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ORIGINAL PAPER

# Homosexuality, Homophobia, and Biomedical Sciences in Twentieth Century Mexico

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**Abstract** Previous accounts on how homosexual identities developed in Mexico along the twentieth century have tended to exclude biomedical sciences as an important part of the background in which the modern homosexual subject came into existence. In this paper, I seek to remedy this lack of attention by examining the role these expertises played. More concretely, I offer an historiographic narrative in which homophobia was institutionalized through these disciplines, thus generating the conditions of possibility for the rising of homosexual identities. In general, I show how eugenics, legal medicine, and psy-expertises can be characterized as the venues responsible for the introduction and standardization of medical categories associated with this identity.

**Keywords** Homosexual identity · Homophobia · Biomedical sciences

The aim of this text is to offer new historical perspectives on how modern westernized homosexual identities were introduced and consolidated in Mexico along the twentieth century but prior to the advent of modern activism in the 1970s. In order to do so, I briefly present the current historiographies that nowadays dominate Mexican gay and lesbian studies and, also, Mexican gay and lesbian activism—I will refer to these histories as *the canon* given the centrality they have acquired. After introducing these histories, I will elaborate on their particular limitations and biases; more specifically, I will focus on their lack of attention to structural and ideological changes that the Mexican State underwent after the Mexican revolution (1910–1920).

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Hence, my objective is to advance a new narrative, which aspires to be much more critical than previous historiographies that are much indebted to the autobiographic accounts of Salvador Novo, Carlos Monsiváis, and in a lesser extent, Miguel Capistrán. More concretely, this paper aims to:

I. Reflect, on the one hand, on how homophobia was a major force in the co-construction of homosexual identities in Mexico and, on the other, examine its historical transformations and articulations from the early 1900s to the late 1970s.
II. Offer a general perspective on the role played by the biomedical sciences, the psy-expertises (i.e., psychology, psychiatry, and psychoanalysis), and the legal medicine along the aforementioned period as the spaces in which homophobia was institutionalized.
III. Situate some well-known figures and episodes within this context in order to show the relevance it had.
IV. Examine current explanations regarding how homosexual identities developed in Mexico during the twentieth century.

However, I must say that my narrative should be read as a part of a larger and more intricate history still awaiting us to write it. This is so because the interplay between these disciplines and the construction of homosexual identities has seldom been explored although there are some important exceptions that I will revisit.

Methodologically, this work is in essence the result of re-reading some well-known episodes—and the historiographies written about them—in light of the history of medicine and the psy-expertises [specially taking into account the new cultural and social history of medicine (Huertas 2001)]. What I have sought to do is to elaborate this narrative by either comparing, whenever it was possible, the events occurring in Mexico with similar events that occurred abroad, or by situating these events within the larger context of the history of medicine, psy-expertises, and legal medicine in Mexico. Hopefully, this might help us to shed light on the historical processes affecting the construction of identities, in general, as well as in this particular case.

Moreover, I also brought in some new sources that so far have never been discussed; more precisely, I am referring to scientific products such as (1) science books, (2) journal papers, and (3) unpublished theses. Furthermore, I incorporated letters and references by Jorge Cuesta and Elias Nandino that, although well known, have not been connected with the historical context I present in this text.

Despite that, I must clarify two further points. First, the time period that I examine here goes from the 1890s to the 1970s because some structural changes that play an important role in this narrative actually begun at the end of the nineteenth century so I decided to include them in order to generate a more coherent history.

Second, although I would have liked to include only original sources, this has proved impractical because most of the legal and medical literature that analyzes the topic of homosexuality as such dates back to the 1950s (in Mexico). Prior to these years, most references to it are scattered across a diversity of topics such as eugenics, physical anthropology, or ethnographic works on indigenous

communities; these have led me to rely, maybe too heavily, on the secondary sources that happen to mention some discussion on homosexuality.

Finally, the structure of the paper is composed of four sections. First, a rather brief reflection on why homosexuality can be analyzed by attending to the history of homophobia. Second, I will introduce the abovementioned canon and its limitations. Third, I will present my own narrative. In the end, in the concluding remarks, I will elaborate on the relevance of institutions and their capacity to strongly subjectify us.

## Homosexuality, Homophobia, and the Sciences

> Only in the second half of the twentieth century is homosexuality in Mexico approached from a scientific perspective (or so people claim).
> Carlos Monsiváis 2003; p. 142.

Homosexuality and homophobia are connected in complex trends that run along history, geography, language, emotions, bodies, disciplines, and institutions (Fone 2000). The latter seems to imply the existence, or at least the recognition, of the former—even though it denies the right to exist or to be visible of those subjects which it decries. Moreover, the former gave birth to the modern gay identity as a response against the latter and, it could be argued, the former was forged in an historical context in which the latter was an implicit, albeit common, value. When the term "homosexuality" was coined by sexologists and physicians in the middle of the nineteenth century, it denoted a pathology. In a sense, both concepts have co-constructed each other and have co-evolved for the last 150 years (Fone 1994, 2000).

Hence, this co-construction offers us a powerful narrative to tell, re-tell, and revisit accepted historiographies of how homosexual identities developed and became embraced and defended by particular subjects in particular historical contexts. Their dialectical relationship helps us to emphasize the contradictions and tensions within a given society. Of course, neither homophobia nor homosexuality occurs in a vacuum. Homosexuality, as well as homophobia, is embodied and comes associated with certain values and emotions partially conditioned by disciplines, institutions, languages, and geographies (Fone 2000; Nussbaum 2010).

Indeed, the very internationalization of homosexual identities and subcultures cannot be explained unless we invoke global dynamics that affect and mold local contexts. This in no way means that homosexualities across the globe are within a path toward homogenization in which a westernized notion of sexuality erases and replaces whatever categories and norms it found. On the contrary, homosexual identities are re-signified and re-interpreted within the larger background of the culture to which they integrate. In this process, homophobia also plays a role, either by co-interacting with local processes of resistance against identities that are perceived as foreign and maybe detrimental to the values and integrity of a society, or by reinforcing previous prejudices and taboos regarding the norms of gender that govern that society.

