

Homosexuality

Society and the State in Mexico

Ian Lumsden

Canadian Gay Archives
Solediciones

**Homosexuality, Society
And The State In Mexico**

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To

Max Mejía
gay activist
who epitomizes
all that is best of Mexico

Solediciones, the editorial branch of Colectivo Sol, renews its activities with *Homosexuality, Society, and the State in Mexico*, written by Ian Lumsden, a Canadian gay academic. It constitutes the first publication dealing with the history of homosexuality and the gay liberation movement in Mexico. Generally, Mexicans are more put out than sympathetic to a foreigner writing about Mexico. In this case, however, the book is written by a foreigner who is gay and who is writing from this particular perspective about homosexuality in Mexico.

The text at hand is part of a broader comparative study of homosexuality in three Latin American countries: Cuba, Costa Rica and Mexico. The part dealing with Mexico undoubtedly represents a landmark in literature dealing with homosexuality in our country. Although anthologies dealing with the subject have already been published by Xabier Lizarraga this is the first time that we have a book entirely devoted to the subject.

Furthermore, the fact that it is appearing simultaneously in English and Spanish, co-published by Colectivo Sol and the Canadian Gay Archives of Toronto, Canada, is important to us, and is an experience that we may well want to repeat in the future. The absence of material dealing with homosexuality produced by individuals and groups involved in our country's gay liberation movement is something that must come to an end.

It can be expected that the viewpoint expressed by the author will provoke debate that can only enrich the subject matter. We hope that in the near future, many gay activists and writers will offer us their own versions of events.

Juan Jacobo Hernández,
Mexico, June, 1991.

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Preface

This study forms part of a larger comparative study of Mexico, Costa Rica and Cuba which I have been undertaking during the last few years. I decided to make the Mexican section available in the present format because of uncertainty as to when the broader study would be completed. I also wanted to publish the text in a way that would make it more accessible to Mexicans, given that most academic studies are least available to those who are most affected by their contents.

The title of the work refers simply to homosexuality, since that is usually taken to be synonymous with *male* homosexuality in Mexico. I have not attempted to include lesbianism in my study, not because of lack of concern, but rather because I believe that it would be more appropriate for a woman to undertake such a study. Clearly my study is based upon "participant observation", as well as upon more conventional academic sources such as written texts and interviews. In the course of this study I have made numerous trips to Mexico, a country which I have known for nearly thirty years. To be able to do so is an expression of privilege as much as of affinity (I was born and raised in Latin America). I hope that Mexicans will feel that I have made good use of my privilege and will find it useful in their struggles, and that it will help others to see the connection between homosexual oppression and underdevelopment.

I could not have carried out this study without the help of countless Mexicans, many of whom may not have been aware of the fact. I cannot thank them enough. Amongst those who have been most helpful, in no particular order, are Max Mejía, Pedro Preciado, Jaime Leroux, Juan Jacobo Hernández, José María Covarrubias, Gerardo Ortega, Francisco Galván, José Dimayuga, Juan Carlos Bautista and last but not least Luis Zapata. There are many others such as "Eduardo" of Oaxaca who graciously consented to long taped interviews that I was not able to include in my text, even though that had been my original intention. Finally there are those wonderful Mexicans whose generosity kept my spirits alive when I felt completely defeated by the overwhelming technical, economic, and human problems that beset an underdeveloped country. I would also like to thank David Thorstad in New York and friends in Canada, most of all Linda Briskin, without whose encouragement, I would not have completed this project. Thanks are also due to Atkinson College, York University, Toronto, which has supported my work in various ways and funded the translation by Luis Zapata.

Introduction to Mexico

Mexico City: An Introduction to Life at the Brink

Mexico City offers some of the most telling evidence of the anarchy, bankruptcy and social violence of dependent capitalism in Latin America. The site of the present-day capital of Mexico has fulfilled a similar function throughout most of the recorded history of Mesoamerica. Teotihuacán (on the outskirts of Mexico City), which was founded more than two thousand years ago, was the largest city in the world before it was destroyed in the seventh century. The Aztecs, who were to succeed the Toltecs as the dominant power of Mesoamerica, constructed an equally impressive imperial center known as Tenochtitlán. Its size and splendor rivalled those of Paris and Venice, and its population far exceeded that of Seville, Spain's largest city in the fifteenth century. The Spaniards were overwhelmed by the sophisticated planning that linked palaces, temples and over fifty thousand houses through an elaborate system of causeways and aqueducts.

Tenochtitlán was clearly a huge metropolis for it was also the trade and service center for one and a half million people who lived in the adjoining valley prior to the Spanish conquest. Nevertheless, the Aztecs seem to have had some understanding and respect for the ecological limitations to the city's growth. By accident, more than design, the population of Mexico City grew slowly during the next four centuries, and only reached half a million by the beginning of the twentieth century. Even this figure may have been a challenge to the physical inhospitality of its site. For its location is 7,400 feet above sea level, surrounded by mountains, depleted of fresh water, and is hundreds of miles from the sea or navigable rivers. It is also at the center of an earthquake zone, as was tragically demonstrated in 1985.

The city, whose foundations have been literally drained from beneath it, is now veritably sinking under the weight of close to 20 million inhabitants. The old centre of the city, which was most affected by the 1985 earthquake is currently sinking by *only* 10 centimeters a

year (the Palacio de Bellas Artes in the centre of the city has dropped about 4 meters since its completion in 1934). Outlying areas such as Nezahualcóyotl are now trying to catch up. Neza (as it is popularly called) sinks at the rate of 31 centimeters a year. The only reminder of the beautiful lake of Texcoco, which so delighted the Spaniards when they arrived at the Aztec capital is the powdered excrement which is blown off the parched lagoon beds each spring before the summer rains settle the sewage deposits for a few months. Over thirteen thousand tons of metal, chemical and bacterially contaminated dust particles are reputedly released into the atmosphere each day. Smog is so bad that the surrounding mountains are normally invisible to the city's inhabitants. The snow-clad cones of Popocatepetl and Iztaccíhuatl which were once as synonymous with Mexico City as the Sugar Loaf is with Rio de Janeiro may never be seen again from the city.

It is not for nothing that Mexico City has the dubious distinction of being the most contaminated of any major metropolis in the world. The level of air pollution is almost three times higher than the maximum levels recommended by the World Health Organization. Though most of the pollution is caused by the city's three million vehicles, the government is blithely going ahead in the expectation that there will be seven million vehicles in the city by the end of the century. Massive new arterial thoroughfares are constantly being ploughed through the city to no avail. You can't avoid the congestion any more than the pollution. There are no more than three square meters of parkland per inhabitant in comparison to the nine meters recommended by the World Health Organization. On any weekend there are over one and a half million people searching for a blade of grass in Chapultepec's thousand acre park. Trees and birdlife are dying all around, most notably in the fabled Alameda Central and the once gracious Paseo de la Reforma.

Given the terrible conditions described in *The Children of Sanchez*, Oscar Lewis' famous study of urban poverty in Mexico City, published in 1961, it is horrifying to realize that there are even more people living in such conditions today. Lewis was describing life in the central "vecindades" or tenements. None of these have disappeared except for those that have been bulldozed to make way for urban renewal projects and arteries that service the needs of the middle and upper classes. But in addition to the two million or more people who live in "vecindades" you now have several million more people living in the "colonias populares" and "barriadas" or squatter settlements that have sprung up around the rim of the city.

Life is becoming worse even for the skilled working class whose fortunes were once improving. Real wages have been more than halved in the last decade. Consumption of all basic proteins, such as eggs, milk and meat, and even beans, rice and maize has dropped dramatically. Almost anywhere in Mexico City, you can expect to find people degraded by poverty, malnutrition, disease and ignorance.¹ Their plight mocks the demagogic rhetoric of the politicians who have monopolized power for over half a century on behalf of a mythologized social revolution. The affluence of the rich, who have never had it so good, bespeaks only too clearly whose interests are really served by the "institutionalized revolutionary" regime. The stock market has boomed like never before in recent years.

To see only the poverty and inequality of Mexico City, however, would be to miss the other component of the city's life. Despite the dreadful stress incumbent upon living in such conditions, the inhabitants of De Efe (as the Federal District is known) have a spirit and zest for life that characterize all great cities. For gay men the city has many attractions. Cute "chavos" and intriguing men abound in every direction. They may not be the best looking in Mexico, but they have verve and spunk to make up for it. Like other Latin Americans they also have a serenity and physical grace that a lifetime of workouts at Gold's or the Y.M.C.A. cannot attain.

Despite the notoriety they enjoy in other parts of the country, its inhabitants, popularly known as "chilangos", always retain their essential humanity. At rush hours, the crowds in the superb Metro system may exceed our worst fantasies about those in Tokyo's, but for much of the rest of the day, people are amazingly patient, courteous and generous of spirit, qualities that are increasingly scarce in the rest of North America. "Chilangos" may be as frustrating and disorganized as the city itself — unpunctual and unreliable — but they always retain the warmth and spontaneity that characterize Latin Americans. As they say, "Mexicans may not be civilized, but they have such a rich culture" — an incredibly expressive use of language, joyous music, emotion-

* Mexican term for young male.

** Whereas "Americans are so civilized but..."

filled fiestas, a love of public art, a sense of history and tradition, inventive cuisine, beautiful and ingenious crafts, — the list could go on and on. To reduce the appeal of Mexico City to this level of sentiment, however, would be to do it an injustice. Even more than most great cities, De Efe is full of striking contrasts and diversity. There are appalling slums and tenements, but also gorgeous baroque buildings and striking skyscrapers that can match those of any other great metropolis. In a country which is barely literate, you also find great writers and artists, museums and academies that rank with the best. There is a thriving intellectual life amongst the elites. In Mexico City you are always aware that you are at the hub of Hispanic America. Though Mexico's political regime may not be that much less repressive than more than one recent dictatorship in the region, its civil society has a vitality that is beyond the dreams of Cuba (and in some respects of Costa Rica).

The diversity and vitality of public life in Mexico City are reflected in the decline of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional, the P.R.I., which has monopolized power for over half a century, and in the rise of radical challenges from the Left and Right. It is reflected in the debates about art, religion, and censorship, and about the relationship of traditional morality to sexual education in the age of A.I.D.S. And more to the point, it is reflected in the wide diversity of identities and values in the increasingly visible homosexual component of its culture. Outrageous transvestites are just as much a part of the gay scene in Mexico City, as are the respectable patrons of L'Barón, one of the more expensive discos, or the middle-class hunks who work out in the San Francisco gay gym in the heart of the Zona Rosa. "Miss Alex", who once did a show-stopping rendition of Mireille Mathieu in the Spartacus disco on the outskirts of the city and who was prominent in the early gay rights demonstrations, is just as legitimate a representative of the city's homosexual communities as Luis González de Alba, a prominent intellectual and bar-owner who is hell bent on transforming the patrons of his bars into North American-style ghetto clones, or Gerardo Ortega,

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- * In 1980, approximately two thirds of those over 15 years of age had not completed primary school, and almost forty per cent were considered to be functionally illiterate. Consejo Nacional del Programa de Solidaridad, *El Combate a la Pobreza*, El Nacional, Mexico, 1991. p. 46.

a one-time drag queen and master of "gender fuck" who has given up his beauty salon to organize the street people of Neza.

The Diversity of Mexico

Speculative as it may be to make generalizations about sexuality in Costa Rica and Cuba, they may have some validity insofar as they refer to small countries with homogeneous populations. Cuba and Costa Rica are relatively integrated countries which are not riven by major linguistic, ethnic, or geographic divisions, all of which exist in Mexico. Class divisions, too, seem much less divisive in Costa Rica and Cuba than in many other Latin American countries whose relatively small middle and upper classes are surrounded by dispossessed masses, as in the case of Brazil, Peru, Colombia and, of course, Mexico itself.

Mexico has undergone a massive transformation in the last few decades. In 1940, only thirty five per cent of its population was urban, while sixty five per cent was rural. By 1990, the ratio was well reversed. In the meantime the population of the country had more than tripled. Mexico had not only become urbanized but it had also become one of the most industrialized countries in the Third World. Until the mid-twentieth century whole regions were isolated behind impenetrable mountain ranges and barren deserts. Mexico is now covered by a network of major roads and a public transportation system that crisscrosses the country, and it has also acquired a national television grid that brings soap operas and government propaganda to almost every shanty-town and rural pueblo in the country.

Nevertheless, Mexico remains an extraordinarily diverse country, one that is "inhabited by a number of races speaking different languages and living on different historical levels".² Mexico City lies a world apart from the ten million Indians who belong to 56 distinct cultures, for whom Spanish represents an alien way of life. In the state of Oaxaca alone, there are at least 12 native languages. 42 different dialects are spoken by the Zapotec Indians alone (not to mention those of other major indigenous cultures such as the Mixtecos, Mazatecos, Chinantecos and Mixes). Every rural pueblo in Mexico retains its own distinctive traditions and religious fiestas. Although the urban culture of major cities such as Guadalajara and Monterrey obviously has much more in common with that of Mexico City they, too, seem very remote from the federal capital. This is even more true of outlying provincial centers, such as Mérida or Tuxtla Gutiérrez, the state capitals of Yucatán and Chiapas. Most inhabitants of provincial cities still identify themselves

with self-contained local cultures and are largely indifferent to what goes on in Mexico City. And the only thing that they may have in common with the inhabitants of other provincial cities is a resentful awareness of De Efe's pervasive impact upon the economy of the rest of the country. In the Federal District itself, a wide chasm separates the largely impoverished world of Neza from that of lower middle class colonias such as Vallejo, not to mention Juárez and Roma which offer homes to many of the city's gay discos and their patrons, let alone Las Lomas and Polanco which house the very rich.

The character of modern Mexico is a reflection of two quite distinct historical processes. The first has revolved around the interaction between the criollo mestizo culture that emanated from the Spanish conquest, and the strong indigenous cultures that awaited Cortés. The second process involves the struggle of the whole country to withstand the pressures of its omnipotent neighbour to the north which devoured half of Mexico's territory in the mid-nineteenth century, and whose corporations increasingly dominate its contemporary economy and culture.

The polarity of indigenous and mestizo cultures is evident between and within regions. For example, the impoverished southern states of Oaxaca and Chiapas, where over a third of the population speak native languages, remain bastions of Indian culture which is essentially despised by most middle class mestizos living in the central and northern regions of the country. But within Oaxaca itself, the fact that the majority of the population share a Zapotec and Mixtec heritage does not ensure that these cultures are respected in the state capital itself. Those who wield power in the city of Oaxaca are as anxious to promote the assimilation of Indians into the mainstream as most of the state capital's 510 hinterland "municipios" are to preserve their cultural autonomy.

The complexity of Mexico's dichotomous cultural history is exemplified by the life of Benito Juárez, an impoverished Zapotec Indian who learned Spanish as a second language and rose to become president of Mexico in the mid-nineteenth century. He may be the most revered Indian in Mexico's history since Cuauhtémoc. But he may have also contributed as much as any other president to the erosion of the Indian way of life as a result of his agrarian reform which decimated the communal lands upon which the indigenous culture was based. Nevertheless, in destroying much of the power of the Catholic hierarchy and colonial institutions which Mexico had inherited from Spain, he also established the basis for a modern state, which however inade-

quately, reflects and respects its Indian component to an extent that surpasses that of any other country in the Western Hemisphere.

Though Indian cultures are more predominant in the south, they survive throughout most of Mexico. The Huichol Indians in the central state of Nayarit have resisted assimilation as strongly as any other indigenous group. And so have the Tarahumara Indians in the northern border state of Chihuahua. Nevertheless, as a general rule, Mexico's culture becomes more mestizo towards the central highlands and regions to the north. The character of its rural population also changes commensurately from one that is primarily peasant and subsistent, to one that is more directly tied to capitalist land tenure. In the process, rural inhabitants become more dependent upon wage employment and seasonal migration, and increasingly absorb values associated with the urbanization and industrialization that has changed the face of the northern half of Mexico since 1946.

All of Mexico is also inexorably caught in the orbit of American culture and economic power. Repulsed as many Mexicans may be by the inter-personal values of the American way of life and resentful of U.S. claims to dominion over the rest of the Western Hemisphere, they nevertheless remain hypnotized by U.S. mass culture, and are more assiduous consumers of its corporate products than any other Latin American country. At no time is this more evident than at Christmas as Santa Claus and consumerism displace age-old communal traditions and religious festivities. As you move up-scale within Mexico's class system and traverse the country towards the border, culture becomes increasingly Americanized and alienated from its traditional roots.

Throughout Mexico's history there has been a continuous tension between identification with the indigenous values of the Indian people and the values implanted by the Spanish conquest. Did Spain introduce civilization or destroy culture? Did the Catholic Church, in particular, civilize the "barbaric" Indians, or has it only represented the forces that exploited the indigenous people who had formerly created one of the greatest empires, albeit a brutal one, in the history of mankind? Who is the real hero of Mexico, Hernán Cortés who conquered the Aztecs and implanted the European institutions that would transform Mesoamerica, or Cuauhtémoc who died heroically resisting the Spanish invaders? Just as the ascendant social forces in Mexico have opted for the values associated with Cortés, even while repudiating him in principle — unlike Pizarro's remains which are the centerpiece of Lima's Cathedral, the whereabouts of Cortés' body have until recently been

systematically obscured in Mexico, and there is not a single public monument named after him in the whole country — so has the dominant class opted for ever greater economic and cultural integration with the United States, even while symbolically rejecting its influence at every turn.

Despite the omnipresence of its rich and complex traditional culture, modern capitalism is clearly the driving force that is shaping Mexico's present character and which is responsible for the polarities that presage greater political tensions in the future. Its capital accounts for forty per cent of Mexico's industrial production, while its hinterlands are drained of wealth and knowledge. The distribution of national income is becoming equally distorted as a result of current economic policies. By 1990, the richest 5 per cent of the population received no less than a third of national income, whereas the bottom 40 per cent received a mere 12.8 per cent of national income. The result, as even the Government has had to admit, is that 41 million Mexicans, or half the population, now live in a state of poverty and 17 million in a state of indigency.³ The iniquity and irrationality of the Mexico's political economy are evident for all to see. So is the clash in values between the sixty five per cent of the population which is under 25 years of age, and the older generations tied to institutions that have outlived their original purpose. The fifty million Mexicans who have been added to the country's population since 1960 are the products of the age of television and mass-marketing, for whom the P.R.I. regime seems either irrelevant or represents little other than bureaucracy, corruption and repression.

Mexico is now plainly in the midst of a major economic, social and political crisis. There is no immediate prospect of economic recovery or of restoration of living standards for the mass of the population. In particular, the employment prospects of the million and a half young Mexicans who are added to the official labour force each year are hopeless. The question is how long the present regime can survive given its blatant incapacity to solve the material needs of the population, and how long the potentially explosive mass of young urban inhabitants can be contained without resorting to even more repression and the assumption of explicitly dictatorial forms. Mexico is already essentially a political dictatorship, for no effective parliamentary or extra-parliamentary opposition is tolerated. Although the necessity of allowing some meaningful opposition to be expressed has been conceded since 1977, no alternative party was allowed to win office in even one of Mexico's 32 states, or occupy a seat in the Senate until the 1988

elections. With great reluctance, the regime then conceded victory to the right-wing Partido Acción Nacional (P.A.N.) in Baja California Norte.

In all fairness, however, it should be added that violent repression has not been the chief means by which the P.R.I. has been able to retain power. It has certainly been used when necessary, as evidenced by the massacre of over three hundred students prior to the Olympic Games in 1968. The P.R.I. is also complicit in the torture, assassination and "disappearance" of hundreds of its political opponents which have occurred in recent years, particularly in rural parts of the country. But, in the main, the P.R.I. has retained power by inheriting and exploiting the mystique of the revolution begun in 1910 and by using carrot and stick to coopt or intimidate any opposition. Cooptation, manipulation and occasionally violent repression have worked for most of this century. However it is one thing to retain power in an illiterate, rural society with the help of local "caciques". It is another matter to continue exercising it over a mass of young urban inhabitants who are increasingly aware of their hopeless personal prospects.

From the perspective of homosexuals, the saving grace of the P.R.I. regime is that it does not exercise power in the name of an official exclusionary ideology. The P.R.I. is a pragmatic coalition of forces that has presided over a process that has brought about an increasingly pluralistic society. Mexico City may be a calamity in terms of social conditions, but it has a cultural and intellectual vitality that is conspicuously absent in staid San Jose and bureaucratic Havana. The circulation of newspapers may be minimal, but newspapers like *Unomásuno* and *La Jornada*, which are gay-positive and pro-feminist, and *El Nacional*, (which despite being owned by the government, includes a wide spectrum of opinion) and which are read by much of the elite, have no equivalent in Cuba or Costa Rica (nor in North America). The coverage of internal politics in most dailies, particularly

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- For example, the creation of the National Commission of Human Rights and of the Programa Nacional de Solidaridad (Pronasol) — a national anti-poverty programme — by the present government could be interpreted with a certain amount of scepticism regarding the government's motives, but it is undoubtedly the case that they also represent responses to pressures within and without the P.R.I. to address the country's social problems. They are not merely demagogic gestures.

that which touches upon the role of the president himself, may be written by hacks whose articles respond to official bribes rather than to hard facts; but major newspapers such as *Excelsior*, *Universal*, and *El Día* also contain radical commentary, and a breadth and balance of world news that are not available in the American and Canadian press. Although to be sure, most Mexicans read the tabloid yellow press such *Angustia*, *Alarde*, and *Peligro*, comics, and illustrated pulp romances which cost as much as newspapers, there are also excellent radical independent magazines such as *Proceso*, *Punto*, *Siempre!*, and *Nexos*, the like of which are beyond the reach of those who live in Costa Rica or Cuba. Even *Diva*, a defunct, soft porn monthly, had a style and intelligence that seems more characteristic of Europe than of North America.

Universities in Mexico are in a precarious condition. Budgets which were already inadequate have been reduced even further. Nevertheless, universities remain critical centres grappling with real social and political issues, not least of which is the role of the university in a dependent, underdeveloped country that is essentially in a state of bankruptcy. It is doubtful that most students in the state universities receive much of an education given the open admission policies, huge classes, paltry library resources and so forth. Nevertheless, their political awareness is once again mounting, and they promise to play a major role in the political transformation of the country. *La Guillotina*, the radical cultural magazine, largely written by students and associates of public universities can stand on its own in any company when it comes to political insight, and sexual-cultural avant-gardism.

Mexico City has a lively publishing industry and an extensive range of bookstores. Once again you can really appreciate how fortunate its inhabitants are in comparison to those of San Jose, whose two major bookstores sell texts as if they were household decorations, and to those of Havana, of whose state bookstores, the least said the better. Nevertheless, as one might expect, most Mexicans prefer to watch

* The April, 1988, issue, for example, contained a long interview with Heberto Castillo, the socialist P.M.S. presidential candidate in the 1988 elections regarding sexual politics, an article by Carlos Monsiváis, currently Mexico's most celebrated intellectual, fiction by Mario Vargas Llosa, and three articles on A.I.D.S. from a gay-positive perspective.

television than to engage in any other cultural activity. The major television channels such as Televisa's channel 2, which produces the *Eco* news-casts and Jacobo Zabludovsky's 24 *Horas* of nightly propaganda, as well as *Siempre en Domingo*, which despite, or because of, its unctuous sexism is the most popular variety programme in Mexico, are quite dreadful. In essence, Televisa, the commercial network, has been allowed to monopolize television, saturating its audience with Americanized mass culture in exchange for being abject apologists for the P.R.I..

Lest it be thought that too much emphasis is being given to the cultural assets of Mexico City which are relevant to the intellectual elites and educated middle class, it should be stressed once again that the bright side of Mexico City is but a shaft of light that scarcely illuminates the dimness of the cultural environment that envelopes the mass of its population. As Heberto Castillo, leader of the defunct Mexican Socialist Party, the P.M.S., has rightly pointed out, "economic misery leads to all other miseries. The idea that the poor are more worthy may serve to excuse wealth. But, in fact, poverty deteriorates the body, the human spirit and personal behaviour".⁴

Notes

¹ See the Consejo Consultivo del Programa Nacional de Solidaridad, *El Combate a la Pobreza*, El Nacional, Mexico, 1991, pp. 19-57, for a most telling account of how living conditions have deteriorated during the last decade.

² Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, Grove Press, New York, 1961, p. 11.

³ See Consejo Consultivo del Programa Nacional de Solidaridad (Pronasol), *El Combate a la Pobreza*, pp. 20-22.

⁴ Roberto Diego Ortega, "Coversación: Heberto Castillo", *Diva*, April, 1988, p. 56.

The Sodomitic and Machista Background

It would be nice to believe that sex, and homosexuality in particular, was alive and well in Mexico, but it would be extremely naive to believe that such could be the case given the country's cultural heritage and the appalling social conditions that prevail in its capital and much of the remainder of the country. Machismo, rooted in the subjugation of women in the pre-Columbian civilization, and reinforced by the Catholic medieval values that accompanied the Spanish conquest, has been perpetuated by a popular culture that combines ignorance and social violence.

The Spaniards were not responsible for introducing "homophobia" into much of Mexico, as must surely have been the case in Cuba and Costa Rica, where the indigenous people were scarce and either exterminated or soon assimilated into the dominant colonial culture. In contrast, although the native Indians were literally decimated by disease and forced labour in Mexico, they always vastly outnumbered the Spaniards^{**} and resisted cultural and social assimilation for several centuries. The dominant culture in Mesoamerica on the eve of the Spanish conquest was that of the Aztec empire which severely penalized

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- * The term "homophobia" will be used to refer to the contempt directed against identifiable homosexuals, rather than to the fear of same-sex sex *per se* (and the hostility derived from it), which is at the core of Anglo-American homophobia.
 - ** According to some estimates there were 25 million Indian inhabitants in Mesoamerica on the eve of the Spanish conquest. Their number had declined to 4.2 million within half a century. But Spaniards and mestizos only numbered 113,000. Their number continued to decline, reaching a nadir of 1.25 million in 1646, at which time, Spaniards and mestizos numbered 285,000. Numbers were not matched until the late eighteenth century. Charles C. Cumberland, *Mexico: The Struggle for Modernity*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1968. p.367.

sex between people of the same sex. However, as always, its practice was not extirpated. In fact, according to the accounts of some Spanish chroniclers such as Bernal Díaz del Castillo, the Spanish conquerors were shocked by the extent of sodomy in the coastal regions of Veracruz and Michoacán. Hernán Cortés reported back to Spain that "(the inhabitants of Veracruz) are all sodomites and have recourse to that abominable sin".¹ Spaniards were also indignant on discovering a few carved idols in Yucatán which apparently depicted homoerotic acts.

Antonio Requena makes a persuasive argument that sodomy was "widely practised by the inhabitants of pre-Columbian America"² However, an element of caution may be in order. Do we really have the means to know how widespread same-sex sex may have been? Do we know what meaning it had in terms of the sexual orientation of those who practised it? Moreover, it must be borne in mind that the Spaniards had a vested interest in exaggerating its incidence, since prevalence of the "abominable sin" amongst the indigenous people could be used to justify their "mission civilatrice" in New Spain. Conversely, Bartolomé de las Casas, the great defender of the Indians' human rights, was outraged that the discovery of a few idols could be used to defame all of the Mayan people. According to him, they were much less likely to engage in it than other people. In fact, Las Casas was emphatic that sodomy was rarely practised, and was never condoned by the Indians, particularly by those who lived in Mexico and Tezcucó (the Aztecs).³

The Aztec rulers executed anyone who engaged in sodomy within their own domain in the central highlands. (They also garroted women who had sex with other women).⁴ Particularly severe punishments were reserved for "cuiloni" the passive effeminate sexual partners who were burned to death subsequent to having their entrails wrenched out through "the conduit that had been used for sex" (as Salvador Novo put

* I use the term same-sex sex when the meaning of "homosexual" acts is not necessarily the same as is commonly understood in North American today. I prefer same-sex to same-gender because gender (a social construct) may differ, as in the case of masculine "mayates" and feminine "vestidas".

** For example, the homoerotic idols discovered in Yucatán amounted to no more than two, according to J. Eric S. Thompson, *Maya History and Religion*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1970. p.21.

it in one of his most evocative essays).⁵ Furthermore, unlike many Indian tribes in other parts of North America in which cross-dressing "berdaches" were both common and respected by the Indian cultures, the Aztecs executed any man caught dressing as a woman.

