xiomara does not only write but recites her poems. Slam poetry links Xiomara to her African roots as orality occupies a central position in African tradition. Besides this, its

performative component takes Xiomara's embodied discourse to a whole new level. Performing is the transgressive act through which the same bodies that were supposed to be possessed by others in different forms (physically, culturally) are reclaimed for self-affirmation (Moïse, 2018, p. 146; Brown, 2018, p. 32; Brooks, 2001, p. 41-70). Xiomara's body is no longer a sexual object, but a tool for her empowering and embodied art. Indeed, Xiomara confesses that she "could get addicted to" this new type of attention at the stage, as there her body is not sexualized, but a discursive and performative instrument that finally "feel[s] important" (Acevedo, 2018, p. 259). Just as before she wanted to be a "disappearing act" and kept her hands in her lap evidencing how she wanted to hide her body, now "every one of her limbs is an actor trying to take center stage" (Acevedo, 2018, p. 250, 79). Thus, by becoming a discursive and performative instrument of subjectivity, Xiomara lets her body "take all the space it wants" since it has become a site for activism and a vehicle for agency (Acevedo, 2018, p. 79).

5. Conclusions

Afro-Latinx communities in the US have been linked to displacement due to their double diasporic heritage and the current gentrification in cities. However, *The Poet X* discusses another form of displacement that Afro-Latinas also suffer, and that Xiomara is able to suppress: corporal dislocation. Xiomara's agency was expelled from her body by dominant discourses of racism and patriarchy. Indeed, racial and patriarchal discourses have dominated the Afro Latina body for centuries as a result of slavery, colonial and neocolonial regimes, capitalism, and oppressive Catholic doctrine. Nevertheless, the body can also be a site of activism and resistance for Afro-Latinas in the US. *The Poet X* shows that body and agency can be finally associated by embracing one's sexuality, self-representation through embodied discourse, and the performance of poetry. By re-appropriating their own bodies through these mechanisms, Afro-Latinas can combat the dominant cultural constructions against black female bodies.

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