Anyway, whatever our favored explanation might be, it seems that history, historiography, and philosophy of history are deeply connected if we aim to

comprehend how sexual identities originate and travel across geographies and languages. To disregard how history is written—i.e., historiography—is tantamount to disregard alternative historical explanations that are derived from different philosophies of history.

Therefore, on the one hand, the history of homosexuality cannot and should not ignore its ties to the history of homophobia. On the other hand, it must take into consideration the way in which history, historiography, and philosophy of history intertwine with each other if we truly aim to understand the processes governing the history of identities.

And, additionally, if we are going to focus on the history of homophobia at the level of institutions, in general, and scientific institutions, in particular, then we necessarily need to address how these institutions are affecting the larger population and, more importantly, which institutions deserve our attention.

This last task is certainly not trivial because, as the epigraph that opens this text shows, it is far from clear whether homosexuality was actually approached from a scientific perspective in peripheral countries such as Mexico. Indeed, this quote seems to express a fact followed by a doubt but it is far from obvious what is being doubted. Is it the case that homosexuality in Mexico was in fact approached from a scientific perspective *only* in the second half of the twentieth century? Maybe not, maybe Monsiváis intuits the existence of an unknown history prior to that time. Or maybe he suspects that homosexuality has never been approached from a scientific perspective in Mexico.

Clearly, whatever Monsiváis meant is beyond our grasp, not only because the intended meaning underdetermines the text, but also for the fact that "scientific perspectives" are not transhistorical entities that everyone can point out. They have histories; they are negotiated, standardized, and globalized; they develop within institutional contexts and ideological traditions. For that matter, we should ask what would count as a scientific perspective and what would count as homosexuality? And, if we believe Foucault (1977), these two categories might be intertwined in a co-constructing process in which science partially constructs homosexuality and homosexuality partially constructs science.

However and surprisingly, even though Foucault has been tremendously influential in Mexican studies of sexuality [see, for example, the critical revision of Parrini and Hernández (2012) on the field of Mexican studies on sexuality], historical works on science and homosexuality are scarce and they usually focus on particular scientists, physicians, or institutions (e.g., Piccato 2003; Rivera Garza 2003). They also tend to suffer from a methodological dependence because they have a tendency to focus on periods and actors foregrounded by historians of culture whose very own framings follow the interpretations offered by historical actors such as *Los Contemporáneos* or the 1970s activists.

I must confess I find this rather odd because comparative history normally leads us to search for similarities and differences across contexts but in this particular instance biomedical sciences and psy-expertises (be this psychiatry, psychology, or psychoanalysis) have largely remained outside the scope of historians of homosexuality in Mexico. Precisely because of this last point is that I believe that either a comparison with the history of science and homosexuality in other countries or an

intertextual reading of the history of medicine in Mexico, on the one hand, and the history of homosexuality, on the other, might be a fundamental tool for understanding how homosexual identities were established in Mexico along the twentieth century.

Obviously, there is a myriad of global processes that affect and mold local contexts. As a consequence of this, we must accept that any history we offer cannot be, but fragmentary, provisional and incomplete. Be this as it may, we can still assess different historical hypothesis regarding how identities are internationalized and what was the role played by homophobia according to every scenario.

Moreover, if we aim to write an history of homosexuality, homophobia, and the sciences, then we probably should focus on various forms of institutional violence that might be anticipated such as (1) body interventions, (2) sexist pedagogies, and (3), legal regulations. In what follows I intend to do so.

Anyway, my main objective is to show how the history of homosexual identities in Mexico began only at the dawn of the twentieth century and within a larger biopolitical framework centered in race and admixture. Along this century, the history of homosexuality is mainly a history of institutionalized homophobia that, nevertheless, produced a common identity that served as a motor of change after the 1970s.

## The Canon

In recent years, scholars within the field of Mexican gay and lesbian studies have offered an historical reconstruction of how homosexual identities developed in Mexico along the twentieth century (Díez 2011; Gallego Montes 2010; Laguarda 2009; Salinas Hernández 2010). This particular narrative has become extremely influential not only within academy but also in gay and lesbian activism, and we could even argue, it has become canonical.

Its influence, I must add, includes major works both within and outside Mexico—as can be seen by the fact that both Lumsden (1991) and Carrier (2003), probably the founding fathers of the field as an academic enterprise, refer to its kernel as a given (i.e., the Ball of the 41, *Los Contemporáneos*, the 1970s activists and the arrival of AIDS in the 1980s) even if they do incorporate many more elements in their respective analyses. Indeed, the papers written by professional historians do not seem to fare better because they are still framed following the general lines provided by Novo, Capistrán, and Monsiváis (e.g., Rivera Garza 2003; Piccato 2003; Buffington 2003).

This historiography situates the year 1901 as a foundational moment, as the very moment in which Mexicans became *aware* of the existence of homosexuals in Mexico, since in that year a famous scandal took place: the Ball of the 41. This dance was in fact immortalized by the plastic artist Jose Guadalupe Posada in a collection of engravings illustrating the so-called *41 lagartijos* (a *lagartijo* is a male lizard and the term was used derogatorily to denote homosexual men), half of them wearing female dresses. These images were published by the newspapers of the time and motivated a public condemnation of the men involved.

But, as the above-cited scholars have reported, there were 42 men in attendance; the forty-second was actually the son-in-law of the famous Mexican dictator Don Porfirio Díaz. Except for him, all the others were arrested by the police and the ones wearing dresses were sent to the state of Yucatán to assist the military troops against the revolts that were taking place in Mexico's southeast at that time; the rest were merely imprisoned.

In the canonical history, this foundational moment is usually followed by an historical gap that ends in the 1930s and 1940s. In those years, a group of intellectuals known as *Los Contemporáneos* began to publish a variety of literary productions that were critical of the post-revolutionary ideology of the Mexican State centered on nationalism, Marxism, and machismo. Writers as Salvador Novo, Xavier Villaurrutia, Jorge Cuesta, Carlos Pellicer, Jaime Torres Bodet, and others were all homosexuals and members of this group. As I said, they were all very critical of this post-revolutionary ideology that had become dominant in the plastic arts in Mexico thanks in part to the influence of the muralists Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros. In sharp contrast to the muralist, *Los Contemporáneos* were extremely influenced by figures like André Gide, Marcel Proust, André Breton, and Sergei Eisenstein.

