

QUEERING POLITICS IN 20TH CENTURY MEXICO: THE EVOLUTION OF A NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENT

ABSTRACT

This historical analysis will demonstrate the evolution of an ethnographic and political history which, through the queering of politics, converges into a new Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT) social movement during the second half of the twentieth century in Mexico. This research explores the trends in scholarship on deviant sexuality and on social movements in an attempt to define what constitutes as this new LGBT social movement in the Mexican context. This paper has woven through a social science perspective, important historical events and prominent political figures within this period. Through the use of queer and social science theory, ethnographic and anthropological studies, and various secondary literature on sexuality in modern Mexico, this paper has problematize the history and trajectory of this new LGBT social movement. The use of multiple levels of analysis and multiple theories drawn from social science, illuminates how complicated it is to track this social movement and the reasons for its development.

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History 687: 20th Century Mexico

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12/2010

Queering Politics in 20th Century Mexico: The Evolution of a New Social Movement

In the turn of twentieth century a new term was added to the Mexican Spanish lexicon: *cuarenta y dos*. This is simply translated as the Spanish numerical spelling of forty-two but in the Mexican context, it alludes to one who is secretly homosexual or one who gets away with behavior that stigmatizes those less well-connected. This term was derived from a widely publicized police raid on a drag ball in México City on November 17, 1901 in which forty-one men, half of them dressed as women, were publicly humiliated, forced to sweep the street in their drag, and eventually arrested. A forty-second person was released, allegedly because she was a “real woman,” but suspicions were that a close male relative of President Diaz was the forty-second.¹ This scandalous event of the famous 41 was politicized by contrasting newspaper reports, poems, illustrations, editorials, sermons, and several fictional narrations, including a novel. Through all of these outlets, the drag ball gained immense symbolic importance in Mexico and more importantly, this scandal initiated the first significant discourses of homosexual relations in Mexico since colonial times. It has undoubtedly raised questions about sexuality, masculinity, morality and Mexicanness itself.²

This scandalous event acts as a point of reference for the evolution of an ethnographic and political history which, through the queering of politics, converges into a new Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT) social movement during the second half of

¹ See Murray, Stephen. *Latin American Male Homosexualities*. University of New Mexico Press. 1995. Pg. 185. He directs further explanation to Taylor, Clark L. *El Ambiente*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley. 1978. See also, William H. Beezley. *Judas at the Jockey Club and Other Episodes of Porfirian Mexico*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. 1987.

² Irwin, Robert McKee. “The Famous 41: The Scandalous Birth of Modern Mexican Homosexuality.” *Gay and Lesbian Quarterly* 6:3. Duke University Press. 2000. Pg. 353.

the twentieth century in Mexico. Through the use of queer and social science theory, ethnographic and anthropological studies, and various secondary literature on sexuality in modern Mexico, this paper will problematize the history and trajectory of this new LGBT social movement. By using multiple levels of analysis the interactions and motivations of the Mexican state, institutions and other political actors can be better situated in this historical context. The use of secondary scholarship from various fields will add to the complexity and understanding of this new social movement. Finally, by taking polyvocal approach, the inclusion of multiple personalities will add to the depth and richness of this social history. After exploring the trends in scholarship on deviant sexuality, an attempt will be made to define what constitutes as new social movement. This paper will then shift toward intricately weaving, through a social science perspective, important historical events and prominent political figures within this period. The focus of this work is to demonstrate how specific timing, in conjunction with the Mexican state, prominent political actors, interest groups and nongovernmental/transnational organizations (NGOs/TNOs), together, shaped social policy, granted rights, and changed normative attitudes toward the LGBT community in twentieth- century Mexico. The conclusion of this research will address further and potential areas of inquiry in this subfield of Mexican studies. Reference will also be made toward an expected trajectory and advancement of the LGBT social movement in the region.

The most accurate historical accounts from this scandalous event of the famous 41 come from newspapers and a 1906 novel, *Los 41*, by Eduardo A. Castrejon.³ Those forty-one (or

³ Irwin (2000) explains of Castrejon's novel that, due to its lack of pretensions as serious literature, it had been wiped from Mexican literary history until its recent discovery deep in Mexico's National Library. He finds that Castrejon's ambivalence of the scandal is particularly interesting, because elsewhere in Latin America, the

forty-two) involved were never given the chance to speak publicly, and their private lives and sexual tastes and habits remain mysteries. What is known however, is that these people belonged to divergent social classes, which eludes to the notion that homosexuality crossed class lines and threatened all strata of Mexican society during this period.⁴ It is clearly apparent that deviant forms of sexuality were acknowledged in the social and political spheres during the turn of the twentieth century in Mexico; but to gauge how Mexican homosexuality was interpreted and how it functioned within these spheres within this historical context, a brief discussion of the literature is in order.