The Aztec rulers were also sexist. Adultery was subject to capital punishment but female prostitution was tolerated. Married men were allowed to have concubines provided that they otherwise honoured the official status of their wives. On the other hand, tight restrictions were placed on women's sexuality as well as upon the "way they spoke, walked, used gestures, and language".⁶ The gender of males was similarly regulated to uphold a dominant form of masculinity. To ensure that adolescent males would incorporate appropriate masculine values, they were groomed to become warriors in separate schools. Phallic symbols accompanied warriors into battle while their enemies were ridiculed for their sexual impotency and femininity.⁷ Aztec values therefore easily adapted to the sexist, homophobic values that accompanied the Spaniards, for "they both made marriage and motherhood the focal points of women's roles, and condemned abortion and homosexuality alike".⁸ And they both reserved the assertion of sexual desire for males.

However, their motives may have differed. Condemnation of same-sex sex and cross-dressing amongst the Aztecs may have been motivated by their militarism and concern for social stability, in relation to which the family was considered a central institution. They advocated self-discipline and sexual restraint amongst their youth.⁹ But they were not prudish. They acknowledged the value of sexuality at the personal level, and represented sexual lust and diversity in all its variety at the ritual level. One of their deities, Tlazolteotl, was worshipped as the Goddess of "sensual pleasure and voluptuousness", while other deities such as Xochipilli and Xochiquétzal protected "illicit" sexual relations and even prostitution.¹⁰ Furthermore, unlike the Spaniards, the Aztecs did not conquer the whole region, nor did they seek to impose their moral values on those they had conquered but allowed them to keep their institutions and customs.

The Spaniards, on the other hand, were obsessed by their goal of suppressing sexual diversity. Their centuries-long crusade to drive the Moors out of the Iberian peninsula left a heritage of intolerance and persecution of non-conformists which accompanied them on their conquest of the New World. They were religious fanatics who had been determined to extirpate any vestige of Moorish culture, which was much more relaxed about sodomitic practices, from Spain.

Males who practised homosexuality were persecuted and executed during the Spanish Inquisition in a manner that matched the Aztecs for bestiality. Those who engaged in sodomy could be burned to death for their sins, as was true in the much publicized case involving 14 homosexuals in 1658. During the republican period, Mexican authorities gradually became more lenient subsequent to the legal reforms that took place in the mid-nineteenth century. Nevertheless, as late as 1901, 41 upper-class homosexuals were rounded up in Mexico City and many deported to do forced labour in the Yucatán for their sins. Furthermore, though the state may have become more acquiescent to private homosexuality, publicly identified homosexuals such as the flamboyant man of letters, Salvador Novo, were subjected to abusive public campaigns subsequent to the Revolution. Nonetheless, Salvador Novo would become one of Mexico's most celebrated writers, courted by government and cultural elites alike (even though he continued to be targeted by certain sectors of the nationalist Left). In the 1930's some of the most prominent artists and intellectuals in Mexico, such as Juan O'Gorman and Jesus Silva Herzog, tried to have homosexuals included amongst the government employees who were to be investigated as potential counter-revolutionaries by a Committee of Public Health.¹¹

In terms of social prejudice, effeminate homosexuals remained at the bottom of the heap. But women did not fare much better. In fact, their lot under Spanish colonial rule was worse than it had been under the Aztecs. Double sexual standards became more acute.¹² Female prostitution was tolerated under republican rule just as it had been

* The term "homosexual" will be used to describe males who habitually have sex with other males, while recognizing its conceptual limitations. Aside from the fact that the term was not coined until the late nineteenth century, it is still barely used in rural and popular urban districts of Mexico. As we shall see, most Mexicans have, until recently, labelled people according to variations in masculine gender in association with beliefs that relate to the role they are assumed to play in same-sex sexual acts. In principle, the term homosexual is best used as an adjective to describe a type of sexual act, rather than as a noun to describe a type of sexual identity. But sexual regulation (and indeed common usage amongst educated Mexicans) have so popularized its use in the second sense that it seems pedantic to avoid using it as a noun with reference to sexual orientation.

** "41" has since become a code word for homosexuals in Mexico.

under the Aztecs. Brothels were fully legalized in the early nineteenth century. By 1905, there were no less than 120 officially registered prostitutes for every thousand inhabitants in Mexico City.¹³ And, as before, the sexuality of "decent" women was denied and mystified. As far as the Catholic church was concerned sex could only take place within marriage for purposes of reproduction. Sexual roles within marriage were explicit in their attribution of submission and innocence to women, as laid down, for example, in the civil marriage oath that was enacted in 1863. (Even though it no longer has any legal standing it is frequently used to this very day, as we were reminded in the film *Doña Herlinda and Her Son*):

The man whose sexual attributes are principally courage and strength should, and will give protection, food and guidance to the woman, treating her always as the most delicate, sensitive and pure part of himself, and with the magnanimity and benevolent generosity that the strong person owes the weak one, especially when the weak one has delivered herself to him and when society has entrusted her to him. The woman whose principal attributes are abnegation, beauty, compassion, perspicacity, and tenderness, should and will give her husband obedience, pleasure, assistance, consolation and counsel, always treating him with the veneration due to the person that supports and defends her.¹⁴

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- The expression reflects more than a mere ritual as Lourdes Benería and Martha Roldán found in their study of women living in very poor neighbourhoods in Mexico City. "...all wives thought that their behavior - in the domestic and public spheres - should not transgress the limits imposed by the 'respect' owed their 'masters'...(i.e) obedience and deference". *The Crossroads of Class and Gender: Industrial Homework, Subcontracting, and Household Dynamics in Mexico City*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1987. p.139.

Despite Mexico's modernization and the fact that Mexican women outside the middle and upper classes work from dawn to dusk, there is still great resistance on the part of many Mexican men to allow their women to enter the paid labour force. As late as 1970 only 10% of married women went out to work. In poorer neighbourhoods women often have to disguise the means by which they supplement the family income, for their husbands believe as a matter of honour that wives should remain at home. Consequently, although women's participation in the labour force is rising, it is rising very slowly in comparison to countries such as Cuba. For the most part Mexican females are still "conditioned and limited to the fulfilment of a series of roles which could be summed up as those of wife, mother and ideal housewife".¹⁵ In quantitative terms, at least, they performed these roles admirably for by 1977 Mexico had a population growth rate of 3.7 per cent, a figure which has been exceeded by few other countries in the world. The cultural and political oppression of Mexican women is striking, even in comparison to other Latin Americans. For example, they only obtained the right to vote in 1953.

It is within this general historical and cultural context that the contemporary family has evolved along with its inseparable component — the Mexican "madre". The family, and the mother within it, is the central reference point for all Mexicans. "Madres" are the embodiment of the objectification, mystification and oppression of women. In this respect they are treated not much differently from other Latin American women. However, in the case of Mexico, the roles and values projected onto them are buttressed by two central figures of Mexican folklore: La Malinche, and the Virgin of Guadalupe. La Malinche, Cortés' Tabascan mistress who is considered to have betrayed her fellow Indians, symbolizes women's corrupt sexuality and untrustworthy nature. (Her role could have been interpreted in quite a different way to symbolize women's strength and intelligence, for in addition to Náhuatl, the language of the Aztecs, and Maya, she mastered Spanish, hence her role as an invaluable intermediary for Cortés. For her part, she saw the Spaniards as a force which could liberate her own people from the hated Aztec rulers.)

The Virgin of Guadalupe, on the other hand, is a mythical figure who was created by the Spaniards in the sixteenth century in order to substitute a Catholic brown-skinned idol in place of the Indian deity, Tonantzin, previously venerated as a symbol of motherhood and fertility. The Virgin of Guadalupe symbolizes the asexual, self-abnegating maternal female who protects her children throughout all misfortune.

To make matters worse for Mexican women, the Virgin of Guadalupe has become more than a mere religious idol. She has become institutionalized as the embodiment of Mexico's national values, whose name can be invoked to justify a wide range of moral bigotry.

La Malinche and the Virgin of Guadalupe represent the profound ambivalence of Mexicans towards power and domination, vacillating between seductive embrace and submissive, stoic resignation. They seem unable to come to terms with the original encounter between the Indians and the Spaniards, which Octavio Paz has described as the "suicide of the Aztec people".¹⁶ For some parts of the Aztec empire welcomed the Spaniards as liberators, whereas others resigned themselves to the conquest because they believed that their gods had abandoned them. Mexican males are as ambivalent about their masculinity, vacillating between the desire to dominate and the impulse to submit, as they are about femininity, incarnated in their overvalued "madres" and devalued wives. According to Santiago Ramírez, the Mexican psychoanalyst, "the Mexican's machismo is basically no more than the insecurity of his own masculinity: an over-wrought virility".¹⁷

Machismo has long been the dominant trait of Mexican masculinity, and revolves around invulnerability and the obligation to take advantage of a weaker person. "Chingar" is the quintessential Mexican word. The origin of the word, which means "to rape", or "to take advantage of", is probably Aztec, and is connected to the Spanish conquest of the Indians, particularly of their women. There is no greater insult in Mexico than to say "chinga a tu madre".^{**} "Chingar" has a multitude of derivatives to express both opportunity and misfortune.

* To be sure, it must also be recognized that the economic, social and cultural changes that have accompanied the industrialization of Mexico since Paz published his book in 1959 have had a profound impact upon the values of younger Mexicans in particular.

** A "madre" in the personal sense must be beyond reproach. "Madre" in the generic sense is something else — a mere woman. Machista expressions reveal how Mexicans really value mothers. "Pinche madre. Una madre" means useless. "Que padre. Padrisimo" means great, fabulous. When "madre" is included in a compliment, however, it becomes "de poca madre" (barely any "madre").

According to Octavio Paz, "to the Mexican, there are only two possibilities in life: either he inflicts the action implied by 'chingar' on others, or else he suffers them himself at the hands of others".¹⁸ This is what gives legitimacy to the macho male who fucks "passive" homosexuals. They have abdicated power, the prerogative of masculinity. He is only doing what is natural in taking advantage of an opportunity. And in doing so he neither questions his masculinity nor admits to any homosexuality.

Much that Paz attributes to the Mexican psyche, however, and which can certainly be associated with Aztec values, is not unique to the Mexican people. In great measure it should be attributed to the effect of colonization. For the essential characteristic of Mexican culture and society is the fact that Mexico is a doubly colonized country — the Indians by the Spaniards and mestizo elites, and all of Mexico by the United States.¹⁹ Power may corrupt, but so does powerlessness. The majority of Mexicans feel powerless to bring about changes in their personal lives or structural changes in their society. What is left is the opportunity to exploit opportunities for individual gain, particularly with respect to those who have let their guard down, or have even less power than oneself.

The stereotypical traditional Mexican family revolves around the ever present, submissive, protective "madre", and her absent machista husband who finds sexual fulfilment elsewhere. At least two fifths of Mexican households are headed by single mothers, many of whom are caring for the off-spring of two or three distinct biological fathers. Young males grow up in both fear and emulation of their absent fathers, tied to their desexualized mothers and dependent upon them for their every need. Mothers are happy to oblige. "Because of the scarce emotional content of her relationship to her husband, the wife tends to transfer her main emotional needs onto her sons".²⁰ Sons, in turn, adore their mothers and believe that no other woman, including their wives, can be their substitute. They grow up in the expectation that they will court an idealized "novia" (fiancee) and will find sexual fulfilment with other women, just as their fathers have done before them.

Double sexual and relational standards are therefore built into the fabric of Mexican families and hence of Mexican society. Forms must be protected, the expression of honest feelings inhibited at all costs.²¹ Mexicans are socialized from an early age to expect fulfilment in marriage, an expectation that is quite unrelated to their own experience

of their homelife and parents' marriage^{*}. This is particularly oppressive for daughters since they are expected to inhibit their sexuality and protect their virginity until they marry or cohabit, in the knowledge that if their mothers' fate is anything to go by, they will find precious little sexual fulfilment thereafter. Boys on the other hand grow up in the expectation that they will be sexually active from an early age. Since they romanticize the sexuality of their "novias", who are to be the future mothers of their children, they are more likely to have sex with women (or men) who they do not really respect. It is not surprising, then, that the sexuality of Mexican males is problematic given that they are coddled by their mothers, and pressured to be macho by their fathers who condemn any sign of non-masculine behaviour as weakness, effeminacy and even worse, potential homosexuality. It is not uncommon for "effeminate" sons to be beaten by their fathers.

Homosexuals are the butt of taunting and sexual humour between fathers and sons. They are portrayed as the paradigms of passivity and effeminacy. They are also defined as "putos" or easy lays. In a world where young males are expected to be sexually aggressive, but where sexual outlets corresponding to the needs of machismo may be scarce with the exception of prostitutes who have to be paid for, it isn't surprising that many teenage males are willing to get their "rocks off" with other available males. It does not represent a threat to their

* Lourdes Beneria and Martha Roldán describe the dismal choices that confront many daughters from sub-proletarian backgrounds: "given the reality of a daily family life that most women described as lacking in affection, companionship, and communication with the parents, carried on in an atmosphere of verbal and often physical violence in the household; young women have wanted to forge a minimum space within which they could better control their lives. This they had hoped to find as wives and mothers in their new homes. Some sought economic security and masculine protection, others affection, if not love." Beneria and Roldán p. 88.

** Attitudes to sexuality and experience of sex have, of course, changed considerably in recent years due to industrialization, urbanization and the impact of the mass media. Nevertheless, even amongst the educated middle class there is a large gender gap in relation to age of first intercourse. And most women from the working and marginal classes still tend to become pregnant and dominated by the father of their child simultaneously with their first sexual relationship. See Dolores Ponce, Ana Irene Solorzano y Antonio Alonso, "Lentas olas de sensualidad", *Nexos*, Vol. 12, No. 139, July, 1989, pp. 30-38.

masculinity so long as they are the "active"^{*} ones who take advantage of the vulnerable, and therefore despised homosexuals. In fact, having sex with a homosexual is seen by some as a means of confirming their masculinity. It is proof that they haven't succumbed to becoming homosexual, even though they have tried it once or twice themselves. "Macho calado", as they say in Mexico.

In fact, "homophobia" is a problematic concept to apply to Mexican culture, insofar as, strictly defined, it implies fear of homosexuality, as much as of hostility. Actually, it is not so much homosexuality which Mexicans are afraid of, but rather of being seen by others as weak, effeminate, and passive sexual objects. Unlike the United States and Canada, where an allegation that somebody might want to have sex with another man is always intended to humiliate and insult, in Mexico the insinuation does not carry the same emotive charge. In fact, allusions to homosexuality are a frequent feature of "albures" among men from the popular classes. "Albures" consist of erotic rhymes and word-plays with which two or three people spar with each other. It is a form of teasing rather than taunting, that reflects friendship more than antagonism (even though the person that has lost has to accept the fact that he is the one who has "dropped his pants").

Even if they don't have sex with other males, young Mexicans enter into a world whose intense male bonding contains much that is homo-social at the very least. Their father's behaviour has taught them that men's company is to be sought after, while that of women is not to be taken seriously. Consequently, in his social life, "a Mexican's marital status is of little practical importance, as a man carries on virtually the same sort of social life after marriage as he did before — and one in which women have little part".²² That is why the male friends of young men, particularly if they belong to the working class, are much more central figures in their lives than their girl friends. "Cuates" are close male buddies, usually from the same barrio who share intimacy and mutual support. In many cases, "cuates" may even represent "the most intense inter-personal relationship in a male's life".²³

* "Activo" (related to being the inserter in anal intercourse), and "pasivo" (related to being the insertee) are terms commonly used in Mexico to categorize different types of homosexual acts, and identities derived thereof.

The meaning attached to homosexuality and the identities of those men who have sex with other men in contemporary Mexico varies across the country. For to be, sure Mexico is an incredibly diverse country. Because of the profusion of indigenous languages and dialects, in many regions "communities just a mountain apart can barely understand each other".²⁴ In Mexico City, too, the difference in living conditions and lifestyles between those who live in central middle class neighbourhoods and those who live in outlying settlements is like night and day. Nevertheless, it may be useful to conceive of homosexuality being constructed and regulated in three distinct regional fashions, the rural/Indian, the urban/provincial, and the metropolitan/cosmopolitan.

Until very recently Mexico has been a predominantly rural country in which most people lived on the land or in small towns and villages. The Indian presence has been very strong. So much so that some Indian communities give the impression of having retained the integrity of their pre-Columbian cultures. More tolerant attitudes to sex between males may possibly have survived not only the Spanish conquest, but also exposure to the homophobic values of the expanding Aztec empire. Nevertheless, one must be cautious about accepting the notion that an "unbroken aboriginal influence"²⁵ is in evidence anywhere in Mexico. Conceivably, it may be applicable to the handful of Lacandonese who live in what is left of the virgin jungles of Chiapas. Overall, however, contemporary Indian cultures have been moulded by the impact of the Spanish military and spiritual conquest, by the manner in which each region was integrated into expanding metropolitan economies, and by the extension of Mexico's modern state and dominant culture. Furthermore, it is hard to find a single part of Mexico that has not been affected to some extent by contemporary cultural and economic imperialism.

One must be equally cautious about generalizing about regional indigenous cultures and projecting the values of a sub-regional culture onto that of a region as a whole. Walter Williams in his otherwise interesting book on sexual diversity in American Indian culture seems to make that type of error when he projects the values of the Zapotec Indians who live in the Isthmus region onto all the Zapotecs who live in Oaxaca. This is problematic, because it is debateable whether or not such a thing as a "distinctively Zapotec" culture has existed for a long time. In fact, it is probably more useful to think of Zapotec culture as a "conglomeration of things pre-Spanish and of things Spanish ... in

which Zapotecs identify] mostly with a community and very little with a Zapotec ethnic group".²⁶

If this is true of the Zapotecs who are only one of the ethnic groups who live in the Isthmus region (along with the Huaves, Chontales, Mixes and Zoques), and only one of many distinct indigenous cultures who co-inhabit the state of Oaxaca, it is even truer with respect to generalizations about Indian culture as a whole. The fact is that not enough is known about the sexual desires and practices of Mexico's rural population of peasants and Indians to allow one to make such generalizations as: "among the Zapotecs of Mexico, homosexual behaviour among males is common for all age groups".²⁷

Part of the problem stems from the definition of Indian. In Mexico, the term "Indian" primarily refers to social, cultural and linguistic attributes rather than to race. Indians may be economically integrated into the broader economy with respect to their labour and produce, but they are typically marginalized from mainstream culture. Because of this, generalizations about Indians cannot include people who share an aboriginal culture along with those who attend bathhouses, an urban phenomenon, and who refer to "internacional" sex practices.²⁸ Familiarity with urban homosexual argot in itself would constitute a demarcating line. The term "homosexual" itself is probably unknown in truly Indian cultures, and indeed in many rural communities as well.²⁹

In short, the values attached to homosexual desire, symbols and practices in rural and indigenous Mexico are varied and likely quite different to those of the urbanized and cosmopolitan centres. For example, in the Juchitán region in the state of Oaxaca, homosexuality reputedly has a visibility and acceptance that is unusual in most other rural parts. According to some reports, homosexuality is openly expressed in a variety of forms, including:

drag; transvestism; openly gay-identified; active homosexuality but without a "gay iden-

* "Internacional" is the Mexican term for someone who enjoys being the insertee as well as the inserter in anal intercourse. The term implies that interchangeable sex roles are not indigenous to Mexico.

tity"; a benign view of sex play among boys, and even between men and boys; occasionally, a "dykey" look adopted by short-haired women who do not wear the traditional long dress of the "tehuanas".³⁰

There are other Indian communities such as the Huastecos and Totonacos of Veracruz and Puebla in which same-sex sex may be more common and less stigmatized than elsewhere. Their values may have affected the behaviour of the adjoining mestizos, which might account for the homosexual reputation of the "tierra caliente", or tropical lowlands along parts of the Pacific and Caribbean coasts. (Or is it simply a reflection of the tropical environment which encourages extroversion in comparison to the central highlands?) The Huichol and Cora Indians of the state of Nayarit also incorporate apparently homosexual symbols and gestures in their Easter Week ritual celebrations.

However, just as we must be careful not to equate Aztec proscriptions against sodomitic acts in terms of modern forms of homosexual oppression, so must we not interpret same-sex rituals, symbols and practices in rural and indigenous Mexico in terms of contemporary gay discourse. Same-sex sexual acts may be tolerated or accepted in specific circumstances because the local culture does not assign particular significance to them in terms of constructing overall gender roles. Those who engage in them do not become "homosexuals", whose role in same-sex sexual acts is irrelevant, and whose acceptance reflects a different type of social order. For example, the seeming acceptance of homosexuality and the seeming dominance of women in Juchitán can be deceiving. The region may be less machista than other parts of Mexico, but it is no matriarchy as some would have us believe. For it is ultimately structured along patriarchal and even heterosexist lines.³¹

Although it may be true that in some indigenous communities homosexual acts are placed "right at the bottom of the hierarchy of deviance",^{32*} those who engage in them may still be stigmatized and accordingly devalued by their communities. Most of these are probably

* Whereas in Mexico as a whole, according to Carlos Monsiváis, the homosexual is consigned to the bottom of the heap, regardless of the criteria that may be used. "Salvador Novo: los que tenemos unas manos

like the Chamulas in the state of Chiapas who have puritanical views about sexuality and "very strict norms about male-female relationships".³³ Overall, I am inclined to agree with E.A. Lacey's generalization that "the more purely Amerindian in culture the region in question, the more inhibited, suppressed and lesser will be its ... degree of homosexual activity and expression."³⁴

Lacey adds that "the more Europeanized (the region), the less inhibited and larger, at least apparently, its gay community is likely to be, and the greater degree of homosexual activity". This certainly seems to be true of Mexico. For at the opposite end of the homosexual spectrum we find the cosmopolitan gay culture of the middle and upper class of Mexico City, of fractions of those classes in other large cities such as Guadalajara and Monterrey, and of those near the northern border which have been directly exposed to North American gay discourse and manner of regulating sexuality. It is here that you will find the most direct equivalents to the gay culture which is to be found in large American and Canadian cities — gay bars, bathhouses, cruising areas, identities, and sexual practices. Sexual identities tend to be more dichotomized. If there may be more tolerance of homosexually identified individuals and social spaces, there is probably also a greater investment in "straight" identities.

In between these extremes, we find the majority of Mexico's urban population whether they live in smaller cities or in most of Mexico City itself. In these urban areas, traditional mestizo values, a blend of Aztec and Spanish, tend to predominate. Machismo has been at their core for centuries. It has conditioned both private and public expressions of homosexuality. Though homosexuality may be a fairly common phenomenon in certain circumstances, its private exercise is almost always affected by underlying feelings of shame and by the sexism that pervades social relations overall. This leads the "active" partner to be not only sexually dominant but also to have a socially oppressive

que no nos pertenecen", *Amor Perdido*, ERA, Mexico, 1977. p. 275.

- * I will henceforth use the term gay in reference to those homosexuals who have developed a consciousness of their sex-gender identities that leads them to organize much of their social life around their sexual orientation.

relationship to the "passive" one.^{*} The relationship is not infrequently buttressed by violence.

The public expression of homosexuality is heavily stigmatized and accordingly repressed, particularly insofar as it is identified with passivity and femininity. This is true even of Guadalajara, most of whose homosexuals are very discreet and closeted despite the fact that it has a reputation of being the Mexican San Francisco on account of the large number of homosexuals who reputedly live there. It is also true of Veracruz, which has been identified with homosexuality since pre-Columbian times. There may be a lot of homosexuality amongst young males, but the popular culture is nonetheless machista and homophobic. If the annual carnival in Veracruz has acquired a certain notoriety for homosexuality, it is largely because it is one of the few occasions in which homosexuals, particularly transvestites can collectively make their presence felt in public. For the rest of the year, however, homosexuals are careful to abide by the sexual mores and prohibitions that are enforced in Veracruz as much as in any other provincial city.

Notes

¹ Cited by Antonio Requena, "Sodomy Among Native American Peoples", *Gay Sunshine*, Summer/Fall 1979, No. 40/41. p. 37.

² Requena, p. 37.

³ Fr. Bartolomé de las Casas, *Los Indios de México y Nueva España*, Porrúa, Mexico, 1982. pp. 70-71, 132-33, 190-191.

⁴ Carlos H. Alba, "Estudio Comparado Entre el Derecho Azteca y el Derecho Positivo Mexicano", cited by Fernando Castellanos Tena, *Lineamientos de Derecho Penal*, Porrúa, Mexico, 1990. p. 43.

⁵ Salvador Novo, *Las Locas, El Sexo. Los Burdeles*, Novaro, México, 1972. p. 12.

⁶ Julia Tuñón Pablos, *Mujeres en México: Una Historia Olvidada*, Planeta, Mexico, 1987. p. 25.

* And conversely, the "passive" male tends to internalize the values attached to the social role of women, that is to say, seeking protection, the strong man etc. He doesn't tend to respect men who are openly tender and sensitive.

⁷Noemí Quezada, *Amor y Magia Amorosa Entre Los Aztecas*, 3rd. Edition, U.N.A.M., Mexico, 1989. pp. 67, 107, 112.

⁸Tuñón Pablos, p. 47.

⁹See María Isabel Morgan, "La Sexualidad en la Sociedad Azteca", *Familia y Sexualidad, La Educación de La Sexualidad Humana*, Vol. 1., Consejo Nacional de Población, Mexico, 1982.

¹⁰Quezada, pp. 30,43,47.

¹¹See Carlos Monsiváis, "Salvador Novo: los que Tenemos unas Manos que no nos Pertenecen" in *Amor Perdido*, ERA, Mexico, 1977. pp. 275-277.

¹²See Noemí Quezada, "La Sexualidad en M130xico", *Anales de Antropología*, Vol. 16, 1979. p. 242.

¹³Tuñón Pablos, p. 118.

¹⁴Tuñón Pablos, p. 92.

¹⁵Carmen Lopez Cervantes y Victor M. Saria, "Condición Femenina y Desigualdad Social", *Excélsior*, March 4, 1988.

¹⁶Paz, p. 94.

¹⁷Santiago Ramírez, *El Mexicano, Psicología de sus Motivaciones*, Grijalbo, Mexico 1977. p. 62.

¹⁸Paz, p. 78.

¹⁹See Ramírez, for an illuminating analysis of this twin process.

²⁰Larissa Adler de Lomnitz, *Como Sobreviven los Marginados*, Siglo Veintiuno, Mexico, 1975. p. 100.

²¹See *Familia y Sexualidad, La Educación de la Sexualidad Humana*, Vol. 2, Consejo Nacional de Población, Mexico, 1982. pp. 50, 67.

²²F. Peñalosa, cited by Joseph M. Carrier, "Cultural Factors Affecting Urban Mexican Male Behaviour", *Archives of Sexual Behaviour*, Vol.5, No.2, 1976. p. 107.

²³Adler de Lomnitz, p. 190.

²⁴Alan Riding, *Distant Neighbors: a Portrait of the Mexicans*, Vintage, New York, 1986. p. 309.

²⁵Walter L. Williams, *The Spirit and the Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1986. p. 143.

²⁶See Joseph W. Whitecotton, *The Zapotecs: Princes, Priests and Peasants*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1977. p. 219.

²⁷Williams, p. 91.

²⁸Williams, pp. 144-145.

²⁹See, for example, Roger Lancaster's account of same-sex sex in rural Nicaragua, "Subject Honour and Object Shame: The Construction of Male Homosexuality in Nicaragua", *Ethnology*, Vol. XXVII, No. 2, April, 1988.

³⁰David Thorstad, "A Pueblo Journal: Homosexuality Among the Zapotecs", *Christopher Street*, Issue 160, March 1988. p. 40.

³¹See Macario Matus, "Conceptos sexuales entre los Zapotecas de hoy", *La Cultura en Mexico: Suplemento de Siempre!*, #859, August 9, 1978. See also Whitecotton, p. 21 and 266, and Beverley Chiñas, "Isthmus Zapotec "Berdaches", *Newsletter of the Anthropological Group on Homosexuality*, Vol. 7, No.2, May, 1985, and *The Isthmus Zapotecs: Women's Roles in Cultural Context*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1973.

³²Henry Selby, *Zapotec Deviance: The Convergence of Folk and Modern Sociology*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1974, cited by Clark Louis Taylor Jr. "El Ambiente: Male Homosexual Social Life in Mexico City", University of California, Berkeley, Ph.D. dissertation, 1978, p. 16.

³³Gary Gossens, *Chamulas and the World of the Suri*, Waveland Press, Prospect Heights, Illinois, 1974, p. 105.

³⁴"Latin America: Myths and Realities", *Gay Sunshine*, No. 38/9, Winter 1979. p. 26.