This first generation of openly homosexual men is usually followed in this canonical history by a second generation, the 1970s activists. Renowned writers like Carlos Monsiváis, Luis González de Alba, Juan Jacobo Hernández, Miguel Capistrán, Nancy Cárdenas, and José Joaquín Blanco belonged to this second generation. Some of these activists, like Luis González de Alba, had been involved in the 1968s student's movement that tragically culminated in the Massacre of Tlatelolco on October 2, 1968. Others, like Juan Jacobo Hernández and Nancy Cárdenas, were the founding members of the *Frente Homosexual de Acción Revolucionaria* (Homosexual Front of Revolutionary Action, FHAR)—mainly composed of homosexual men—the LAMBDA group, and the OIKABETH[1] group—mainly composed of women.

These groups collectively organized the first Gay Pride Parade in the summer of 1979 after they have joined as an explicitly homosexual contingent a massive protest lamenting the 10th anniversary of the Massacre of Tlatelolco on October 2, 1978.

The relevance of this generation also lies in the fact that they were also the ones who started to write the history of homosexuality in Mexico as can be seen in the short text *Un día como hoy hace más de ciento* by Miguel Capistrán (2010). In that text, Capistrán recalls how he rediscovered in February 1974 the famous Ball of the 41 and how he interpreted it as the beginning of the history of homosexuality in Mexico.

The canonical history finally arrives to the 1980s and the terrible impact that AIDS had upon the gay and lesbian activists. It was such a devastating strike to the gay movement that all the scholars I mentioned consider that AIDS utterly destroyed the nascent gay and lesbian activism in Mexico. The survivors would require years to reorganize and recover political momentum.

[1] OIKABETH is an acronym for the Mayan phrase "Ollin Iskan Katuntat Bebeth Thot" and means "fighting women that open paths and throw flowers".

This last period represents for authors like Laguarda (2009) and Díez (2011) an historical shift in which an Americanized gay identity finally comes to replace the former homosexual activist identity and its connections to Marxism. Laguarda actually explains this shift as a consequence of the influence of the American tourists visiting Mexico in the 1970s. For Díez, it marks the decline and the eventual failure of the homosexual activism molded by Marxism. For both, the arrival of the new Americanized gay identity also represents a reframing of identity in which a criticism toward total institutions like the State and the Market is replaced by a more focalized criticism in issues like human rights, social security, and access to medical institutions.

### Re-assessing the Canon

Nevertheless, there seems to be a constitutive bias attached to this canon because Capistrán, its main architect, and Monsiváis, its main popularizer, were pupils and friends of Salvador Novo and, as a consequence, much of this history is actually derived from the personal experiences of Novo during the 1930s and 1940s (Schuessler 2010). Problematic is also the fact that most of the events discussed during the 1970s were written by Carlos Monsiváis as autobiographic anecdotes (Monsiváis 2003, 2010). Unfortunately, the four authors above cited have taken for granted the fundamental elements of the narratives of Novo, Blanco, and Monsiváis, which indicates an absolute lack of professional historical work and the necessity to revise the accuracy of this inherited narrative.

Furthermore, it is quite problematic to claim that homosexuality was discovered in the year 1901 or that Mexicans became suddenly aware of it. To be sure, this is an important moment in the history of homosexuality in Mexico but to claim, as most contributions did in the book *The famous 41* (McKee Irwin et al. 2003), that it represents the invention of homosexuality in Mexico—following in this the well-known opinion of Monsiváis—is, to say the less, controversial, or so I will argue in the next section.

Equally problematic is the assertion that an Americanized gay identity arrived in the 1970s just "by diffusion" thanks to the American tourists—as Laguarda does. As I stated in the previous section, identities normally require a collection of institutions in order to be introduced and maintained within a given population. Hence, the problem with the canon lies not in its veracity but in its utter simplicity regarding the social machinery that accompanied these four major generational transitions.

In the next section, my aim will be to offer a new historiography that incorporates some ideological and institutional components that radically affected the Mexican population along the twentieth century.

## Toward an Institutional History of Homosexuality

In this section, I focus on two aspects that are fundamental if we aim to understand how homosexual identities arrived to Mexico and became entrenched along the twentieth century. First, I briefly discuss how the first networks of men erotically and/or sexually attracted to other men came into existence as a consequence of urban sanitation

policies. Second, I analyze how these networks eventually became a concern for the Mexican State after the revolution and how different institutions in different times attempted to control the homosexual practices enabled by these new spaces.

One remark, nonetheless, should be made at this point. My narrative is centered on male sexual practices and it should not be extended to female sexual practices. This bias has two sources. On the one hand, previous sociological, historical, or anthropological analyses have tended to privilege male homosexuality over lesbianism as an object for investigation. On the other hand, Mexican culture in general usually plays down women's sexuality; hence, phobias against homosexuality are normally directed toward homosexual men. This in no way implies that lesbians have not been stigmatized and discriminated—nothing could be further from the truth—what it means is that they are usually rendered invisible and erasable from public space. I obviously do lament the exclusion of lesbianism in this narrative but it is a topic seldom discussed in the sources that I have found. Precisely because of this absence, it would not be advisable to extrapolate what we know about male sexual practices onto female sexual practices; after all, in a Foucauldian jargon, we might say that lesbians were not subjectified by the Panopticum in the same way homosexual men were.

## Hygienism, Urbanization, and the Coming into Being of Networks of Homosexual Men

So, how did these networks come into existence? Paradoxically, the Ball of the 41 might be a good clue if we know how to situate this event. In her recent book *Victory: The Triumphant Gay Revolution*, Hirshman (2012) tells us that at the beginning of the twentieth century, it was a common practice for homosexual men—at least in New York and Paris—to celebrate secret social events like parties or dances. Common was also the practice of incarcerating those in attendance after the police raided the locations in which those events were being celebrated. What is of interest to us is how these parties are evidence of the existence of networks of men erotically and/or sexually attracted toward other men.

According to Hirshman, these networks emerged in the late nineteenth century as a consequence of two different but related processes. First, the amount of people living in cities by the end of nineteenth century enabled a form of public anonymity seldom seen in small towns or villages. Thus, it was possible to incur in a variety of practices with almost no risk of losing credibility, respectability, or prestige. Hence, this anonymity in a sense enhanced the migration patterns by making cities an appealing place for those seeking to engage in what was considered at that time a sexually deviant behavior.

