One of the fundamental paradoxes of "new social movements" arising in the late 1960s and early 1970s was the disjuncture between their theoretical and practical stances on equality. Despite organizing some of their goals explicitly around demands for equality, these movements were not always exemplary at practicing their theoretical commitments. This was true notably in different race-based organizations that arose in partnership with and in response to the mainstream civil rights movement. While sometimes (though not always) featuring demands for the equality of all people, groups like the Black Panthers, Nation of Islam, MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán), and the early Young Lords frequently paid only lip service to the equality of a large portion of their membership: women (Brown, 1992; García, 1997; Knapper and Brown, 1996; Nelson, 2001). Despite their active participation in the daily functioning of these organizations, women often were relegated to subservient positions and denied an equal voice in communal governance as such performances of leadership did not fit expectations of hegemonic masculinity. But in the New York Young Lords, women banded together and demanded more than the theoretical equality announced by the organization.

When the New York Young Lords were founded in the summer of 1969, they filled a need for radical Puerto Rican activism created when McCarthyism drove the first generation of militants underground in the 1950s. In the beginning, however, some of their eventual goals vis-à-vis
gender equality were not yet being enacted. As Jennifer Nelson (2001) suggests, "At first, gender was not a matter of great importance for the [Lords]. Women joined the party for many of the same reasons men did" (p. 161). When the Lords were founded, it was a group of men who handled the organization and leadership aspects. Women quickly became involved, but they were not invited into the leadership, which was chaired (beginning in the autumn of 1969) by the charismatic Felipe Luciano. The disjuncture between theoretical demands for gender equality and practical failures to actuate those demands made present, to some in the organization, the need for immediate change.

In 1970, publication of their bi-weekly newspaper, Palante, began in New York in the press office of the radical, separatist feminist (and predominantly white, female-run) newspaper The Rat (Oliver-Velez, 2004). Denise Oliver, an African American woman who never found a comfortable place in Black Nationalist organizations because of their problematic stances on women, was in charge of producing the paper. Upon later reflection, the interactions Oliver had with women at The Rat proved to be germinial in their formation of feminist consciousness in the Lords. “Within months of the [Lords'] founding,” Nelson (2001) writes, “gender conflict emerged as women pursued a greater role in determining the direction of the movement” (p. 161). More specifically, women in the Lords confronted their male leaders with a simple demand: start promoting women’s equal agency in the revolutionary struggle. Women and men in the organization worked together to find innovative ways to resist machismo (a virulent form of sexism rooted in the intersections of racism-classism-sexism) and eventually transformed the structure and culture of the organization to support gender and sex equality (e.g., Enck-Wanzer, 2008b; Nelson, 2001). The transformation was not easy. According to one former Young Lord, Olguie Robles (2004), “Some of [the men] were very open to the ideas because they were sincere. And some of them were very shut down to it because they were not sincere—because it was more about their egos than about true qualitative change. [...] It took a long while. It took a long while.”

Once the women in the Lords gained a voice, however, they set their sights on using it for productive purposes. The initial victory—gaining representation of women on the organization’s central committee, structural equality in the operations and activities of the Party, and embodied public evidence that women could lead alongside men—set a background in front of which a new rhetorical offensive would be waged. Now that women had an intelligible public voice on behalf of the Young Lords, they set out to advance a Third World (proto-feminist) demand rooted in an analysis of the intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991a; 1991b) of oppression along gendered-raced-classed axes. Such enactment of demand is central to a radical democratic politics of the Young Lords generally and of the women’s initiatives in particular. In the Young Lords “revolution within the revolution,” demand—understood as a particular species of rhetorical act—manifested itself in several forums: in the daily operations of the Lords, in their unique concerns with health care and reproductive rights, and most importantly (because of its authorizing force) in print.

In what follows, I engage several of the Lords’ feminist texts in an effort to identify the unique form and content of the anti-essentialist stance they advanced. As such, this chapter serves two functions. First, it is an attempt to grapple with the nascent, complex, nuanced anti-essentialist rhetoric of demand produced by Young Lords women and men that emerged out of a markedly gendered context and struggle. Second, in so doing this chapter seeks to enrich our theoretical understanding of what Lisa Flores (1996) calls a “rhetoric of difference,” and what Kent Ono and John Sloop (1995) identify as “cultural syncretism” inherent to vernacular discourse, by exploring the potential role of demand (Laclau, 2005) in such rhetorics. Thus, this chapter aims to advance both our historical understanding of one early Latina/Third World feminist rhetoric and our theoretical understanding of how rhetorics of difference and vernacular rhetorics function through demand. I begin by putting vernacular discourse into conversation with a theory of demand. Next, I explore a central, and widely circulated women’s text: the “Position Paper on Women” (Central Committee, 1970), which articulated the organization’s stance on gender equality and against machismo. From there, I proceed with an analysis of two key textual fragments of women and equality in their book, Palante: Young Lords Party. Finally, I turn my attention to the implications of this discourse for the Young Lords’ and broader “identity”-based calls for inclusion and democracy.

VERNACULAR DISCOURSE AND RHETORICS OF (DIFFERENTIAL) DEMAND

In their seminal essay on the subject, Ono and Sloop (1995) argue that critical rhetoricians ought to shift focus away from studies of dominant rhetorics (e.g., speeches of major public figures and other textual fragments of mainstream public culture) and toward a critique of vernacular discourses. With such a shift, critics “would look at discourse that resonates within and from historically oppressed communities” and would entail “engaging in talk about everyday speech, conversations in homes, restaurants, and ‘on the corner’” (Ono and Sloop, 1995, p. 20). Rather than merely appreciate or recover these vernacular discourses, however, Ono and Sloop (1995) suggest the need to be critical of Other rhetorics by advancing an anti-essentialist critique of the constitution of subjectivities. Such subjectivization happens through two related vernacular forms: cultural syncretism (a simultaneous challenge of hegemonic articulations
and affirmation of culture) and pastiche (the piecing together of popular cultural fragments).