Class, and Sexual Diversity in Mexico City

It is as hard to generalize about the character and regulation of homosexuality in Mexico City as it is to do so about the rest of the country, on account of its vast population and the impact of migration. The city's traditional culture, insofar as it has a distinctive identity, is strongly affected by its explosive population growth, youthful demographic profile, and half million annual migrants from other regions of Mexico. Older more settled parts of the city coexist with a conglomeration of newer "colonias" and of even newer "barriadas" or squatter settlements which are almost totally lacking in identity.

Given the scale of urbanization and industrialization in the Federal District and the fact that it has a virtual monopoly of the country's mass media, one might expect that the sex-gender identities of those homosexuals who live within it would reflect the most modern forms of constructing and regulating gender and sexuality. They do so, but to a much more limited extent than one might suppose.

The existence of a score of gay bars and discos, mostly in the affluent Zona Rosa and Insurgentes Sur districts, should not mislead one into exaggerating the gay presence in the city. To put this number in perspective one need only recall that San Jose, Costa Rica, with a thirtieth of its population has almost half as many gay clubs, while Monterrey, the dynamic industrialized city in northern Mexico, which has only a fourth of its population has almost as many bars. The striking aspect of gay culture in Mexico City, in fact, is the relative absence of bars, distinct cruising areas, and of full-time commodified male prostitution. It is also striking in relation to the size of the middle

* To be sure there is a lot of "chichifismo" or casual hustling in Mexico City, but those who engage in it are much less likely to constitute a class apart than they would in North America. A very wide spectrum of young males are involved in "chichifismo", and it doesn't seem to have quite the pejorative connotation that hustling has in North America. In fact, it is

and upper class, which if only constituting twenty percent of the population, would still amount to around four million people. Despite the fact that a much larger percentage of middle-class gays tend to live apart from their families in Mexico City than in other cities, colonias such as Juárez and Roma, which house large numbers of homosexuals, could by no stretch of the imagination be equated with the gay residential and commercial areas of North America. Even late in the evening, homosexuals on Avenida Juárez, alongside the Alameda, the city's most famous cruising rendezvous, are barely distinguishable from heterosexual pedestrians.

The relative scarcity of identifiable gay areas in Mexico City can in part be attributed to the fact that Mexicans, in general, accept "cuatismo" (male bonding). Since most homosexuals are not identifiable by their dress or behaviour, men who hang out together are not rejected or suspected of being homosexual. Furthermore, there is a tolerance of bisexuality and an acceptance of male "horniness" which facilitates sexual contacts between males throughout much of the city. There is no need for gays to go to specific areas in order to find other males who are open to having sex with them. The size and anonymity of the city permits sexual liaisons to take place in a way that would be much more difficult in smaller cities, as well as in those whose traditional culture was more antagonistic to homosexuals. When you ask a gay "chilango" where you should go to cruise as likely as not he will suggest the metro, or more specifically, particular stations such as Hidalgo and Insurgentes. This is either very tantalizing or very frustrating when you bear in mind that over four million people use the metro each day. The fact is,

not restricted to sex, but could include getting someone to pay the entrance to a bar, or a drink etc. The exchange will often be mediated by prior social interaction, such as having a drink before the subject of money is broached, and the allusion to money will typically be indirect in terms of a "préstamo" or loan to buy books, medicine, taxi fare etc. as opposed to a fee for a specific sexual service. And very often, money is merely implicit. The use of street language (which a "straight" person would not understand) and the situation implies that usual conventions are likely to be broken. There is also more "professional" prostitution in certain well-known locations, but "masculine" prostitution seems to be much less developed than in North America. For example, male prostitutes and masseurs (unlike female prostitutes) don't advertise their services in the mainstream and alternative press as they do in many North American and European cities.

however, that you are as likely to bump into somebody on the subway as anywhere else. The same is true of the city's streets, parks, cinemas, cantinas, restaurants, and baños, of which there are over two hundred listed in the telephone directory.

Unlike cultures in which homosexual and heterosexual identities are more polarized, there are few prescribed rules of the game with regard to homosexual cruising in Mexico City other than being courteous and discreet with a stranger. It is quite permissible and, in some situations such as park benches and cantinas) commonplace, for strangers to strike up a conversation. Asking for a cigarette or the time still remain the favourite opening gambits. Self-identified homosexuals are likely to intuit the sexual proclivities of other males. Nevertheless, the probability that the other person wishes to pass as straight must always be respected. In any event, this is no impediment to further contact since casual relationships are typical of public life in Mexico. There is thus a lot of space for homosexuals to both blend and meet within the crowd. Gays in Mexico City may have their share of complaints about social and state oppression, but I have not met many who have complained about the lack of sexual opportunities.

In Mexico City, as anywhere else, class will affect sexual identities and behaviour. In broad strokes, one could posit the existence of at least four different classes or strata: 1) the popular or marginal classes

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- * Baños are public bathhouses which are particularly characteristic of Mexico City. A city such as Guadalajara, which has almost a quarter of the capital's population, has proportionately far fewer. Some have separate facilities for women, but in the main they seem to be patronized principally by men. Although most people seem to take cleaning themselves very seriously, they are also places where men go to socialize, have a massage, a drink, and their boots polished. For example, the "gay" bathhouse in Oaxaca, which has the delightful name of El Jardín, (The Garden), offers an important social refuge for homosexuals in an otherwise very restrictive social environment. I have wonderful memories of men really playing in the "vapor general", and of a "diva" entertaining us by belting out arias at the top of his voice.
 - ** When I am referring to parks, I am thinking more of plazas or zocalos rather than parks such as Central Park (New York) or Balfour Park (Toronto). In contrast to North America (and even to San José, Costa Rica) there is very little cruising in the Mexican equivalents, because the possibility of theft or assault is quite high. Even in smaller parks, such as the Parque de México, in the heart of the colonia Roma, there is little or no cruising, though it otherwise seems an ideal location.

that live in the central "vecindades" and outlying "barriadas" that have emerged over the last four decades; 2) the regularly employed working class and the newly poor middle class whose real incomes have been halved in recent years; 3) the corporate professionals and small business class who may have been able to weather the economic crisis; and 4) the upper-middle and upper classes.

The popular classes live in a world apart from the rest of the city in the sense that a great many of them have no regular employment and neither income nor culture that allows them to relate to males in other classes, even by "chichifeando". These are the people who if they are lucky work as day labourers of one sort or another, as street vendors, car-washers, servants, and so forth, and who constitute most of the three-fifths of the labour force that is unemployed or underemployed, and the two-thirds of the population that receive the minimum wage or less (approximately \$120 a month). Whole families tend to live in one or two-room homes, share beds, and "confront the problem of survival by nimbleness, native wit and social solidarity".¹ Almost all the half million annual migrants from the provinces end up in places like the outer "barriadas" of Nezahualcóyotl. The change from a poor but relatively organic communal way of life to the anarchic squalor of the slums of Mexico City must be devastating.

The sexual culture of the "barriadas" and "vecindades" is both open and violent.² "People have to live promiscuously ... and have sexual relations in front of their children and relatives".³ There is constant friction, arguments and frequently brawls between people who have to share very limited physical space and economic resources. The barrio streets become the only social spaces available to young males who protect their territory in a variety of ways that enforce relations of dominance and hierarchy. Machismo is unquestioned. Sexual values and behaviour have much more in common with those found in impoverished provincial outposts than they do with those of the cosmopolitan core of the city. The characteristic sexual relationship of homosexual males mirrors that of heterosexuals. Active and passive

* Literally millions of Mexicans have had to spend most of their lives since childhood on the streets. In Mexico City, an estimated one and a quarter million children earn their livelihood on the streets, and no less than a quarter of a million are homeless. (*La Jornada*, April 28, 1991.)

roles are rigidly demarcated. Virtually the only visible homosexuals are "vestidas" who eroticize machos and "mayates". "Vestidas", by definition, appear sexually passive in public, even though this may be far from the case in private. The "amante" (lover) or "marido" ("husband") will neither identify himself nor be identified by others as a homosexual since his masculine, active role is self-evident. In all probability, the "machín" will have a "novia" and will eventually marry without necessarily giving up his sexual contacts with homosexuals. Although "vestidas" may be submissive in relation to their masculine partners, they are far from being so when it comes to survival in the world outside their relationship.

Homosexual males who are neither effeminate "locas" nor bisexual "mayates" must repress their sexual drive a lot of the time, since there is no place for them within this culture. If they come on to another homosexual, they are likely to meet with a lot of hostility for contravening the accepted rules of the game. They are so invisible that terms such as homosexual and gay are virtually unknown. Their homosexuality will only be manifest in situations which excuse their behaviour, such as the states of inebriation which follow fiestas and street dances. "Vestidas" and "mayates", on the other hand, are open about their sexual relations since these duplicate traditional gender roles and don't call into question the masculinity of the latter. Needless to say, there are very few entertainment or recreational outlets for young males, specifically ones which meet the particular needs of homosexuals. At best the latter may be allowed to appropriate the corner of a local cantina or tavern. And provided that traditional gender roles are respected they may participate in street dances. In fact, "vestidas" are

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- * "Vestidas" are typically young homosexuals who have accepted the popular equation of homosexuality with passivity and femininity. Though their dress and mannerisms are consciously feminine, their behaviour owes more to social pressures than to psychic needs as may be the case with transvestites.
 - ** "Mayates" are "masculine" males who deny any homosexuality on their part, however much they might engage in it, and usually play the "active" (insertor) role. They typically expect some sort of material compensation in return (tantamount to *noblesse oblige*.) Sometimes the term becomes synonymous with "chichifo".

particularly sought after as dance partners because "normal" young females tend to be much more inhibited.

It is in no way surprising that in these circumstances young males have developed their own defensive culture by organizing themselves in street gangs known as "bandas" and "pandillas". These gangs provide a means of self-identity and of self-protection in conditions of poverty, unemployment and police oppression. The lot of "vestidas", in particular is not an easy one. Those who they eroticize, such as "mayates" typically expect to be compensated for their favours, a fact which adds to their already precarious economic situation. Many resort to prostitution in order to survive. They may be robbed and raped, individually and collectively, if they transgress territorial limits and are not protected by their "hombres" or by the "pandillas" from their barrio. Their only other defence is their readiness to defend themselves by the same violent methods used by those who seek to exploit them — knives, razor blades, and broken bottles. Their situation may be deplorable but they are not to be pitied, for as gay writer, José Joaquín Blanco, has rightly noted, "those precious locas who against everybody and everything have resisted a limitless inferno which we can't begin to imagine, are who they are with courage, dignity, strength and a will to live, which I and probably the reader lack".⁴

Working-class males who have sex with other males are caught between two worlds. They neither have the licence for sex that results from the promiscuous social conditions of the marginal "barriadas", nor much space to just be themselves in their own neighbourhood, particularly if they don't want to assume traditional sex-gender identities; nor do they have the income or culture to become active participants in the social spaces that serve middle-class gays. Although they may occasionally find the means, often by "chichifismo", to attend a downtown disco, they will probably feel uncomfortable, and even marginalized, given the acute social sensibilities of the middle-class patrons who could more easily afford the cost of a night out — usually well in excess of a day's wage for a worker. There are a few "de

* For example, bars like El Taller (the Workshop) and L'Barón charge twice the total daily minimum wage to get in on weekends, and drinks are proportionately as expensive in relation to what they would cost in a tavern, such as the Viena which is patronized almost exclusively by homosexuals. There are other discos which are even more expensive. The high admission charges are acceptable to their class-conscious

ambiente" ^{*} discos such as Dandy's and bars such as the "33" which are largely patronized by working-class males. But, in general, the latter are much more likely to socialize closeted in that quintessentially working-class male institution, the "cantina" or even attend a local disco ^{**} at week-end in the hope of connecting with some frustrated "buga".

Working-class homosexuals are much more conscious of the risk of being rejected by their families, barrio or employers on account of their sexual orientation, since they have so much at stake. Although a surprising number find the means to live alone or with another homosexual male, most prefer and have no alternative but to live with relatives. The family, in particular, offers a blanket of economic and social security for the lower class, particularly at a time when real wages and employment prospects have been dramatically reduced. It is not necessarily the case that they would be ejected from the family on grounds of their homosexuality, even though traditional machista values are likely to be strongest in the working class. For their families may depend upon their contribution to family incomes just as much as they are themselves dependent upon the family when in need. What is most likely is that a *modus vivendi* will be worked out ^{***} such that the Latin American rule that "todo hecho, nada dicho" ^{***} will imply that they must keep their homosexual life apart from their family's home. ("Locas", who cannot deny who they are but whose role is more acceptable within a machista culture, may, as always, prove the exception.) Lack of privacy at home, and familial notions of "respeto" (decency) mean that many have to rent cheap hotel rooms if they want

patrons since they ensure that the "chusma" (rabble) will be kept out.

- * In some parts of Latin America, "ambiente" is synonymous with homosexual. Its use is declining in Mexico City, where it now typically alludes to the existence of a permissive, non-conformist sexual atmosphere, in contrast to an explicitly gay or homosexual milieu.
- ** In Mexico, "buga" is homosexual argot for a straight male. A straight male, if pressed, would be more likely to define himself as "hombre hombre". Its similarity to "bugarón", the Cuban equivalent to "mayate", can lead to confusion. The Cuban word for straight is "cheo".
- *** "Everything permitted, nothing said".

to spend a night with their partners. Working-class homosexuals are also more likely to have sex in such places as cinemas and baños, both of which can be quite inexpensive in Mexico. Cinemas cost as little as seventy five cents , and most baños a dollar or two.

Members of the middle class, largely comprised of students and of those who have the equivalent of post-secondary education form the core of the "gay community", such as it is. The major difference between their identities and those of their counterparts in Costa Rica and Cuba is that they are more likely to have partially freed themselves from social and familial restrictions with regard to personal and sexual behaviour. More of them are likely to live apart from their families, and many are in live-in relationships. Some of those who continue to live at home may have made their non-compliance with familial norms more evident, even though only a small minority will explicitly come out to their parents. Their sexual practices are much more likely to resemble those of North American gays. To be "internacional", or have interchangeable sex roles is becoming the norm amongst younger-middle class gays, at least. Their preferred self-description is almost invariably "gay". New dress codes and images, such as the jeans and T-shirt look are more likely to catch on here, catered to and fostered by bars such as El Vaquero (The Cowboy) and those gyms which are largely patronized by homosexuals. Their relatively high disposable income makes them welcome clients of smart restaurant chains and trendy stores.

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- * Every city in Mexico has cinemas which are *de facto* sex turfs for homosexuals and other males who are open to having sex with men. Males vastly outnumber females at most performances, and nobody seems particularly concerned by the fact that the main performances are taking place in the toilets, stairwells, and upper balconies, rather than on the screens.
 - ** A recent study of the sexual behaviour of Guadalajara homosexual students found that about three quarters considered themselves "internacionales". See Joseph Carrier, "Sexual Behaviour and Spread of AIDS in Mexico", *Medical Anthropology*, Vol. 10, No. 2-3, March 1989, p. 134.
 - *** For a while El Vaquero would not let you in unless you were correctly dressed in denim, and El Taller supposedly still gives you free admission if you wear a white T-shirt. But very few patrons seem to take advantage of the offer.

The middle class, as one might expect, is the class that has been most influenced by the youth and counter-culture movements that emerged in Europe and North America in the sixties and early seventies. Middle-class homosexuals were the first to acquire consciousness of their oppression, and became the core of the early gay liberation movement. Though they may appear to be comfortable with their sexual orientation, an impressive number are uptight about being viewed as "obvios", and are scared of being "quemado" (exposed) by being seen in public with anyone who appears too gay. The underlying insecurity about their sexual identity is a reflection of their socio-economic position. For the defining characteristic of the middle class is its lack of an autonomous social project. Its members tend to be contemptuous of the masses, dependent upon the goodwill and approval of others, and overwhelmingly imitative of imported American values. They belong to the class that was most amenable to cooptation and depolitization as a result of the new commercial social spaces that emerged to serve their needs. As José Joaquín Blanco perceptively forecast as early as 1979, at the height of the homosexual liberation movement, there is much less of a contradiction between the interests of middle-class gays and those of "politicians, businessmen and the police":

We are far from being the ugly ducklings of the system: we are up to our necks in it, and if we are honest with ourselves, we should admit that in the majority of cases we show more complicity with the social prejudices, comforts and privileges of our class than solidarity with those who have been fucked over, including the homosexuals who have been fucked by the system.⁵

Although members of the upper class may occasionally be encountered at the more expensive discos such as Caztzy, their wealth and privilege typically place them in a world apart. They are utterly self-indulgent and devoid of social conscience. Of course there are individual exceptions and even particular ghettos and groups who have their own distinctive way of organizing their social lives, as there are in any class. But in the main, upper-class homosexuals are likely to be closeted and to socialize amongst their peers in private fiestas, house parties and in international settings, be they Cancun, Puerto Vallarta or Acapulco within Mexico, or abroad in New York, Miami, or San Francisco. They

would be more likely to have marriages of convenience, with kept lovers (often in separate apartments) and access to private call-boys (as opposed to "chichifos") on the side. Their main preoccupation is to preserve their economic privilege and social status. And so long as they keep this in mind, their social peers will excuse their homosexual pécadillos.⁶

Class has to be the most important variable in terms of the organization of social space and inter-personal relations. Though "tricking" may occasionally cross class boundaries, inter-class relationships are probably very rare in Mexico City because of the acute social consciousness of the society as a whole, and because of the sharp economic cleavages that separate the major social strata (theft being a constant preoccupation). Nevertheless, it is not unusual for an older or more established male to be the patron of a young lover, in effect subsidizing his studies or other activities. Mexicans, with the exception of the cosmopolitan middle class, are much less likely to be critical of such a relationship than would probably be the case in North America where bourgeois individualistic values are far more widespread. "Padrinazgo" is after all a deeply rooted institution in their country's traditional culture.

Middle-class Mexicans conventionally deny the impact of race on social mobility. Admittedly, Mexican racism is less acute and a more complex phenomenon than that of the United States. But it is there for all to see. To be called an "indio", is equivalent to being called a "negro", and the term "indígena" (not to mention "indito") is applied to those who are patronized or pitied. From the time of the Spanish conquest and the appropriation of Indian women by the Spanish males, racism has been tied to machismo and therefore to homophobia. "Weakness, femininity, submissiveness, social devaluation have become primordial attributes of women and Indians".⁷ Accordingly, whereas in the United States and Canada, racism projects virility and enormous cocks onto blacks, the contrary applies in Mexico; Indians are devalued sexually because of their supposed passivity and small penises. Apart from being

* Hence the Mexican expression "malinchismo" (derived from la Malinche, Cortés' Tabascan mistress), which refers to admiration for foreigners and imported products and prejudice against all that is native to Mexico.

a reflection of the Spanish conquest, "Mexico's profoundly racist society"⁸ is a reflection of the continuing structural racism which compels Indians to work for a pittance and to live in inhuman conditions. Accordingly, standards of attractiveness and social acceptability are related — amongst homosexuals, as much as within the rest of society — to the extent to which an individual approximates white middle-class American standards. The mass media and mass-marketing are satiated with fair-skinned Caucasian images that affirm them. So does the gay pornography and sexual representation which almost exclusively come from the United States. There are subtle barriers by which the middle class tends to sift out those who are not tall and do not have the skin and muscle tone that denote a middle-class background. For that reason, a dark-skinned "prietito" will only make it in the middle-class gay scene if he has a good education and preferably money.

Aside from generalizations regarding the impact of class, it is particularly difficult to categorize homosexuals in Mexico City. The Federal District's population has been exposed to so many different economic and social upheavals over the last two or three decades — massive migration, oil boom and bust, the debt crisis, the 1985 earthquake — that it is very difficult to identify any cultural identity or trend that is specific to it. On the one hand, there is a very large young male population which is exposed to the all-pervasive influence of television and mass-marketing; on the other hand, poverty and the growing impact of the economic crisis present considerable barriers to the realization of the values they promote. The traditional regional values that persist in poorer neighbourhoods and are reinforced by the half million migrants who flow into the city each year, also have a strong impact upon the heterogeneous character of the Federal District.

In Mexico City, you will therefore find a broad spectrum of identity and behaviour which range from the most traditional machista forms to the most modern Americanized gay identities. Dress codes and ways of being, like closeted "gym queens" and "fresas" (preppy types), which don't relate to traditional categories like machos and "locas", are becoming more popular. Though the American influence is clear, sexual identities are nevertheless much more fluid and not nearly as dichotomized into gay and straight as in North America. Moreover, though less true than a decade ago, particularly with respect to the middle class, "one commonly sees much more variety in Mexican public homosexual games than in the United States".⁹ There is less preoccupation with conventional good looks, bodies, and age differences. And like most

Latin Americans, Mexicans seem to be much more spontaneous in approaching, or coming on to someone.

The baños illustrate the diversity of same-sex sex and the interface of homosexuality and heterosexuality. For example, the "vapor general" in the Baños Sintierra is primarily patronized by middle-class gays who go there for sex in private cubicles. Why hunky apparent "bugas" choose to patronize the Sintierra early in the day is unclear. First and foremost they are there for a sauna and maybe a massage. Some may be "mayates", (and others may be closeted) but those who are neither don't seem perturbed by all the attention they are receiving from the gay men. In fact, in characteristically Mexican fashion, they probably enjoy it. Older ostensibly straight males, too, patronize the sauna seemingly unperturbed by the reputation of the Sintierra, which is the closest equivalent to a North American gay bathhouse. The masseurs (legitimate) are middle-aged men who appear to be straight, but are nevertheless comfortable with the heavy cruising that is taking place all around them. Although it is not unusual to see people actually having sex in public in the "vapor general", this doesn't seem to deter one masseur from bringing his 16 year old son to help clean up and do odd jobs.

It is quite a different story at other middle-class baños, such as the Imperial, and the San Jorge, which used to advertise in *Macho Tips*, the gay magazine. In the Imperial, the "general" is very respectable and demure, with not a trace of sex as far as I could tell. The "individuales", however, are something else. A range of young studs is on hand throughout the day to offer a massage and "extras" to the mostly closeted patrons within luxurious private rooms. According to one masseur, he usually "serviced" six to seven people a day without ever coming, since he made a point of saving himself for his "novia!" The San Jorge is particularly interesting because men and women share the

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- I have some reservations about using the actual names of baños, even though many Mexican gay friends insisted that I should do so, given that several have already been correctly named in popular novels and plays. In fact, Pepe, the attendant at the Sintierra, who provides his favourite clients with condoms, lubricants, poppers and pornography, was insistent that I mention his name and role! Nevertheless, I decided not to use the real names because of the risk, minimal though it might be, that the authorities might use the information to raid or close the baths.

same floor of the "vapores individuales". The masseurs offer their "services" alternately to men and women. So its largely closeted clients can be sure to find a "real" man to meet their needs!

Most baños are "normal" or "tranquilo", as they might say in Mexico. Nevertheless, I suspect that discreet or furtive cruising goes on in most of them. On the other hand, there are some baths, such as the Palma, and most of all the Ecuador, where public orgies are the norm in the "vapor general". Sex is wild and uninhibited as if A.I.D.S. had never been heard of. At any moment of the day, (most baths close by 9 p.m.) you can expect to see people having anal sex in couples and groups .

The bar world is equally heterogeneous.^{**} If there are some such as El Taller and the Vaquero which offer discounts to males wearing white T-shirts and jeans, and exclude women, there are others such as the defunct Marsella where you will find everything from aging queens to exuberant young transvestites and their "hombres". For several years, the queen of them all was Spartacus, located outside the limits of the Federal District, in the state of Mexico, a fact which would contribute to its eventual undoing. Initially, its support came strictly from the popular and working class inhabitants of Neza, mostly "may-ates" and "vestidas", but as its reputation grew, more and more people came from the centre of the city attracted by its glittering transvestite show and outrageous, electric atmosphere. It offered a fantastic spectacle of everything you could imagine, where every night was celebrated

* The Ecuador and the Palma were closed down by the local "delegacion" authorities in 1990, but significantly the "infraciones" that were used as the pretext for the "clausura" did not relate to the one that would have made sense, A.I.D.S. prevention. There are at least half a dozen other baños which continue to provide locales for increasingly dangerous types of sex. Colectivo Sol, is proposing to do what the public health authorities have, as usual, failed to do, that is, pressure the baños to promote safe-sex amongst their patrons.

** The lifespan of Mexican gay bars is no greater than elsewhere. Some of the places that I mention may have closed for one reason or another, but in all probability they will have been replaced by new ones offering a similar ambience. Perhaps a distinctive feature in comparison to North America is that they are more likely to be temporarily closed by the authorities (clausurado) for some alleged infraction of a by-law, but which is much more likely to be related to failure to cough up the required "mordida" (bribe).

as if it were New Year's Eve. Its notoriety may have been a challenge to the local authorities who forced its closure, no doubt because of its failure to "cooperate" in the traditional manner. In comparison to Toronto, at least, the number of mixed clubs, such as the Bugamvillas, is also quite striking. At one time there were several middle-class clubs such as the "9", Infinity and Rose's Garden where on some nights there were as many heterosexual people as homosexuals, and it is evident that both were attracted by that particular type of chemistry. From my perspective, another difference is that taverns such as the Viena and the defunct L'Hardy's, which was known for its mariachi entertainers, are very lively places. There is very little "attitude", and people seem to delight in being with their friends. On the other hand, most bars are very misogynous. In fact, tight restrictions tend to be placed on the appearance and behaviour of women, who must know their place if they expect to be admitted into most gay clubs. Conspicuously absent are bars which primarily attract lesbians or even mixed bars in which feminist lesbians would feel comfortable.

At the other end of the spectrum, there are places like Dandy's which is "de ambiente", but where identifiable gay males dancing together are conspicuously absent from the dance floor. You have to *appear* to be a lady, or be a *real* lady to have any chance of dancing, and as far as I could make out most of the "chavos" didn't care about the hidden anatomical features of their partners when it came to a "danzón". Even more to the point is the fact that although intense interaction is taking place between the "mayates", it is based upon male bonding rather than homoerotic attraction. On a sexual level, most men appear to be indifferent to the appeal of gay men. Great fun to visit except for the possibility of being caught in the wild skirmishes that may explode in one corner or another throughout the evening. The reason for such brawls, which may involve broken bottles or even knives on occasion, is not usually clear since they happen so quickly, but they rarely seem to involve a seemingly straight male's rejection of the advances of a homosexual. The inadequacy of projecting North Ameri-

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- In city of twenty million inhabitants there is not a single exclusively lesbian bar (whereas several bars exclude women). El Don is patronized by lesbians, but it also admits males.

can categories onto Mexican males who attend such places as Dandy's or the Fiesta is clear. "Vestidas" and transvestites have very little affinity with the middle-class gays who have most visibility within North American gay culture. Their "esposos" or "maridos" even less. For example, it would be hazardous to assume that an "esposo" might enter into a homosexual relationship with a more conventional homosexual male if and when his existing relationship terminates. It would be more probable that he would become involved with a heterosexual female.

It is often assumed that bisexuality in Mexico consists of "mayate" or even "buga" males fucking homosexuals without interacting emotionally or sexually in other respects. This may be true of many of those whose traditional machista values have not been affected by the cultural changes that have taken place over the last twenty years, but it may be much less true of younger males than it was in the past. Although it is true that most "mayates" are very insistent that nobody touch their arse, and that only they are to do the penetration, actual sexual behaviour may be much different from public image. Gays who eroticize "hombres" and "mayates" insist that younger ones, at the very least, are much more reciprocal, affectionate and open to being fucked themselves than their public postures might suggest. In fact, there is even a term, "hechizos", for former "mayates" who have become complete homosexuals over time, terminating any pretense to having a "novia".

Bisexuality can evidently take a variety of forms in Mexico ranging from married males who have a homosexual partner on the side, and are therefore conscious that they eroticize other males, to those "mayates" who only have sex in return for some material inducement, and those "bugas" who only do so after having got drunk. In between there

* But one must be careful about making quick assumptions. One night I went to see a bodybuilding contest in a local gay disco, and to my astonishment found that many of the bodybuilders were accompanied by transvestites, and that it was the latter and not the former who appeared to be the dominant partners. Apparently, it is not uncommon for some Mexican machos to harbour a desire to be fucked by transvestites.