Second, on the other hand, the amount of population living in those very cities also brought about many problems like epidemic crises of cholera and other infectious diseases. Sewers and public baths were two types of measures that urban hygienists implemented in order to cope with these problems. And, although baths and sewers obviously predate the late nineteenth century, its globalization indeed occurs in that century thanks in part to the huge flow of migration toward cities. But public baths, by its very nature of being *public* but designed for personal *private*

issues, were soon refunctionalized as meeting places for those seeking to engage in a variety of sexual practices; thus, public baths became what Foucault (1967) used to call *Heterotopias*.

And Capital of course added a class element with the creation of saunas and very exclusive baths in which only a selected few could enter. These new places began to offer an array of services including massages, beverages, and, most likely, prostitution and, so, very soon the elites were doing business as usual in a very unusual place. For Hirshman, most networks, if not all, of upper class' homosexuals were probably forged in these public/private spaces in which a certain anonymity could be preserved.

This hypothesis certainly seems likely for Mexico and, according to Macías González (2004; see also De Mauleón 2012), this is indeed exactly what happened. In this regard, we know that in 1892, an epidemic crisis of typhoid fever killed 80,000 people and led to the creation of a public bath in the *Zócalo* (Mexico's central plaza) and five more in the streets nearby. These bathhouses in particular were created with the explicit aim of popularizing hygienic practices. It seems this was not an easy practice to enforce as the Mexican expression *"más vale oler a puerco que a muerto"* (better to smell like a swine than like a deathman) perfectly illustrates. Hence, the police was also ordered to incarcerate anyone who was found defecating in the streets.

Nevertheless, there were much more exclusive public bathhouses, like the famous *La Alberca Pane* (The Pane Pool) located on *Avenida Paseo de la Reforma* (Avenue Path of Reform), which apparently served as a meeting point for men erotically/sexually attracted to other men. It is, I think, in light of this that we should interpret the scandal of the 41.[2]

However, notwithstanding the scandal of the 41, the press attention it received and the publication in 1906 of the first Mexican novel devoted to homosexuality with Eduardo Castrejón's *Los cuarenta y uno. Novela crítico-social* (all of these are elements commonly recognized by the canon), it seems that the Mexican State was not especially concerned about homosexuality in this period (Macías González 2004).

An additional example might serve to fortify this claim. We know that it was in this period that the famous physician Carlos Roumagnac began the first criminological studies on the sexual practices of prison inmates (Piccato 2003). Yet, the general context of the asylums of the time does not allow us to claim that these served as total institutions or as models for a social machinery aiming to control everyone within the country because these spaces were also general hospitals, orphanages, shelters for the homeless, etc. (Sacristán 2005; see also Rivera Garza 2003). So, it is most likely that Roumagnac's efforts were not indicative of a larger and more structural concern.

Indeed, as Buffington (2003) has shown, prior to the scandal of the 41 it was rather common for the Mexican Bourgeoisie to celebrate parties in which transvestism was a frequent part of the entertaining. This co-occurred with a political use of the figure of the transvestite or the inverted that aimed to parody and

[2] Boivin (2011) further elaborates on the spatial construction of identities in Mexico city along the XXth century.

mock the politic and economic elites. Obviously, all of this changed after the scandal took place because the inverted ceased to be a metaphor for degeneration and became a real concern for both the working class and the bourgeoisie. For the former, it represented the indolent masculinity of the bourgeoisie, and for the latter, it represented a challenge to its capacity to become the ruling class.

Curiously, these last points echoed the political use of obscene literature and images before and during the French Revolution (Frappier-Mazur 1993; Sigel 2002) that, according to Zanotti (2010), targeted the aristocracy and its languid way of life. Apparently, adds Zanotti, this led to the construction of a masculinity in which effeminacy was equated with indolence and, even, with an incompetence to rule life and labor.

So, the canon correctly addresses this moment as a major breakthrough. Sadly, it misrepresents it as the moment in which homosexuality is either invented or discovered. It was certainly not invented by the press scandal that took place. Neither was it invented *in that particular time* because, as I have argued, the social networks were already there thanks in part to hygienism and urbanization but the identity—the label *homosexuality*—was not yet there.

On the other hand, it was not discovered because, as a metaphor, the inverted and the transvestite—but not the homosexual—were already there; again, thanks in part to hygienism, as Roumagnac exemplifies. Furthermore, just as in France (Frappier-Mazur 1993; Sigel 2002; Zanotti 2010), the aristocratic masculinity seemed to have served as a mold for the development of an inverted masculinity. Probably, a more comprehensive understanding will require of us a deeper analysis of Mexico's nineteenth institutions.

## The 1920s and 1930s: Re-situating Los Contemporáneos

But by the 1920s, especially with the creation of the *Partido Nacional Revolucionario* (National Revolutionary Party, PNR) in 1928 by the then Mexican president Plutarco Elías Calles (1924–1928), the Mexican State entered into a new period in which a variety of institutions were created. For example, in 1926, Calles created the *Tribunal para menores infractores del Distrito Federal* (Tribunal for underage delinquents of the Federal District) (Saade Granados 2011). According to Saade Granados (2011), there was at least one case in the archives that made reference to a young boy who was accused and prosecuted for being homosexual.[3]

[3] There were other institutional spaces in which this modernizing trend, deeply rooted in hygienism and eugenics, fructified. For example, in 1940 the *Legión Mexicana de la Decencia*—Mexican Legion for Decency—successfully promoted the promulgation of the *Código de producción cinematográfica*—code of cinematographic production—with the explicit aim of regulating obscenity in the Mexican film industry. This code was very similar to the United States' Hays Code for cinematography (Monsivaís 2010, p. 170). In the Mexican case this code formalized previous concerns with obscenity that had already resulted in the extradition of the famous Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein after some of his homoerotic drawings were internationally exposed in a scandal involving Mexico, the US and the USSR (Debroise 2001). I must add, nonetheless, that these concerns were not targeting homosexuality per se. On the contrary, they were directed against any behavior that was judged subversive, as Debroise (2001) pointed out in the case of Eisenstein by showing how important his support for Trotskyism was as a motive for his extradition.