Historiographical Trends

In the subsequent development of gay/lesbian studies, a variety of movements, tendencies, schools, and theories have contended with each other; and collectively, these historians, social scientist, anthropologists queer theorists have added to our conception of gender and definitions of deviant sexualities during this period.⁵ The ethnographer Roger Lancaster finds that the very first historical and ethnographic studies in this field were motivated by the desire to homogenize notions of sexual identity, but they soon encountered an enormous range of historical difference and cross-cultural diversity: “relatively short periods of history, even relatively proximate cultures, display dramatically different configurations of gender and sexuality.”⁶ This ostensible diversity has complicated a universalist conception of

tendency was not just to condemn a newly visible homosexuality but to deny its relevance to national culture. The most notorious of the 41 men were identified as members of upper-class families. These dandies were also linked to lower classes. This in itself is political, but will not be addressed in this study. Ibid., Pg. 360-361.

⁴ Ibid. Pg. 358-362.

⁵ Lancaster, Roger N. “On Homosexualities in Latin America (And Other Places)” *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Feb., 1997), Pg. 193.

⁶ Ibid. Pg. 194.

sexual identity. In this light, research has been conducted in the Latin American context that highlights the different configurations of gender and sexuality. A historiographical review of homosexuality throughout Latin America has veered away from a universalist conception of sexual identity, and depicts a synthesis of the intellectual and cultural traditions of attitudes and laws regarding homosexuality. It is within the context of the archive that the majority of study on sexuality in the colonial period in Latin America has been directed. In general, there has been a shift toward the inclusion of oral histories, ethnographic data, popular culture and art, in order to capture the allusive subject of deviant sexuality.

The study of deviant sexuality in the twentieth-century in Latin America has taken on a cross-national comparative tone, with the evaluation of male same-sex dominating the literature.⁷ This can be viewed as problematic for some, but from the advent of queer theory, “the topic of male homosexuality has been used as powerful lens through which scholars have addressed and problematized the dilemmas of reconstructing the social past.”⁸

The trends and approaches taken in the historiography of deviant sexuality in Latin America has transcended to the Mexican context. The twentieth-century historiography has also veered away from a universalist conception of sexual identity and there has been a tendency toward ethnohistorical and anthropological studies that focus on sexuality within urban centers.⁹ Anthropologist Joseph Carrier’s seminal work, *De Los Otros*, primarily focuses on homosexual practices between men in México City and Guadalajara. Put generally, the

⁷For regional and comparative histories see: Green and Babb (2002), De La Dehesa (2010), Murray (1987), (1995), and Nesvig (2001).

⁸Nesvig, Martin Austin. “The Complicated Terrain of Latin American Homosexuality.” *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 81:3-4, August-November 2001, pp. 689-729.

⁹ For anthropological surveys and monographs of Mexican homosexuality in urban centers, see Laguarda (2009), Reyes (2009), and Carrier (1995).

principle question of his twenty-five year study has been: how do mestizo Mexican men (men of mixed Spanish and Indian ancestry) who engage in homosexual behavior cope with their homosexuality in their everyday lives in a society that censures such behavior.¹⁰ Through the use of participant observations in the field and structured interviews, Carrier successfully presents an intimate view of male homosexuality in Mexico at a time when little had been written in detail about nonfictional intimate accounts of homosexual people in most societies around the world.¹¹

Other scholars in this context have focused on notions of Mexican masculinity, machismo, and the active/passive binary of gay men.¹² Through the use of a Mexican literary history covering the period from the early nineteenth-century through the middle of the twentieth-century, Robert Irwin's *Mexican Masculinities* demonstrates how homophobia was a major guiding principle in Mexican cultural history. He also finds that there is fluidity to Mexican masculinity, and that the archetypes of Mexican machismo are changing.¹³

This sample of the scholarship presented above, demonstrates the wide array of methodological approaches taken in explaining this homosexual history in Mexico. Scholars have drawn on methods used in cultural anthropology, social history, and literary criticism in order to broaden the discussion of sexuality in modern Mexico to include analysis of power,

¹⁰ Carrier, Joseph. *De Los Otros: Intimacy and Homosexuality Among Mexican Men*. New York: Colombia University Press. 1995. Pg. xvii.

¹¹ Ibid. Pg. xix.

¹² For studies of machismo and masculinity see: Carrier (1995), Reyes (2009), Macías-González (2001)

¹³ Irwin, Robert McKee. *Mexican Masculinities*. (Cultural Studies of the Americas, number 11.) Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 2003. Similar observations are made in the early period of the twentieth century in, Robert McKee Irwin, Edward J. McCaughan, and Michelle Rocio Nasser, editors. *The Famous 41: Sexuality and Social Control in Mexico, c. 1901*. (New Directions in Latino American Cultures). New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 2003.

culture, and sexuality in a modernizing nation. To sum up this scholarship Katherine Bliss notes in, *The Sexual Revolution in Mexican Studies*, that:

“The growing body of work that deems it necessary to integrate the study of sexuality and gender into the broader field of Mexican studies concerned with political processes, collective action, economic development, and social organization. The numerous articles and conference papers on sexual politics appearing in recent years attests to the fact that many researchers are finding that studying sexuality offers them a fascinating window on cultural politics and social change.”¹⁴

In the wake of this body of literature this paper will now address how the political and social progression of the LGBT community in twentieth-century Mexico culminated as a definitive social movement. But first, a social science discussion is necessary to explain how modernization (the impetus to this new social movement) occurred in Mexico.