In Latina/o communication studies, Michelle A. Holting (2008) argues, this challenge to take up vernacular discourse has been met by significant studies that explore Latina/o vernacular voices in a diversity of contexts. Although she does not use the terms, Flores (1996) is one of the first to explore the functionality of cultural syncretism through what she calls a “rhetoric of difference” in the writings of Chicana feminists. A rhetoric of difference, much like Ono and Sloop’s later description of syncretism, “includes repudiating mainstream discourse and espousing self- and group-created discourse” (Flores, 1996, p. 145). Flores is particularly interested in processes of naming—that is, how groups come to terminologically and metaphorically define themselves. For Chicana feminists, this process of definition involves the “creation of their own discursive space” (Flores, p. 146) where self-definition can flourish.

Bernadette Marie Calafell and Fernando P. Delgado (2004) further enrich our understanding of how vernacular discourses function through self-definition by directing attention toward the visual vernacular. Distinct from the process of self-definition enacted in verbal discourse, Calafell and Delgado (2004) demonstrate how images and image-texts circulating in the book and documentary film Americanos function in the margins and center of the public to re-imagine Latina/o identity for multiple audiences. They use Americanos, then, “to explore the ways in which visual images provide arguments and counterarguments to ideologies or public memories concerning Latina/os in the US” (Calafell and Delgado, p. 17). This analysis deepens our understanding of the complexities of Latinidad in contemporary multicultural contexts. Furthermore, it stretches the boundaries of Ono and Sloop’s (1995) work to show us how the visual can and does play a central role in rhetorics of cultural syncretism and elements of pastiche.

Building on this earlier scholarship, I want to turn our attention to a particular dimension or character of rhetorical act possibly undergirding cultural syncretism in vernacular discourses: demand. In his recent work on radical democratic and populist politics, Argentine political theorist Ernesto Laclau (2005) underscores the centrality of demand. Meaning “request” or “claim,” demand structures the political relation between self (a person or organization) and other (the state or other hegemonic regime). As such, demand may play an important role in syncretic rhetorics that seek to negotiate the tensions between resistance to hegemonic subjectification and positive affirmation of marginal identity.

The demand, for Laclau (2005), is most interesting in transition from demand-as-request to demand-as-claim. In that transition, demands unfulfilled are differentially absorbed by dominant regimes and create the space for equivalential relations to form between formerly autonomous political actors.

We will call a demand which, satisfied or not, remains isolated a democratic demand. A plurality of demands which, through their equivalential articulation, constitute a broader social subjectivity we will call popular demands—they start, at a very incipient level, to constitute the ‘people’ as a potential historical actor (Laclau, 2005, p. 74).

From a Lacanian perspective, however, demand can never be fully satisfied, which is one thing that makes it such an interesting trope to explain democratic and popular politics. In other words, demand is interesting and important precisely because it is not satisfied—which means that it continues to drive the relation between self and other, thus keeping the processes of identification open or deferred and forming the contingent foundation of a radical democratic politics.

To turn to some specifics, Laclau (2005) argues that democratic demands are “formulated to the system by an underdog of sorts . . . there is an equalitarian dimension implicit in them”; furthermore, “their very emergence presupposes some kind of exclusion or deprivation” (p. 125). In this sense, the democratic demand is not tied to any particular regime of politics except for in a differential relation (i.e., it is democratic not because it is tied to a liberal democratic regime but because it arises in opposition to some other political regime). For Laclau (2005), the ‘people’ as the articulating instance—the locus of what we have called popular demands—can result only from the hegemonic overdetermination of a particular democratic demand which functions, as we have explained, as an empty signifier (as an objet petit a in the Lacanian sense) (p. 127). Furthermore, Laclau (2005) defends his use of the term “democratic” in talking of specific demands on the grounds that it “points to that equivalent/discursive environment which is the condition of emergence of the demand” (p. 128).

That said, “demand” remains a fairly abstract theoretical category for Laclau (2005). Granted, demand has practical political consequences and forms the basis (of sorts) for popular political agency; but Laclau (2005) fails to consider the rhetorical form or implications of the demand aside from characterizing it as request or claim. Perhaps he does not want or need to do so. If Lacanian demand is an expression of one’s narcissistic relation to the imaginary that structures processes of identification and subjectivity, then Laclau’s (2005) use of demand to explain one aspect of the core of the political is helpful insofar as it marks the political as constantly in flux, always deferred. When demand functions as a contingent object or impetus of politics, it sparks the process of hegemonic articulation and requires the formation of linkages between disparate groups (Laclau, 2005). If we approach the vernacular’s cultural syncretism with such an understanding of demand, we may be poised to interpret specific rhetorics of difference as temporary points of fixity in a broader rhetorical trajectory toward radical democratic renewal. In the
Young Lords’ rhetoric of gender equity, we can see such a trajectory in the emergence of a unique set of demands.