** The impersonal references to fucking somebody range from the typical "meterlo" or "put it in", to the expression of an otherwise gentle "mayate" who told me that he had "perforated" a tourist in Acapulco.

are considerable numbers who frequently have sex with other males without ever questioning their sexuality in the process. One possible expression of bisexuality is the fact that cross-dressing "vestidas" and high-priced transvestite prostitutes probably outnumber "masculine" male prostitutes in Mexico City.¹⁰

How common is bisexuality in Mexico? Mexican gays insist that the vast majority of apparently straight males are open to the possibility of having sex if they so much as return a look. They are not unusual in this respect, since gays in Costa Rica and Cuba also claim that every other straight man is a closet case. They are exaggerating, of course. Most of all such claims do not differentiate between generational or situational, and a life-long or persistent bisexual predisposition. Same-sex sex is much more typical of young males than of adult males because of the combination of social pressures whereby they are pressured into affirming their masculinity in terms of sexual conquests, and young females are restrained from having pre-conjugal sex. After marriage, and access to other older women, the practice of same-sex sex would be expected to drop. Bearing this in mind, Joseph Carrier's estimate that thirty per cent of Mexican males between the age of 15 and 25 are bisexual to some extent or another does not seem implausible.¹¹

There seems to be general agreement amongst sociologists "that in Mexico the incidence of bisexuality is extremely high, amongst the highest in Latin America, and certainly higher than in the United States".¹² Official A.I.D.S. statistics, which admittedly should be treated with caution seem to bear this out. 24.5 per cent of all A.I.D.S. cases in September, 1990, reportedly consisted of bisexual males, compared to 38 per cent who were classified as homosexual. The rising number of females who have been infected by their male partners would also tend to confirm the incidence of bisexuality.¹³

The relatively high incidence of bisexuality is linked to the relatively low incidence of self-identified and publicly identifiable homosexuals within a society that is extremely misogynist. Whereas in the United States and Canada sexual behaviour in large measure defines the parameters of male gender, in Mexico sexual orientation is inferred from gender identity. Whereas in North America a young male has to demonstrate his heterosexuality by dating females and distancing himself from any suggestion of affection for other males, young Mexican males are not faced by this problem since heterosexuality is assumed insofar as it is equated with masculine demeanour. Closeness with one's "cuates" and males in general is considered the norm. Whereas

in North America most males believe that "one drop" of homosexuality makes one totally homosexual" most Mexicans by no means believe that "one drop of homosexuality" makes one totally homosexual as long as the appropriate sexual role is played".¹⁴

The price of dropping one's guard and behaving in a "gay" manner, that is, one that is construed as being non-masculine, is so high and the tangible rewards for coming out appear so slight to bisexual males, that most are deterred from doing so. A variety of cultural factors such as identification with the family, life-long bonds with a mother from whom Mexican males are loath to separate in the process of acquiring autonomous adulthood, and the great value placed on being the formal fathers of children, (not to mention all the other stigmatizing factors) deters even exclusively homosexual males from coming out and assuming a gay identity.

These traditional barriers to the adoption of identities similar to those of many gay males in the United States and Canada are reinforced by the relative absence of a public discourse about sexuality and gender identity, (which is even more noticeable in the case of lesbians than homosexual men). The absence of organizations such as Gay Fathers, gay sports and social clubs also affects the way Mexican homosexuals could envisage organizing their social life in alternative ways if they were to risk breaking with their family by coming out. Moreover, as always economic constraints are ever present for most of them.

In turn, the reluctance of Mexicans to assume a public gay identity means that the pool of possible supporters of non-commercial gay organizations will be relatively small. While it is true that Mexico City has more gay theatre and literature than any other Spanish-speaking city in Latin America, this should be put in the perspective of a very large population. Individual gay activists or spokesmen such as Juan Jacobo Hernández or novelist Luis González de Alba have a certain presence in the mainstream media, but here again their assertion of gay sensibility or rights would be invisible to the vast majority of

* I by no means intend to imply that the latter should be the norm. Nevertheless, the fact remains that young Mexicans increasingly tend to adopt the comportment and values of their American peers.

homosexuals (as well as to the public at large) since the circulation of newspapers such as *La Jornada* is very low. The sales of most gay novels would seldom exceed a few thousand copies, while other gay-positive literary and televised depictions of homosexuality are virtually non-existent. In the circumstances, it is not surprising that the political awareness of most homosexuals in terms of state and social repression is very low, a fact which is reinforced by the relatively free access to most variants of sex in Mexican society.

Notes

¹ Adler de Lomnitz, p. 96.

² My account of homosexual life amongst the popular classes is heavily indebted to Gerardo Ortega and Max Mejía.

³ Ortega, p. 56.

⁴ José Joaquín Blanco, "Ojos que Dan Pánico Soñar", *Función de Medianoche*, ERA, Mexico, 1981. p. 185.

⁵ Blanco, p. 185.

⁶ Their banal way of life has probably not changed that much since it was so graphically portrayed in Alberto X. Teruel's novel, *Los Inestables*, (Costa-Amic, Mexico, 1968).

⁷ Ramírez, pp. 51-52.

⁸ José de Val, Director de Investigación y Promoción Cultural del I.N.I., *El Nacional*, March 29, 1991.

⁹ Clark Louis Taylor, Jr., "El Ambiente: Male Homosexual Social Life in Mexico City", Ph.D. Dissertation, Berkeley, University of California, 1978. p. 148.

¹⁰ See "Entrevista de Ana Luisa Liguori y Gerardo Ortega", *Nexos*, Vol. 12, No. 139, July, 1989. pp. 55-56.

¹¹ J.M. Carrier, "Mexican Male Bisexuality" in F. Klein and T. Wolfe eds., *Bisexualities: Theory and Practice*, Haworth Press, New York, 1985. p. 81.

¹² Miguel Angel González Block, *Política* supplement of *El Nacional*, NO. 8, June 29, 1989.

¹³ See José Luis Valdespino y Ma de Lourdes García, "Epidemiología del Sida en Mexico", *Sociedad y Sida* supplement of *El Nacional*, Vol. 1, No. 2, November 1990.

¹⁴ Carrier, "Mexican Male Bisexuality", p. 83.

Homosexuality and the State

At first glance it would appear that homosexuality is less subject to penal sanctions in Mexico than in the United States or Canada. Homosexual relations between adults over 18 years of age are not criminalized. There is in fact only one explicit reference to homosexuality in the Mexican and Federal District penal code. Article 201 dictates a prison sentence of six months to five years for anyone “who facilitates or procures the corruption of a minor under 18 years of age”, which is increased to five to ten years in the event that the corrupting acts have led the minor to habitually engage in “homosexual practices”.

The absence of any other explicit reference to homosexuality in the penal code might be interpreted as an indication that homosexuals in Mexico, unlike Cuba, are not oppressed by the state. The penal codes of individual states (Mexico has a federal political system) with the exception of Chihuahua and Jalisco do not even include the reference to explicitly homosexual corruption of minors that exists in the federal code. Given that “street” homosexuals are particularly subject to public harassment, there is one other significant difference between Mexico and Cuba (and Costa Rica) with respect to their civil rights. Mexicans are not required to carry an identity card and/or proof of employment, even though Article 255 provides for a prison sentence of two to five years for those “who don’t have a valid reason for not having an honest job and who have a bad record”.

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- * On the other hand neither are relationships between homosexuals legalized akin to those between heterosexuals. Only a man and a woman may contract civil marriage, and a divorced parent loses any claim to custody of his or her children on account of “depraved habits”, (meaning adultery on the part of the mother or homosexuality on the part of the father), if they allegedly affect the morals of their children. (Article 444 (iii) Civil Code).

In fact, Mexicans enjoy considerable privacy vis-a-vis the state with respect to how they conduct their personal life. In part, this is due to the historical limitations upon the state and the church being able to impose their edicts upon the Mexican people. For much of the colonial period they had to accommodate themselves to the fact that the vast majority of the population "continued to live in traditional style, far from cities, haciendas or mines, speaking their own language ... ruled by their (own) governors and worshipping their own gods".¹ And even after Mexico became independent from Spain, and more Indians had become integrated into the national economy, the political shift had little effect upon the way in which many of them lived.

Regardless of policies such as the Inquisition (which in any case didn't directly apply to the Indians), the Catholic Church in New Spain soon realized that if it was going to relate to the Indian population it could do so only by turning a blind eye to the retention of indigenous customs as the price of securing the Indians' formal conversion to Catholicism. They facilitated this syncretism by frequently building Catholic churches on the grounds of former Indian temples, and by associating Catholic saints with specific pre-Columbian Indian deities. To this day, the character of the religious rituals which take place in Indian villages such as San Juan Chamula and Zinacantán outside San Cristobal de las Casas in Chiapas, has only the vaguest resemblance to the Catholicism of Europe. In fact, even in Mexico City one has only to visit popular religious festivities, such as those held on December 12 which celebrate the Virgin of Guadalupe to appreciate the extent to which Catholicism throughout much of central and southern Mexico continues to be insolubly associated with pre-Columbian rites in the minds of much of the population.

The extension of the state in medical, educational, and social services (and consequently of social control) since the 1940's is undeniable, but the fact remains that there are still vast stretches of rural Mexico and of marginalized urban settlements where the state is hardly present. The impoverished anarchic condition in which much of the population of Mexico City lives fosters a "live and let live" attitude in defiance of the government which is perceived as an exploitative institution. Far from protecting the security of ordinary people and upholding the law (the vast majority of crimes against individuals in marginal neighbourhoods are not prosecuted), the police are more likely to try to extort money from them. Not surprisingly, much as in black American urban ghettos, the local population protects certain categories of lawbreakers, and if necessary enforces its own laws. Further-

more, in isolated rural areas, local "caciques" and "hacendados" are likely to impose their own personal rules regardless of formal laws. For there is little access to the world outside the community, and little chance of legal repercussion provided that they don't directly threaten the interests of those immediately above them in the state.

Apart from these historical and contemporary social conditions, recognition of the right to individual privacy dates back to the 1857 constitution and the liberal Reform Laws of 1858 which sought to destroy the traditional power of the Church, particularly with respect to education and civil relations, and of communal Indian institutions over the individual. The Conservative reaction to Juárez' reforms led to the French occupation and imposition of Maximilian as "emperor" of Mexico. Quite unexpectedly from the standpoint of the Conservatives who had invited Napoleon III to oust Juárez, Maximilian turned out to be as anti-clerical and reformist as Juárez himself. Though French rule was brief, it reinforced the influence of the Napoleonic Code upon Mexico's own code. These factors account for the absence of sanctions against consensual homosexual acts, along with all other sexual acts conducted in private. The privileged status of private sexual acts was reinforced in 1917 when an attempt to bring them within the domain of the penal code was quickly discarded during the constitutional convention.

On the other hand, regardless of its formal enunciation of human rights, the over-riding characteristic of the Mexican state is the discrepancy between legal rights, and the way authority is exercised in the name of the state. Whatever the formal rights of the individual, these are often of no avail given the immense gulf that separates the mass of the population from those in power. Though the Mexican people have

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- * Article 130 of the 1917 Constitution further diminished the secular role of the Catholic Church by denying it any form of corporate juridical status.
 - ** Under the Napoleonic code, "Deviant' sexual acts were treated as a crime only when they implied an outrage on public decency, when there was violence or absence of consent, or when one of the parties was underage or not regarded as able to give valid consent for one reason or another". Vern L. Bullough, *Homosexuality: A History*, Meridian Books, New York, 1979. p. 37.

intermittently risen up against their oppressors, many have also retreated back into their shell, stoically accepting their powerlessness. Today, almost as much as in the colonial past, Mexico upholds the dictum that "the colonists (sic) were born to be silent and obey, and not to discuss or proffer advice on the higher affairs of government".² That is why, as Carlos Monsiváis has noted, the Mexican state can act with impunity in almost every respect.³

Homosexuals in Mexico are much less affected by explicit prohibitions in the penal code than by the broad and seemingly innocuous references to "Transgressions Against Morality and Public Decency", the heading of the section under which the article dealing with the corruption of minors is listed. In this context, the underlying purpose of Article 201 is not to "protect" minors from "sexual depravity", but to stigmatize anyone whose values and behaviour question Mexico's machista and heterosexist social order. Thus, Article 201 associates homosexuality with drug addiction, alcoholism, prostitution, and crime in terms of the possible outcome resulting from the "sexual corruption" of minors. In the same spirit, Article 262 implies that an adult male is not responsible for having secured a female minor's consent for sex by deceit, if she fails to prove that she is "chaste and honest". Furthermore, until very recently, he was exculpated if he agreed to marry the minor in question (Article 263).

In practice, the real burden of the criminal code is that it can be used to legitimize or excuse the arbitrary persecution of homosexuals, particularly those whose public appearance, rather than private acts run counter to the dominant gender values. As gay activist Max Mejía has pointed out "it is of little consequence whether or not homosexuality is actually defined as a crime. The criterion for establishing what is legally immoral is determined by machista standards of decency, morality and shame".⁴ Strictly legal rights for homosexuals to exercise their sexuality freely are of little avail in a society in which most homosexuals still feel a great deal of shame and embarrassment about

* The sexism in the penal code is particularly evident with regard to its provisions regarding adultery. Although every other male in Mexico engages in adultery (a conservative estimate), men have successfully fought off all attempts to depenalize adultery (Article 273) on the grounds that it would weaken the family (read their hold over women).

their sexuality, and in which supposed advocates of the legal rights of homosexuals can write manuals which refer to homosexuals "not having the good fortune to feel love for the right person" and to lesbians who become pregnant "for reasons that are foreign to their body's inclinations".⁵

A homophobic popular culture legitimizes the oppression of individual homosexuals at the hands of the notoriously corrupt police. In this respect, Article 201, in particular, offers *carte blanche* for the police to persecute anyone in the company of an underage minor. That the state may rarely actually prosecute someone for having sex with a minor underlines the arbitrary nature of its possible enforcement, given the scarcity of males who are sexual novices by the time they reach legal maturity! In any case, the concept of a universal age boundary separating minors from adults is particularly questionable with respect to Mexico since male relationships are not nearly as stratified by age as they tend to be in other parts of North America. It is very common, particularly in rural areas, to see adolescents socializing with older males.

In Mexico City, the by-laws (reglamentos) of the Federal District police, which are in effect extensions of the criminal code, have particular impact upon the lives of homosexuals. They give police sweeping powers to arrest "anyone who behaves or uses language that contravenes public decency", who makes "gestures that are offensive to other people", who disturbs "public order", and who "invites, permits or engages in prostitution or carnal commerce", amongst a host of other offenses.(Article 3).⁶ Similarly, in Guadalajara, the police are authorized to detain anyone who engages in acts that contravene "normal sexual relations".⁷

The poorly paid police throughout Mexico exploit the provisions of the penal codes and police regulations to harass and extort money from

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- * In any event, it is very obvious that in Mexico, as in the United States and Canada, most cases of sexual assault of male minors are carried out by relatives within the home, the sanctity of which is invariably respected by the state.
 - ** In fact, every urban centre down to the smallest municipio is governed by equivalent by-laws.

street homosexuals in particular.⁸ They can get away with it because on the one hand homosexuals, in particular visibly effeminate ones such as "vestidas" and "locas", are the ones who are stigmatized as deviants by the general public and are identified with criminality ; on the other hand, police corruption has an almost institutionalised status with respect to which many middle- and upper-class Mexicans are complicit.

There is a hierarchical system of police graft whereby high officials condone (or even exert pressure with respect to) the corruption of those below them in exchange for a cut of the graft. Homosexual victims of the police typically either collaborate with them by offering protection money in advance, as do some prostitutes, or cough up the requisite "mordida" rather than risk public exposure and humiliation in the case of ordinary middle- class gays. Failing that, "chilango" homosexuals are typically detained overnight at El Toro, a central police station in Mexico City, which has a section reserved for homosexuals. They are usually released the next day, but not before they have been robbed of any valuables on their person. Ironically enough, on occasion they may escape detention on the grounds of public immorality by having sex with the police officer who has arrested them, for many Mexican police are no less likely to pass by an opportunity to have sex with a "joto" than is the typical machista "mayate" in the population as a whole who wants to "get his rocks off".

Occasionally the police appear to implement a policy designed to enforce the law which is unrelated to personal graft, such as the campaigns in 1988 against possession of illicit weapons, and against drugs in 1990. Gay bars may be raided with this in mind. The enforcement of obscenity laws is equally lax and arbitrary. Article 200 of the criminal code, for example, provides for a prison sentence of six months to five years for anyone who "creates, reproduces, or publishes

* For example, during the "morality" campaign of the incumbent mayor of Guadalajara which has led to the closure of bars and massive street raids, press references to arrests of homosexuals have invariably been illustrated by photos of extravagant cross-dressers. Even references to the forthcoming International Lesbian and Gay Association conference in Guadalajara have been illustrated by photos of prostitutes.

** One of a multitude of pejorative terms used to describe homosexuals.

obscene books, articles, images, or objects or who shows, distributes or circulates them, (as well as) anyone who performs or is responsible for the performance of obscene displays". In the context of Mexico, the fact that gay bars and bookstores which show or distribute gay porn are not currently prosecuted is not due to a legal loophole, but rather to current municipal policies, and no doubt to bribery at the lower level. There is every reason to assume that almost every gay bar pays protection money to the police and local officials. Those which fall afoul of the law, in all probability have done so because of their failure to "cooperate" in the prescribed manner. Given the exploitative character of most of the bars and the conservative passivity of most of their clients it is understandable that there is no resistance when bars are raided or closed down.

Localized police oppression may have a devastating impact upon the lives of individuals, but a more significant reflection of the oppressive character of the state is the extent to which it reinforces the homophobic values of the society as a whole. For it is these values which permit the police to oppress homosexuals with the impunity to which they are accustomed. Since the late 1970's, and particularly since the advent of the homosexual liberation movement, there has been a growing recognition of the civil rights of homosexuals amongst elite opinion makers and sections of the middle class in particular. Nevertheless, even as late as 1974 homophobia has been incited at the highest level of the state. President Luis Echeverría in his Fourth State of the Nation Report declared that amongst other things that characterized the background of the terrorists operating in Mexico was a "high incidence of masculine and feminine homosexuality".⁹

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- * The same applies to entertainment. Transvestite shows are allowed, but with rare exceptions male strippers are not allowed, because they would be considered offensive to "buenas costumbres" (machistas).
 - ** The owner of El Taller and El Vaquero claims to be an exception. In fact, El Taller was briefly (unlike other Zona Rosa bars which are typically shut down for much longer periods) shut down in late 1990. If Luis González de Alba is able to defy the authorities it may be due to his political connections and his formidable reputation as a civil libertarian and fighter — he was one of the leaders of the 1968 student rebellion.

His successors, Miguel de la Madrid, and Carlos Salinas de Gortari, proved to be unexpectedly liberal on sexual-cultural issues despite the economic crisis and the adoption of anti-popular economic policies designed to placate the I.M.F. and the powerful corporate interests within Mexico itself. For example, at the national level, A.I.D.S. has not been allowed to become a pretext for increased repression of homosexuals despite the demands of such homophobic movements as Pro-Vida and the Union Nacional de Padres de Familia, aided and abetted by Cardinal Ernesto Corripio Ahumada and of various prominent Mexican bishops for whom A.I.D.S. is the consequence of "anti-natural" and "disordered" behaviour.¹⁰ At most, the religious groups associated with the Right have been able to prevent the Mexican government from extending its safe-sex public education, particularly with respect to the use of the condom.

How individual homosexuals, effeminate "locas" in the main, will be harassed by the state outside Mexico City will depend upon regional tradition and the character of the local P.R.I. machine that wields power at the state and municipal level (save for a few exceptions such as the city of Mérida). Although in some respects, the autonomy of the local state government is purely nominal, insofar as the incumbent president virtually decides who will be nominated as the P.R.I. candidate and hence automatically become governor (at least until 1988 when the P.A.N. was allowed to win the northern state of Baja California Norte), he cannot impose a candidate regardless of local political factions. The state government and even municipal authorities, as can be seen by the behaviour of the mayors of Guadalajara and Mérida, have considerable latitude with respect to social and cultural issues. How they will police the lives of homosexuals will in part depend upon the level of political awareness and organization of the local homosexuals. In general, it is very low throughout Mexico. For example, no collective resistance has been mounted against the campaign of the Delegación Cuauhtémoc to "improve the image" of the Zona Rosa by driving homosexual bars out of the district. Whereas a couple of years ago

* For example, when the Cyprus bar was shut down by the Delegación Cuauhtémoc for patently absurd reasons (alleging that it was a centre of prostitution and satanic cults), not one of the one hundred and eighteen patrons who were arrested was prepared to challenge the legitimacy of the order or to demand respect for his civil rights. If it had not been for the concern of intellectuals such as Francisco Galván, Arturo Díaz and

there were half a dozen bars there, by 1991 only El Taller remained, due in no small measure to the courage of its owner, Luis González de Alba. In exceptional cases, however, such as in Guadalajara, gays and lesbians have impressively resisted some of the most oppressive policies in Mexico.

An additional factor that is absent in the case of both Costa Rica and Cuba is the existence of a progressive press which is alert to the persecution of homosexuals by provincial authorities. Over the last decade Mexico has acquired some relatively independent journals which are gay positive in the sense of covering lesbian and gay-related news from the perspective of civil rights. Consequently when the state of Yucatán, otherwise a fairly isolated region of Mexico, experienced a "moral panic" about A.I.D.S. initiated by a handful of fascistic groups in the spring of 1987, and which led to homosexuals being swept off the streets of Mérida, the state capital, the national press in Mexico City was largely responsible for forcing the local government to disown the campaign and to condemn the responsible organizations.¹¹ It is also more than probable that the federal government intervened. For the homophobic manipulation of the A.I.D.S. issue was contrary to the enlightened liberal image that Mexico was trying to project with respect to its A.I.D.S. policies, which until then had emphasized the use of condoms as a major component of its safe-sex public education programme.

Though systemic persecution of homosexuals may not be official public policy in most parts of Mexico, harassment and exploitation of street homosexuals, cross-dressers and "chichifos" remains the rule. There is also a widespread belief amongst homosexuals that state harassment of homosexuals becomes intensified prior to the end of each "sexenio", and sometimes at the beginning of the new one as different elements struggle to maximize their share of the spoils while

Margo Su, as well as that of Luis González de Alba, no one would have denounced the illegitimate campaign to close the gay bars in the Zona Rosa, and Spartacus in Nezahualcóyatl. Apart from revealing the corruption of the Delegación officials, the campaign was extremely hypocritical since the campaign never touched the "Ladies bars" in the Zona Rosa, which are no more than disguised brothels. See Francisco Galván Díaz, "Prostitución y Libertades Ciudadanas en la Cuauhtémoc", *El Nacional*, February, 1991.

they have the opportunity. Moreover, given the generalized homophobia that persists in almost all sectors of Mexican society, and the tenuous hold of civil rights, there is no guarantee that future governments will not be tempted to use homosexuals as scapegoats to distract attention from the multitude of social problems which Mexico has been unable to resolve.

Notes

¹Riding, p. 43.

²Cited by Riding, p. 42. Riding uses the term colonists but the Mexican edition of his book refers to the "colonizados" (colonized), which seems more appropriate.

³*La Jornada*, June 3, 1988.

⁴Max Mejía, "Nadie es Libre Hasta que Todos Somos Libres", in Gina Fratti and Adriana Batista, *Liberación Homosexual*, Posada, Mexico, 1984. p. 229.

⁵See Ernesto A. Martínez, *Guía Legal del Homosexual Urbano*, Edamex, Mexico, 1985. pp. 19-20.

⁶Martínez, pp. 75-88.

⁷Decreto No. 8121, Congreso de Estado, Jalisco, "Reglamento de Policía y Buen Gobierno para el Municipio de Guadalajara", (1X).

⁸See Claudia X, "Prostitución e Inseguridad en la Vía Pública", *La Guillotina*, No. 19, October, 1989, pp. 68-69.

⁹Cited by Joseph Carrier, "Cultural Factors Affecting Urban Mexican Male Homosexual Behavior", *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, Vol.5, No.2, 1976, p. 123.

¹⁰See Rodrigo Vera and Manuel Robles, "La Publicidad Sobre el SIDA Rompe Tabúes ante la Irritación de los Tradicionalistas", *Proceso*, May 2, 1988.

¹¹See, for example, *La Jornada*, May 5, 13, 20, 1987 and *Proceso*, May 24, 1987. See also, for example, Francisco Galván Díaz, "Guadalajara: la Chicago tapatía?" *El Nacional*, January 4, 1990, and on the resumption of the "moral campaign" in Mérida, "Emprende el Ayuntamiento de Mérida una Campaña de Moralización social", *La Jornada*, February 9, 1991.

The Gay Liberation Movement in Mexico City

1968 was a momentous year for Mexico as it was for much of Europe and North America. Although the Mexican student movement was savagely crushed in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas in Tlatelolco, Mexico would never be the same again. In a cultural and political sense it marked the emergence of modern Mexico, and signalled the arrival of a whole new generation that could not be denied, repressed or coopted as easily by the traditional state mechanisms. Until then the P.R.I. regime had mostly had to concern itself with the established factions that had competed for influence and a share of the spoils, namely the P.R.I. organizations that claimed to represent peasants, labour and the bureaucracy, and above all the new industrial and financial elite that had emerged since the 1940's. Given that the Mexican economy had expanded at one of the highest rates in the world for much of this period, the state was able to meet many of the demands placed upon it. The rich grew richer, but the standard of living of all but the poorest and most marginalized elements of Mexican society was also beginning to show a marked improvement.

Nevertheless, a new generation of Mexican youth had arrived on the scene which was much more impressed by the achievements of the Cuban Revolution, the example of Che Guevara and the student struggles that had convulsed half of Europe and North America, than by the high growth rates of the Mexican G.N.P. Neither the women's movement nor gay liberation, in the form of Stonewall, had yet made their presence felt in the United States, so it is not surprising that sexual freedom was not a major preoccupation of the student movement that was protesting the archaic authoritarianism of the Díaz Ordaz administration, and the squandering of public resources on the 1968 Olympic Games, which Mexico could ill afford and which few of its citizens could expect to attend. Nevertheless, the *defi* of traditional authority and power wet the feet of many people who subsequently would become leading figures in the gay liberation movement.

University students, as one might expect, were the first to echo the questions raised by the radical student movements that had emerged in the United States and Europe in the sixties. Counter-cultural, albeit derivative, forms of expression began to take root in Mexico that would popularize rock, drugs, informal dress style, hang-loose attitudes, a questioning of conventional parental authority, and a general rejection of anything identified with traditional Mexican institutions. "La Onda",¹ * a term which would become almost a code word amongst Mexican youth had arrived on the scene. La Onda, according to Carlos Monsiváis, represents the first movement in contemporary Mexico which from "a *non-political position* rejects institutional conceptions and reveals with eloquence the extinction of a cultural hegemony".¹ Onda attitudes would eventually transcend class boundaries and percolate down from Mexico City to almost every town in Mexico. You are as likely to find them amongst teenage "chavos" in the city of Oaxaca, as amongst the artsy upper-middle class in Insurgentes Sur, or amongst "pandilleros" in Neza.

Although the cultural ferment that would eventually infect much of Mexico's youth was at first restricted to a small segment of the middle class, it was sufficient for the new concepts of sexual freedom that were being aired in Europe and the United States to take root in Mexico in the early seventies. The dismissal of a Sears department employee in 1971 on account of his allegedly homosexual demeanour was the catalyst that brought together the first group of gays and lesbians in Mexican history that would question their stigmatization and social oppression. Various consciousness-raising and political study groups emerged in the following years aided and abetted by prominent intellectuals such as Nancy Cárdenas and Carlos Monsiváis who had ties with American and British gay communities. People like Juan Jacobo Hernández, later to become a prominent gay activist, had also lived in United States for a while and were much influenced by their exposure to the explosive assertion of gay rights that had taken place there.

* "Onda" literally means "waves" or colloquially "vibes". Essentially it refers to non-conformity and counterculture. "Que Onda?" means what are you into? "Buena onda" refers to someone or a situation that young people can trust. It also can have a gay connotation. "Eres de onda?" means are you gay? "Mucha onda" means lots of gays around.

Within a few years, organizations like Sex-Pol and the Frente de Liberación Homosexual had been founded. These were closeted groups at first, because hardly anyone could contemplate the possibility of coming out on account of the social repercussions.² Furthermore, even though retrospectively it is evident that a different Mexico had emerged after 1970 that would have much more liberal social and cultural policies, most would-be gay activists were still understandably fearful that they could be incarcerated for contravening "buenas costumbres" (public decency) or crippled by the fearsome "halcones", the paramilitary thugs that the Mexican state had traditionally used to silence and intimidate dissidents. They had good reason to be cautious. Despite his radical Third World rhetoric, President Echeverría could be as despotic as any of his predecessors when the legitimacy of his own regime was in question. As Secretario de Gobernación in the Díaz Ordaz government, he had been directly responsible for the 1968 massacre of over three hundred students in Tlatelolco, and as president he had permitted a second "matanza" of one hundred students to take place in June, 1971. Furthermore, "razzias" or massive police raids remained a constant threat hanging over homosexuals. For example, one raid alone in early 1975 led to the arrest of 190 people.³

Over the next few years lesbian and gay study groups proliferated and their members' confidence and outrage grew proportionately. By the late 1970's they had coalesced around three distinct groups. The largest, most notorious and initially by far the most influential group was the Frente Homosexual de Acción Revolucionaria (F.H.A.R.). As its name implied it represented a coalition of different groups whose members mainly identified themselves with socialism and anarchism. Although it formally espoused a feminist position, its composition was largely male and was perceived as misogynist by many lesbians. Its political style was the most counter-cultural and confrontational of the three major groups.