Modernization and Revolution

An in depth conception of modernization is offered by Samuel Huntington in *Political Order in Changing Societies*. He contends that modernization and political development of a nation needs two things. First, social mobilization- meaning a change in the attitudes, values, and expectations of people from those associated with the traditional world to those common to the modern world. This change is a consequence of literacy, education, increased communications, mass media exposure, and urbanization. Secondly, economic development- refers to growth in total economic activity and output of society (change in their capabilities).¹⁵ It can be argued that the second element of modernization, economic development, was an impetus for the Mexican Revolution because this part of modernization is a highly destabilizing

¹⁴ Bliss, Katherine Elaine. “The Sexual Revolution in Mexican Studies: New Perspectives on Gender, Sexuality, and Culture in Modern Mexico.” *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (2001). Pg. 268.

¹⁵Huntington, Samuel. *Political Order in Changing Societies*. Yale University Press. 1996. Pg. 33.

process that can lead to massive economic inequality in a society.¹⁶ Social mobilization then increased awareness of the inequality and the resentment of it. In this sense, both aspects of modernization combine to produce political instability. In the twenty years before this Mexican Revolution in 1910, witnessed a tremendous economic growth and expansion. This was also accompanied by massive economic inequalities between the rich and the poor, particularly in land ownership. This all took place in a political system ill-equipped to moderate the impact of these changes or to provide opportunities for political expression and release of tension. The eventual overthrow of President Diaz set the stage for the bloody battle between the elites and the worker/peasant masses culminating in the Mexican Revolution.¹⁷

This modernization framework is the foundation for understanding the new LGBT social movement because the two elements of modernization (economic development and social mobilization) addressed above, created political instability and the eventual revolution. It is now argued that the political system and political culture that emerged from the Mexican Revolution created the means necessary for an LGBT new social movement to take form in the second half of the twentieth-century. This extremely brief review of the effects of modernization as a model for explaining the cause of the Mexican Revolution leads to the path dependent argument that the Mexican Revolution made possible a LGBT social movement through the evolution of civil society which is brought on by modernization.¹⁸

¹⁶For a discussion on how Huntington explains the adverse effects of rapid economic development see Ibid. Pg. 49-52.

¹⁷ This brief historical account is depicted by Huntington Ibid., Pg. 316. It is out of the scope of this paper to evaluate the intricacies of the Mexican Revolution.

¹⁸ Huntington explain that modernization requires both social mobilization (involves changes in the aspirations of individuals, groups, and societies); and economic development (change in their capabilities). Ibid. Pg. 34.

Among the various and important changes brought on by the revolution, social scientist and historians have found that the revolution enhanced the coherence of the Mexican political system and broadened participation of social groups in the political system. This occurred because the revolution:

“broke down the rigid class stratification and by ending the traditional cleavage in Mexican society between the aristocratic, creole, military, religious tradition which came down from colonial times and the liberal, middle-class, individualistic, civilian political strand which had developed in the nineteenth-century.”¹⁹

The revolution completely revitalized the previous political system through the creation of new political institutions, and a new system of institutionalized bargaining and compromise within the party framework.²⁰ It is this product of the revolution that creates the space for the LGBT community to aggregate interests, contest policy, ensure rights, and gain legitimacy as a new social movement. But political activists must first make the dangerous journey into the political public arena to make their interests heard by those in power.

History of a New Social Movement through a Social Science Perspective

A new social movements such as, the transnational LGBT movement, can be defined by the evident belief that the course of history and society can be created and changed by people and social forces determined to do so.²¹ A new social movement doesn't have to take up massive resistance. This is seen from the work by James Scott (1989), in which he finds rural peasants could locally exert their political grievances through quite, disguised, and undeclared forms of every day resistance; and in their aggregate form, they can be considered as a social

¹⁹ Ibid. Pg. 317.

²⁰ Ibid. Pg. 318.

²¹ Offe, Clause. “Challenging the boundaries of institutional politics: social movements since the 1960s,” in Charles Maier (ed.), *Changing Boundaries of the Political*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1987. Pg. 91.

movement.²² This, however, does not negate collective action as a means changing the status quo of the dominant society. Old social movements were organized by specific social groups oriented around class (peasant, workers, aristocrats) and had materialistic goals that were not being sustained by the dominant culture. Those interests are framed and made manifest through collective action. These new social movements, as opposed to older class based movements, are centered around issues that cross-cut various social constructs such as: race, ethnicity, class, nationality, religion, political ideology and gender.²³

From 1934-1968 in Mexico, according to Camin and Meyer (1993), the expropriation of oil led to the peak of social revolution under President Lazaro Cardenas (1934-1940); and the subsequent “Mexican Economic Miracle” (1940-1968) led to massive changes in social, demographic, and labor force composition. This miracle was characterized by a manifest political stability maintained by the authoritarian but flexible control exerted by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and by immense economic growth.²⁴ This prosperous period of history also saw an expansion in homosexual appropriated spaces: “Queer men... and women appropriated bars, parks, plazas, and other public spaces in growing cities, expanding the parameters of increasingly visible and heterogeneous homosocial subcultures, which by the middle of the twentieth century had given rise to specialized markets catering exclusively to

²² Scott, James, “Everyday Forms of Resistance.” in Forrest Colburn, ed., *Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharp. 1989. Pg. 8.