THE POSITION PAPER ON WOMEN: FIGURING GENDER, NATION, RACE, AND CLASS

The issue of the Young Lords’ Palante newspaper in which the “Position Paper on Women” (Central Committee, 1970) appears—volume two, issue twelve (dated Friday, September 25, 1970)—begins on its cover with a subversive element. A popular icon of the post-“Commonwealth” status of the Puerto Rican government in 1952 was the image of a racial triad that signified the Puerto Rican nation: Spanish, African, and Taino/Arawak, the indigenous population subject to genocide by the Spanish (Davila, 1997). Semiotically, the different government-sponsored images were similar in that they represented the three “faces” of the nation in a way that depicted an idealized racial/national harmony. Often, the image illustrated the races in passive poses. As such, the viewer would have no reason to be threatened unless they were racist and sought to repress and/or suppress the very idea of the racial triad. Furthermore, the representation of races/faces was always male, thus authorizing men as the symbolic faces of the respective political parties. The image drawn by Denise Oliver on the cover of Palante, however, offers a stark contrast (see figure 4.1).

The setting is rural and mountainous, which places the figures in a geographical region similar to Lares, the site of the founding nationalist rebellion in Puerto Rico in 1868 (El Grito de Lares). Visually, then, this links the Lords with a continued struggle for Puerto Rican national independence, a link continued later in the issue through articles about Ramon Emeterio Betances (the leader of El Grito) and El Grito de Lares itself, the anniversary of which (September 23) was being commemorated in the issue. Furthermore, the sky is dark and the land is untouched by industrialization, allowing a visual reminder of the island’s pre-capitalist state and the pastoral purity of the rest of the image. On this background, there are three figures, each of whom represents one of the three races. The first is a man of African descent, hair “natural,” clothing dark, rifle in hand, with a defiant gaze looking directly at the reader. The positioning of the African first and in an interpellative role calls on the reader to identify with this often-repressed element of Puerto Rican nationality. The second person is a white man, of Spanish descent, performing jibaro (a word that translates into something like “hillbilly,” but had been appropriated by the Island independentistas to have a positive connotation, in large part because of the jibaro’s role in El Grito). The jibaro is also defiant with one fist raised in a uniquely U.S. “power to the people” manner; he holds a machete in the other hand, ready for combat.
women's oppression focusing principally on familial relations and the institution of marriage. The second section, "The Double Standard, Machismo, and Sexual Fascism," examines the links between the capitalist system, machismo, masculinity, and "sexual fascism" (someone who "thinks of the opposite sex solely as sexual objects to be used for sexual gratification and then discarded" [p. 12]). The third section, "Prostitution," examines the systemic causes of sexual and economic prostitution and demands reproductive freedoms for Third World women. The fourth section, "Day Care Centers," identifies briefly the need for adequate day care facilities. The final section, entitled "Revolutionary Women," constructs a genealogy of women in anti-colonial struggles, identifying a tradition of activism and revolutionary leadership to which the Lords and their contemporaries could look for guidance, hope, and inspiration. The images of revolutionary women, in order, are a Black Cuban militia member, a Vietnamese guerrilla, Lolita Lebron (a Puerto Rican Nationalist who led an assault on the U.S. congress) being escorted by police, a women's protest centered on a Black woman holding a Third World Women's Alliance sign, Leila Khaled (a Palestinian revolutionary), a large and unidentified multi-racial women's rally (possibly set in front of a courthouse), and a lithograph of an ambiguously ethnically marked woman (she could be African, Caribbean, or otherwise Latin American) with what looks like a baby on her back and a rifle in her hand.

The PPW begins with a proposition of fact: "Puerto Rican, Black, and other Third World (colonized) women are becoming more aware of their oppression in the past and today" (Central Committee, 1970, p. 12). As such, the PPW frames itself as serving the dual purposes of identifying the problems of Third World women (their historical and material oppression and the implications of that oppression) and an attitude of resistance adopted by the Party to combat those problems. The main demand of the PPW is best represented in its third paragraph, and underscores the representational force of the Taino woman on the front cover:

Third World Women have an integral role to play in the liberation of all oppressed people as well as in the struggle for the liberation of women. Puerto Rican and Black women make up over half of the revolutionary army, and in the struggle for national liberation they must press for the equality of women; the woman's struggle is the revolution within the revolution. Puerto Rican women will be neither behind nor in front of their brothers but always alongside them in mutual respect and love (Central Committee, 1970, p. 12).

Here we see textual evidence of the Lords' resistance to an either/or mentality that marked some variants of radical feminism (and other nationalist groups) at the time.14

In advancing a strong position on the equality of women, the Lords are careful not to alienate the men—separatism is not what they are after;
rather, this initial statement binds the interests of women and men in revolutionary struggle. This is one key difference in how the Young Lords dealt with feminism(s) as compared to their Chicano contemporaries. Where the Lords saw the interests of revolutionary women and men inextricably bound in a manner that required gender equity, groups like MEChA and Latino Unidos Party failed to be inclusive and Chicana feminists had to articulate their voice outside those organizations until years after their initial demands for equality (Muñoz, 2007). Simultaneously, the PPW enunciates recognition that women’s equality represents a unique challenge that cannot be explained or solved by a simple Marxist or otherwise anti-colonialist critique. To balance this tension, the PPW names a “revolution within the revolution” that marks out the layers of domination and resistance and maintains the hegemonic, nodal status of “revolution” as the empty signifier of the struggle.