Grupo Lambda de Liberación Homosexual, whose membership included as many lesbians as gays, was the other major group that emerged in the late seventies and which would eventually replace F.H.A.R. as the hegemonic homosexual liberation group. It shared most of F.H.A.R.'s ideological perspectives but was more concrete and pragmatic in its approach. Thus it not only ensured that its feminist principles would be structurally incorporated within its leadership which had an equal representation of lesbian members, but as co-founder of the Frente Nacional por la Liberación y los Derechos de las Mujeres, it became the first organization that attempted to insert

lesbian rights into Mexico's incipient feminist movement. As a member of the Frente Nacional Contra la Represión, the first organization that embraced all of the Mexican Left, Lambda was also responsible for introducing gay rights into the platform of the Left. It also developed ties with the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (P.R.T.), a Trotskyist party.

The smallest group, Oikabeth, was perhaps the most disciplined and ideological. Its exclusively lesbian membership was concerned with forging a socialist lesbian space within the nascent feminist movement, at a time when straight feminists rejected any such possibility for strategic as much as homophobic reasons. Given the depth of sexism, and the fragile foothold of feminism, most feminists feared that the assertion of lesbian rights would be divisive and premature. Though Oikabeth had reservations about the "phallogentric" image of F.H.A.R., and doubts about what its members considered to be the petty-bourgeois, albeit feminist leftism of Lambda, its members shared the basic perspectives of the other two groups.

Mexican activists were initially inspired by the American (and to a lesser extent British and Catalan) gay liberation movements which emerged subsequent to the 1969 Stonewall riots in New York. The rhetoric of the U.S. movement was revolutionary and many of its initial actions were certainly radical. But organizations such as the Gay Liberation Front (G.L.F.), which espoused socialist principles, could hardly be expected to grow in the absence of a more developed class consciousness in the United States as a whole. In fact, subsequent to the withdrawal of the United States from Vietnam and the removal of the *raison d'être* of the anti-war movement, most of the radical movements that had convulsed the United States, including the civil rights and student movements disintegrated. Although the feminist and gay liberation movements continued to make an impact upon American society, they discarded their socialist ideology and assumed a liberal character that was more consistent with traditional American politics.

If the revolutionary rhetoric of the G.L.F. was ineffective insofar as it could only connect with the fringe of American politics, this was much less true of the socialist rhetoric of the early lesbian and gay organizations of Mexico. Even though the majority of the original activists were inevitably middle class in origin, they could hardly be oblivious to the fact that no issue could be expected to touch the post-1968 youth unless it was tied to a radical questioning of the system. Even though Mexico was still in the midst of its oil boom, the class contradictions and objective misery which plagued most Mexicans were too all-encom-

passing to be ignored, even by movements that were concerned with apparently peripheral issues such as sexual liberation. It is, therefore, not at all surprising that the original gay and lesbian organizations were all leftist. Nor is it coincidental that in 1978 the F.H.A.R. chose the annual July 26 demonstration in support of the Cuban Revolution to "come out" in public. Only a handful of homosexuals participated. But a much larger gay and lesbian contingent made an appearance in the October 2 commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the 1968 student massacre. Even more daring was the demonstration which occurred in May, 1980, inside the headquarters of the Mexico City police. The demonstrators demanded that the hated and feared chief of police, Arturo Durazo Moreno, put an end to gay raids in the Federal District.

The reaction of the traditional Left was initially one of astonishment, given its machista outlook. Participation in the pro-Cuban demonstration also touched a raw nerve since the homosexual contingent raised the issue of the oppression of homosexuals within Cuba which had become such a controversial question amongst Mexico's radical intellectuals at the time. Nevertheless, as the gay and lesbian movement demonstrated its ability to capture the attention of the media and eventually to mobilize thousands of participants in public demonstrations, at least one socialist party, the P.R.T. embraced it with open arms. *

Although the P.R.T. is in principle a Trotskyist party, in 1982 it nominated Rosario Ibarra de Piedra as its candidate in the presidential elections. She herself was not a Trotskyist, but had acquired a national reputation as the founder of the National Committee to Defend Political Prisoners and had had first-hand experience of Mexican repression since her own son had "disappeared" in 1975. Within a context whereby a non-Trotskyist becomes the standard bearer of a Trotskyist party, the decision of the P.R.T. to nominate several gay liberation candidates for

* The Mexican Communist Party, (P.C.M.), actually preceded the P.R.T. in formally endorsing sexual rights in 1980. Its commitment to homosexual and women's liberation was reflected in the May 1980 issue of *El Machete*, the party magazine, which contained a very sympathetic interview with Carlos Monsiváis on the subject matter. Thesis 34 of the P.C.M. which upheld sexual rights was discarded, however, when the party was integrated into a new party, the Partido Socialista Unificado de Mexico, (P.S.U.M.), shortly after.

election as federal deputies becomes comprehensible. The P.R.T. campaigns of Lupita García de Alba and Pedro Preciado in Guadalajara and of Claudia Hinojosa and Max Mejía in Mexico City were organized by C.H.L.A.R.I., the National Lesbian and Homosexual Committee to support Rosario Ibarra, and were virtually independent of the rest of the P.R.T. electoral campaign.

The assertion of homosexual rights under the umbrella of the P.R.T. during the 1982 election campaign, was an unprecedented phenomenon in Mexico's political history. In a country in which public acknowledgement of homosexuality (other than in terms of homophobic allusion) was as rare as its private incidence was common, the media were at first scandalized and then hypnotized by the temerity of the thousands of ordinary men and women who were "flaunting" their homosexuality in public. The Left and intellectuals, too, were initially flabbergasted by the affirmation that the creation of a socialist society implied the elimination of heterosexism, and by the homosexual movement's insistence that a whole series of repressive and discriminatory acts against lesbians and gays were as political as any more conventional issue affecting civil rights. Despite its initial impact, the organized lesbian and gay movement in Mexico City entered a period of crisis in 1982 and had virtually collapsed by 1984. The marriage of convenience between the P.R.T. and the lesbian and gay liberation movement could not last.* Even though most of the early activists were nominally socialists, the explicit identification of socialism with homosexual liberation tended to alienate the majority of their immediate supporters, for they were mostly middle class and did not share their political perspective. The movement could no longer attract new activists to its organizations nor mobilize large numbers in public demonstrations. More to the point, its breakup was related to its demonstrated inability to devise concrete responses to the oppression experienced by gays and lesbians in their everyday life. The movement had always been more successful in staging public demonstrations (although it by no means limited itself to these) than in persuading the homosexuals who at-

* For example, no mention of homosexual oppression and liberation was made in the P.R.T.'s 1988 electoral campaign.

tended them to struggle with specific issues in the workplace, schools and housing.⁴

Moreover, Mexico had suddenly become submerged in an economic crisis. The bottom had fallen out of the world oil market, leaving Mexico unable to pay either the interest or the principal due on the huge debts amassed under the corrupt Echeverría and Lopez Portillo administrations. The incoming government of Miguel de la Madrid began to implement a savage overhaul of the economy in an effort to placate Mexico's creditors and secure the means to repay its debts. The middle class from whose ranks most of the gay activists, regardless of their radical stance, had come was particularly hard hit. Incomes had been slashed and people were much more insecure about alternative job prospects. Gays and lesbians were much less willing to come out or to put their jobs in jeopardy as a result of their activism.

In addition to these external objective circumstances there were internal subjective factors that are as characteristic of gay politics as of any other branch of radical politics in Mexico. The Mexican Left and oppositional forces in general seem incapable of sustained organization and cooperation. Their first inclination always seems to be that of forming yet another "grupúsculo" (faction). Moreover, their individualism leads to "vedetismo" (leaders becoming prima donnas) and intellectual radical posturing that does more harm to the possibility of mobilizing an effective opposition than it ever does to the P.R.I. establishment. There are at least three nominally leftist daily newspapers, each of which consequently has a very small circulation, and even more "socialist" parties with similar consequences in terms of their base of support. Accordingly, the fragmentation of lesbian and gay organizations represents perhaps the greatest impediment to the effective insertion of the homosexual liberation movement in the struggle for the democratization of political life that is currently taking place in Mexico.

Given this political culture, it is almost a miracle that the three major lesbian and gay organizations were able to mount common actions in the late seventies and early eighties. In a way, the seeming ease with which the issue of homosexual oppression had been thrust onto Mexico's political arena contributed to the undoing of the movement. Activists were not prepared for the new conjuncture within which homosexual oppression had suddenly become a public issue. In particular, they lacked the organization to respond to the incipient politicization of masses of ordinary gays and lesbians. Tensions over priorities concerning the continuing need to challenge the hegemony of traditional machista values, to mobilize gays and lesbians around

specific rights and abuses, and to integrate the movement within the broader socialist struggle to revolutionize Mexican society became more acute.

All three groups proved unable to respond to the new circumstances. Tensions between and within them led to their effective disintegration well before the 1984 debacle which seemingly signalled the end of the movement. The violence — mostly verbal — of that year's Gay Pride Day march whose organizers had hoped would focus on the rising number of gay murders, alienated as many of its rank and file participants as it did the movement's bewildered supporters in the mass media and public as a whole. Attention was diverted from violence against gays to seeming violence amongst gays.

The issue of the political direction of the movement which had lost its subversive radical character as it gained in popularity was a valid one — and one that was by no means unique to Mexico — but it is debateable whether the decision of Colectivo Sol and of others formerly associated with the F.H.A.R. to disrupt the march in order to underline the "death" of the movement's original goals was constructive. In any event, the homosexual liberation movement in its organized form has never recovered its early vitality in Mexico. The energy, skills and experience of its leaders became dissipated in personal recriminations which became major obstacles to the reformulation of the movement which was so pressing given the social crisis which by now had engulfed Mexico.⁵

The Gay Communities in Mexico City Today

By 1991, Mexico City, a city which a few years earlier had witnessed the mobilization of thousands of gays and lesbians in radical pride day demonstrations, had lost most of its gay political infrastructure. Only one gay institution had effectively operated during most of the previous few years. Cálamó, founded by former members of Lambda, was an expressly non-political organization which offered a wide range of legal and medical counselling to gays and lesbians. In collaboration with the owner of the "9", a mixed bar in the Zona Rosa, it organized the most imaginative A.I.D.S. fund-raising events in the city. At its peak, it had about twenty professional volunteer collaborators and a membership of about sixty others. Valuable though its work may have been, the number of members involved in its activities indicates just how marginal it was in terms of the needs of homosexuals in a city of nearly twenty million inhabitants. Because of its low non-political profile, it

was often criticized by other gay activists for its accommodative philosophy. In any event Cálamo, too, began to fall apart in 1990.

There are a handful of other political organizations such as Colectivo Sol, Guerrilla Gay, the Grupo Homosexual de Acción Revolucionaria and the Circulo Cultural Gay. Colectivo Sol, lead by Juan Jacobo Hernández and others previously associated with F.H.A.R., has recently established what promises to be the best gay and lesbian archives in Latin America. Apart from that, however, its energies have increasingly turned towards A.I.D.S. support and education rather than gay liberation *per se*; understandable, but a radical departure from its former preoccupations. The Circulo Cultural Gay mounts an annual series of debates, films, theatrical performances and art displays prior to Gay Pride Day. As one might expect, however, its audience is almost exclusively middle class and its location, currently in the Museo Universitario del Chopo, is far removed from the conditions in which the vast majority of Mexican homosexuals live out their lives. Moreover, the reality is that the projects that these organizations undertake are more a reflection of the role of one or two individuals than of any collective political undertaking.*

There are no central meeting places associated with lesbians and gays, in part because public gatherings to discuss such issues as the relation of A.I.D.S. to homosexual oppression and liberation no longer take place. For example, there was no attempt to organize a collective political response to the homophobic agenda of Pro-Vida and of elements of the Catholic hierarchy with regards to A.I.D.S., nor to intervene collectively in the 1988 presidential campaign. An excellent opportunity to raise issues such as the consequences of declining public health budgets on A.I.D.S. support and education was thus lost. The point is not to make abstract criticisms but rather to illustrate the real consequences of the demise of the organized movement, for in the early eighties, it had the capacity to organize such interventions in

* One leading gay activist explained that more collective organizations simply do not work in Mexico. In the case of his organization, he said that he was prepared to consult with other members, but he would always have the last word. From my observation, he may be right, given the political culture inherited from the past which gay organizations must perforce share until Mexico develops a more participatory and democratic civil society.

politics and public discourse. Both F.A.H.R. and Lambda had their own newspapers, respectively called *Nuestro Cuerpo* and *Nuevo Ambiente*. Today, unfortunately, there is not even a collective phone line or notice board, let alone a gay magazine or newspaper by which information could be distributed to the city's homosexuals. (Fortunately, *La Guillotina*, which has consistently supported gay rights, has ensured that the issue of homosexual oppression would remain part of radical discourse, even though it only appears sporadically). In the circumstances, it is hardly surprising that even mass participation in Lesbian and Gay Pride Day celebrations is becoming a distant memory.

For a while, the most visible public presence of the homosexual community in Mexico City consisted of *Macho Tips*, a glossy Americanized magazine which appeared intermittently and was sold on corner newsstands in major cities. It served to publicize and, in a sense, legitimize the existence of gays and lesbians. Regardless of its high price, its format was eye-catching and may have attracted the attention of many people who would otherwise be oblivious to the existence of a gay viewpoint. In reality, however, it was a commercial and possibly P.R.I.-connected political venture, whose information was erratic, and which in no sense could be said to be a vehicle for communication between and on behalf of gays and lesbians. Its graphic images and editorial content in no way reflected the sexuality of most homosexuals in Mexico. Its replacement, *Hermes*, promises to be no better.

Unfortunately, a similar type of criticism could be made of *Opus Gay*, a short-lived magazine that appeared in 1987. It was more self-consciously intellectual and therefore largely directed to people with university education. It also had the virtue of being socially and politically concerned. But its style and editorial content — derivative of Europe rather than the United States — made it culturally inaccessible to the vast majority of gays who have yet to grapple with the more mundane and concrete issues of homosexual oppression, let alone the sophisticated theorization of Michel Foucault and Jeffrey Weeks.

There are now over a score of gay bars and taverns in Mexico City,⁶ whereas there were perhaps no more than a handful as late as 1976. Their significance should not be underestimated in terms of constituting social spaces in which middle-class gays (although not exclusively so, since one or two are mostly patronized by working-class homosexuals) can explore and solidify their communal and social needs. Nevertheless, they may also impede the politicization of homosexuals insofar as their ghetto character reinforces the belief that sexual orientation is a private rather than public matter. Only two or three of the bars,

notably those owned by gay novelist, Luis González de Alba, attempt, however misogynist they may be, to reflect some of the broader needs of homosexuals.* For example, only one bar, the "9" (currently shut down on a drug charge), which is ironically a mixed bar, has consistently collaborated with A.I.D.S. fund-raising and education.** Almost without exception the remainder have closer ties to the police and local politicians in terms of "mordidas", than to the homosexual community whose patronage fattens their profits.

Although the organized expression of a radical gay liberation movement was short-lived, it has nevertheless left a positive legacy which can be the base for future struggles.⁷ "There now exists a homosexual band that stretches across Mexican society, which has an identity and consciousness of itself".⁸ Moreover, as Juan Carlos Bautista, a young gay writer and activist has pointed out, "today, it is possible to be openly gay in infinitely more ways than was true at the end of the last decade".⁹ Furthermore, it has had a major impact upon the sexual discourse of the political elite and the "clase media ilustrada" (the educated middle class) as they say in Mexico. They now have a knowledge about homosexuality, and of the legitimacy of demands to have the civil rights of gays and lesbians respected, that was largely absent before. For until quite recently, homosexuality within Mexico was a taboo subject even amongst intellectual and academic circles. Concepts of homosexuality were almost entirely based upon outdated foreign publications and stereotypes about "vestidas" and "locas". (In fact, no serious study of homosexuality in Mexico has ever been published within the country).*** In addition, the traditional position

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- * El Taller hosts a weekly gay liberation forum organized by Guerrilla Gay. Although the space in a gay bar has much to be said for it, it nevertheless partakes of all the limitations of its physical location in the affluent Zona Rosa. Few homosexuals, other than El Taller's middle-class patrons would be aware of the forum. Consequently, attendance is very limited.
 - ** Luis González de Alba, the co-owner of El Taller and El Vaquero gives considerable financial support to the Fundación Mexicana Contra el Sida, but otherwise his bars seem to be run on strictly commercial grounds.
 - *** *Liberación Homosexual*, whose first edition was published in 1973 graphically illustrates the point. The name of its author, Gina Fratti, is a pseudonym for a Mexican anthropologist. Its content is utterly devoid of

of doctors and psychologists, until recently filled with prejudice and ignorance* rather than science and concern for the health of homosexuals,¹⁰ is being challenged by new organizations such as the Instituto Mexicano de Sexología which is gay-positive.

Although weekly tabloids such as *Alarde*, *Angustia* and *Peligro* continue to exploit homosexuality in terms of eye-catching stories about transvestism, lesbian murders, sex-change operations and the like, the national press and television in general no longer restrict themselves to the presentation of gross stereotypes and caricatures of homosexuality. The early courage of lesbians such as Nancy Cárdenas and Claudia Hinojosa to come out in the most public of all media, television, and the opportunity to do so in such television programmes as Jacobo Zabludovsky's "24 Horas", were landmarks in this respect. Televisa, the major private network, which is otherwise both sexist and reactionary in its politics, has recently become much more sensitive with respect to the coverage of homosexuality and A.I.D.S.-related news. This is as significant as the gay-positive content of elite journals such as *La Jornada*, *El Nacional* (especially its supplements) and *Proceso*, given that television is by far the most popular medium of communication.

In addition, gay culture has carved out an increasing presence in Mexican arts as a whole. At least a dozen serious gay novels have been published in recent years, some of which such as *El Vampiro de la Colonia Roma*, have received national and international acclaim. *Adonis García*, as it is known in its English translation, was revolutionary, as José Joaquín Blanco has noted, because it enormously expanded the way in which culture, language and social morality could be expressed

any reference to Mexican data, even in its discussion of the historical, religious and legal background to the repression and regulation of homosexuality. Significantly, even the appendix to the second edition published in 1984 contains more information about gay liberation outside the country than within it.

- * The fact that until recently, medical students received no sexual education, meant according to Pablo García Rodríguez, "that they shared the prejudices and myths (about sexuality) that were deeply embedded in (Mexican) culture", cited by J. L. Alvarez-Gayou, and Rafael Mazín Reynosa, "La educación sexual en el mundo", *Mundo Médico*, Vol. 5, No. 50, 1978.

in Mexico.¹¹ Ten years after its publication in 1979, the intellectual and literary climate of Mexico has changed so much that it seems unbelievable that there could have been so much¹² initial opposition to its publication and recognition of its literary merits. In the meantime, its author, Luis Zapata who happens to have written several novels with gay themes, but who refuses to be categorized as a gay novelist, has almost become part of the Mexican cultural establishment.

Films with homosexual themes, such as *Doña Herlinda and her Son*, have also been increasingly produced within the last decade. The lives of homosexuals are in the main represented in a much more sympathetic manner than those of the characters represented, for example, in *El Lugar Sin Límites* (directed by Arturo Ripstein), an earlier gripping film whose transvestite hero met a typically tragic end. *El Lugar Sin Límites*, and *Doña Herlinda and her Son* (directed by Jaime Humberto Hermosillo), offer rough signposts of the range and evolution of Mexican machismo. In the first film (by now a Mexican classic), which was made in 1977 and was located in a rural outpost, every character without exception has internalized the most brutal values of traditional machismo. The latter film, made in 1984, represents the modern middle-class face of Mexico and allows its characters far more choice in the way they experience their sexuality and gender.*

Local and foreign plays dealing with homosexual topics are now also a relatively common feature of theatre life in Mexico City.** Not long ago there was a tremendous uproar when Nancy Cárdenas directed *Los Chicos de la Banda* (Boys in the Band), and had to overcome a furious campaign to have it censored. Since 1974, however, there has been a steady stream of "off-Broadway style" productions of local gay works, as well as of such international hits as *Torch-song Trilogy* (Una Canción Apasionada). José Antonio Alcaraz's play *Y Sin Embargo Se Mueven*, produced in 1979, had a particular impact because of its

* Actually *Doña Herlinda and her Son* is *de facto* censored in Mexico. It had a very brief run in an art cinema when it was first released and has rarely been shown since.

** For example, during my most recent stay in Mexico City (April, 1991), there were no less than three plays or reviews on stage containing gay themes.

trenchant critique of dominant sexual and social mores. In the same vein, Juan Jacobo Hernández', *El Lado Oscuro de la Luna*, which has been playing on and off for nine years, politicizes the representation of a tranvestite prostitute's life. The visibility of homo-erotic themes in the plastic arts has also become more apparent. In this respect, the Círculo Cultural Gay has played an important role in publicizing the work of gay artists and in mobilizing artists who are gay-positive in support of gay liberation and A.I.D.S.-related causes.¹³ Finally, an increasing number of universities, museums and even the hallowed Palacio de Bellas Artes have opened their doors to A.I.D.S.-related events sponsored by organizations identified with lesbians and gays.

Few public figures have followed the example of Nancy Cárdenas, José Joaquín Blanco and Luis González de Alba in coming out. But times have changed so much that if Juan Gabriel, by far Mexico's most popular singer, were to come out it would only alienate a minuscule portion of his fans.* Furthermore, there are many intellectuals writing for newspapers such as *La Jornada* and *El Nacional*, whose sexual orientation can be inferred from their writing without their public status being apparently diminished in the process.** Certainly, people like José Ramón Enríquez and Francisco Galván, have not felt inhibited from frequently addressing gay issues.

"Patriarchal machismo", as Monsiváis has noted, is thus no longer the unquestioned norm of Mexican culture. There has been a "rupture of verbal and social taboos" and a real corrosion of traditional machismo which today is as much an "expression of unconscious values" as it is the butt of conscious humour, whereas in the past it encapsulated the essence of Mexican culture.¹⁴ Much has happened since Monsiváis

* The change that has taken place in Mexican mass culture is evidenced in the obviously gay *persona* of Juan Gabriel. Twenty years ago when Jorge Negrete, Pedro Infante and Javier Solís still reigned supreme as the incarnation of machismo, the former would have been hounded out of town because of his "effeminacy". If Juan Gabriel were to explicitly come out it might well be considered in bad taste but indirect allusions to his sexual orientation are there for all to hear in the words of his most popular hit, "El Noa Noa".

** Perhaps this is not all that exceptional, given that Salvador Novo, perhaps Mexico's most famous man of letters, was from all accounts quite a "queen".

remarked upon this cultural shift a decade ago. For example, the ruling P.R.I. party has (however reluctantly) had to acknowledge the extent of homosexuality as evidenced by its safe-sex education programmes in response to the A.I.D.S. epidemic. More significantly, the new coalition that coalesced around the candidacy of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas in the 1988 elections is a long way from espousing the puritanical, machista socialism of "monks and nuns" which, as Heberto Castillo has admitted, once characterized the attitude of the Mexican Left to sexuality. Castillo, the most prominent socialist politician in Mexico, who was the presidential candidate of the Marxist P.M.S. party until he withdrew in favour of the candidacy of Cárdenas, is on record as stating that homosexuality is not only as normal as heterosexuality, but also "revolutionary" in the sense that regardless of the politics of individual homosexuals their demands imply a fundamental change in society because they open "new spaces for creativity".¹⁵ In fact, a commitment to respect sexual rights was one of the twelve principles which the P.M.S. originally laid down as a basis for unity with the Corriente Democrática upon the withdrawal of Castillo's candidacy in favor of that of Cárdenas. Even though Cárdenas' party, now named the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (P.R.D.) has not chosen to take up Castillo's challenge, it is evident that the cultural and political climate in Mexico with respect to the legitimacy of homosexuality is far ahead of that in Cuba, and even of Costa Rica.

Notes

¹ Monsiváis, *Amor Perdido*, p. 235.

² For an account of this period see Taylor, Chapter Six.

³ Taylor, p. 34.

⁴ For an analysis of the successes and failures of the gay and lesbian liberation movement see Juan Jacobo Hernández and Rafael Manrique, "10 Años del Movimiento Gay en Mexico", *La Guillotina*, No. 16, September, 1988. See also Max Mejía, "Diez Años del Movimiento de Liberación Homosexual en México", unpublished manuscript, Archivos Gay, Mexico; Jaime Leroux, "El M.L.H. más Allá del Desgreñe", *La Guillotina*, No. 17, March, 1989; and Colectivo Masiosare, "Tolerancia y Democracia en el M.L.H.", *La Guillotina*, No. 17, March, 1989.

⁵ My account of the early days of the gay liberation movement in Mexico City is influenced by a round-table discussion between some of its original leaders which took place on June 5, 1988, which was

organized by El Colectivo Masiosare in collaboration with Cálamo. It included Arturo Díaz, Juan Jacobo Hernández, Ian Maria Castro and Alma Aldama. I am also indebted to a series of interviews and ongoing discussions with Max Mejía, Juan Jacobo Hernández, Pedro Preciado, and José María Covarrubias.

⁶See Taylor, for an historical account of the emergence of a gay scene in Mexico City in the sixties and seventies.

⁷See the retrospective critique by Francisco Galván of the emergence of a homosexual community and its relation to the rest of society during the last twenty years. "Cambio Social. ¿Liberación Sexual?", *Política*, supplement of *El Nacional*, April 11, 1991.

⁸Roberto González Villarreal, "SIDA e Identidad Homosexual", in Francisco Galván Díaz ed., *El SIDA en Mexico: Los Efectos Sociales*, Ediciones de Cultura Popular, Mexico, 1988. p. 247.

⁹"El Fin de la Democracia Gay", *Nexos*, Vol. 12, No. 139, July 1989. p. 60.

¹⁰See *Carácter Antisocial de los Homosexuales*, written by Alfonso Millán, former president of the Liga Mexicana de Salud Mental, analyzed by Francisco Gomezjara, *Sociología de la Prostitución*, Fontamara, Mexico, 1978. pp. 84-87. See also the homophobic moralistic prejudices of the psychologist, Luis Jorge González, *Terapia para una Sexualidad Creativa*, Edición Castillo, Monterrey, 1989. pp. 281-99.

¹¹*La Jornada*, April 20, 1988.

¹²See Carlos Monsiváis, "Las Plagas y el Amarillismo: Notas Sobre el SIDA en Mexico", in Galván, *El SIDA*, pp. 122-124.

¹³See *Exprofeso. Recuento de Afinidades. Colectiva Plástica de Afinidades*, Colectivo Cultural Gay, Mexico, 1989.

¹⁴"Monsiváis: Femenismo y Homosexualidad", *El Machete*, May, 1980.

¹⁵Ortega, p. 54.

The Future of Gay Liberation

Although the organized gay movement ultimately had a significant impact upon the sexual discourse and cultural politics of the middle class in Mexico City, it must nevertheless be recognized that it gained few if any concrete rights for gays and lesbians, (particularly those who live in poorer neighbourhoods) and left them no less vulnerable at the individual level to state and societal oppression. This has become strikingly apparent from the discriminatory medical treatment in public hospitals of people with A.I.D.S. No reforms have been made to the penal code or to the police regulations of Mexico City, and the federal labour code (although rarely invoked) still permits employers to dismiss personnel for having committed "immoral acts" on the work site regardless of their competence and fulfilment of their work obligations in every other respect (Article 47 #8). Middle-class homosexuals may have more social space to socialize within bars and private fiestas in the knowledge that the police are now unlikely to bust them, but the vast majority of homosexuals who do not have the economic means to enjoy such spaces are still at the mercy of local police and of social victimization on the street. They are no more free to truly enjoy their sexuality and their bodies than any other dimension of their lives.