²³ Offe, Clause. “Challenging the boundaries of institutional politics: social movements since the 1960s,” in Charles Maier (ed.), *Changing Boundaries of the Political* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987)

²⁴ Camin, Aguilar and Lorenzo Meyer. *In The Shadow of the Mexican Revolution: Contemporary Mexican History 1910-1989*. University of Texas Press. 1993. On a discussion about the expropriation of oil see Pg. 156. For a discussion on the “Mexican Economic Miracle” see chpt. 5.

queer clientele.”²⁵ The economic prosperity that allowed for the advancement in individual and collective spaces did not have the same affect on the legal protection of these individuals or groups. Homosexuality is not illegal in Mexico but homosexuals have been prosecuted through the use of legal terms that regulate obscene or lurid behavior.²⁶

The Mexican state’s crackdowns on these spaces in order to control ‘morals and good customs’ has undoubtedly played a significant role in fostering organized resistance, as an early lesbian activist in Mexico City recalls:

“The granaderos [riot police] came into the bar [armed with automatic weapons and tear gas] and began beating people up. I didn’t see why. People were drinking coffee, having a drink, just like anyone else. Those of us who managed to leave saw them loading everyone into police cars. So people who didn’t know each other stood at the street corner and began talking about what happened. That’s where I met a women named C., and we decided to continue talking at Sanborn (a nearby restaurant)... And she invited me to a group called Lesbos [the first organized lesbian group in the country], in which she and Y. already participated. It was a consciousness-raising group.”²⁷

Rafael De La Dehesa has extracted numerous testimonies in México City since 1978; which highlight the violence of police procedures and underscore that as a more visible challenge to dominant gender norms, trans people have been particularly targeted by state violence.²⁸

With a drastic change in political institutions since the Mexican Revolution and the forging of a stable and economically prosperous period in the Mexican miracle, why did homosexuals experience the same sort of harassment and castigation seen in the previously

²⁵ De La Dehesa, Rafael. *Queering the Public Sphere in Mexico and Brazil: Sexual Rights Movements in Emerging Democracies*. Duke University Press. 2010. Pg. 16.

²⁶ Middlemist, John. And Herrick, Paul H. Stuart. ed. *Encyclopedia of social welfare history in North America* Sage Publication Inc. 2005. Pg. 144.

²⁷ Dehesa, Rafael de la. *Queering the Public Sphere in Mexico and Brazil: Sexual Rights Movements in Emerging Democracies*. Duke University Press. 2010. Pg. 16.

This discussion occurred between the activist and the author in 2000.

²⁸ Ibid. Pg. 39.

mentioned case of the famous 41? Social scientist Clause Offe (1987) argues that collective bargaining, party competition, and representative party government were the virtually exclusive mechanisms for resolving social and political conflict.²⁹ This created specialized highly institutionalized interest organizations, mostly dominated by political parties, who were endorsed by civic culture. If a group didn't fit this civic culture, like the LGBT community, then they are marginalized. Other outlets for political representation would be forged by these groups within civil society.³⁰ This can be seen in the formation of Lesbos and subsequent other LGBT liberation groups. Interestingly, Offe also explains that "new social movements seek to politicize civil society in ways that are not constrained by representative-bureaucratic political institutions and thereby to reconstitute a civil society independent from increasing control and intervention... these movements claim to civil society itself- its institutions and its very standards of rationality and progress- must employ practices that belong to an intermediate sphere between private pursuit and concerns and institutional, state-sanctioned modes of politics."³¹

In contrast to this view, social scientist Mary Bernstein (2002), finds in her study of the national, state-oriented, U.S. LGBT movement that by distinguishing between "new" and "old," "cultural" and "political" movements impairs an understanding of all social movements. The emphasis on identity and culture on the one hand and politics on the other, even in one social movement, is shifting, multidimensional, and complex, depending on resources, networks, and

²⁹ Clause Offe, "Challenging the boundaries of institutional politics: social movements since the 1960s," in Charles Maier (ed.), *Changing Boundaries of the Political* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) Pg. 67.

³⁰ Ibid. Pg. 68.

³¹ Ibid. Pg. 65.

political conditions. Like Offe (1987), she also contends that the implications of such strategies can, and do, change over time.

Because available resources, social networks, and external political conditions are better able to explain a movement's emphasis on political or cultural strategies and goals than is a reliance on a fixed notion of identity, an LGBT movement would then form both cultural and political goals.³² Cultural goals include (but are not limited to) challenging dominant constructions of masculinity and femininity, homophobia, and the primacy of the gendered heterosexual nuclear family (heteronormativity). Political goals include changing laws and policies in order to gain new rights, benefits, and protections from harm. Activists seek both types of goals in both the civil and political spheres.³³

The rise of a new LGBT social movement in Mexico emerged under a so-called semi-authoritarian regime in the late 1960s and 1970s. The PRI, which had ruled since 1929, maintained tight reins on political hegemony. Violent government crackdown on civil society during this time- part of an ongoing dirty war against the left- and an election in 1976 in which the PRI's presidential candidate ran unopposed further eroded the ruling party's claims to democratic credentials, prompting a number of electoral reforms to strengthen the opposition's formal representation. Dominating both the political and social spheres, a homosexual liberation movement emerged as part of a larger opposition movement, seeking to press the boundaries of democratic change.³⁴

³² Bernstein, Mary. "Identities and Politics: Toward a Historical Understanding of the Lesbian and Gay Movement." *Social Science History*. 26:3 (fall 2002). Pg. 537.