In claiming that “revolution” is an “empty signifier” of their struggle, it is important to avoid some misunderstanding. First, an empty signifier is not empty because it lacks understood meaning but because it lacks any essential meaning. As Laclau (1996) argues, empty signifiers “only emerge if there is a structural impossibility in signification as such, and only if this impossibility can signify itself as an interruption (subversion, distortion, et cetera) of the structure of the sign” (p. 37). Using an example, Laclau (1996) argues that “‘Order’ as such has no content, because it only exists in the curious forms in which it is actually realized, but in a situation of radical disorder ‘order’ is present as that which is absent; it becomes an empty signifier, as the signifier of that absence” (p. 44). In identifying “revolution” as their empty signifier, I mean to argue that “revolution” is articulated as that which is absent, which makes it (rather than “equality”) the focal point of an attempt to hegemonize “revolution.” In rhetorically centering “revolution” as an ideograph (McGee, 1980) central to their politics, the Young Lords make it a “signifier of the lack” (Laclau, 1996, p. 44). In making this observation, though, I do not mean to diminish the role or force of the Lords’ rhetoric in the PPW; on the contrary, I would argue that the PPW’s stance is powerful in part because of the way that it links itself as an equivalency to “revolution” in an anti-essentialist manner. In so doing, the PPW is able both to (a) problematize the unequal status of women within the Party and (b) advocate equal participation in revolutionary advancement outside the Party.

A good example of this dual-pronged move of challenging inequality in the Party and advancing equality outside the Party is found in the PPW section called “The Double Standard, Machismo, and Sexual Fascism.” The section begins with a systemic analysis of the contradictions of capitalism: “Capitalism sets up standards that are applied differently to Puerto Rican and Black men from the way they are applied to Puerto Rican and Black women. These standards are also applied differently to Third World peoples than they are applied to whites.” Consistent with other radical discourses of the time period, the Lords lay blame on a racist (and in this case also sexist) system of oppression that ought to be the target of analysis, critique, and revolution (e.g., Elbaum, 2002). In this particular instance, “the system” is identified as an authorizing force that erects a double standard allowing the advancement of whites (especially white men). Where whites are understood as capable of advancement, Third World men “are looked upon as rough and sexual, but not as intellectuals.” Similarly, women are “not expected to know anything except about the home, kitchen, and bedroom. All they are expected to do is look pretty and add a little humor.”

In both instances, “the system” defines Third World people outside of modernity as uncivilized brutes who are fully embodied but incapable of reason. Within this already inequitable set of relations, men are placed (they are objects, after all) into positions of superiority over women, which give them “license to do many things—curse, drink, use drugs, beat women, and run around with many women.” Furthermore, this positioning of men over women is naturalized, thereby reifying essential differences between Third World men and Third World women. “As a matter of fact,” the PPW argues, “these things are considered natural for a man to do, and he must do them to be considered a man. A woman who curses, drinks, and runs around with a lot of men is considered dirty scum, crazy, and a whore.” “The system,” then, creates two sets of double standards: one between whites and Third World men, and a second between Third World men and Third World women. More important for my argument, however, are the ways in which “the system’s” authorizing force is discursively aligned, in part as a double standard, but also as essentialist in its treatment of race and gender more broadly.

As a result of the double-standard, the PPW argues, a fundamentally unequal and counterrevolutionary system of gender relations between Third World men and women (known as machismo) is propagated:

Today Puerto Rican men are involved in a political movement. Yet the majority of their women are home taking care of the children. The Puerto Rican sister that involves herself is considered aggressive, castrating, hard and unwomanly. She is viewed by the brothers as sexually accessible because what else is she doing outside of the home. The Puerto Rican man tries to limit the woman’s role because they feel the double standard is threatened; they feel insecure without it as a crutch (p. 12).

In this rich passage, we can identify the ideological force of the double standard and the damaging effects of an essentialist gender politics. The same system that keeps Third World men in a position of subjugation becomes an enabling force, the highest source of agency, in the men’s relations of domination over women. As such, the performance of revolutionary agency by women threatens the little agency that men feel they have; it calls into question the order imposed by capitalism’s double stan-
Prior to joining the Lords, however, Perez was a high school teacher who was active in students rights movements. After the Lords disintegrated, Perez remained active in Puerto Rican struggles for independence and social justice, eventually working directly with the Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation in their political struggles against police brutality and for economic justice in New York City.

In his only entry in *Palante: Young Lords Party*, Perez demonstrates a key critical sensibility that is symptomatic of the Lords' praxis in what I call the second movement of the "revolution within the revolution." Perez begins his contribution with a critique of machismo, not masculinity, writing, "In our community machismo is something that is a particular problem. It's one of the trademarks of Latin culture. It is that exaggerated sense of manhood that constantly must be proven in a number of different ways" (*Young Lords Party and Abramson, 1971, p. 53, emphasis in original).* Like the women in the Lords, what he calls attention to is not masculinity generally—some might argue, in fact, that even the women Lords embraced a particular performance of masculinity in order to resist male oppression and get their demands met (e.g., seeing crying as a form of weakness and avoiding it when they were being beaten by men in martial arts training)—but the specific problem of racist-sexist-classist machismo for Latinos. As something to be proven, machismo is a performance that works itself out in the most insidious ways: through acts of physical aggression against men and women, through the erection of strict gender roles, and through certain aggressive verbal discourse. Furthermore, machismo's aggressions were normalized, explained by men as "a natural thing" (*Young Lords Party and Abramson, 1971, p. 54*).