Nonetheless, the 1920s are more important in ideological terms. The above-mentioned Tribunal is a good example. Physicians like Rafael Santamarina and Roberto Solís Quiroga commonly performed biometric analyses looking for any evidence that might show racial degeneration. And this is so because race and admixture had become by then a central concern for Mexican intellectuals (Suárez y López-Guazo 2002).

José Vasconcelos' 1925 book *La Raza Cósmica* (The Cosmic Race) is usually referred as the best-known example of this ideology in which admixture was seen as a form of racial improvement in which the strength of the Amerindian races was supplemented with the white European intelligence. According to Vasconcelos (1981), the Bronze Race—the Mestizos—were the legitimate heirs of the former glory of the Romans and the south European empires. Vasconcelos was also minister of Education from 1921 to 1924, and in 1929, he actually ran for president and lost. He was also the main architect of the State-sponsored public educational system and the free textbooks that now are an institution in Mexico.

Mexican philosopher Samuel Ramos is another good example of the ideology of those times. In 1934, he published *El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México* (A profile of Man and Culture in Mexico); this book is a psychoanalysis of the Mexican culture and it marks the introduction of psychoanalysis (*à la Adler*) in Mexico. The book is also important for its racial and racists underpinnings that constantly debase the Amerindians by characterizing them as lazy, feebleminded, and incapable of any real technological achievement. According to Ramos (1993), Mexicans have a psychological complex of inferiority partially explained by this heritage and partially explained by their ignorance of most aspects of European culture, a culture that he described as "the Light".

The influence of these projects of social engineering eventually led in the 1920s and 1930s to a process of modernization that included socializing education and health but also "improving" the racial qualities of Mexicans and, so, the Mexican State joined the West in the delusion that was Eugenics by legislating against migration from east European countries, Africa or Asia, people of a Jewish descent, or people with malformations or hereditary diseases. The State also supported the creation of scientific institutions potentially beneficial for the Nation in areas like health or agriculture (Suárez y López-Guazo 2002).

This can be seen with the creation in 1927 of the *Sociedad Mexicana de Puericultura* (Mexican Society for Childcare) renamed in 1931 as *Sociedad Mexicana de Eugenesia* (Mexican Society for Eugenics) (Barahona Echeverría 2009). The creation of these societies was possible thanks in part to the support of Dr. Bernardo Gastélum—minister of Education from 1924 to 1926, after Vasconcelos was removed by Calles, and also Chief of the Public Health Department after 1926 (Suárez y López-Guazo 2002).

The relevance of this society for our topic lies in the fact that in 1932, some of its members suggested to the then minister of Education, Narciso Bassols, the creation

and distribution of free textbooks dedicated to the topic of sexuality with the aim of educating the Amerindians and the poorer classes in order to preclude the racial degeneration of the entire nation as a consequence of the higher births rates of these two population segments (Monsivaís 2010).

Extreme opposition from the *Unión Nacional de Padres de Familia* (National league of family parents) eventually stopped the implementation of these policies but mainly for misogynistic and religious reasons that had to do with female decorum and decency. However, Bassols had to resign to his position in 1934 after heavy criticism from this league.

Nonetheless, the society as a whole kept its influence until the very late 1930s. For example, in 1939, Dr. Lozano Garza in a conference with the title *El sentimiento de inferioridad y la Eugenesia* (Inferiority feelings and Eugenics) recalled with a positive assessment some of the ideas of Dr. Antonio F. Alonso. Dr. Alonso belonged to the group of Mexican physicians that attended the Second International Conference on Eugenics held at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City in the year of 1921. He also became famous because he advanced projects for racial improvement that included the systematic elimination of those that are no longer eliminated by Natural Selection thanks to the social policies of the State (Suárez y López-Guazo 2002).

The Mexican State, however, was not the only sponsor of these policies. Also during the 1920s, the Rockefeller Foundation began a program of scholarships for Mexican physicians who wanted to study in the US. A total amount of 67 scholarships were given and Dr. Gastélum apparently was pivotal for this program because the agreement with the Rockefeller Foundation stated that these physicians would occupy central positions within the Mexican government. In general, the aims of the program were, on the one hand, eradicating the yellow fever and other infectious diseases that were affecting the oil and the train industries—both owned by the Rockefeller's—and, on the other hand, to expand their influence in Mexico by promoting a more intensive collaboration with American scientists (Solórzano 1996).

So, it is in light of this context that we must situate the group of *Los Contemporáneos*. They are certainly the first generation of openly homosexual men in Mexico but, at the time, homosexuality was not yet a concern per se for the Mexican State, which tended to interpret it as an instance of degeneration and, therefore, saw it as one among many possible maladies that might affect the country.

Nevertheless, it was rather exceptional at this time to be prosecuted for homosexuality because Mexico, like most Latin countries, had Laws inspired by the Napoleonic Code that rendered sexual affairs—including consensual sodomy—as private (except for instances of rape or child molesting) (Figari 2009; Ramos Frías 1966). Hence, it would be inaccurate to present them as the founding fathers of the modern gay and lesbian political dissidences and this for two reasons.

First, some members of this movement were physicians (e.g., Rubén Salazar Mallén and Elías Nandino, see Bustamante Bermúdez 2008) or scientists (e.g., Jorge Cuesta who was a chemist, see Schneider 1981) but, in sharp contrast to the 1970s generation, they were hardly critical of the science of their time. Jorge Cuesta, for example, was very much influenced by the nascent science of endocrinology, in general, and by the works of the Spanish physician Gregorio Marañón, in particular, up to the point of interpreting his own hemorrhoids as evidence of a corporeal manifestation of his "sexual inversion" (Schneider 1981).

Here, I must add for clarification how important Gregorio Marañón was, not only in Spain or Mexico (Glick 1982), but in the entire Latin-American region (Ferla 2004). He was not only an endocrinologist but also a strong proponent of eugenics and a harsh critic of feminism; this led him to promote a variety of biopolitical measures that he characterized as *pedagogy of the body*. According to him (Marañón 1960), and in relation to sexuality, it was necessary to implement a State-sponsored policy[4] to enhance our sexual dimorphism—bodily and behaviorally—and, so, to culminate what evolution had started. In this, he was most likely influenced by Oscar Riddle's metabolic theories on the developmental origins of sexual dimorphism (see Ha 2011, for a brief overview of Riddle's ideas) even at a time in which the chromosomal basis of sex was already known.