The concrete achievements of the homosexual liberation movement may seem slight in light of its original high expectations. But they must be measured in relation to the co-optive and repressive capacities of the Mexican state, and to the problems posed by the specific character of the Federal District, a city of almost twenty million

* Except for the inclusion of reactionary amendments such as Article 199 bis. See the appendix, Francisco Galván Díaz and Roberto González-Villarreal, and Rodolfo Morales "A.I.D.S., Government and Society in Mexico."

inhabitants. Immense distances separate one part of the city from another. Internal communications by phone and mail are very poor, which makes organization and mobilization difficult given that there is no residential concentration of the homosexual population even amongst the middle class. The sustained economic crisis has made middle-class gays more cautious about their livelihood, and has affected the resources they can commit to gay liberation. Conversely, upper-class gays who have been enriched by present government policies remain as reluctant as ever to lend their support. Thus gay and A.I.D.S.-support activists are crippled by the lack of even pitifully small sums of money to rent office space, establish a phone line, or cover the publication of a newsletter or magazine. Such is the dearth of support from gay professionals and business owners that in discussions about fund-raising, the possibility of obtaining funds from such sources never even remotely occurs to gay activists. All these factors are reinforced by the fact that Mexico has no tradition of voluntary associations such as are to be found in the rest of North America.

Class is a particularly divisive factor in Mexican gay politics, and sexual orientation is only one issue that could potentially unite homosexuals and lesbians who also respond to a multitude of other economic and social pressures. Only a small minority of homosexuals in all probability would place their sexual orientation as their main priority in terms of organizing their lives. This is demonstrated, for example, by the fact that most prefer to continue living with their families regardless of the restrictions that this may entail in fulfilling their sexual and relational needs. Furthermore, only a minute fraction of homosexuals actually patronize gay bars or identify their well-being with their survival (or that of other gay spaces).

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- * For example, the work of Colectivo Sol is made financially possible in large part by a contract with the British organization, Appropriate Health Resources and Technologies Action Group (A.R.T.A.G.), to publish and distribute *Acción en Sida*. After expenses, they have about one thousand dollars a month left to finance all the other activities (mainly A.I.D.S. education) of the collective. Another highly effective group, G.I.S.-S.I.D.A., has a similar arrangement with the U.S. Agency for International Development (A.I.D.). Their finances are put in perspective by those of an organization such as the A.I.D.S. Committee of Toronto which has an annual budget of two million dollars (two thirds from public and one third from private funding).

Those middle-class gays who value socializing in public with other gays have been largely satisfied by the existing bars, baños, resorts and gay-positive restaurants. Those who could not afford such places have found that the anonymity afforded by the sheer size of Mexico City, coupled with the radical cultural change that has taken place amongst its youth, in particular, has allowed them a sexual freedom that was undreamt of by their parents. The sustained economic crisis may have been an inhibiting factor in terms of developing sustained personal relationships, but it may have also encouraged more people to live for the moment, since the future has only seemed to lead to a dead-end for more and more young people in Mexico City. If more people may have been reluctant to come out, more people may have been willing to have casual sex even though fear of A.I.D.S. is beginning to have a profound impact in this respect.

Furthermore, apart from the issue of A.I.D.S. there have been few immediate tangible issues which a broad spectrum of homosexuals could potentially relate to in terms of asserting and defending their collective rights. And certainly none that could compare with the catastrophic decline in their material well-being that has taken place over the last decade. Homosexuals in Mexico City have not been the target of any city-wide repressive campaign in recent years akin to that which took place in 1959 when the incumbent mayor, Ernesto Uruchurtu took advantage of a homosexual murder scandal to wage an outright war against homosexuals, closing every homosexual gathering spot in the city.¹ Today, the motto of the P.R.I. regime (at least, at the national level) seems to be to "let gays sleep in peace".

The range and depth of the problems that beset the everyday life of most "chilangos" also deflects attention from the issue of homosexual oppression. For many people, personal physical security is even more of a problem than economic insecurity. In this context, for example, it is difficult to mobilize gays around the issue of homosexual murders, which some activists believe to have exceeded two hundred in recent years.² These must be put in the context of the other unresolved homicides amongst the 6500 murders that occur each year in Mexico City alone.³ Most homosexual victims are anonymous and in all probability their murder has been motivated by robbery and social violence, rather than being primarily instigated by homophobia *per se*. They have rarely involved gay public figures or activists, whereas journalists, schoolteachers, peasant and Indian leaders, and anyone else who exposes or challenges the state, the business mafia or rural caciques is liable to be assassinated or to "disappear", as they say.

Individual gay activists continue to struggle and raise issues on a wide range of fronts. But in the face of the economic crisis and generalized homophobia they have had collective difficulty in developing a strategy that responds to the diversity and pluralistic character of Mexican society. The problematic of gay liberation in an underdeveloped country is similar to that of the women's movement. Ana Lau Jaiven, a feminist theorist, underlines the significance of factors such as the strength of indigenous cultures, the low participation of women in the paid labour force, the coexistence of different modes of production, as well as acute social divisions in determining the priorities of political struggles. "It would be impossible in societies like ours to make demands that are as sophisticated as those which are used in Europe and North America, when many of our primary needs have not yet been met, and whose solution seems ever more remote".⁴

As Lau Jaiven correctly notes, in such circumstances women (and the same would surely apply to homosexuals) could only be collectively mobilized during an effervescent political conjuncture, or with respect to issues that immediately affect them. "The efforts of feminists to persuade the majority of women to prioritize their identification with women's liberation have been thwarted by their inability to find points of convergence which affect women in general".⁵

The early socialist rhetoric of Mexico City activists was undoubtedly sincere, but it was an abstraction for many of the poor, and eventually alienated middle class gays who would otherwise have been a natural constituency for the movement. Furthermore, the lack of mass involvement exacerbated the endemic tendency in Mexico and Latin America in general to engage in intellectual and radical posturing, as opposed to the less emotionally satisfying task of long-term organization and concrete satisfaction of the immediate daily needs of ordinary homosexuals. The true lesson of the demise of the early movement may be that the assertion of homosexual rights will have to be integrated within the long-term struggle to assert broader rights if the former are to attain security and substance.

Given Mexico City's dominance of the mass media, and cultural indifference to what happens in the rest of the country, and regional diversity, it is no wonder that nothing akin to a national gay liberation movement has emerged in Mexico. There is a localized movement (FIGHT, ¡Y Que!, and the new paper, *Frontera Gay*,) in Baja California Norte. But Tijuana seems very distanced from the rest of the country. The construction of homosexuality shares the values of the Latino barrios of California as much as those of the central and southern half

of Mexico. Its gay activism is as much an overlap from Southern California, as it is a Mexican phenomenon linked to struggles elsewhere in the country. Apart from this, no gay organizations exist, almost without exception throughout the rest of Mexico.

Guadalajara

The one and very significant exception is the city of Guadalajara. Guadalajara has the paradoxical reputation of harbouring the largest (and most handsome) number of homosexuals outside of Mexico City, while also being one of the most homophobic, culturally conservative, and Catholic cities in Mexico. Together with the adjoining Bajío region, the state of Jalisco fostered the "Cristero" Catholic movement in the 1920's, and later defied the secular radicalism which characterized the regime of Mexico's greatest modern president, Lázaro Cárdenas, who nationalised the oil industry and gave concrete meaning to the agrarian reform promises of the revolution. It is also home of one of the most influential universities, la Universidad Autónoma de Guadalajara, which is a power base of the ultra-reactionary group known as Los Tecos.

Despite its rapid growth and a metropolitan population that approaches five million inhabitants, Guadalajara retains a strong traditional sense of identity, and a provincial character epitomized by the fact that most "decent" people have returned home, and the police have begun to harass many of those who can't or won't go home by ten p.m. Unpractical though it may have become, shops and offices still close at mid-day for a two-hour break so that people can theoretically return home for lunch.

Organized gay liberation, as one might expect, began a few years later than in Mexico City.⁶ Its initial impetus came from increased police repression as homosexuals began to be more visible in the downtown core of the city. Gays and lesbians responded by forming Guadalajara's

* To my knowledge, not even Monterrey, an affluent industrial city of three million inhabitants has a gay organization of any significance. Neither has Puebla, with a population close to two million inhabitants. At one time, however, even much smaller cities such as Colima, Toluca, Guanajuato, and Oaxaca had formed gay groups.

first homosexual liberation group in 1981, the Grupo de Orgullo Homosexual de Liberación (G.O.H.L.). The politicization of Tapatio homosexuals, encouraged the P.R.T. to nominate a couple of homosexual activists as its candidates for the Chamber of Deputies in the 1982 elections. Even more than in Mexico City, their campaign, created a scandal; but it also gave much publicity to the presence and rights of homosexuals in a city that would much have preferred to have retained its traditional oppressive tolerance of homosexuals in its midst, provided that they stayed in the closet. The climate of the electoral campaign emboldened gays and lesbians into organizing two protest marches against police repression down Avenida Juárez, which tied up Guadalajara's main street at the height of the rush hour.

Subsequent to the 1982 elections, the new governor of Jalisco made the mistake of mounting a full-scale campaign against homosexuals for their temerity. The police were instructed to clear the streets, including the most popular downtown cruising park, as well as closing all the gay bars in the city. A raid upon a private fiesta attended by three hundred of the most well-heeled homosexuals in the city proved to be the last straw. What the electoral campaign had failed to do was done by the police and the state. Homosexuals came out in droves, and took to the streets and the courts in defence of their rights.

Unlike Mexico City, the gay movement in Guadalajara was able to make a more successful transition from the general demands and denunciations of an electoral campaign identified with socialism to the defence of concrete rights and exposure of police abuse. Subsequent to the 1982 elections, it sloughed off its socialist rhetoric and instead mounted a campaign focused on specific cases of police repression and extortion. It was so successful that it succeeded in having the homophobic policies of the new state government reversed. Gay bars were reopened within a few months, the police were ordered to stop harassing homosexuals in the Parque Revolución (a traditional cruising area), and the government acquiesced to the subsequent opening of a community-run disco, whose premises and profits enabled G.O.H.L. to establish a homosexual centre that offered a wide range of services to gays and lesbians.

* Popular name for residents of Guadalajara.

Although the Guadalajara gay movement has had its share of personal and factional disputes, it has nevertheless developed the most effective gay organization in the country. The explanation can be attributed in great measure to the outstanding political skills of its leader, Pedro Preciado, who early on made a conscious decision to eschew abstract rhetorical denunciations of gay oppression.⁷ Instead, G.O.H.L. focused attention on concrete incidents of discrimination and police repression, while also working with the P.R.I. in an effort to reform the state's most repressive policies. It developed radio programmes which were broadcast over university stations, worked with local television and its leaders visited countless schools and colleges in the area. G.O.H.L. made a point of ensuring that the centre and its disco, Boops, would be accessible to working-class and street homosexuals who had not been welcome in, or could not afford, the city's commercial discos such as Monika's and S.O.S. The centre offered psychological and legal counselling services and A.I.D.S. information, a gay hot-line that was continually in service, a growing library and archives, vocational courses for street kids, and a theatre group.

Although the management of the G.O.H.L. centre and Boops was undoubtedly controversial, the fact remains that the centre, financed in great measure from the disco's profits, went from strength to strength. Despite (or perhaps because of) Pedro Preciado's essential monopolization of authority, G.O.H.L. has reflected an institutional stability and effectiveness that is unknown in Mexico City until now.

G.O.H.L.'s – that is Preciado's – pragmatism, was questioned by members of Triángulo Rosa, the other but much less influential gay group (now defunct) in Guadalajara, and by envious critics in Mexico City who accuse him of opportunism and more. Much of this reflects the negativism and factionalism that are so characteristic of Mexican gay politics. Nevertheless, G.O.H.L.'s working relationship with the P.R.I. regime is problematic since it may have delimited the range of issues that could be addressed and the manner by which the oppres-

* This is also true of the lesbian community. The Grupo Lésbico Patlatonalli is widely recognized to be the most effective lesbian organization in Mexico. It has its own locale which caters primarily to lesbians but also collaborates with G.O.H.L. and feminist groups on broad political issues.

sion of gays and lesbians could be confronted. The influence of the gay liberation movement increasingly lies in the individual skills of its leaders rather than upon its capacity to mobilize and politicize rank and file homosexuals.

In general, nonetheless, G.O.H.L. has an unmatched record in denouncing police corruption and oppression of homosexuals, and during the last few years it has played a leading role in A.I.D.S. and safe-sex education. It is clear that G.O.H.L. continues to play an effective role in the assertion of gay interests in Guadalajara, since no civic issue that touches on the needs and rights of homosexuals, such as A.I.D.S., can now be decided without regard to its response. What it may no longer be able to do is to organize a collective political response to the oppression of homosexuals or to ally itself with those political parties that are most likely to represent the class interests of the majority of homosexuals.

This became apparent subsequent to the election of a new mayor, Gabriel Covarrubias in 1989. His election unleashed a "moral campaign" directed at all who offended or threatened the interests of the city's entrenched Right, which included the Church, business, the P.A.N., and their spokesman, the president of the Junta de Mejoramiento Moral Cívico y Material de Guadalajara (Junta for the Moral, Civic and Material Betterment of Guadalajara). Street homosexuals and cross-dressing prostitutes were at the top of their hit list. Hundreds were arrested in continuous street raids. G.O.H.L. was forced to close its original centre following threats of violence and an actual explosion on its premises. Boops, along with all other gay bars were closed down. Although some eventually reopened, Boops could not do so for a variety of reasons, not least of which was the stress and diversion of energies entailed in continuing to defy the Right by keeping it open. To the latter, a club which was financially and culturally

* What provoked Covarrubias, the Mayor of Guadalajara more than anything else was the fact that the prostitutes were "deceiving" male customers, for as he himself admitted, in itself prostitution was not illegal. Since the penal code did not apply, the local authorities empowered themselves by means of a drastic revision of the police regulations, which in itself was quite unconstitutional. See Francisco Galván, "Guadalajara: ¿la Chicago Tapatia?", *El Nacional*, January 4, 1990.

accessible to homosexuals from marginalized backgrounds was intolerable, as evidenced by their equal determination to close down Pancho's, a downtown bar which met the needs of much the same clientele late at night. The Right also mounted an abusive and violent campaign to prevent the International Lesbian and Gay Association (I.L.G.A.) from holding its annual conference in Guadalajara in 1991. This would have been the first occasion in which it would have met in the Third World.

Although the repression of homosexuals continued, the two major groups, G.O.H.L. and the Grupo Lésbico Patlatonalli, courageously resisted attempts to drive them from the city and to prevent them from hosting the I.L.G.A. conference. If G.O.H.L. has not been able to meet the needs of street homosexuals and cross-dressers as it might once have done, the impression remains that it has been regvanized by the crisis. As it enters its second decade in existence (in itself an impressive achievement) it is well positioned to confront the other major challenge facing the homosexual community, A.I.D.S. For the local population continues to be decimated by the disease, in great part due to the ineptitude, corruption and prejudices of those who control the city.

P.S.

As the English edition of this book was going to print, word arrived that the I.L.G.A. conference had been cancelled. The organizers either underestimated the strength and determination of the Right to prevent the conference from taking place, or overestimated their own capacity to respond to the violence of the Right. (The option of moving the conference to Mexico City or to another site while there was still time to do so, was apparently ruled out.) They may have put too much emphasis on negotiating their rights, in place of mobilizing political support for the defense of those rights. Furthermore, for a variety of

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- * For example, until 1990, the two largest drug-store chains in Guadalajara refused to sell condoms, let alone advertise their prophylactic qualities with respect to the transmission of H.I.V. and S.T.D.s. More recently, a coalition of A.I.D.S.-prevention community action groups were driven out of Zapopan, a suburb of Guadalajara, by the police when they attempted to organize a rally to advertise safe-sex and offer other information relating to A.I.D.S. See "Policía de Zapopan: Luchar contra el Sida es atentar contra la moral", *Sociedad y SIDA*, supplement of *El Nacional*, #4, January 1991.

reasons the support of gay organizations and sympathizers in Mexico City was not successfully enlisted. Nor was the "modern" reputation of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari put in question, by linking it to Mexico's failure to uphold minimal civil rights in Guadalajara. At a time when Mexico's record on human rights was once again being scrutinized abroad as a result of the free trade negotiations, the failure to make the cancellation of the conference a public issue in Mexico City and abroad is a serious blow that bodes ill for the future. The Right, at least in Guadalajara, will be emboldened to pursue even more homophobic ends in the future.

Notes

¹ See Taylor, p. 32.

² Interview with José María Covarrubias, April 25, 1988.

³ *Excelsior*, June 20, 1988.

⁴ Ana Lau Jaiven, *La Nueva Ola del Femenismo en México*, Planeta, Mexico, 1987. p. 144.

⁵ Lau Jaiven, p. 145.

⁶ See Joe Carrier, "Letter from Mexico", *The Advocate*, June 10, 1986, for an account of the origins of the gay movement in Guadalajara.

⁷ Interview with Pedro Preciado, April 22, 1988.

Gay Liberation and the "Modernization" of Mexico

Three distinct but connected social processes are taking place in Mexico which will affect the construction and regulation of homosexuality in the foreseeable future. First, there is a continuing tension between the conservation of Mexico's traditional sex-gender identities, roles and values and the increasing dissemination of new values which not only entail an ideological questioning of old taboos and institutions but also a commodification of sexuality. Mexico is inexorably caught in the North American mass culture which is diffused amongst youth, in particular, by the constantly refined technology available to the communication and entertainment industries, by the ever-growing penetration of the Mexican economy by foreign capital oriented towards consumption and personal services, and by links with the mushrooming Latino population in the U.S. southwest.

Nevertheless, Mexico's traditional culture will not be displaced readily since it is so rich, diverse, dispersed, and deeply rooted in the country's history. Furthermore, it is often very functional or responsive to the needs of the vast majority of the population who are forced to live in material and social circumstances which radically contradict the values attached to Americanized mass culture. Life in Nezahualcóyotl, on the outskirts of Mexico City, may seem light years away from the rural municipios of Oaxaca, but the traditional values that the Zapotec and Mixtec migrants have brought with them may be one of the few factors that give its large number of Oaxaqueño inhabitants a semblance of self-respect and social cohesion. The world of "Dallas" and "Madres Egoístas", or whatever happens to be the "telenovela" of the day, represents passing fantasies, whereas real lives including sex continue to be rooted in the concrete conditions within which most Mexicans struggle to survive, a world of poverty, extended families, "compadrazgo", "cuatismo" and reciprocal support at the barrio level.

Secondly, A.I.D.S. is becoming an increasingly devastating epidemic, whose implications with respect to intensified state repression of homosexuality, cannot yet be fully foreseen. Informed estimates

suggest that there are twice as many people with A.I.D.S. as the official total of 5905 cases for January 1991 would suggest. There are probably half a million further Mexicans infected by H.I.V.¹ Nevertheless, for the populace as a whole, A.I.D.S. is still largely conceived in mythical terms rather than as a concrete epidemic with individual and social repercussions. Though there may be an intellectual awareness of A.I.D.S., particularly in the middle classes, sexual behaviour may have been modified much less. It is rare to find anyone outside the middle and upper classes who has even the most minimal knowledge of the disease in terms of dangerous sex practices, associated illnesses, medical treatments and particularly, given conditions in Mexico, of ultimate death. Because of its association with homosexuality, individuals with A.I.D.S., out of personal choice, or pressure from their families, are secluded, and the mass media ignore the situation in which they live out their lives and in which they receive medical attention.

Because of quite different attitudes to death in traditional Mexican culture – it is one of the few western ones that has a national holiday celebrating rather than lamenting death and the dead – it may be that Mexicans can incorporate death by A.I.D.S. in the same way as they have accepted a whole series of personal deprivations, illnesses and loss of life that would be terrifying to most North Americans, one of whose major preoccupations is to postpone aging and death at any cost.^{..} For whatever reason, despite the safe-sex education to which the educated middle class, at least, has been exposed there is common agreement that only a very small number of Mexicans use condoms, for example.^{***} And those who do, do so only “usually”. Given the fact

* For example, the life expectancy of somebody diagnosed with A.I.D.S. in Mexico is perhaps eight months whereas it has increasingly been extended by as much as several years in the rest of North America, so much so that the possibility of it becoming a chronic rather than terminal disease can increasingly be envisaged.

** Popular expressions like “de algo me he de morir” (I’ve got to die of something), and “al que le toca le toca” (if it’s your turn it’s your turn) typify Mexican attitudes to death. Mexican values contrast more with American ones than those of the rest of Latin America. A very popular disco number in 1989, “La Cumbia del S.I.D.A.” was in fact, Colombian. In contrast, the possibility of an “A.I.D.S. number” catching on on the dance floors of North American gay discos seems inconceivable.

*** According to one calculation, at best condoms are used in no more than

that "internacional" reciprocal sex is growing amongst those who have been directly or indirectly exposed to contemporary North American gay values, even the most pessimistic projections of the future number of A.I.D.S. cases may turn out to be conservative.² According to some recent studies as many as thirty per cent of homosexual males who practice anal intercourse (and most Mexican homosexuals do) are already H.I.V.-positive in Mexico City and Guadalajara.³

Despite the attempts of Pro-Vida and the Catholic hierarchy to exploit the issue of A.I.D.S. and safe-sex education in terms of the preservation of "traditional family values" and of procreative sex, there has been no moral panic about A.I.D.S. in the country as a whole. To be sure, there has been increased stigmatization of homosexuals who are now seen as carriers of disease, in addition to being weak and immoral. But unlike what initially occurred in Costa Rica, there has been no public outcry to close baths, brothels and bars, to enforce compulsory testing, or to quarantine H.I.V. carriers. If the state has appeared indifferent to the human rights of those who have or are threatened by A.I.D.S., it is not primarily due to homophobia as may have been true of the Reagan and Thatcher governments, but rather the result of the inefficiency and squander of resources of a corrupt state completely committed to neo-liberal policies.

A.I.D.S. may have to assume vast public dimensions and repercussions before it is perceived as a social problem that is any worse than the malnutrition and economic destitution that exist throughout Mexico. As pathologist Dr. Ruy Perez Tamayo, one of Mexico's most prominent scientists has pointed out, the problem of malnutrition is still infinitely worse than that of A.I.D.S.⁴ Over one hundred thousand babies die of malnutrition each year, and half of those that survive will remain permanently impaired by having been deprived of an adequate diet as children.⁵

Given the fact that Mexico has no more than eighty thousand hospital beds for the entire country, the A.I.D.S. epidemic will put even more pressure upon the country's limited health resources. According

seven percent of all sexual intercourse. See Dolores Ponce et al.

to some early projections by 1991, 48 per cent of the country's health budget could have hypothetically been absorbed by A.I.D.S. care.⁶ That this has not been the case is as much a reflection of the disregard of the needs of people with A.I.D.S., as it is a reflection of the allocation of resources to other patients in need. The needs of neither are currently being met.

Within the context of the growing polarization of Mexican society and politics, and the persistent and often successful efforts of the Right to exploit cultural issues in the name of Guadalupean national values, the possibility of Mexicans being mobilized around A.I.D.S. as a moral issue should not be discounted. Certainly attempts to this effect have had some success in Guadalajara and Mérida, although they have not yet been successful at the national level. The economic, social and political crisis which continues to deepen offers fertile terrain for a demagogic, quasi-fascistic response within which moral issues could yet play a major part.

The extent of Mexico's economic crisis cannot be overestimated. Neither can its impact upon the material and social well being of most of its 85 million inhabitants. Mexico's foreign debt has at last stabilized after rising inexorably from 25 billion in 1976 to 108 billion in 1988. But the cost of achieving even this has been horrendous. According to the World Bank, the price that is being exacted upon Mexico to pay off its debt is greater than that required of Germany after the First World War, and which, as we all know, was a major factor in the collapse of German democracy. At the peak of its economic crisis, no less than 6 per cent of Mexico's G.N.P., or 45 per cent of its export revenues, left the country each year merely to pay interest on the debt. Given that oil prices, which have plummeted since 1981, show no sign of early recovery, there is only one option available to Mexico that is acceptable to the foreign banks, and which will allow it to regain access to foreign capital and technology. It is being pressured to privatize its economy so as to promote new exports on a competitive basis with all the other debt-ridden countries. This has led to a drastic reduction in real wages and domestic consumption, a reorientation of public expenditures away from agriculture and industry serving the local market in favour of those oriented to exports, and last but not least a drastic reduction in health, education and all other social services. Mexico's expenditures

in these areas are deplorable in comparison to those of Costa Rica and Cuba. Per capita health expenditures, alone, have been halved since 1982.⁸

Although the possibility of overcoming its debt crisis cannot be entirely discounted, one can be certain that the neo-liberal strategy that is currently being pursued by the Mexican government cannot continue to be implemented without imposing even further hardship on the majority of the population. The real wages of the working class continue to fall (according to some studies they may already be amongst the lowest in the world).^{**} There is even less hope that the strategy of "modernization" and "more efficient insertion" of Mexico within the world economy (better said, its dependent integration within the North American Free Trade area), of which Carlos Salinas de Gortari is the architect, can generate the millions of new jobs that will be required to accommodate Mexico's exploding labour force.

The third factor that must affect the situation of homosexuals, as much as anyone else, is related to how their civil rights are going to be affected by the political resolution of the present crisis. The P.R.I. regime which has monopolized power for over half a century is inescapably accountable for the present crisis. Unlike other countries such as Argentina and Brazil in which the foreign debt could be attributed to military regimes, the P.R.I. cannot pass the buck to anyone. The debt crisis has widened the fissures in its armour which were already becoming evident in the 1960's. Since 1968, the P.R.I. regime has increasingly lost authority, credibility and legitimacy.

Given the social costs of the P.R.I. regime's economic programme and the coalescing of political forces in opposition to it, one can be

* Mexico spends 0.4% of its G.N.P. on health and 2.5% on education, compared respectively to 6.1% and 4.6% in the case of Costa Rica, and 3.2% and 6.2% in the case of Cuba. *Excélsior*, April 2, 1991.

** According to the Economic Analysis Workshop of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (U.N.A.M.), the real wages of the Mexican working class are amongst the lowest in the world, well below those of equivalent countries such as Argentina and Brazil. Minimum wages have lost 39 per cent of purchasing power since December, 1988, when Salinas de Gortari assumed office. See Oscar González López, "Primero de Mayo de 1991: el Salario en el Suelo", *Jueves de Excélsior*, May 9, 1991.

certain that the P.R.I. will have to find new means of retaining power. The challenge from the Left is obviously much more serious than that from the Right. For the P.R.I. itself has moved steadily to the right in recent years. The capitalist class, tied to the United States, is now clearly the dominant influence within the P.R.I., particularly since the old order of traditional politicians and caciques has given way to technocrats and bureaucrats who have never fought an election themselves and are more at home with corporate headquarters in Mexico City and New York, than with the traditional brokerage deals of Mexico's regional politics. The entrenched bureaucracy would naturally oppose loss of office to the right-wing P.A.N., but Mexico's capitalist class could obviously live with it, particularly since it would have the support of the United States, which would not be the case if the Left were ever to win office in presidential elections.

The coalition of forces that supported the candidacy of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas in the 1988 presidential campaign represents the first movement in the history of Mexico since the Revolution that has been able to mobilize large masses of the population to the left of the P.R.I. Cárdenas, former governor of Michoacán, and son of Mexico's legendary president, Lázaro Cárdenas, broke with the leadership of the P.R.I. The coalition that he lead had the possibility of doing what had never been done before, that is, deny the P.R.I. the exclusive claim to be the only legitimate representative of Mexico's "revolutionary" tradition. During the political fervour and social mobilization that peaked in 1988, many Mexicans shared Adolfo Gilly's belief that the "Mexican Revolution (had) been split in two".⁹ But this proved to be over-optimistic.

The P.R.I. retained office not merely because the ballots were rigged, but because many Mexicans were still resigned to its inevitable victory. The biggest factor in favour of the P.R.I. until now has been the fact that the mass of the population has passively accepted its political manipulation, while political challenges have been diffused by a variety of means ranging from cooptation to various forms of repression. The challenge that faced the movement that supported Cárdenas in the 1988 election was to transform itself into a mass political organization capable of wresting power from the P.R.I. over the long term, and of creating a democratic space within which the latent radicalism of the masses could be expressed. But so far it has not succeeded in doing so, whereas Salinas de Gortari has demonstrated unsuspected political skills. The P.R.I. regime has survived its greatest challenge.