Perez, like the Lords' women, critiqued machismo for being counter-revolutionary and a hindrance to the their struggle for social justice and multiple equalities. One particularly pointed example of his critique is worth quoting at length. In the context of confronting machismo's normalization, Perez writes:

> "Revolution within the Revolution" begins with a quotation from Che Guevara: "Let me say at the risk of seeming ridiculous that a true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love." Four brief narratives follow this introductory quotation. First, Pablo Guzman writes about gender norms. Second, Denise Oliver writes about the role of women within the organization and in society at large. Third, Richie Perez writes about the dangers of machismo and the importance of equality in the struggle. Finally, Guzman ties the Lords' evolution on the gender issue into their broader socialist politics. Rather than deal with all of these narratives in order, I focus attention on Perez's and Guzman's first contributions: two essays that (a) speak most directly to their progressive stance on gender without repeating the PPW and (b) demonstrate uptake of the ideas first publicly laid out in the PPW.

One of thousands of members of the Young Lords, Perez's story is both unique and commonplace. Joining the Young Lords Organization during the first People's Church offensive, Perez entered at a time when the organization's visibility and membership were increasing rapidly.

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**BREAKIN' IT DOWN: THE POLITICS OF LANGUAGE AND RHETORICAL POSSIBILITY**

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Perez, like the Lords' women, critiqued machismo for being counter-revolutionary and a hindrance to the their struggle for social justice and multiple equalities. One particularly pointed example of his critique is worth quoting at length. In the context of confronting machismo's normalization, Perez writes:

> We've talked about all kinds of things, like the fact that brothers don't know how to talk about sisters. Words like "broad" and "chick" are negative terms—again, they take away the humanness of the people that you're applying them to and make them into objects. Of course, no brother would like to be referred to as, "That's my stud," or something like that. Instead of saying "manpower," we're trying now to use the word "peoplepower," 'cause we're not only talking about men—we're talking about brothers and sisters. This isn't an organization of just men. At first people said, "well, it's just words. Terminology doesn't mean anything, you know, it's how you really feel." We had to break that down. Words do show an attitude, and if you want to change that attitude, you have to begin by changing the words that you're using to describe people (*Young Lords Party and Abramson, 1971, p. 54*).
Framed in terms of dealing with problems of interpersonal communication the men were having among themselves, Perez advanced some profound points regarding the importance of language. First, he rehearsed the now familiar critique of sexist language as propping up objectifying relations. Second, he underscored the practical political move of de-sexing terms like “manpower” because they discursively excluded women from the ranks. Equality, through Perez’s perspective, is a position that must be advanced in all aspects of the Lords’ activism, including the specific language that they use.

Perez continues by making a key point: language matters. Sounding a bit like Kenneth Burke or Jacques Derrida, Perez calls attention to the need to break down a dominant view within the group that words don’t matter—that it is what is inside that “counts.” Perez’s stance seems to be a practical example of Barbara Biesecker’s (1989) turn to difference in critiquing the relationship between rhetoric and agency. In her essay on the rhetorical situation, Biesecker (1989) suggests that a “reexamination of symbolic action (the text) and the subject (audience) that proceeds from within Jacques Derrida’s thematic of difference enables us to rethink the rhetorical situation as articulation. Indeed, deconstructive practice enables us to read symbolic action in general and rhetorical discourse in particular as radical possibility” (p. 112). In this sense, Perez drew attention to the formation of political subjectivities by the language of the Lords’ membership. “Words do show an attitude,” he wrote, and changing those words is key to both changing attitudes and changing the positionality of various rhetorical agents.

Reading Perez’s move as a deconstructive one, in the sense that Biesecker (1989) discusses deconstruction, is productive. Deconstruction means something very specific to Biesecker: “I will suggest that deconstruction is a way of reading that seeks to come to terms with the way in which the language of any given text signifies the complicated attempt to form a unity out of a division, thereby turning an originary condition of impossibility into a condition of possibility in order to posit its ostensive argument” (p. 112). As such, deconstruction becomes a critical attitude that posits the constitutive nature of texts as moments that fix chains of signification into a unitary whole (a text). Through rhetoric, then, anything is possible, making a detailed understanding of those possibilities central to appreciating the rhetorical situation. Perez, in that vein, posits the dominant sexist terms as constitutive of a problematic, dehumanizing agency that is counterproductive to the Young Lords’ revolutionary aims.

In a complementary fashion, Ronald Walter Greene (1998) argues that a logic of articulation “allows Biesecker to posit a theory of the rhetorical situation as an ‘effect structure’ that makes subjectivity possible through a linguistic sleight of hand that ‘fixes’ a unity out of difference” (p. 25). “Fix” might be the wrong metaphor since any “fixity” is only temporary, made possible through its radical “unfixity.” In Greene’s (1998) assessment of Biesecker, “Rhetoric is not synonymous with language or symbolic influence but becomes the ultimate bricoluer building a text out of a vast host of shifting signifiers” (p. 25). This has tremendous implications for how we understand the audience and agent of rhetoric: both are the product of an articulatory process that seeks to stabilize signifiers long enough (even if always only temporarily) for the “text” to make sense (cognitively and corporeally).

For Perez, rhetoric has real, practical consequences for the potential of social movement amongst the Lords and in society-at-large. If machismo were allowed to continue, the Lords’ rhetoric would authorize or “fix” agency in an inherently inequitable manner. Concluding his contribution to Palante: Young Lords Party, Perez writes,

“It’s no use making revolution if after we make it and take state power we’re as fucked-up as the people we replace. We not only have to change the political structure of this country, we’ve also got to change everything else. Revolution means change from the top to the bottom, and that includes the way we deal with each other as human beings (Young Lords Party and Abramson, 1971, p. 56).