Indeed, even Monsivaís (2010) recognizes how influential Marañón was in the self-interpretation that Elías Nandino gave of himself in his—by then unpublished—autobiography (published in 2000 with the name *Juntando mis pasos*). Nandino certainly saw himself as a natural abnormality; this is, he agreed with the medicine of his time. After all, Nandino took classes of psychoanalysis with Santiago Ramírez—see below—at UNAM (Nandino 2000; p. 64) and he even claimed to be the one who introduced *Los Contemporáneos* into psychoanalysis. Therefore, it is not surprising to discover how orthodox were their own views on homosexuality.

Consequently, to present *Los Contemporáneos* as the precursors of modern activism necessarily implies overlooking how uncritical they were of the science of their time and how much they were subjectified by it. Regarding this last point, Rodríguez (2012) elaborates on how much both Salvador Novo and Elías Nandino were, in a sense, the two faces of the same coin: the nineteenth century homosexual as an inverted. So, they surely knew they were homosexual, but they understood this still very much in the same terms as the nineteenth century scientists had done. Because of this, it would be more accurate to claim that they were the ones responsible for the consolidation of the term "homosexuality" but not in some kind of anachronistically pre-Queer sense, as Monsivaís (2010) seem to believe, but in a rather more medicalized sense.

[4] Here we should not forget the effects of the Spanish Civil War on Mexican medicine. Specifically, we must have in mind the amount of physicians that left Spain and found a new life in Mexico (Sacristán 2005). Gonzalo Lafora, for example, who was a former student of Marañón, became the treating physician of Jorge Cuesta; indeed, the letter in which Cuesta expresses his fears of suffering some form of sexual reversion -because of his hemorrhoids- is addressed to Dr. Lafora (Schneider 1981). Undoubtedly, he was responsible for introducing Marañón's ideas to *Los Contemporáneos*.

On the other hand, *Los Contemporáneos* were neither outsiders to the prevailing ideologies of modernization nor foreigners to the elites, as can be exemplified by the fact that some of them actually worked in the ministry of Education (e.g., Jorge Cuesta and Xavier Villaurrutia) since the time it was headed by Vasconcelos until the early 1930s with Narciso Bassols (Monsivaís 2010). Indeed, they might be taken as good examples of this modernizing trend that sought to bring Mexico into the globalized and industrialized twentieth century.

Most of them actually befriended Samuel Ramos and even collaborated with him in the magazine *Examen* in which Salazar Mallén published fragments of his novel *Cariátide* (1932); in this book, he discussed aspects of the sexual life of Mexicans (Schneider 1981). Hence, although they were fundamental for the introduction of psychoanalysis and for enabling the first public discussion of Mexican sexuality, they engaged in all of these activities as members of an intellectual elite heavily influenced by European arts and sciences.

This is especially clear when we focus our attention to psychoanalysis. In Spain, José Ortega y Gasset, Gregorio Marañón, Gonzalo Lafora, and Santiago Ramón y Cajal were the central figures in the introduction and diffusion of psychoanalysis (Glick 1982). In the case of Ortega y Gasset, it is well known that he studied philosophy at Marburg—where he actually came to know the works of Freud—and, as for the physicians, the ties between endocrinology, psychiatry, and psychoanalysis were strong at that time. The distribution in Mexico of *La Revista de Occidente* (The magazine of the West) and of the newspaper *El Sol* (The Sun), both edited by José Ortega y Gasset in Spain, was made possible thanks in part to the role of intellectuals such as Ramos (Álvarez del Castillo 2006).

Therefore, it would seem that the canon needs a substantial revision in order to fully understand the relevance of *Los Contemporáneos* within the larger narrative of how modern identities entered Mexico. Moreover, as I will show just below, it would be until the 1940s that the Mexican State will actually begin to consider homosexuality per se as a social problem that demanded governmental policies.

## Mexican Criminology, Psychiatry, and Institutional Homophobia

This new trend began in 1947 when José Ángel Ceniceros, former ambassador of Mexico in Cuba, extended an invitation to José Agustín Martínez asking him to offer a series of lectures on criminology for the Mexican Supreme Court (Martínez 1947). Martínez was at the time the Editor in Chief of La Habana's *Revista Penal* (Journal of Penal Right), had been by then president of the Cuban National Institute of Criminology and the Cuban Society for Criminology, and is considered one of the founding fathers of Latin-American criminology.

In these lectures, Martínez chose homosexuality as his topic and he argued extensively that, although homosexuals were not criminals *per se,* homosexuality should be seen as a constitutive index of the tendency to engage in criminal behavior. Martínez also emphasized that homosexuality was an illness caused by

hormonal alterations and, therefore, was not punishable in itself even if it certainly was a social problem.

He also recommended preventive treatments consisting in mandatory injections of male hormones and a reform to the penal system in order to allow the inmates to practice heterosexual sex with their wives or girlfriends at least once a week and, hence, avoid the spread of homosexuality and, with it, the tendency to commit crimes.

However, it would not be until the 1960s when criminology came to be institutionalized with the creation in 1962 of the *Instituto de Capacitación Criminalística del Poder Judicial del Distrito Federal* (Institute for Criminological Education of the Judicial Power of the Federal District) (Quiroz Cuarón 1962; Gutiérrez Bazaldúa 1962; Roman Lugo 1962).[5] Its first director was Dr. Alfonso Quiroz Cuarón, a Mexican human geneticist and co-founder in 1968 of the Mexican Society of Human Genetics (Barahona Echeverría 2009). The institute regularly gave classes on criminology, psychology, civic duties, law, and personal defense.

These classes were aimed at policemen[6] but, apparently, there were plans for eventually creating a magazine to popularize criminology. Though this last project never materialized, the very creation of the institute was a significant event because many psychiatrists from Mexico and Spain (e.g., Dr. Antonio Viqueira Hinojosa, Dr. Enrique Gutiérrez Bazaldúa, and Dr. Manuel Casas y Ruiz del Árbol) attended the inaugural lectures on homosexuality and professional legal medicine, social legal medicine, and judicial legal medicine.