Nevertheless, in spite of all the propaganda about the economic and social progress under the Salinas administration, it is quite evident that the country's basic problems will not be resolved by the present neo-liberal policies. That is why the polarization of Mexican society will become more acute, and will eventually lead to a greater challenge than that of 1988. Although there may be elements within the P.R.I. who favour a populist response, even if only at the demagogic level, it is doubtful that the economic and political space to do so exists today. Neo-liberal policies permit continuous propaganda with respect to the supposed efforts of PRONASOL to solve the social and economic problems that face the Mexican masses, but with rare exceptions they cannot solve them in reality (as demonstrated by the fact that the majority of Mexicans are much worse off than they were in 1988.) It is impossible to resolve them because it would imply a redistribution of income that would affect the interests of the Mexican and foreign capitalists whom the Salinas government is so assiduously courting.

Given the probability that the P.R.I. or the Right in coalition will not relinquish power, what are the prospects regarding the regulation of homosexuality by the state? Could there be outright repression of homosexuals along the lines of the military regime in Argentina, fuelled by fear of A.I.D.S. and the imposition of "law and order", if an overtly dictatorial regime were to emerge from the current crisis? It seems unlikely, given the specific cultural and social diversity of Mexico which any capitalist regime would be wise to respect if it were to succeed in securing the stability necessary for the expansion of capital. Although state repression of homosexuals in the form of bar closures and persecution of street homosexuals in particular has by no means been eliminated from public life in Mexico, and almost certainly will persist in the more conservative provincial regions for some time, its purpose is symbolic or extortionary, rather than representing a systematic integrated element of the state's political agenda.

Despite the increasingly successful attempts of the Catholic hierarchy to reinsert itself within the ruling apparatus, the Mexican political

* Those who consider this to be no more than a paranoid fantasy that has not relation to the "modern, democratic" world, should give some thought to the recent resurgence of anti-semitism and racism in Europe.

tradition is still quite different from Argentina and Chile (or that of Castro regime in Cuba) with respect to the state imposing a moral order on society. Mexico has its share of faults, but being puritanical is not one of them. One must recall, moreover, that while the Argentine generals closed gay bars and hunted down homosexuals in the streets, Pinochet for all the institutionalized Catholicism of his regime, turned a blind eye upon many elements of gay culture, such as middle class bars which have flourished as never before in Chile. Moreover, Mexican Catholicism remains essentially Guadalupean and pre-Columbian for much of the population. Its appeal is much more mystical and less ideological than that of Chile or Costa Rica. The masses may respond to an alleged insult to the Virgin of Guadalupe but it is doubtful that they would react in like fashion to demands on the part of the Catholic hierarchy for the state to intrude in their private lives. Nevertheless, Salinas de Gortari may well be counting upon the Church to play an important role in buttressing his otherwise illegitimate government.

The fact is that as an essentially middle-class phenomenon, the gay "community", as represented by commercial social spaces in particular, is not a potential oppositional force to a right-wing regime, unless it is provoked into becoming one. This is something which elements in the P.R.I. regime clearly recognize. That is why, for example, the homophobic demands which organizations such as Pro-Vida and the Unión Nacional de Padres de Familia have made, initially had little impact upon the safe-sex campaign of CONASIDA, attached to the Ministry of Health. Conversely, P.R.I. organizations like the Asociación Nacional de Padres de Familia which officially claim to represent 14 million parents have taken out full-page advertisements in the national press in support of the explicit language used initially by CONASIDA with respect to the use of the condom, insisting upon the constitutional obligation of the government to eschew moral or religious prejudices in its sex education programmes.¹⁰

CONASIDA eventually caved into the "moral Right" by virtually terminating its efforts to publicize the use of the condom. Its A.I.D.S.-prevention and support programme remains pitiful. Nevertheless, in typically contradictory fashion, elements within the P.R.I. regime have given their endorsement to the work of the Grupo de Investigación Social Sobre el SIDA y Defensa de Derechos Humanos (G.I.S.-S.I.D.A.), which has become the most outspoken critic of CONASIDA, and is responsible for the editorial content of *Sociedad y SIDA*, which is distributed as a supplement of *El Nacional*, the government's official organ.

Nevertheless, the majority of gay activists reject any possibility of working with the P.R.I. regime, and still define any meaningful homosexual liberation in terms of democratizing the society and state as a whole. That is why many, perhaps most of them, support the P.R.D., headed by Cárdenas (in spite of his refusal to give public support to the civil rights of homosexuals).¹¹ Gay activists recognize the need to create effective new civil organizations capable of asserting and defending lesbian and gay rights. But in addition to this, many believe that the most pressing task is to insert the issues of machismo and social oppression of homosexuals into the discourse of the mainstream institutions of civil society such as the mass media, educational institutions, trade unions, and political parties. For them, strengthening the autonomy of these institutions vis-a-vis an authoritarian, corporatist state is the best guarantor of civil rights, and of being able to transform its machista, homophobic character over the long haul. A pre-requisite for any meaningful homosexual liberation consists of the government, at the very least, respecting those rights which already exist in form, if not in practice. In the long-term newer and more insidious forms of discrimination and oppression, fostered by moralistic, fundamentalist Protestant sects, the New Right and Hollywood, which accompany the ever-growing Americanization of Mexico will also have to be confronted.

The task which faces gay activists is not an easy one given the dimensions of Mexico's current crisis, the palpable demoralization and confusion which many gays and lesbians initially experienced as a result of the disintegration of the organized homosexual movement, the demobilizing impact of the commercial spaces which have met the public needs of many middle-class gays, and last but not least the deepening immiseration of the vast majority of homosexuals that is entailed by the neo-liberal resolution of the economic crisis. In addition, many former activists have become assimilated into mainstream society, and the remainder are having to pay the price for the failure to create more solid organizations in the past.

* The ideological manipulation of sexuality in the telenovelas and variety shows of Televisa, particularly "*Siempre en Domingo*", offer good examples of this.

A.I.D.S. has taken its toll, as elsewhere, in terms of the loss of life and the diminished health of many leading activists. It has consumed almost all the energies of the latter, and side-tracked most of the traditional goals of gay liberation. Nevertheless, in practice, it may have also contributed to the maturation of the movement by connecting it to the wider struggles to transform Mexican society. To be really effective, A.I.D.S.-support and education must be directed as much to the democratization of public health and education, as to addressing the human rights of those who have been most immediately affected by the epidemic. The renewed energy and effectiveness of such groups as Colectivo Sol, G.O.H.L. and G.I.S.-S.I.D.A. reflects this new direction, since they have broadened their mandates and opened their ranks to non-homosexuals. The struggle against A.I.D.S. has lead to increased collaboration with progressive heterosexuals working in non-governmental organizations which are beginning to make their presence felt in Mexico for the first time. Daunting as the struggle may be, there are renewed grounds for having confidence in the ultimate outcome of the attempt to at least secure the civil rights of gays and lesbians in Mexico.

Notes

¹Excélsior, February 2, 1991. See also Francisco Galván Díaz and Rodolfo Morales, "El SIDA en México", *Sociedad y SIDA*, supplement of *El Nacional*, Vol.1, No.1, October 1, 1990.

²See J. M. Carrier, "Sexual Behavior and Spread of A.I.D.S.", *Medical Anthropology*, Vol. 10, 1989, pp. 129-142, and Proyecto Azomali, "Ideas para la Educación y Prevención contra el S.I.D.A. en México", Guadalajara, Mexico. November, 1987.

³Carrier, p. 131.

⁴Proceso, August 10, 1987.

⁵Universal, April 4, 1988.

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- For a full description of the impact of A.I.D.S., and the response of non-governmental organizations, most of which are led by gay males who have a long history of involvement in the gay liberation movement, refer to the appendix by Francisco Galván Díaz and Roberto González-Villarreal, and Rodolfo Morales.

⁶Nexos, No. 132, December 1988. p. 17.

⁷Excelsior, December 16, 1988.

⁸Nexos, No. 132, December, 1988. p. 17.

⁹La Jornada, May 25, 1988.

¹⁰See La Jornada, May 22, 1988.

¹¹See Francisco Galván Díaz, "Carta Abierta al Ingeniero Cárdenas", El Nacional, January 19, 1990.

Conclusion: Personal Epilogue

It is difficult to respond to the present situation and future prospects of homosexuals in Mexico without imposing, even if only unconsciously, one's own personal values, as well as the collective ones of gay liberation as understood in North America (if such exists). It is doubly difficult because in the main the level of state oppression in Mexico is relatively low, at least in terms of institutionalized state policies. Homosexuals are exploited by the police and local politicians, but collectively they are now at the very least tolerated by the state. Our concern is therefore directed to the issue of social oppression, and to how machista values are reflected and upheld by the state.

In North America and other industrialized countries it has been relatively easy to link an affirmation of gay pride to a critique of heterosexism. This is because in addition to a generalized sexual dissatisfaction, which is not peculiar to homosexuals, the major social support of heterosexism, the conventional nuclear family, has been criticized by feminism and objectively undermined by the development of industrial market society. Only a small minority of the population lives in conventional family homes, and in the core of the larger cities an impressive percentage of the population lives alone. A social or collective alternative to the nuclear family has yet to be established. The commodification of leisure and personal needs is rampant. Consequently social anomie and alienation typify urban North American life in the late twentieth century. It is common for North American homosexuals, as is also true of heterosexuals, to complain or give unconscious indications of both sexual and relational dissatisfaction.

This is much less true of Mexico. Amongst younger homosexuals at least, although they might wistfully project some sort of sexual nirvana onto North American gay life, one rarely encounters complaints about lack of sexual contacts or about their quality. The same is true of social relationships. It is very rare to meet a Mexican who has rejected his family, even though it may be very evident that relationships within the family may be based more on form and economic support than on

emotional substance. As many Mexican homosexuals as North Americans may seek a long term relationship, but the felt consequences of not being in such a relationship seem to be less because most Mexican gays have other relationships that may compensate for the absence of a primary homosexual one, for example, with their family, "cuates", and barrio friends. A Mexican does not expect to be alone, and will actively seek such company if alone.

Nevertheless, with the caveat that I am projecting my own values and needs, I would argue that gay liberation, as conventionally understood, is needed in Mexico. By conventional gay liberation, I understand the freedom to participate in a society within which homosexual or bisexual sexual acts, orientation, or identity are accepted as being equally legitimate to that of heterosexuality, such that there will be no legal, social or ideological discrimination or institutionalized preference for one or another form of sexuality. In such circumstances, sexuality will be validated as a necessary and life affirming potentiality for human fulfilment that is neither more nor less important than other aspects of human identity such as work and community.

Such conditions do not exist in Mexico at present. Human fulfilment for homosexual males is problematic, in particular, because in addition to religious values, the machista culture overvalues patriarchal masculinity at the expense of femininity, heterosexual male sexuality over female sexuality, and active phallic sexuality over other ways of expressing erotic feelings. The affirmation of sexual prowess and dominion has an exaggerated significance in terms of defining male gender and sexual identity to the detriment of its other components such as relational and affective abilities.

Homosexual and bisexual males are relatively free to have sex in private and to a limited extent make their sexual orientation evident in public. However, the meaning attached to sex will often reflect and reinforce the socially constructed values attached to the public identities. The active dominant male will have his identity reinforced in positive terms, whereas the passive one will have his identity reinforced in negative terms. In other words, sex reflects and reinforces the power relations in society as a whole, and particularly those within the family. It is impossible to divorce the social construction of homosexuality and hence of the social oppression of homosexuals from the social construction of femininity and hence of the social oppression of females. Both are oppressed by machista males whose sexuality and identity are privileged by society and family alike.

In conditions of such inequality it is very difficult for either homosexual males or females in general to develop autonomous personalities with an integrated sexuality. The sexuality of homosexual males is invalidated in its own terms. It is either seen as a reflection of devalued femininity in the male, or as a physiological release devoid of emotional meaning on the part of the "masculine" male. It is not seen in terms of the eroticization of males whose sexual identities could incorporate a full range of the values associated with masculinity and femininity. It is not seen in terms of conscious choice, that is, that sex between males need be no more instinctive or exclusively physiological than that between males and females.

The actual conditions within which sex and sexual relationships between males in a machista culture take place often have the effect of separating genital sex from emotional commitment. There is nothing wrong with spontaneous anonymous sex — recreational sex as it is sometimes called — and much that may be right, but it is clearly insufficient in terms of developing integrated adult personalities. For most of us need to experience and reveal who we are in terms of our relationships with other people, which includes a primary but not exclusive or permanent sexual relationship with another person. Insofar as many, indeed most, Mexican homosexuals have absorbed many of the values of a machista culture, they have encountered just as much difficulty in forging satisfying emotional relationships as have heterosexuals. Machismo privileges males and male bonding at the expense of females. But ultimately it also subverts relationships between men. That is why it has to be confronted (including its misogynist component) in the interests of male homosexuals, as much as those of females.

For these reasons homosexuality must be validated on its own terms, and the machista power relations which are responsible for devaluing it have to be transformed. That is why it is necessary for homosexuals, individually and collectively, to come out and have their sexuality validated and respected in society. How this is to be done is another matter. Since it entails a revolutionary transformation of the sexual relations which are embedded within the social formation of

* Typified by the expression occasionally used to have an orgasm-
"vaciar" (to empty oneself).

Mexico in all its complexity, it will entail analysis, strategy and tactics. Freedom or autonomy in relation to the enjoyment of homosexuality can no more be secured in a vacuum than any other type of freedom. Its individual exercise can be expanded by choice but in the final analysis it will depend upon the material and social pre-conditions that permit it to take place.

This is made abundantly clear if one compares the advances that have been made amongst the middle and upper classes to those of the working and marginal classes. Socially constructed gay culture certainly has its problems, not least being the commodification and objectification of sexuality that takes place within capitalist commercial ghettos. Nevertheless, middle-class gays have much more social space to develop their personalities and explore their sexual potentialities than before. This is much less true of the rest of the population. Since the vast majority of the population falls under the category of lower and popular or marginal classes, a critique of Mexico's class structure and dependent capitalist economy must go hand in hand with a critique of the oppression of homosexuals. One need not determine what the specific content of sexual regulation should be in Mexico, anymore than one should specify how its political economy should ultimately be organized, in order to morally and politically reject the legitimacy and equity of the present system.

Furthermore, given the extent to which the Mexican economy is dependently integrated within the global capitalist economy, one can see how a critique of the imperialist system must accompany a critique of the social oppression of homosexuals in Mexico. For without a resolution of its present social crisis and a restructuring of its economy that will lead to continuous balanced development, there is no prospect of any meaningful process of homosexual liberation taking place that will benefit the vast majority those who have sex with people of the same sex. This is not to say that the assertion and defence of homosexual needs and rights against discrimination by the state are not, in themselves, valid and necessary. It is merely to recognize the objective limitations of gay liberation divorced from a broader social movement.

A.I.D.S., GOVERNMENT AND SOCIETY IN MEXICO

to Federico Luna Millán, Guillermo Hernández, Esperanza Negrete, Gloria Licea and Irma P. Juárez.

by
**Francisco Galván Díaz,
Roberto González-Villarreal
and Rodolfo Morales.**

From Mythology to Politics

At the outset, anguish and fear of the unknown was able to explain it all. A new illness, without any clear origin, without recognizable causes and with a strange focus on marginalized individuals, brought about the strangest reactions, individual and social, scientific and mythical.

At the end of the 1970's and the beginning of the 80's, A.I.D.S. was only an enormous accumulation of questions, few clues and a lot of fear. When the first cases were registered, the few patterns that were found outlined an atrocious picture: a mortal illness, in men around the age of 30, with promiscuous homosexual practices, very depressed immune systems, and unusual symptoms and illnesses. A new medical entity without recognizable pathogenic agents: because of this, the search for a common cause was directed at patients and their behaviour.

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The history is known: first, a focus upon homosexuals and then upon drug addicts and Haitians. In their practices and customs, life, place of origin: in their very identity. Science began by looking for the cause of A.I.D.S. in individuals and their environment, in people and their practices. It was said that the homosexual practice of *fellatio* and the ingestion of semen was an immunodepressant mechanism, that anal penetration tore the walls of the anus and introduced pathogenic agents, that *promiscuity* diminished natural defenses, and finally that casual marginalized sex was responsible for A.I.D.S. And the same was true for heroin addicts — another form of promiscuity —, and for Haitians, the overcrowdedness of poverty, the fact that they were black, had in some cases spent time in Africa, and had supposedly had sex or shared food with green monkeys.

In short, at the outset the statistics lead to an etiological approach that traced the causes of A.I.D.S. to individuals and their conduct, and which in conjunction with the lethal nature of the disease, resulted in the initial "socialization" model that focused on subjects with particular practices who were categorized as "high risk" groups.

Thus in the initial stages, the medical rationale promoted a discriminatory and frightening model of A.I.D.S. In short, the beginnings of the "socialization" of A.I.D.S., that is, the conversion of a medical problem into a societal one, and also the process whereby the preoccupation with A.I.D.S. in doctors' offices and in public health agencies became a social issue, was characterized (both in the social and medical spheres) by repression and harassment of infected patients, relatives and other people related in one way or another to the so-called "high risk" groups.

The generalized ignorance about the causes of A.I.D.S. and the original concentration of reported cases in the rich and upper-middle classes, as well as amongst the marginalized sectors of society, such as homosexual males, meant that the illness came to be seen by the public at large as a species of "divine punishment" or design which became comprehensible in terms of the supposed physical and personal excesses identified with the *sexual revolution*: it became a moral problem.

This attitude was shared and promoted not only by the Catholic hierarchy, but also by a good part of the medical and paramedical world in Mexico (both private and public). In spite of the years that have gone by and the existence of a government agency commissioned to prevent and control A.I.D.S. (CONASIDA), these myths about A.I.D.S. have not disappeared in Mexico.

The isolation of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (H.I.V.), the advances in biomedical, psychological and social research dealing with A.I.D.S., coupled with intense and objective reflection over the nature of this complex problem, has shifted attempts to understand A.I.D.S. towards the field of public health and consequently to public policies; that is to say, the multiplication of cases, as much as scientific discourse, moved the syndrome away from popular mythology and moral manipulation to the public sphere and to government regulation.

Today, there are probably few people who consider A.I.D.S. to be a species of divine punishment; however, the disease is still associated predominantly with homosexuals, prostitutes or promiscuous people of whatever sexual persuasion. No less significant are myths that distort the way in which A.I.D.S. is transmitted and which deny that it is an infectious illness, but a contagious one. In this respect, there are important sectors, even in the field of medicine, that believe that A.I.D.S. is transmitted by casual contact, and there are even some who think that insects are able to transmit the virus. Despite all this, the reality is that today, particularly in some governmental spheres and in some groups of civil society, it has become accepted that A.I.D.S. is above all a problem of public health. This is what makes the issue ambiguous. There is a tendency to superimpose government policies upon mythical beliefs that not only impedes the creation of a genuine public policy to control and prevent A.I.D.S. but also of a social policy directed to meeting the needs of people who are seropositive or living with A.I.D.S.

The Politics of Numbers

To know the real number of A.I.D.S. in Mexico is no easy matter. If you examine newspapers and periodicals everything differs: the totals, the percentages, the rates, etcetera. The same is true of official statistics and statements made by various public health officials. Maybe this can be attributed to internal or external pressures, but the fact is that there is no uniformity in handling A.I.D.S. numbers.

In one area there seems to be some coincidence: the use of the cases of A.I.D.S. by commentators, investigators, activists and the mass media in Mexico, as in the rest of the world, is inevitably based on official information. The fantasies and sensationalist myths of certain media and their collaborators echo the epidemiological confusion. So much so that one is entitled to be sceptical and even to wonder whether or not there is a vested interest in manipulating the statistics.

For example, in one of many statements made at the end of August of 1990, the former Director General of Epidemiology and now Subsecretary to the Department of Health of the federal government, Dr. Jaime Sepúlveda Amor, told the press that there were 4589 cases of A.I.D.S. in Mexico. In reality, that number is correct if you only consider the cases that were reported by June 30. But correct is not synonymous with real. To that number you would have to make some adjustments that correspond more approximately to actual reality, and not just to dexterity with statistical and epidemiological techniques which, in the final analysis, can be adapted to the changing needs of public policy.

Epidemiology officials should regularly take into account tendencies in the growth of the epidemic, calculated month by month. This would give a more credible estimate. So when the public is informed of the number of A.I.D.S. cases in Mexico, the total should be related to the delay in publishing the statistics (you can't use the facts of June in August without warning that this is the case, particularly if you are attempting to be scientific and objective in your analysis). But you must also build in 26 per cent due to under-registration and a further 37.6 per cent due to delay in reporting (*Boletín Mensual SIDA*, de la Dirección General de Epidemiología/CONASIDA, February, 1990, p. 816).

The latest information released on March 31, 1991, reported 6510 cases of A.I.D.S. in Mexico (*Boletín Mensual SIDA*, April, 1991). 5566 were males and 944 were females, a ratio of one female to every six males. The official statistics of A.I.D.S. cases listed 2015 homosexual males, 1343 bisexual males, 794 heterosexual males and 248 heterosexual females. Compared to earlier data, this suggests that there has been a moderate decline in the relative number of homosexual male cases and a relative increase in those of bisexuals and heterosexuals. 1058 cases due to blood transfusion were reported, and for the first time significant numbers due to intravenous drugs were also reported - 83 cases, of which 4 were female. Finally, there were 745 cases left unclassified and 222 paediatric ones.

The real number of A.I.D.S. cases in Mexico are not the same: even applying the criteria that the very same authorities have suggested, it is not difficult to arrive at less optimistic estimates. Merely by adding a further 26 per cent due to under-registration and 37.6 per cent due to delay in reporting the official figures, you arrive at more realistic figures: *one can estimate a total of 11667 cases by March, 1991*, of which 3406 would correspond to homosexual males, 2364 to bisexuals and

1803 to heterosexuals, a sum of 7573 cases by way of sexual transmission. Likewise, one can estimate that 2268 cases originated in the transfusion of contaminated blood and 177 in intravenous drug use. 1238 could not be easily classified and 421 cases could be considered paediatric. Of these 11667 cases, there were between 4 and 5 males for every female; approximately 45 per cent have died and a similar number are alive; of the remaining 10 per cent nothing is known. Life expectancy, once the disease has taken hold, is one of the lowest in the world - fluctuating between 7 and 8 months. If you apply the criteria used by World Health Organization (W.H.O.) specialists to project the probable number of A.I.D.S. cases and particularly the number of people who are seropositive (between 50 and 100 for each reported case of A.I.D.S.) it is also possible to arrive at other calculations. By the winter of 1992-93 there could be 75,000 cases of A.I.D.S. in Mexico and by the beginning of the second quarter of 1991 between 583,850 and 1,167,700 seropositives.

We are, then, faced by a grave problem of public health and a complex social problem that is more extensive than the one that has been minimized by some analysts and certain Department of Health officials of the Mexican government.

It is necessary - taking everything into consideration - not to lose sight of the fact that Mexico has not waited until now to respond to this situation. Governmental and societal responses - with the notable and almost absolute absence of businessmen, financiers and industrialists - began to unfold a decade ago, although that doesn't mean that the results have been, or will be, in all cases, successful.

The Politics of A.I.D.S.: the Governmental Sphere

The first significant measures, were taken towards the end of 1986 and in April of 1987, shortly after the former Secretary of Health, Dr. Guillermo Soberón, had declared in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, in the aftermath of some police raids, that *A.I.D.S. was a foreign disease and only a problem for Americans*. Various actions taken during Dr. Soberón's term of office are of a unquestionable merit, in spite of first judgements. The reforms of the General Health Law in 1987, the limited promotion of condoms between 1986 and 1988, the public debate constantly maintained with fundamentalists and Catholic traditionalists and, his televised declaration regarding the normality of homosexuality and the right of individuals to be homosexual.

Although tardy, the creation of CONASIDA (National Council For the Prevention and Control of A.I.D.S.) and some modifications to the General Health Law signified an advance, given the lack of a public policy. An organization to prevent and control A.I.D.S. was created in 1986 and in 1988 it was endowed with regulatory functions but, as an *organismo desconcentrado* it was not assigned a budget. It determined that the test for the detection of H.I.V. would be voluntary, and not obligatory; that it would be anonymous and that the results would be kept confidential. The fundamental government strategy focused on the control of blood transfusions, on blood banks and to a certain extent on "professional donors".

All of these actions were accompanied by some epidemiological and serological surveys dealing with behaviour and "levels of knowledge about A.I.D.S."; by a few advertisements and publicity full of

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- * In CONASIDA the following institutions and organizations are represented: the I.M.S.S. (Mexican Institute of Social Insurance); the I.S.S.S.T.E. (Institute of Social Security of State Service Workers); various state Coordinated Health Services; the Department of Government; the Department of Tourism; the Department of Work and Social Security; PEMEX (Mexican Petroleum); TELEvisa; IMEvision; The National Chamber of Radio and Television, the National Commission of Human Rights, the Mexican Foundation for the Struggle Against A.I.D.S., among other institutions. The problem is that their participation is merely formal. Since there have never been full meetings of the Council, they have not been able to exercise their right to participate. Some of these institutions, paradoxically, are amongst the most responsible for violations of the rights of people living with A.I.D.S. or H.I.V.
 - ** In articles 42, 43, 48, 51, 134, 136, 137, 138, among others.
 - *** Within Mexican public administration, an *organismo desconcentrado*, is part of an existing government department, which implies that it will lack autonomy with respect to finances and the formulation of policies. An *organismo descentralizado*, on the other hand, would have its own budget, and would not be tied politically to the "bureaucratic hierarchy", it would have separate legal status, and would furthermore be able to intervene in fields beyond those directly related to health; and most of all it would have relative political autonomy.
 - **** See Jose Luis Valdespino, et al, "Distribución de la Epidemia del SIDA" and Jose Antonio Izazola, "Conocimientos, Actitudes y Prácticas Relacionadas con el SIDA, Bases Para el Diseño de Programas Educativos", in Jaime Sepúlveda Amor ed., *SIDA, Ciencia y Sociedad en México*, F.C.E., Mexico, 1989.

ambiguities^{*}, and by some spectacular measures^{**}, whose essential purpose was to show that something had been done and above all, *had been done very well*.

In spite of the fact that Mexico has two of the most important television networks in the Spanish-speaking world: TELEvisa and IMEvision, the lack of political will^{***} is revealed in the inability to carry out a well-planned, continuous, clear, and direct advertising campaign, which would also be consistent with the diversity and plurality of the different Mexican cultures. This goes for printed information and also for Mexican radio, with the exception of the Instituto Mexicano de la Radio (the Government network) and to a lesser degree Radio U.N.A.M., Radio U.d.G., and Radio Universidad de Veracruz (Xalapa).

In general, there was little substantial progress with respect to prevention between the second semester of 1989 and the first semester of 1991. The few advances that were made on television were not

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- ^{*} Until the beginning of 1989 these advertisements were transmitted late at night and outside peak viewing hours. The advertisements revealed the underlying tendencies of the campaign; they gave priority to the issue of transmission by blood (showing various needles); followed by fidelity: "make love with your partner" or, subliminally, *be monogamous*, and finally: "but if you have relations with more than one partner, use a contraceptive". There was also the notorious advertisement with Hugo Sánchez, the famous Mexican football player, who declared that "Against A.I.D.S., there must be information", without ever saying what information, or how to protect oneself effectively against A.I.D.S.
 - ^{**} There were many actions that were never actually undertaken but were presented abroad and in international congresses as realities. Such is the case of the advertisement using the song by Lucía Méndez, *Castigate* (Punish Me) which was said, in many forums, to have been transmitted on commercial and Mexican state television. But that never happened. There was also the declaration made by the Secretary of Health, Dr. Guillermo Soberón in 1988 at the end of the Second Congress of Education and Social Communication, "that in a couple of months a pamphlet on sex education will be distributed" and to this day that project remains filed. There was, too, a promise to defend the human rights of people with A.I.D.S. and H.I.V. made by various officials during the first Congress of Social Participation, in May, 1989, in the Federal District, which until now has hardly been fulfilled, at least with respect to the provision of medicines, treatments and quality of life.
 - ^{***} Apart from the Department of Health, the Departments of Government, Public Education, Labour and Social Security of the Federal Government also have technical and political responsibilities in this area.

maintained. Save for a small, very ingenious pamphlet, little material was produced and very few measures of any worth were carried out. That is, unless, *Amor de Nadie*, the television soap-opera of Lucia Méndez, could be considered the paradigm of prevention promoted by CONASIDA, or the poster of middle-class "ladies" issued to publicize World A.I.D.S. day in 1990, or the 3000 copies of a calendar (co-edited by Círculo Cultural Gay) which more than preventive material, appeared to be a promotional catalogue for the work of various Mexican artists.