It is this anti-essentialist, relational aspect of everyday practices (including embodied, verbal, and other forms of symbolic action) that Perez demands must be challenged in their articulation of “revolution.”

**PROBLEMATIZING SEX AND ENVISIONING A NEW IDENTITY POLITICS**

The most telling example of the affect of this anti-essentialist politics is Pablo “Yoruba” Guzman’s first essay in the “Revolution Within the Revolution” section of the Palante book. In this rich but short piece (taking up less than two pages in the book), Guzman addresses explicitly at least two issues relevant to this argument. On the relationship between race, class, and gender oppression, Guzman challenged what Judith Butler (1990) would call “the insistence upon the coherence and unity of the category of women” (p. 14) characteristic of public perceptions of feminisms at the time. Furthermore, Guzman embraced the performativity of gender and sexuality, which ends up being a key step in the Lords’ progression toward a broader anti-essentialist, radical democratic politics.

Guzman begins his piece by admitting frankly the prevalent attitude of men in the Lords at the time when women began strengthening their calls for equality. “The first time we heard about Women’s Liberation our machismo and our male chauvinism said, ‘Well, these chicks are all frustrated—that’s their main problem. What they really need is a good—you know.’ That was the thing that we were coming from” (Young Lords Party and Abramson, 1971, p. 46). Motivating this attitude, Guzman sug-
gests in the spirit of the PPW, was a complex interweaving of race, class, and gender considerations. Careful to recognize that women's oppression cannot be totalized through the discursive field of capitalism ("No, we can't blame this totally on capitalism, it is a thing that goes way back to the tribes"), Guzman points out the difference between the oppression of white, middle-class women and Third World women. "The thing with the white women is that they have been put on a pedestal, right; however, with Third World women the problem has been that the white man has put the white woman on a pedestal, and then messed around with Third World women" (Young Lords Party and Abramson, 1971, p. 46). While this quotation belies a bias toward compulsory heterosexuality, it also indicates an er, with Third World women the problem has been that the white man is like that white person, they go around oppressing women (calling them whores, etc., if they acted "out of place") also informed discourses about gays and lesbians. "There's this whole thing about faggots, you know, and queers, and this and that. From the time you were a kid your folks told you the worst thing you could be was gay" (Young Lords Party and Abramson, 1971, p. 46). Guzman writes, "the second thing that made perhaps a greater impact on us was when we first heard about Gay Liberation" (Young Lords Party and Abramson, 1971, p. 46). As one can imagine, the same machismo that reinforced boundary-defining discourses about women (calling them whores, etc., if they acted "out of place") also informed discourses about gays and lesbians. "There's this whole thing about faggots, you know, and queers, and this and that. From the time you were a kid your folks told you the worst thing you could be was gay" (Young Lords Party and Abramson, 1971, p. 46). Guzman and the Lords confronted this attitude rooted in compulsory heterosexuality and began to rethink the implications of being gay or lesbian.

Such an inquisitive attitude leads Guzman to make one of the most striking statements in Palante: Young Lords Party: Now, I'm not gay, but maybe I should be. It would probably give me a better outlook on a whole lot of things. At this point, I am talking from a theoretical point of view where I feel like I understand the problem. Being gay is not a problem; the problem is that people do not understand what gay means. See, there is a biological division in sex, right—however, this society has created a false division based on a thing called gender. Gender is a false idea, because gender is merely traits that have been attributed through the years to a man or a woman. Like, the man is supposed to be strong, noble, hearty, hairy, rough, and the woman is supposed to be light, tender, pretty, fragile, crying, and weak. And what happens when you find a guy that's light, pretty and tender? The guy is obviously a "queer," right. And if you find a woman who has the gender traits of the man, then that woman is obviously a "lesbian." And both words are said very negatively—they're both supposed to be very fucked up, right. In other words, a man trying to be a woman and a woman trying to be a man. Well, that's not true, you see, because in our analysis of the Gay struggle—and I like to put it in those terms, the Gay struggle for liberation—it's been clear to us that what this means is really rounding out the person.

The time I spent in the academic world there was always talk about how you could get an education that would round out the individual. The Gay struggle really rounds out the individual, you know. Because certain traits have been assigned to people historically by society, we've actually developed half-people, as half-real. We're saying that to be totally real, it would also be healthy for a man, if he wanted to cry, to go ahead and cry. It would also be healthy for a woman to pick up the gun, to use the gun (Young Lords Party and Abramson, 1971, p. 47, emphasis added).

The quotation begins with a radical admission rooted in a fundamental problematization of the gendered subject. Gender, he says, is a lie, a "false idea" that limits human potential through a socio-historical bifurcation. Although he speaks as if "sex" is a real, material difference, gender is a construction for Guzman. In the suggestion that maybe he should be gay, Guzman draws attention to the fluidity and performativity of gender and sexuality.