³³ Ibid. Pg. 536.

³⁴ Dehesa, Rafael de la. *Queering the Public Sphere in Mexico and Brazil: Sexual Rights Movements in Emerging Democracies*. Duke University Press. 2010. Pg. 16. This discussion occurred between the activist and the author in 2000. Pg. 2.

Social science literature pertaining to the growth of organizations comes from Robert Dahl's (1974) work on *Organization Pluralism*. This is described as both a cause and effect of the liberalization and democratization of hegemonic regimes.³⁵ The essential principles of democracy, like the freedom to organize, right to vote, right to representation and the like, are important conditions for the growth of organizations, particularly political organizations. This is because they both increase the incentives for forming political organizations and reduce the costs of doing so.³⁶ Important to Dahl's understanding of how groups organize is the notion that in a society with varying groups vying for political power or even representation, it is most feasible in a system where groups are able to organize and have relative autonomy from the government. If groups organize to further their respective demands, they simply foster organizational pluralism.³⁷ Other authors explain how groups organize around their interest through the use of other paradigms, like that of *corporatism*.

Unlike Dahl, Shmitter explores various uses of the concept of *corporatism* in a manner of countering other possible modern configurations of interest representation, of which pluralism is perhaps the best-known and most frequently acknowledged alternative.³⁸ He develops the concept and defines it as "a system of interest and/or attitude representation, a particular model or ideal-typical institutional arrangement for linking the association ally organized interests of civil society with the decisional structures of the state."³⁹ Although

³⁵ Robert Dahl, "Pluralism Revisited," *World Politics* 10, no. 2 (January 1978). Pg. 197.

³⁶ Ibid. Pg. 197.

³⁷ Ibid. Pg. 201. There are draw backs from this however. As stated, "what sets out to be a way of ending conflicts among organized groups may only deepen an existing cleavage or create a new one. In the absence of general agreement on the substantive content of a transcendent public good, each group strives to impose its policies on the rest."

³⁸ Philippe Schmitter, "Still the Century of Corporatism?" *The Review of Politics* 36, 1 (January 1974). Pg. 86.

³⁹ Ibid. Pg. 86.

pluralism and *corporatism* share common characteristics, Schmitter believes that both of these forms “of political organization recognize, accept and attempt to cope with the growing structural differentiation and interest diversity of the modern polity, but they offer opposing political remedies and divergent images of the institutional form that such a modern system of interest representation will take.”⁴⁰ These differences lead him to create an alternate model in expressing why groups organize interests. Corporatization of interest representation is related to basic needs of capitalism to reproduce the conditions for its existence and to accumulate further resources.⁴¹ Accordingly, he finds that corporatism seems to depend very much on pluralist historical past, which involves a history of organizational development, competitive party politics, authenticity of representation, and a previous pattern of organizational autonomy.⁴²

Beginning in the 1970s, influenced by the U.S. gay liberation movement, homosexual men and women formed small political and cultural groups. Collectively, these groups refer to themselves and their efforts as the LGBT movement. In the late 1970s, the groups began to hold yearly gay and lesbian pride marches in Mexico City- attracting thousands of participants.⁴³

Many of the early LGBT activists came from the urban middle classes, including many leaders with close ties to universities and artistic and intellectual communities as well as leftist organizations. Dehesa (2010) explains that In México City the first homosexual liberation group in the country, the Homosexual Liberation Front (FLH), was founded in 1971. This was in

⁴⁰ Ibid. Pg. 97.

⁴¹ Ibid. Pg. 107.

⁴² Ibid. Pg. 126.

⁴³ Middlemist, John. And Herrick, Paul H. Stuart. ed. *Encyclopedia of social welfare history in North America* Sage Publication Inc. 2005. Pg. 144

response to the firing of employees of Sears Roebuck for their homosexuality.⁴⁴ An interview recalling her production in México City of Matt Crowley's *The Boys in the Band* (1968), the theater director Nancy Cardenas,⁴⁵ a founder of the FLH, recalled, "One year after I translated the [play], serious and significant documents produced by homosexual liberation front in the United States and Great Britain began reaching Mexico. These works quickly raised the consciousness of a good number of important Mexican homosexuals."⁴⁶

Mexican LGBT activists maintained ties with the international arena and were certainly aware of gay and lesbian liberation movements were doing elsewhere. Some principles and ideas are perpetuated by activists or advocates in larger transnational networks who plead the causes of others or defend a cause or proposition. This is described by Keck and Sikkink (1998), who explain that these transnational advocacy networks are organized to promote causes, principled ideas, and norms, and they often involve individuals advocating policy changes that cannot be easily linked to a rationalist understanding of their "interests."⁴⁷ The documents propagated by the homosexual liberation front in the United States and Great Britain are a good example of how this social theory functions. It is argued by constructivist theorist that democratic rights are perpetuated through informal means; through a culmination of beliefs that transcend localities, such as international human rights norms. Civil society is made up of

⁴⁴ See also, Feinberg, Leslie. "Struggles for sexual, gender liberation rooted in national liberation movements." *Workers World*. Lavender & red, part 113 Oct 21, 2007. <http://www.workers.org/2007/world/lavender-red-113/>.