Dr. Antonio Viqueira Hinojosa (1962), for example, echoed the concerns of Mr. Fernet, former director of Paris' judicial police, who had voiced before INTERPOL in 1958 his distress regarding how the rise in homosexual behaviors was also promoting the rise of criminal behavior. Viqueira Hinojosa proposed the creation of a public record of homosexuals that, luckily, never came to fruition. Others, like Casas y Ruiz del Árbol (1962), claimed that homosexuality was the byproduct of Capitalism and it represented the failure of the American way of Life as, according to him, the Kinsey studies from 1948 clearly illustrated. Viqueira Hinojosa also agreed with this diagnosis and he actually blamed the American tourists for bringing homosexuality to Mexico.

At the same time these changes were taking place, a different type of a much more brutal intervention was becoming a common practice. According to a 1979 letter of the FHAR sent to the Editor in Chief of the newspaper *Uno más Uno*, all along the 1970s many homosexual men underwent psychological and hormonal

[5] Lumsden (1991, p. 77) interestingly mentions that in 1959 the major of Mexico city, Ernesto Uruchurtu—also known as the "Iron Regent of Mexico city"—began a series of razzias after a murder in which a homosexual man died came to attention of the press. Uruchurtu's policy was to close all bars, restaurants or saunas in which homosexual men gathered. Indeed, according to Alejandro Brito (Personal Communication), he was the main architect of some of the razzias of the time. Uruchurtu hold this position for 14 years, from 1952 to 1966, so, most likely, he was the one responsible for promoting the creation of the *Instituto de Capacitación Criminalística*.

[6] It is most likely that the razzias of the 1970s were in part a continuation of Uruchurtu's policies, but now legitimated in light of the criminological approach of this institute.

therapies, as well as surgical interventions, to change their sex.[7] These were not voluntary operations requested by Male to Female Transsexual Women (MTF Women), but induced interventions promoted by physicians that wanted to restore the "natural equilibrium of mind and body" by modifying the latter after it had become clear that therapies aiming to modify the former had failed.

Up to my knowledge, the first of these procedures actually took place in 1953 when Dr. Rafael Sandoval Camacho, in collaboration with the MD students Antonio Dupont Muñoz, Carlos Dupont Bribiesca, and Antonio Mercado Montes, convinced an unidentified 21-year-old boy from Veracruz—who suffered a bad case of colitis caused by amoebas—that he should undergo these procedures (Sandoval Camacho et al. 1957).

Let me state this clearly, this boy went to see Dr. Sandoval Camacho because he was suffering from amoebas and wanted to be treated for *that issue* but, as we can read in the 1957 book published by these physicians *Una Contribución Experimental al Estudio de la Homosexualidad* (An Experimental Contribution in the Study of Homosexuality), Dr. Sandoval Camacho suggested, insisted, and eventually succeeded in convincing this boy that he would be better as a woman.

Therefore, by 1979, when the FHAR activists denounced this practice, Mexican homosexuals had been suffering this kind of interventions for a period of already twenty-six years! Paradoxically, Dr. Sandoval and co-workers even quoted Claude Bernard and defended his view on the incontrovertible nature of medicine as a social and ethical praxis which aimed to improve, through an objective detachment free from prejudices, the quality of life of the entire mankind.

However, these practices were more or less clandestine, but there were other psychological interventions openly supported by most clinicians, psychologists, and psychiatrists. For example, it is a known fact that in 1952, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) was published for the first time; it is a less-known fact that it was inspired in the US' Army Psychiatric Nomenclature also developed—at least in part—by Dr. William Menninger. Menninger had also collaborated since 1946 with the military as a coordinator of the Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry and as an advisor in the creation of the National Institute for Mental Health (Jones 2000; Menninger and Nemiah 2000). Hence, we

[7] This letter came to my attention thanks to Sofía Argüello who rediscovered this letter while working on a paper on identity construction during the years 1968–1984. This is the letter in question—in Spanish—as it was published on July 30, 1979, in the Mexican Newspaper *Uno más Uno*):

"Que las operaciones de 'cambio de sexo', médicamente son necesarias solo cuando existe una malformación genital, externa o interna, de carácter congénito. En estos casos los pacientes son sometidos a cuidadosos estudios durante años, a tratamientos previos, a terapias de adaptación que concluyen en una o varias intervenciones quirúrgicas que ajustarán el sexo biológico de la persona con la sexualidad que psicológicamente se le ha formado en los procesos de educación y socialización (…) Otro es el caso de los llamados cambios de sexo en adolescentes y jóvenes homosexuales, que se presentan actualmente en nuestro país en cantidades alarmantes (tenemos cifras aproximadas, extraoficiales, de más de dos mil casos), y que no son más que auténticas carnicerías fomentadas por un puñado de médicos mercenarios y sinvergüenzas, quienes se han enriquecido a costa de la opresión de los homosexuales, ya que ninguna de las víctimas de estos fraudes realmente requiere de este tipo de operación. El argumento que hace caer a compañeros homosexuales en manos de estos modernos doctores Frankenstein es creer que 'llevan dentro de sí a una mujer' y que la castración les hará convertirse en mujeres" (Letter to Manuel Becerra Acosta, Editor in Chief of the Newspaper *Uno más Uno)*.

should not be surprised by the blatant bias against homosexuality, which is presented as a menace for the integrity of the military units and, then, as an antisocial behavior.

Furthermore, Dr. William Menninger is probably one of the most influential actors in the history of American Psychiatry—and the whole Menninger family, I might add, is an entire chapter of that history. He was also in charge of the Hospital for Veterans at Topeka, Kansas, and he eventually came to be president of the American Psychiatric Association. When homosexuality was removed in 1973 of the DSM, the Menninger foundation strongly voiced its opposition against this modification (Bayer 1987).

In Mexico, the 1950s were also a fundamental moment in the institutionalization of psychoanalysis. In those years, the *Sociedad Mexicana de Psicoanálisis* (Mexican Society for Psychoanalysis, SMP) was created by Erich Fromm, while the *Asociación Psicoanalítica Mexicana* (Mexican Psychoanalytical Association, APM) was created by psychiatrists who had studied in France, Argentina, and the US. Both societies had their central offices at Mexico's National University (UNAM), at the School of Medicine in the case of the SMP, and at the College of Psychology of the School of Philosophy and Literature in the case of the AMP (Álvarez del Castillo 2006).