Little by little, CONASIDA has expanded its operations throughout Mexico, even though its growth has been related more to the promise of future measures than to those of the present. It has been said that there are between 15 and 20 State Councils (COESIDAS) in the interior of the country and 8 telephone lines that are always open to the public; nonetheless, it is still far from offering adequate services, most of all in the interior provinces. The project that has yielded most politically in terms of image, if not in efficacy, is TELSIDA, an imitation in the Federal District of the *hot line* of the San Francisco A.I.D.S. Foundation. A daily average of 200 calls during workdays for a population of 20 million inhabitants, is hardly significant. The bulk of TELSIDA's replies almost always direct its callers to civil groups or private institutions and very rarely to public health offices. It should be recognized, however, that in recent months TELSIDA has begun to professionalize its services and the training of its personnel, which may ultimately benefit its users.

CRIDIS, with much less political publicity offers a very important service, above all to researchers of various disciplines. But even

* She is one of the most popular singers and actresses of Mexico and of the Spanish-speaking world. *Amor de Nadie*, was transmitted by TELEvisa at 9:30 p.m. (peak viewing hours) Monday through Friday. One of its characters had sex with a prostitute, and a few weeks later became sick with A.I.D.S. and died. He was seen in a private hospital, which has no relation to the reality found in public hospitals where most A.I.D.S. cases are treated. It showed a few stigmatizing situations, but overall the show was typical of the *rosy and happy world* of TELEvisa, and full of subliminal moral messages. CONASIDA appears in the credits as adviser.

** Some notable exceptions in order of importance are the COESIDAS of Guadalajara, Morelia and Culiacán.

*** Regional Centre of Interchange, Documentation and Information about

that is far from being a model in this terrain. The Centres of Information, especially the one in Flora and the evening centre in Copilco, Mexico City, in spite of being overworked, are amongst the better projects undertaken by CONASIDA.

Overall, the most important achievements of CONASIDA in the last two years include its endowment with an infrastructure with a specific budget (8000 million pesos 3.7 million from the Mexican government for 1991 and \$3.5 million from foreign sources); it has introduced the purchase of A.Z.T. for systematic and subsidized distribution through the Centres of Information in the Federal District (around 2000 million pesos) from late 1991 on, and it has begun a policy of supporting civil groups and associations, incipient in 1991, but very promising for 1992.

In this context and in keeping with its legal mandate and programmatic directives, it must not be forgotten that CONASIDA is obliged to limit its efforts to prevention and to some normative services. Done well or poorly, this work is insufficient. Few projects of this institution focus upon people who are living with A.I.D.S. or who are H.I.V.-positive^{**}. And we are not only referring to questions related to the care and treatment of patients, to the medicine and laboratory studies that are required, but also to the psychotherapeutic and spiritual support that they also need for a good quality of life and to have a dignified death. We are speaking also of projects related to the defence of the civil and human rights of the people living with A.I.D.S. or H.I.V. in Mexico. Without all of these elements, it is not really possible to speak of an integrated A.I.D.S. policy in Mexico.

A.I.D.S. of CONASIDA.

- * In the meeting of the Executive Council of the Global A.I.D.S. Programme, of the W.H.O., held in April, 1991, in Geneva, Switzerland, the Mexican delegation, headed by Dr. Federico Chávez Peón, promoted, and succeeded in having a resolution passed that from 1992, 15% of national A.I.D.S. budgets should be devoted to financing the work of non-government organizations, in particular those that had most prospects and were best organized. See *Sociedad y SIDA*, No. 8, May 24, 1991, pp.8-9.
- ** The only exception is the one previously mentioned and which will continue to remain a promise until put into effect at the end of this year.

Gaps, deficiencies and irregularities could probably only be overcome if the decree creating CONASIDA were to be changed and if its juridical and administrative status was fundamentally reformed from that of an *organismo desconcentrado* to that of an *organismo descentralizado*, such that it would become an entity with its own budget and interdepartmental competence, with the participation of representatives of organized civil society, fully endowed with rights and not merely with responsibilities. At the moment, only the Fundación Mexicana Para La Lucha Contra El SIDA (Mexican Foundation for the Fight Against A.I.D.S.) has a representative in CONASIDA, Luis González de Alba. However, there are many other civil groups in existence, be they progressive, conservative or fundamentalist in character, who have not been consulted. Moreover, the Fundación Mexicana has never effectively exercised its representative role in CONASIDA, be it in council meetings with respect to making decisions or to other measures of an institutional character.

Accordingly, the status of an *organismo descentralizado* would give CONASIDA the legal authority to assert legal rights and to support public denunciations, including those directed against members of its own council; and what is more important, it would be able to carry out its existing functions with more efficiency and political dignity. Besides that, it would be possible to introduce new, more effective ways of overseeing the epidemic and the situation of particular cases. Furthermore, real decentralization would also facilitate the "demedicalization" of the institution. It is known that A.I.D.S. has ceased to be a biomedical problem, insofar as it is increasingly characterized by social, legal, cultural, economic and political aspects that exceed the Department of Public Health's sphere of competence, and which entail practical responses, not merely rhetorical formulations.

In November of 1989, the *Programa de Mediano Plazo para la Prevención y Control del SIDA en México, 1990/1994* (P.M.P.) was presented to the international community, and a year later to President Carlos Salinas de Gortari. This document is the first integrated, coher-

* The *National Health Plan*, which was presented to the President of the Republic by the Secretary of Health and his officials towards the end of 1990, made no fundamental changes to the basic character of the P.M.P.

ent and detailed programme that has been designed by a branch of the Mexican administration to confront the demands of a growing epidemic.

The contents of the P.M.P. are so vague that they encourage indiscriminate negotiations with all interested social forces. Its ambiguity becomes counter-productive in relation to its own objectives to destigmatize, inform and educate in accordance with constitutional principles and the guidelines of the W.H.O..

It is not possible to deny that the P.M.P. represents a relative advance in questions of education and human rights, but it continues to be imprisoned by a vision of sex education that is exclusively concerned with health: pleasure has no place within it. In addition, it doesn't specify either the education strategies, or the concrete contents of the activities that will be promoted, upon which its impact, relevance and relationship to its general objectives will precisely depend.

The case of the defense of human rights is more disturbing, because apart from some consultations with lawyers, reviews of penal codes and the dispensing of information about their rights to people living with A.I.D.S., seropositives and relatives of both, no consideration has been given as to how they will be specifically defended when necessary. In this respect, coordination with the Department of Labour and Social Security, the Department of Government and the judiciary (Poder Judicial) has been left to chance without being spelt out in any particular manner.

To be sure, the government's A.I.D.S.'s discourse has ceased referring to the disease as one that was limited to specific segments of the population and to "high risk groups", but the P.M.P. also conceals the homosexualization of A.I.D.S. by very sophisticated means. By making distinctions between general population, specific audiences and the population whose behaviour places it at risk, the information and education campaigns become differentiated, thus addressing an abstract general population - in which, by definition there would be no place for those so-called high risk and other groups segmented by their work and generational identities. And here the counter argument is already known. In Mexico between 38 and 65 per cent of those who have A.I.D.S. are male homosexuals and bisexuals, who constitute a high risk group with considerable possibility of becoming infected, and who consequently have to be addressed in a particular manner. Questions without answers that arise from this include: are homosexuals (and homosexuality, as a sexual and affective practice) not part of the population as a whole? How can they pretend to destigmatize A.I.D.S.,

if "normal" and "abnormal", high, low and no-risk individuals continue to be separated? How can they hope to succeed with the educational campaign if the general population is a concept that excludes by homogenizing people, such that concrete individuals see and feel that the problem is alien to them, since they can't help but feel that they are abnormal within this framework?

When one examines the P.M.P. the elementary question that arises, concerns the role of people living with A.I.D.S. and H.I.V. in relation to its means and objectives. The answer is that the P.M.P. is a programme designed for controlling and preventing A.I.D.S. from affecting those who aren't infected or ill. It regards those who live with A.I.D.S. and H.I.V. as simple objects of political adornment or at best as passive, powerless subjects, incapable of acting and reasoning against the illness, who without exception must be cared for, informed, cured and maybe intimidated to ensure that they don't "disseminate the illness". *In no case do seropositives and people with A.I.D.S. (organized) participate in the definition of specific programmes that emerge from the P.M.P.. On a more general level it is not difficult to observe that the P.M.P. convokes civil society to action, but doesn't give it any place in decision-making or in evaluation.*

CONASIDA effectively controls the Program. CONASIDA coordinates, designs, carries out and evaluates the P.M.P. Some elements of civil society and some non-governmental organizations are formally listed as advisers within its organizational framework, but this is merely for the sake of appearance. How can they claim to coordinate a national effort in the struggle against A.I.D.S. when one government institution decides, designs, carries out and also evaluates its own policies?

Because of its general character and the need to respect human rights, because of the interrelationship between public policies, the politics of A.I.D.S. offers an opportunity to create new state relations, and new institutional models. Particularly so in Mexico, which is engaged in a global process of rethinking the role of the state. However, the characteristics of A.I.D.S. have also offered an opportunity for a centralized integration of the government's policies of control and prevention, and have facilitated the creation of an institution that continues the traditional mechanisms of state reproduction: anti-democratic and pre-modern politics. Consequently, the P.M.P. is more a means for the state to reproduce itself than a social mechanism in the fight against A.I.D.S.

Not far removed from this pre-modern logic is the reform of the Mexican penal code that in 1990 established the *crime of danger of*

contagion, in Article 199bis^{*}, which threatens the civil and human rights — consecrated in the Mexican constitution — of people living with H.I.V. or A.I.D.S.: to be able to enjoy the rights which it establishes, and which cannot be suspended nor restricted; the right not be personally harassed, the right to live, to work, to liberty, to freedom of movement and to health.

Given all these factors, it is essential to reconstruct CONASIDA, as we have repeatedly argued. Only as an *organismo descentralizado* could it ensure that the P.M.P. could be rebuilt, coordinated, put into practice and become responsible to society as well as to the government.

It is not the existence of the P.M.P., in itself, which confers a modern character upon the A.I.D.S. policies of Mexico. Its present character is as pre-modern and formalistic as the institution that implements it. To decentralize CONASIDA and to modernize the P.M.P. is, in effect, to risk participation in the *political market*, and in the *plural world of decision-making*. To decentralize would imply participation in the loyal competition of diverse policies, with diverse ends, in the centre of the political-administrative subsystem. It would legitimize, first, in the inner governmental apparatus and especially at the executive level, the need for a policy. And that, of course, implies risks: it would open the administration to politics and thereby to society.

Under these terms, the reconstruction of the P.M.P. — as an objective — would require incorporating the protection of human rights as a fundamental objective^{**}. It would mean giving immediate priority to their constant violations, especially to those which relate to medical

* According to the reform, a "person who has a venereal disease or another grave infectious disease who knowingly places the health of another in danger of contagion, by sexual relations or other transmissible means, will be sanctioned by three days to three years in prison and a fine of up to forty days. If the illness is incurable a penalty of six months to five years in prison will be imposed. In the case of married couples, and of couples who are living together, proceedings will only occur in response to a complaint of the offended party."

** Recently the National Commission of Human Rights was given representation in CONASIDA. In a private conversation, its president, the prestigious constitutionalist, Dr. Jorge Carpizo commented that the Commission would only discuss A.I.D.S. questions that were exclusively concerned with the Mexican penitentiary system.

attention and treatment, psychotherapeutic support and social assistance to those people who are seropositive or who are living with A.I.D.S.

In the same manner, it would require the information and education campaigns to be broken down treating the general population as a plural universe, composed of individuals with many different identities and excluding exclusive criteria: upholding the universal right to be different.

Lastly, but no less important, it would entail a conception of sex education that fundamentally surpasses notions relating to the reproduction of the species and which conceive of A.I.D.S. prevention in merely epidemiological terms. Only in this way is it possible to prevent and to combat stigmatization and marginalization and to further social solidarity, or put in other terms, the state could be used to promote a social policy, with the support and participation of important segments of society.

The Politics of A.I.D.S.: the Sphere of Society

The initial reaction of society when confronted by A.I.D.S. was fear and violence. It predominantly took the shape of repression and harassment. Today, when the pathogenic agent of A.I.D.S. has been well established, society is able to recognize the hypocrisy of its first reactions, but it has still not been able to overcome them. To the physical violence and harassment of people with H.I.V. and A.I.D.S., we can now add economic violence due to the bad administration and, in certain cases, insufficiency of resources for integral care; the symbolic violence of domestic, social and hospital humiliation; the communications violence of partial and ambiguous *campaigns*; the work violence of dismissals; the institutional violence that forces people to have H.I.V. tests with false and illegal arguments; the continued violence of ignorance that perpetuates everything else and above all, the social violence of exclusion, abandonment and lack of solidarity with those affected by A.I.D.S..

How many faces does repression have? In how many manners is it presented? The discourse of repression is multi-focused, it has many facets, it resorts to multiple tactics. It finds many reasons to justify itself or rather finds many reasons for the many forms that it assumes. Repression is literally the exercise of physical violence, but it also includes various ways of hindering the development of the means to prevent A.I.D.S. and of the care of seropositives and people with A.I.D.S. In addition to open and manifest repression, there are also a mass of

social prohibitions that mark the everyday lives of the affected subjects and of attempts to surmount the situation. Repression of subjects, various obstacles in the way of responsible care of those affected and many prohibitive regulations that impede strategies of prevention. A.I.D.S. is regulated in negative terms on the basis of certain norms and customs that are assumed to be immutable and obligatory, beyond the reach of our society's fundamental laws.

Repression is multiple, and takes many forms. It is also the result of many rationalizations that have been confronted. The discourse of repression retrieves the network of fragmented and diffused social power in multiple ways. The discourse of repression is one and many: it is a legion. Its forms vary according to whether morality, religion, the economy, medical reasons, social prophylaxis, irrational fear or ignorance are being emphasized. In many ways its connections reveal the will of underlying power, the political and normative, or simply bureaucratic patterns that it contains. That is why the argument that in Mexico public or social policies are insufficient or have been suspended, or have not been undertaken because the church or any of its agents have so determined - in the essentialist sense of those philosophies of history which are already out of fashion - can not be accepted. There are more than enough examples to support this judgement. There is the case of the sex information campaigns to the general population, supposedly prevented by the Catholic hierarchy. Without doubt the latter's influence is very significant, but it is not plausible that in a lay state such as ours it could fundamentally determine public policy, whose political-juridical and philosophical basis is laid down in Article 3 of the Constitution. For that you would have to take into account elements of the government bureaucracy who for moral reasons, promotion within the hierarchy of the political elites, or because of simple interest in bureaucratic stability have prevented the development of efficient programmes and projects. The irrational refusal of the National Union

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- * Article 3 guarantees in accordance with Article 24, "freedom of belief ...that the criteria used to direct education will be kept completely apart from any religious doctrine and based on the results of scientific progress, will fight against ignorance and its effects, servitudes, fanaticism and prejudices" and additionally stipulate that care must be taken to "sustain the ideals of fraternity and equal rights for all people, avoiding the privileges of race, sects, groups, sex or of individuals".

of Workers in Education to include non-prejudiced sexual information in their programme (that goes beyond sexual reproduction and a heterosexual and homophobic framework) exerts as much influence as the Catholic church in preventing these types of decision from being made and public actions from being undertaken.

At the societal level the discourse of repression, defined in these terms, has found its best and most strident representatives in PROVIDA, the Unión Nacional de Padres de Familia (the National Union of Family Parents), the Asociación Cívica Femenina (the Civic Feminine Association), various Ligas Defensoras de la Moral, (Morality Defense Leagues), the Partido Acción Nacional, the so-called Partido Auténtico de la Revolución Mexicana, the Chambers of Commerce and the Mexican Episcopate (with prelates Genaro Alamilla and Ernesto Corripio Ahumada at their head) or the representative of the Vatican to the Mexican government, Don Geronimo Prigione; but it also has its *silent* wing in some rectors of public (Nuevo Leon - 1989 - and Veracruz - 1990) and private universities (the Autonomous University of Guadalajara, LaSalle, La Feminina de Mexico, and the Iberoamerican) and in middle and high ranking officials of various companies (the Aurrera chain, banks such as Serfin and the Internacional, Farmacias de Guadalajara, Bimbo, Mexicana de Aviación, PEMEX etcetera). The most glaring example of the strident campaign was the frustrated attempt in December, 1989, to have Jaime Sepúlveda Amor - at that time general coordinator of CONASIDA, convicted for promoting the use of condoms in Mexico. One of the most notable examples of silent strategies was that of Aurrera and other businesses to proportion funds to be used against A.I.D.S., on condition that all messages would support fidelity in couples, monogamy, chastity, marriage and would reject what they consider to be "sexual perversions": homosexuality, bisexuality, *promiscuity* of any sexual preference, etcetera. Article 199bis' reforms of the penal code responds to the punitive aspirations disseminated by this current of Mexican society. They are not merely a product of the state's imagination.

The other currents of civil society involved in the struggle against A.I.D.S., constitute a scheme of action that cannot be easily conceptualized in relation to traditional political and social beliefs. It is a broad spectrum - that in the majority of cases has been voluntarist without giving much thought to the issue - that ranges from the ultra-Left, anarchism, muddled pragmatism and possessive individualism, to left-of-centre liberalism and others from the liberal-democratic camp.

From the time that A.I.D.S. presumably arrived in Mexico, around 1981 until it began to be constructed as a medical and moral problem and later as a matter of social interest, this uncommon element of Mexican society wasn't left at the margin. From 1983 and almost to the beginning of 1989, some homosexual or gay associations such as Colectivo Sol, G.O.H.L., FIGHT and others like the now defunct Cálamó, the Círculo Cultural Gay and the Macho Tips magazine, manifested their concern by writing articles on the subject, protesting in letters to newspapers, giving talks, and distributing fliers and posters. We are not speaking of a planned policy. It was done without much clarity, more in reaction than in response to reflection, as happened virtually throughout the world. They didn't understand the significance nor the extent of the epidemic. Virtually without resources and with every type of organizational limitation, civil society was not able to accomplish very much in the first few years of the advancing epidemic.

As a pernicious effect of the extreme medicalization of the disease, civil groups and associations likewise medicalized the disease and in the most absurd but understandable extremes, many of them - not all - came to confuse public participation in what was already beginning to appear as a problem which concerned everyone, with piety and pseudo-Christian moralizing disguised as solidarity: the poorly conceived idea of constructing homes or hospices for the terminally ill as the fundamental strategy without any serious plan, offers the best example: a strategy for those about to die, and which didn't give any thought to those who live with H.I.V. or A.I.D.S. who are looking to live longer and better.

In this sense, these erratic group actions coincided with the equally erratic medicalized approaches of the government's policies which have already been examined. The only difference is that in contrast to the latter, the former remained one step behind by not being able to visualize the need for an adequately conceived public policy that, for better or for worse, the Mexican health authorities had begun to undertake in haphazard fashion.

In this respect, ill-conceived arguments that the homosexual liberation Movement had been taken over by the struggle against A.I.D.S. are mistaken. With exception of G.O.H.L., Colectivo Sol, FIGHT, Guerrilla Gay and to a lesser extent Cálamó and the Círculo Cultural Gay, the rest of the groups and associations, the heterogenous world of Mexican homosexuals, gays and lesbians (as well as the no less complex world of heterosexuality), were essentially absent and to a large extent continue to be absent.

Many efforts emerged to combat A.I.D.S. from this society, disappeared, consolidated and sought to mature organizationally - especially since 1988. Also, sadly many illusions have been lost, such as expecting progressive, rational, and lay policies or at least liberal-democratic policies from the political parties. With the exception of some segments of the Partido Popular Socialista and of the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores, political parties have done practically nothing to fight A.I.D.S. The P.R.D. and Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas offer the most consummate manifestation of political opportunism in this matter: "we will only speak about A.I.D.S., when we become the government. The Mexican people are very conservative and we would lose many votes", said Cárdenas, to a group of intellectuals in 1988, and to this date he has not varied from this position.

Today, one can refer to mature groups like G.O.H.L., Organización SIDA Tijuana, Grupo de Investigación Social Sobre SIDA y Defensa de Derechos Humanos, Fundación Mexicana Para la Lucha Contra el SIDA, Colectivo Sol, Ave de Mexico, Compañeros de Ciudad Juárez, Asociación Regional del Sureste; Comité de Madres y Amigos de Personas con V.I.H. y S.I.D.A. de Guadalajara; Entre Amigos, Voz Humana, and Proyecto Azomalli; to the existence of publications such as *Sociedad y SIDA* and *Acción en SIDA*, *Amigos* and the *Boletín Informativo de la ILGA para America Latina*; to books such as *El SIDA en México, los Efectos Sociales*, and *Algunos Pre-textos, Textos y Sub-textos ante el SIDA*; and to the existence of various radio programmes, a telephone line, an office of human and civil rights, two or three medical and psychological counselling centres; as well as specific projects which are subject to rigorous and pluralistic forms of evaluation, to the institutionalization of these groups by means that range from statutory

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- * *Sociedad y SIDA* is a co-publication of *El Nacional* and the Grupo de Investigación Social Sobre el SIDA y Defensa de Derechos Humanos, Ac. *Amigos* is put out by the group Cuenta Conmigo, a wing of Entre Amigos, both of whom are members of Mexicanos Contra el SIDA Confederación de Organismos No Gubernamentales. *Acción en SIDA* is co-edited by el Colectivo Sol and by AHRTAG of England. *El Boletín ... de la I.L.G.A.* by G.O.H.L. in Guadalajara. *El SIDA en México; los Efectos Sociales*, edited by Francisco Galván Díaz, is an anthology of sixty four varied articles, published in 1988. *Algunos Pre-textos, Textos y Sub-textos ante el SIDA*, edited by Xabier Lizarraga and published in 1989 is a collection of his essays and of some members of Ave de Mexico. Lizarraga is the coordinator of Guerrilla Gay.

structures and internal by-laws, to permanent work in accessible public sites. They should suffice to corroborate our perception .

There are certainly many other associations, but the immense majority of them seem to be constituted by two or three people who work sporadically, without plans, programs, premises, infrastructures, etcetera.

As a phenomenon that should not be underestimated, and which is an expression of the traditional corporatism of Mexican politics, we should also recognize the existence of other associations that have arisen under the aegis of CONASIDA and of some Public Health officials, even though in most cases they are little more than a letterhead, like OIVAS, Humanos del Mundo Contra el SIDA, Rock y SIDA and Amor y Caridad, which reputedly has more than five thousand million pesos (nearly two million dollars) for the fight against A.I.D.S. *in a bank* but which, as far as can be made out hasn't been utilized in anything that has to do with A.I.D.S..

The existence of *associations of associations*, which are intended to cover all of Mexico, like Mexicanos Contra el SIDA Confederación de Organismos No Gubernamentales and the Red Nacional de Comunicación y Solidaridad Contra el SIDA, promise much for the future, but at the moment their distinguishing mark is their self-aggrandizement and the creation of a public image (promoted by some journalists for better or worse) that doesn't correspond to their organizational realities and actions.

How do you put into effect the limited projects that exist? How can you generate viable and attractive projects for funding agencies, but which remain true to the needs of the country and its inhabitants? How can you collect funds for test projects? How can you reallocate funds from superficial prevention work given that little or no assistance is

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- Perhaps the gravest problem affecting the existence and efficacy of the civil and non-governmental groups and associations is the lack of economic resources, and in the case of those that have received financing, their unwillingness to reveal how they are using the funds that they have received. Only FIGHT, the Colectivo Sol, GOHL and GIS-SIDA, have made their incomes public and have offered, if necessary, to justify their expenditures. Other associations that have received funding include Mexicanos Contra el SIDA, Compañeros de Durango, FEMAP de Chihuahua, and through frequent auctions the Circulo Cultural Gay.

being given to seropositives and people with A.I.D.S.? How do you respond to the need for democratic politics? And how do you establish a respectful relationship, one that is clear and motivated neither by opportunism nor spontaneity, with governmental and other institutions? These are some of the most important questions to which this branch of civil society in Mexico must still find answers.

The majority of the social actors don't always understand that from many points of view they play an irreplaceable role in the creation of a political system with more democratic characteristics: that explains their repeated appeals to feelings, to the plight of those who are sick, poor and humble, and not to *the rights of citizenship*. They don't always realize, for example, that their actions supply *inputs* for governmental action, that in some respects they are bell-wethers for making governmental political decisions, that will become *outputs*. For a state like ours, developing in the *post-crisis*, it is an advantage which should be explored.

For groups and movements concerned with the fight against A.I.D.S. all the preceding is especially significant. Not to confront with frankness questions of internal organization, to overvalue oneself, to prioritize the immediate, not to be clear with respect to the type of negotiations that one wants to establish and not to continuously question in a country such as Mexico, characterized by privatized space and by public irresponsibility, the circumstances in which actions are undertaken, may have greater costs in the short and long term than would be true for feminist, ecological, gay, and lesbian movements, in which loss of life is a possible outcome but one that is always distant.

These social actors generally forget that it is possible to be a liberation and anti-instrumentalist movement, but in the matter of the fight against A.I.D.S. to express only feelings or counterculture is suicide. A more effectively organized civil struggle against A.I.D.S. must go beyond the origins of the social movement against A.I.D.S. with its accelerated apprenticeship, extreme passions and simple denunciations, to rational explanations and to institutional forms that will really facilitate the care, prevention, self-help, mutual support, defense and self-defense of those affected by H.I.V., in the face of the social effects that have resulted from the same.

To avoid more people becoming infected and to ensure that the periods of survival and the quality of life of those who live with A.I.D.S. or H.I.V. will be improved and their lives lengthened, it will be necessary

for organized civil society to debate these and other questions, to be engaged at the intellectual level with the rest of the politic universe and necessarily to confront organized and unorganized public opinion, and actions of the most diverse origin. Otherwise, the epidemic will continue whether or not the supply of medicines, pharmaceuticals and treatments becomes sufficient and accessible.

Anti-A.I.D.S. Ethics: Solidarity

In these circumstances, when we have gone from a medical problem to a moral one, later to one of public health and from there to one that is more an issue of public policies, the struggle against A.I.D.S. offers an opportunity for an interrelationship between society and the government in which solidarity will mediate state and societal actions. We may also be able to move in this field towards a new definition of social policy, that is to say, programmes that are defined, executed and evaluated by new or reconstructed socio-governmental organizations. Furthermore, a more profound demedicalization and dehomosexualization of the concepts, discourse and institutions concerned with the struggle against A.I.D.S. must develop.

It will not be easy to resolve the national A.I.D.S. problem only with the aid of the health sector, or with laws, bylaws and regulations that are essentially punitive, in which their consensual and flexible function is ignored; it will not be easy to do so without a strong civil society and even less so without the obligatory participation of different sectors of the federal, local and municipal governments, including the Congress of the Union. The public politics of A.I.D.S. imply the need to count on authority, but not only in terms of power and money; it is necessary to generate an accumulation of more responsible and far-reaching public, civil and private solidarity. When we appeal to solidarity in the modern meaning of the word, we are not speaking of friendship nor of Samaritanism or Franciscanism. We are speaking of a social value: we aren't referring, certainly, to Christian charity that has served so many times to conceal wretched injustices or even to the "solidarity of governmental corporatism" in the name of solidarity; but rather of a meaningful solidarity that is able to withstand outside pressures through affection and real support, thereby revealing the limitations of what is considered

just. In this fashion the virtue of solidarity must be extended to all corners of the private and public spheres. In the case of A.I.D.S. social solidarity is a moral imperative

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- This essay would not have been possible without the acute criticism and suggestions of Arturo Díaz and Juan Jacobo Hernández.

This work describes and analyzes homosexuality in Mexico from pre-Columbian times to the present day. It examines the role of the state in relation to the oppression of homosexuals, and the struggles of the gay liberation movement to secure civil rights for homosexuals and to transform the machismo ingrained in Mexican society.

"The text at hand is a part of a broader comparative study of homosexuality in three Latin American countries: Cuba, Costa Rica and Mexico. The part dealing with Mexico represents a landmark in literature dealing with homosexuality in our country." **Juan Jacobo Hernández, Colectivo Sol.**

"It is a pleasure to have collaborated in this project as a translator, since I consider that Ian Lumsden's book represents a valuable contribution to our knowledge of homosexual life and culture in Mexico, given that no one has undertaken such a task in our country until now." **Luis Zapata.**

Ian Lumsden was born in Argentine, and lives in Toronto, where he teaches Social and Political Science at Atkinson's College, York University. He has written on sexuality and the state, underdevelopment and the Cuban Revolution.

Luis Zapata is the author of *El Vampiro de la Colonia Roma* (Adonis García), *Melodrama* and *En Jirones*, among other novels.

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