⁴⁵ "Poet, journalist, playwright, director, and activist, Nancy Cárdenas was perhaps the first out lesbian public figure in Mexico and a pioneer in the Mexican gay movement. From small-town roots, she traveled extensively to study theater and writing, finally returning to Mexico to become a motivating force in Mexican gay politics and culture." See also, Gianoulis, Tina. "Cárdenas, Nancy." *glbtq: An Encyclopedia of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Culture*. 2002. http://www.glbtq.com/arts/cardenas_n.html.

⁴⁶ Dehesa explains that "the FLH met primarily as a consciousness-raising group maintaining a limited public presence." *Ibid.* Pg. 17.

⁴⁷ Keck, Margaret E., and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998). Pg. 8-9.

these norms, or shared understandings and they operate like rules that define the identity of an actor. This concept is used to describe expectations for the proper behavior of actors within a given identity. According to Keck and Sikkink (1998) they are “constitutive effects” that specify what actions will cause relevant others to recognize a particular identity.⁴⁸ Civil society is not in itself a social force that functions like a social movement. This constructivist notion focuses on complex interactions among actors,⁴⁹ on the intersubjective construction of frames of meaning, and on the negotiation of identities and interests.⁵⁰

These complex interactions among actors, which helped to frame meanings and negotiate identities and interests is manifested in the first public marches by gay and lesbians activists in 1978. Dehesa (2010) explains that the July 26 public marches were in commemoration of the Cuban Revolution. They were the first in Mexico that united activist groups including the Homosexual Revolution Action Front (FHAR), named for a French homosexual liberation group known for its radical politics. The group largely composed of gay men and a few lesbians. On October 2 this public march was joined by Lambda, a group of gay men and lesbians, and the lesbian group Oikabeth in a second march, marking the tenth anniversary of the government massacre of student protestors in México City’s Tlatelolco Plaza.⁵¹ The emergence of these groups marked a new public presence and a clear identification

⁴⁸ Ibid. Pg. 3.

⁴⁹ Actors could include: international and domestic nongovernmental research and advocacy organizations, local social movements, foundations, the media, churches, trade unions, consumer organizations, and intellectuals; parts of regional and international intergovernmental organizations; parts of the executive and or parliamentary branches of government- they share values, exchange information and services, Ibid., Pg. 9.

⁵⁰ Ibid. Pg. 3.

⁵¹ Max Mejía, a founding member of the Grupo Lambda de Liberación Homosexual in Mexico City in 1978, described the massive student uprising in Mexico City during the 1968 Olympics, which resulted in the military slaughter of hundreds of activists. “The demands of the ‘68 student movement included those of an entire generation of Mexican youth. Outstanding among the demands were political freedom and also sexual and personal freedom. Gays and lesbians were among the movement’s activists and main leaders.” See Feinberg,

with the left. These groups would also spearhead an early wave of activism that would last until the mid-1980s.⁵² External shocks curtailed this movement, specifically when the LGBT movement changed activist priorities and strategies. During the 1980s gay and lesbian groups were instrumental in initiating programs to combat AIDS, a shift in focus that curtailed, at least temporarily, emphasis on gay and lesbian organizing.⁵³

In 1982, gay and lesbian activists approached the electoral arena for the first time in Mexico.⁵⁴ This election took place under authoritarian regimes during protracted transitions to formal democracy. In Mexico's presidential and congressional race, activists mobilized around gay and lesbian candidates, forging a tight electoral alliance with a leftists party, the Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT), a small Trotskyist party that, while electorally insignificant, played an important role in both homosexual liberation and feminist movements at the time. According to Dehesa's (2007) field research, for many on the left and in civil society, the challenge was to expand this political project beyond the narrowly institutional and into the social, economic, and in this case sexual terrain.⁵⁵

Mexico City's main LGBT groups held a press conference declaring their support for Rosario Ibarra and urging gay and lesbian citizens to vote. On February 20, the newly founded

Leslie. "Struggles for sexual, gender liberation rooted in national liberation movements." *Workers World*. Lavender & red, part 113 Oct 21, 2007. <http://www.workers.org/2007/world/lavender-red-113/>.

⁵² Dehesa explains that "the FLH met primarily as a consciousness-raising group maintaining a limited public presence." *Ibid.* Pg. 17.

⁵³ Middlemist, John. And Herrick, Paul H. Stuart. ed. *Encyclopedia of social welfare history in North America* Sage Publication Inc. 2005. Pg. 144.

⁵⁴ Dehesa, Rafael de la. "Global Communities and Hybrid Cultures1 Early Gay and Lesbian Electoral Activism in Brazil and Mexico." *Latin American Research Review*, Volume 42, Number 1, 2007, pp. 29-51 (Article). University of Texas Press. 2007. According Dehesa in Mexico, Victor Amezcua Fragoso, the manager of a transvestite theater troop, unsuccessfully sought a candidacy for federal deputy with the ruling PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) in 1979, with actress Veronica Castroas his runningmate. Pg.32.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* Pg. 33.