Dr. Alfredo Nammum, for example, was one of the founding members of the APM and, also, a former student of William Menninger. Although, to my knowledge, Nammum never wrote anything specifically on homosexuality, other members of the AMP certainly did so. This is the case of Dr. Santiago Ramírez Sandoval Ruíz who, in collaboration with Dr. Enrique Guarner and Dr. Isabel Díaz Portillo, wrote the book *Un homosexual: sus sueños* (A homosexual: his dreams) (Sandoval Ruíz et al. 1983). This book was published in 1983 but it consists in a series of analysis performed from 1962 to 1966 of an American gay man who was living in Mexico at that time.

The authors decided to publish this work in 1973 after they came to know the final decision of the APA regarding the status of homosexuality as a mental illness. They were obviously opposed to this decision and manifested that homosexuality was clearly a suboptimal behavior; they also argued that it could be treated with therapy and with the aim of restoring the normal psychological development that leads to heterosexuality. Joe, the American gay man they analyzed, apparently was able to marry a woman and he even had a pleasant sexual life until his baby son died, he got divorced and returned to his homosexual relationships with men.

How widespread were these therapies is hard to know, but we can estimate their potential scope by examining the process of institutionalization that psychoanalysis and psychiatry underwent in Mexico at those years.

The SMP created in 1963 the *Instituto Mexicano de Psicoanálisis* (Mexican Institute for Psychoanalysis) and, in 1965, the journal *Revista de Psicoanálisis, Psiquiatría y Psicología* (Journal of Psychoanalysis, Psychiatry, and Psychology). On the other hand, the AMP was more influential thanks to its connections to the International Psychoanalytical Association—created by Freud in 1911—and the prestige of some of its members (Álvarez del Castillo 2006).

Together, nonetheless, they probably had an ample capacity to mold Mexican health institutions as can be seen in a 1968 report of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). This document was financed by the American National Institute for Mental Health and what it shows is that by 1968 there were 278 psychologists, psychiatrists, and psychoanalysts working in 18 of Mexico's 32 states. This census estimates that these professionals represented ca. 40 % of the total psy-experts working in Mexico at that time.

This same report also shows in which institutions they were working and, as expected, most of them were hospitals or mental clinics, where they developed a variety of clinical tools aiming to characterize and medicalize homosexuals (e.g., Castillo Machado and Cantú 1974; Hinojosa 1969). Nonetheless, they were also working as counselors or professors in a wide array of public and private universities or, in a few cases, as counselors in working unions. Indeed, the emphasis on education can be illustrated by a continuos effort sponsored by psy-experts that led to the translation of books originally written in english into spanish; for example, Frederick Kilander's books (1973a, b) on sexual education were oriented toward teachers of *primaria* and *secundaria*—more or less equivalent to elementary and high school, respectively—and contained guidelines regarding how to discourage homosexual practices in children while, at the same time, teaching them about their sexuality.

Curiously, another way of estimating the potential scope of these therapies is by following the biography of the, by then Doctor, Marco Antonio Dupont Muñoz. As I mentioned above, when he was an MD student, he participated in the first Mexican operation of sex change, but by 1968 he was working in the American-British Cowdray Hospital at Mexico City (PAHO 1968). According to some Mexican historians, Dupont Muñoz was one of the most important psychiatrists and he even became president of the APM (Durán 1990).

And here, just as we did with *Los Contemporáneos*, we can situate the 1970s activists as the consequence of two parallel but opposing trends. On the one hand, from the 1940s but especially in the 1960s and 1970s, the Mexican State began a process that we can qualify as an Institutional Homophobia that pathologized the men participating in networks of homosexual intercourse. But, on the other hand, this process also gave them (1) an identity, by giving them a label, (2) and it catalyzed the formation of political action groups thanks in part to the internationalization of, not only the technical psychoanalytic and psychiatric jargon, but also of a critique of the biopolitical dimensions of the mental health discourses and institutions. This last point is fundamental because it allowed the development of collective agencies by giving them a clear target to fight—the razzias and the physical and psychical interventions performed by the police and by the medical establishment, respectively—and a set of unambiguous demands that gave political content and social coherence to this nascent movement.

## Conclusion

If this narrative is able to grasp some of the fundamental dynamics of how identities arrive into a country, we can see why the canon is so utterly simplistic. It assumes

the discovery in 1901 of something that was already there. It also assumes that *Los Contemporáneos* are the first generation of openly homosexual men without realizing how uncritical they were and how critical the 1970s activists became. The very idea of a diffusion of identities as an explanation of how homosexuality as an identity, first, and then gay identities, later, arrived can now be discarded in favor of a more structural approach in which the Institutions and scientific discourses occupy a more central role.

In the particular case of Mexico, we can probably conclude that any meaningful history of the construction of homosexual identities must recognize the role that institutionalized homophobia and its associated violence came to play and why this allows us to claim that the history of homosexuality is the mirror history of homophobia. Obviously, there are still important differences because homophobia was practiced in different forms along the twentieth century. This of course in no way undermines either the agency of homosexuals or the necessity for other historiographical approaches centered upon that agency.

Moreover, this new emphasis on the sciences as one of the loci in which homophobia became an operational form of sexual ideology offers us new conceptual tools for analyzing how homophobia became entrenched—specially after the late 1940s—in Mexican criminology, legal medicine, and psy-expertises. As I claimed, probably the nascent gay and lesbian liberationist movement of the 1970s is a consequence of this institutional violence.

However, we should have in mind that homophobia was already present since the late nineteenth century but in the form of a politicized metaphor aimed to the elites. Only after hygienism and urbanization produced the conditions for the emergence of social networks of men erotically and/or sexually attracted to other men is that we find social events that led to a more serious involvement on the part of the government against homosexuality. But this involvement was still very much within the context of eugenics and racial ideologies against different forms of degeneration. This means that homophobia, at least at the time of *Los Contemporáneos*, was part of a larger social fear against the Amerindians and the working classes. As I already said, this will again change in the late 1940s with the rise of a new discourse in which homosexuality was the central focus.

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