More importantly, though, his statement indicates the adoption of a broader anti-essentialist identity politics. If the boundaries of the "Gay Liberation" struggle are articulated as permeable, allowing Guzman to enter its fray, then the boundaries of identity generally are also permeable. You do not need to "be gay" to enact "Gay Liberation" because "gay" is performative; it is a contingent, socio-historically bound, discursive articulation. [T]he problem is that people do not understand what gay means," Guzman says. The rest of what follows, then, is an attempt to (re)articulate "gay" through this anti-essentialist lens. In today's critical lexicon, such an articulatory moment appears thoroughly "queer." While this queering may be undercut somewhat by Guzman's apparent claims to authenticity (being "totally real"), those claims should be read within their context as responses to a naturalized order imposed on gen-
der/sex by a sexist-racist-capitalist system. While "real" persons may occupy an important signifying role for Guzman, its reality is empty/without positive content: real-ness is roundedness and multiplicity marked by the play of difference and, perhaps, difference. 18

CONCLUSION: GENDER TROUBLE, A NEW HUMANIST POLITICS, AND THE RELEVANCE OF DEMAND

The gender politics of the Young Lords are one of the more fascinating and profound aspects of the organization. The way in which embodied, verbal, and visual discourses converge to enact a radical democratic demand on the Young Lords and, then, on U.S. society at large is complex and offers us the opportunity to begin rethinking the rhetorical functionality of "demand" within the context of vernacular discourse and anti-essentialist politics (Calafell and Delgado, 2004; Flores, 1996; Ono and Sloop, 1995). In this chapter, I examined three key products of the Lords' "revolution within the revolution": the position paper on women published in Palante, Perez's deconstructionist move in Palante: Young Lords Party, and Guzman's queering of differential subjectivity also in Palante: Young Lords Party. When we take this rhetoric of difference (Flores, 1996) into consideration, this instance of social movement, of meta-revolution, can act as a touchstone of radical democratic, anti-essentialist politics (Ono and Sloop, 1995) based in response to various forms of "trouble."

Butler (1990) begins Gender Trouble arguing, "Contemporary feminist debates over the meanings of gender lead time and again to a certain sense of trouble, as if the immediacy of gender might eventually culminate in the failure of feminism. Perhaps trouble need not carry such a negative valence" (p. vii). Indeed, "trouble" need not be negative; and the experience of the Young Lords shows that for some U.S. feminists in the 1960s and 1970s, it was not negative at all. That said, Butler's contribution to our understanding of gender's performativity is immeasurable and can play a key, final role in explaining why the Lords' gender politics were so significant. 19

While Butler offers drag as one example of how gender gets undone, the Young Lords may offer an example more legible to political activists in the way they confronted norms of gender and performance in the "revolution within the revolution." First, the women came face-to-face with the very real problem that those in power (men performing machismo) reacted negatively to what they saw as women trying to be like men. Butler (1990) writes that gender has become "the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions—and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them; the construction 'compels' our belief in its necessity and naturalness" (p. 140). In advancing a kind of cultural syncretism (Ono and Sloop, 1995) to resist male domination and transgress gender norms, women in the Lords compelled the organization as a whole to reject machismo, question gender, and challenge the very stability of sex itself.

Within this newly established frame, the Lords' "revolution within the revolution" unearthed gender as a stable foundation for politics (machismo cannot "be revolutionary") and embraced the play of difference as a means for rethinking oppression, revolution, and democracy—all without giving up on identity politics. When identity politics is foundationalist, Butler (1990) argues, "it "tends to assume that an identity must first be in place in order for political interests to be elaborated and, subsequently, political action to be taken [. . . ] there need not be a 'doer behind the deed,' but that the 'doer' is variably constructed in and through the deed." (p. 142). When the Lords began to see identity as a practice, however, they lost sight of artificial distinctions between constructed categories and saw members and others merely as "humans" in the struggle. As such, distribution of membership duties between "men" and "women" became more balanced and, more importantly, the breakdown of gender norms made demands for equality more tenable.

The Young Lords' stance on gender became so flexible that, within a very short period of time, they were welcoming not only to women but gays, lesbians, and others queers. 20 For example, Stonewall combatant, STAR (Street Transvestites Action Revolutionaries) co-founder, and Gay Liberation Front member Sylvia Rivera was welcomed into the Lords' revolutionary fold. Speaking about a mass demonstration in East Harlem in the fall of 1970, Rivera recounted her first and subsequent experiences with the Lords:

Later on, when the Young Lords [...] came about in New York City, I was already in GLF [Gay Liberation Front]. There was a mass demonstration that started in East Harlem in the fall of 1970. The protest was against police repression and we decided to join the demonstration with our STAR banner. That was one of first times the STAR banner was shown in public, where STAR was present as a group.

I ended up meeting some of the Young Lords that day. I became one of them. Any time they needed any help, I was always there for the Young Lords. It was just the respect they gave us as human beings. They gave us a lot of respect.

It was a fabulous feeling for me to be myself—being part of the Young Lords as a drag queen—and my organization [STAR] being part of the Young Lords. (Rivera and Feinberg, 1998)

The point of recounting Rivera's experience is not to applaud the Lords for something they should have done all along. Rather, the point is to make note of how far they came in a short period of time. The transfor-
naction—from assaulting men’s masculinity by calling them “punks” (read: fags) if they weren’t macho and physically assaulting women who didn’t conform to their notions of what women should do, to openly embracing genderqueers in the revolutionary struggle—was almost instantaneous.

The Young Lords represent an early example of both revolutionary gender politics and radical democratic politics made possible through the opening of difference. Talking to members who stuck through the organization’s transformation from revolutionary machismo to proto-feminist revolutionaries, they admit that there was always work to be done. In making their isolated democratic demand in the context of vernacular discourse (Calafell and Delgado, 2004; Flores, 1996; Ono and Sloop, 1995), though, the Young Lords women transformed their demand into a populist one by hegemonizing the terrain of revolution and articulating the interests of women to the interests of men. Perez’s dictum that “[r]evolution means change from the top to the bottom, and that includes the way we deal with each other as human beings” (Young Lords Party and Abramson, 1971, p. 56) demonstrates the constitutive effects of the women’s initial demand.