Rosario Ibarra Lesbian and Homosexual Support Committee (CLHARI) organized a meeting to discuss the election, attended by about 150 activists.⁵⁶ Rather than using the election as an entry way into the state, Dehesa finds that the participants in CLHARI approached the election as a stage for political theater in order to increase the movement's visibility and mobilize support.⁵⁷ Dehesa believes that this act reflected a common skepticism about the efficacy of existing state institutions in changing the relations of power structured around sexual stigma at the level of everyday life. He explains that there was an understanding that:

“In Mexico, the ruling party's hold on power was opposed on the right by the National Action Party (PAN) and on the left by a relatively small community of social movement activists, progressive journalists and intellectuals, and leftist party militants. Beyond the fact that the PAN was an unlikely ally for gay and lesbian activists given its roots in the Catholic Church and its socially conservative base, the divided opposition reinforced a tight-knit though internally diverse ideological community on the left of the ruling party, within which debates on sexuality and gender emerged in the country, particularly in the capital, in the 1970s.”⁵⁸

This observation demonstrates how the queering of politics is used in this promotion of an LGBT social movement. This is not to be interchanged with identity politics, however.

Research from Mary Bernstein (2002) finds in the case of lesbians and gay men, homosexuality is seen as fixed, whether it is conceived of as a result of nature (genes, hormones, etc.) or of nurture—etched indelibly in early childhood socialization resulting in a unitary identity that cannot be altered.⁵⁹ She explains that those who defend this idea view identity politics as a

⁵⁶ Dehesa cites this information from: Durán, J. Martín Moreno. “Apoyo del ‘Tercer Sexo’ a la Candidata del PRT.” *La Prensa*, January 28, 1982; Leslie Serna. “Estaré donde sea que haya un oprimido: RIP.” *Bandera Socialista*, no. 220, March 1, 1982.

⁵⁷ Dehesa, Rafael de la. “Global Communities and Hybrid Cultures Early Gay and Lesbian Electoral Activism in Brazil and Mexico.” *Latin American Research Review*, Volume 42, Number 1, 2007, pp. 29-51 (Article). University of Texas Press. 2007. Pg. 34. He finds this to be the case in an interview of one of the female candidates and members of the group.

⁵⁸ Ibid. Pg. 39.

⁵⁹ Bernstein, Mary. “Identities and Politics: Toward a Historical Understanding of the Lesbian and Gay Movement.” *Social Science History*. 26:3 (fall 2002). Pg.532

strategy necessary to obtain political goals of freedom and equal opportunity in order to gain entry into the political mainstream on the same level as other groups, without altering the structures of society.⁶⁰ In contrast, critics of identity politics see the result of embracing an essentialist identity as a limited and flawed politics because it relies on claims to a racial- or ethnic-like minority status.⁶¹ Whatever the case, a queering of politics has been and is currently taking place within the second half of twentieth-century Mexican history. A majority of the movement has been in the form of group collaboration since social movements have had little choice but to adapt to the new global paradigm of collective action.⁶² Individual strategies are often reinforced or sustained by collective ones. It is here that we see social movements, amongst NGOs, and IOs aiming to transform or adapt a traditional vision of democracy to reality of the new globalized world order.⁶³

After the shock of the AIDs epidemic in the 1980s, the 1990s saw a resurgence in LGBT organization. In 1991, Mexico hosted a meeting of the International Lesbian and Gay Association (IGLA), the first time it had met outside of Europe.⁶⁴ Similarly, International organizations have become active in protecting sexual orientation through human rights policies. The United Nations, through programs and commissions such as The International Labor Office, The Development Program, and the U.N. High Commission for Refugees, are

⁶⁰ Ibid. Pg. 532.

⁶¹ Ibid. Pg. 532.

⁶² Hamel, Pierre. et al. *Globalization and Social Movement*. Antony Rowe Ltd, Chippenham and Eastbourne. 2002. Pg. 13.

⁶³ Ibid. Pg. 13.

⁶⁴ Middlemist, John. And Herrick, Paul H. Stuart. ed. *Encyclopedia of Social Welfare History in North America* Sage Publication Inc. 2005. Pg. 144.

involved in promoting and monitoring the rights of gays and lesbians.⁶⁵ United Nations Conference Resolutions, such as from the Fourth World Conference on Women, call on nations to recognize that women and men must be able to decide freely all matters relating to their sexuality.⁶⁶ However, this UN resolution hasn't been followed by the state of Mexico. According to a 1995 report by the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission Mexican police have launched a wave of repression in the state of Chihuahua:

“According to reports received by the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, gay men and transvestites in the Mexican city of Chihuahua began to suffer an intense campaign of harassment and repression beginning sometime in October of 1994. That repression continues today....Groups operating in Chihuahua have documented a wide range of rights violations conducted by law enforcement officers. These rights violations include verbal harassment, threats, physical attacks, beatings, mass police sweeps (including raids on bars and private homes) extortion, property damage, arbitrary arrests, illegal detentions and torture while in custody...One common pattern is for gay men and transvestites to be stopped on the streets. They are then asked for "fines" of between 200 to 400 pesos. The fines are justified as warranted under trumped up charges of prostitution or offending public morality. Those who cannot or will not pay have been detained for periods lasting thirty six to seventy four hours. Witnesses and passersby who protest police misconduct are threatened with similar treatment...Official complaints to police authorities have been ignored. One witness claims that the chief of the Municipal Police of Chihuahua said that the complaints would not be pursued because homosexuals are 'social problem'.”⁶⁷

The report cited above demonstrates how international civil society has developed also nongovernmental organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) to monitor states' repressive measures related to sexuality and sexual orientation. The IGLHRCs mission is to advance

⁶⁵ Ishay, Micheline R. *The History of Human Rights: From Ancient Times to the Globalization Era*. University of California Press. 2004. Pg. 306-307.