As the Lords transitioned into the second movement of the “revolution within the revolution,” their social imaginary was transformed as well; thus, we can locate a shift in the rhetorical manifestation of their demand as their focus was less on combating masculine or feminine gender norms within the group and more about problematizing gender as such in their broader revolutionary discourse. In so doing, the Lords enacted a radical democratic sensibility guided by an anti-essentialist identity politics that found strength through the play of difference. Lords like Guzman seemed to recognize the permeability of identity and the ultimate deferral of a fully formed self. Such a progressive stance on gender, then, bolsters the openness of the political conception of democracy the Lords envisioned. Laclau’s (1996) interpretation of Derrida’s “democracy to come” (democratie à venir) is useful here. Laclau argues that democracy is not something that can be readily anchored or stabilized, and, if it is to retain usefulness, is always in a process of becoming through an anti-essentialist politics.21 This is precisely the kind of attitude Guzman enacted in saying “I’m not gay ... but maybe I should be”: captured in this statement is the implicit argument that we must keep ourselves ontologically in motion in order better to theorize the functionality of oppression and the possibilities of revolution. Importantly, the demand for equality was never fulfilled entirely; but the Young Lords always remained open to its ultimate fulfillment and allowed the fissures, ruptures, and residues of formerly stable identities that emerged along the way to keep them in motion looking for a “democracy to come.”

Author’s Note

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NOTES

1. Gays and lesbians were at an even greater disadvantage largely because their voices threatened stable notions of masculinity and femininity.
2. The reasons were varied and included specific issues (e.g., health, housing, and police brutality) and the desire to be in a progressive, grassroots political organization.
3. I use the term “proto-feminist” here and “feminist” elsewhere very reluctantly. From an analytical perspective, we can look back at what they did as being consistent with some kind of feminism. At the time, however, some women were reluctant to use the label and identify with feminism as such because (a) they felt it enforced division between the sexes and (b) feminism as a political project had been dominated by liberal white women. On the suspicion of white feminism, see hooks (1984). Chicana feminists made similar critiques. For examples, see García (1997).
4. A brief note on how the primary texts examined in this essay were chosen. The “Position Paper on Women” was the first, most significant, and most programmatic statement on women published by the Young Lords. Written by women but signed by the entire Central Committee, it was the guiding document on women in the Young Lords. The pieces from Palante: Young Lords Party probably had the widest circulation because a major publisher printed the book. The pieces analyzed were chosen because they demonstrate uptake by two key (visible and influential) men in the organization and add substantively to the discussion.
5. Holling (2008) argues that one of the dominant threads of recent scholarship in Latina/o rhetorical and performance is “the mobilization of political identities in both vernacular and dominant texts” (p. 306).
6. This is a theme I have expanded upon in my prior work on the Young Lords, where I explore how “bodies-images-words” intersect to form “intersectional rhetorics” in vernacular contexts (Enck-Wanzer, 2006b).
7. In On Populist Reason, Laclau makes an explicit turn to rhetoric, understood in terms of tropology rather than attempts to influence.
8. Jorge Matos from the Center for Puerto Rican Studies deserves thanks for this insight.
9. The Puerto Rican Left appropriated this image in the 1950s and 1960s in a manner that gave the races more agency and called into question the “harmonious mixing” espoused by the government.
10. For a recent scholarly engagement of the symbolic force of the jibaro, see Córdova (2004).
11. Lolita Lebron solidified the phrase’s place in history when she became one of the most iconic figures of Nationalist Party politics that day. This interpretation of the link between the image and the phrase is supported further by the text inside the issue, which I will discuss shortly.
12. In some early Chicano filmic representations, women are objectified through a visual linkage to Aztlan (Fregoso, 1993). For the Young Lords, however, Puerto Rico did not serve a similar symbolic or libidinal function as Aztlan did for Chicanos. For island-linked nationalists it may have functioned similarly; but for the Young Lords of 1970, it did not.
13. Although one could posit the genocide of Tainos as an irony in my read, at this point in history the Young Lords had done substantial work to elevate the status of Tainos in the cultural imaginary.

14. Such an either/or mentality was partially endemic of various cultural nationalism, including MEChA's at this time (Munoz, 2007).

15. All of this is influenced heavily by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s (1985) discussion of articulation in chapter three of Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Although Mouffe does not cite him, Žižek’s (1989) explanation of articulation is latent in my understanding of how articulation works.

16. Similar critiques of dominant second-wave feminism are not uncommon. For example, see hooks (1984).

17. On intersectionality, see Crenshaw (1991a; 1991b).

18. Evidence of uptake for this sensibility is mixed. On the one hand, there was enough uptake to create a safe and productive space for GLBTQ activists like Sylvia Rivera. On the other hand, as with sexism directed toward women, some men had a hard time adapting. Little else was written on these issues after the Palante book was published, in part because of a shift in organizational focus to class issues with the transformation from the Young Lords to the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization in 1972.

19. In Undoing Gender, Butler (2004) picks up on this idea by suggesting that the best way to describe this constant remaking of gender is as “undoing.” Undoing suggests that the concept of gender is constantly in motion, constantly being undone and redone.

20. This, too, was a move at odds with mainstream feminism, which was receiving a lot a criticism from lesbian communities for ignoring their personal and political needs.

21. Specifically, Laclau (1996) argues that democracy “does not involve any teleological assertion—not even the limited one of a regulative idea—but simply the continual commitment to keep open the relation to the other, an opening which is always à venir, for the other to which one opens oneself is never already given in any aprioristic calculation” (p. 74).