⁶⁶ Ibid. Pg. 298.

⁶⁷ International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission. “Mexico: Police Launch Waves of Repression in Chihuahua.” 04/01/1995. <http://www.iglhrc.org/cgi-bin/iowa/article/takeaction/globalactionalerts/45.html>.

human rights for everyone, everywhere to end discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.⁶⁸

The notion of transnational advocacy networks as linked to new social movements can be exemplified by the political achievements of LGBT groups in Latin America in the 2000s. According to Corrales (2010), the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender movement (comprising such a tiny and often invisible minority) managed to introduce major changes in Latin America. This is a region where homophobia is so entrenched in all aspects of society, but through the construction of frames of meaning, and through the negotiation of identities and interests, the LGBT groups have become relatively successful in resolving their collective action problems. Corrales argues that through the adoption of innovative politics, the LGBT movement has developed the most influential political strategies—in action and thinking—among social movements in contemporary democracies.⁶⁹ In various countries of Latin America, including Mexico, Corrales finds that LGBT groups: promote causes, principled ideas, and norms, as well as, advocate for policy changes by using specific strategies. Some of the strategies include: embracing, not hating globalization- which he deems has historically been a problem for many leftist social movements in the area. By embracing traditional and new forms of media, embracing tourism, and consuming international cultural products, the LGBT social movement is successful in enhancing their bargaining leverage vis-à-vis the state- and subsequently able to achieve many of its goals.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Ibid., <http://www.iglhrc.org/cgi-bin/iowa/article/takeaction/globalactionalerts/45.html>

⁶⁹ Javier Corrales, "Latin American Gays: The Post-Left Leftists," *Americas Quarterly* (March 2010).

⁷⁰ Javier Corrales, "Latin American Gays: The Post-Left Leftists," *Americas Quarterly*. (March 2010).

Near the end of the twentieth-century advocates for policy change had used specific strategies in gaining presence on the national political stage, reinforcing Corrales' notion of the power and influence of this group. In 1997, Mexican LGBT activists were active in constructing the political platform that resulted in Patria Jimenez, a lesbian activist, in México City, being selected for proportional representation position in the Chamber of Deputies representing the center-left Democratic Revolution party (PRD).⁷¹ This example identifies just how far a new LGBT movement has come in Mexico in the context of the twentieth century. Undoubtedly, larger strides will be made in the twenty-first century in both Mexico and within the transnational movement.

The goal of this paper was to demonstrate the evolution of an ethnographic and political history which, through the queering of politics, converges into a new Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT) social movement during the second half of the twentieth century in Mexico. Specific timing, in conjunction with the Mexican state, prominent political actors, interest groups and nongovernmental/transnational organizations (NGOs/TNOs), together, shaped social policy, granted rights, and changed normative attitudes toward the LGBT community in twentieth century Mexico. Through the use of queer and social science theory, ethnographic and anthropological studies, and various secondary literature on sexuality in modern Mexico, this paper has problematize the history and trajectory of this new LGBT social movement. The use of multiple levels of analysis and multiple theories drawn from social science, illuminates how complicated it is to track this social movement and the reasons for its

⁷¹ Middlemist, John. And Herrick, Paul H. Stuart. ed. *Encyclopedia of Social Welfare History in North America* Sage Publication Inc. 2005. Pg. 145.

development. This paper has explored the trends in scholarship on deviant sexuality and on social movements in an attempt to define what constitutes as this new LGBT social movement in the Mexican context. This paper has woven through a social science perspective, important historical events and prominent political figures within this period.

Today, many Mexicans feel that acceptance of homosexuality is a sign of cultural modernity.⁷² Change in values, attitudes, preferences and conceptions of identity have come in various forms and in various periods in Mexican history. Those who are involved in social reform have been influenced by the new social paradigm of globalization. The relation between reform and revolution is of crucial significance to all groups involved in the process of political change. Those who want social change believe that reform is a substitute for revolution and precisely for this reason attempts to achieve greater social and economic equality through peaceful means.⁷³ The peaceful LGBT social movement that has taken form in the second half of the twentieth century in Mexico is emblematic of this notion. Mexican political culture is characterized by the promises of the revolution. It is through the historical and path dependent argument of one event building upon another that has led to a greater and more visible social movement; one that peacefully advocates equality, human rights, protection and solidarity in a once highly gendered and machismo culture.

⁷² Ibid. Pg. 145.

⁷³ Huntington, Samuel. *Political Order in Changing Societies*. Yale University Press. 1996. Pg. 365.

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