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"Lesbianas Presente:" Lesbian Activism, Transnational Alliances, and the State in Mexico City, 1968-1991

Lucinda Grinnell

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**"LESBIANAS PRESENTE:" LESBIAN ACTIVISM,
TRANSNATIONAL ALLIANCES, AND THE STATE IN
MEXICO CITY, 1968-1991**

by

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

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DEDICATION

For My Daughter, Seda Tavtigian-Grinnell

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“LESBIANAS PRESENTE:” LESBIAN ACTIVISM, TRANSNATIONAL
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ABSTRACT

My dissertation examines the emergence of lesbian movements in Mexico City in the context of the Cold War and the onset of economic neo-liberalism. A transnational approach is crucial to understand the constitution of these movements because they responded and contributed to global sexuality rights movements as well as to the global Left. During this time, Mexican lesbians allied with the political Left offering support to socialist and anti-imperialist groups. In turn, the government treated lesbian activists as they did the Left, monitoring and harassing lesbians and their organizations in an effort to weaken the groups’ influence on civil society. Confronting this state repression as well as increasing economic instability throughout the 1980s, Mexican lesbian activists organized in coalitions with local, national, and international actors defending gay, lesbian, and human rights and pressing for the democratization of the Mexican state.

Challenging Western understandings of the utilization of human rights discourse as a liberal construct, my research reveals that Mexican lesbian activists’ use of these discourses was grounded in their work with anti-imperialist movements in Latin America to democratize the state from the grassroots. They used human rights rhetoric not only to uphold individual civil and political rights, but also to demand social and economic rights and to express solidarity with other marginalized groups working to democratize authoritarian states in Latin America. In particular, my study focuses on the anti-

imperialist politics that Mexican lesbians brought to international organizing for lesbian and homosexual liberation and to the politics of lesbian and homosexual liberation that they sought to instill in the Mexican Left. As part of efforts to further lesbian and gay rights, Mexican lesbians also became leaders in international activism, particularly by their participation in campaigns and conferences of the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA).

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INTRODUCTION

In March 2011 I participated in the fifth annual lesbian march in Mexico City. The press release distributed by the organizing committee, *Las Lesbianas Guerreras Sembrando Dignidad* (Lesbian Warriors Sowing the Seeds of Dignity), began by referencing the lesbian feminist movement's historic resistance to patriarchal oppression and then chronicled the movement's work over the past 34 years to "spearhead" a revolutionary feminist movement:

For more than 34 years Mexico's lesbian feminist movement has consistently worked for the emancipation of women. Since this time, our fundamental purpose has been to eliminate the oppression that patriarchy has exercised against women for millennia; to make ourselves visible in a world where political space has been dominated by men; to achieve autonomy from this social sector and to convert ourselves into full and integral social subjects liberated from the historic dependence that men have imposed on us. Today humanity and the larger planet depend on the creative strength and active participation of women in creating the foundations for a new, just, and harmonious international economic, political, and social system that benefits all beings of our planet. Lesbians have been and continue to be the ideological spearhead of popular women's movements and particularly of the feminist movement. As women we are among the oppressed of the world: we are workers, peasants, indigenous peoples, migrants, unemployed, poor, disabled, students, artists, prisoners, mothers, etc.¹

Several of the ideas conveyed in this excerpt: that the oppression of lesbians is rooted in patriarchal and capitalist structures, that the liberation of Mexican lesbians is integrally linked to that of other oppressed people throughout the world, and that a movement that successfully liberates lesbians must be revolutionary and international in scope; are ones that have been prevalent in Mexican lesbian activism for over thirty five years. At the

¹ Lesbianas Guerreras Sembrando Dignidad, "Documento Central y Demandas de la 5a. Marcha Lésbica 2011," <http://www.marchalesbica.com/archives/286>.

same time, the strategies for realizing these plans have long been a point of contention within Mexico's broader lesbian and homosexual movement.

My dissertation examines the emergence of lesbian activism and movements between 1968 and 1991 in Mexico City in the context of the Cold War and the onset of economic neo-liberalism. A transnational approach is crucial to understanding the constitution of these movements because they responded and contributed to global sexuality rights movements as well as to the global Left. Recent studies of gay men and lesbians in Mexico have begun to document the construction of sexual identities and participation in social movements, yet few have centered the experiences of lesbians or activists' participation in transnational networks. With the exception of Norma Mogrovejo's scholarship, which highlights the history of alliances between lesbians and feminists in Latin America, there is no scholarly work that focuses on lesbian history and politics in Mexico. By contrast, this study places lesbian activists at its center and seeks to understand how lesbian activism and organizations were shaped by revolutionary social movements, transnational lesbian and gay politics, and by political repression under an authoritarian regime. In turn, I examine how lesbian activism influenced revolutionary movements, international lesbian and gay organizing, as well as the Mexican state, particularly its policies concerning lesbian and homosexual and human rights. I consider histories of both autonomous lesbian activism, defined as lesbian exclusive and led organizing, as well as lesbian participation in the broader lesbian and homosexual movement. In examining sexual politics in Mexico City, I differentiate between activism that occurred outside of versus within a social movement. Citing Marc Stein, I believe that a social movement must be "an organized, collective, sustained effort

to produce, prevent, or reverse social change.”² Similarly, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly have defined a social movement as “a sustained campaign of claim making, using repeated performances that advertise the claim, based on organizations, networks, traditions, and solidarities that sustain these activities.”³ Drawing from these definitions, in discussing the time period before 1978, I refer to activism and activists rather than a movement.

Reform versus Revolution

Influenced by Cold War and neo-liberal politics, the fundamental tension in the lesbian and homosexual movement during this time period was between the use of reformist versus revolutionary politics. Activists disagreed over whether to work for reform of the Mexican state in regards to lesbian and homosexual rights, or to organize for the revolutionary overthrow of the state itself. Within the context of the Cold War, during the time period under study, it was very common for both youth and social movements within Latin America to identify with Marxist ideology. Inspired by the success of the Cuban revolution, many activists identified with both anti-imperialist sentiment and the goal of creating a more socially just society. At the same time, the extent to which the broader lesbian and homosexual movement has allied with the feminist movement and condemned patriarchal structures continues to this day to be a dividing factor, particularly between homosexual men and lesbian activists. Beginning in the late 1970s, some Mexican lesbians such as Yan María Yaoyólotl Castro (Y. Castro) argued that because of patriarchal oppression women needed to organize autonomously

² Marc Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2012): 9

³ Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, *Contentious Politics* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2007): 111.

from men. As was prevalent internationally in 1970s radical lesbianism, Y. Castro defined “lesbian” as not just an identifier, but as a political ideology based in Marxist principles and the struggle against patriarchy.⁴ Evoking theories of lesbian materialism such as espoused by Monique Wittig in her 1969 novel *Les Guerilleres*, Y. Castro has contended that lesbians should not be seen as a sexual minority that has been a passive victim of the millennial oppression of patriarchy. Rather, lesbians must be viewed as the most radical expression of rebellion against a social structure that has maintained women in slavery.⁵ Though such ideologies continue to maintain hold in some factions of lesbian organizing, they have never represented the norm in Mexico City and most lesbians have worked in either non-separatist lesbian or mixed gender groups. For example, rejecting notions of a strict gender binary, lesbian and bisexual leaders such as Claudia Hinojosa and Alma A. began in the 1970s to organize in mixed gender feminist identified organizations and continue to believe that LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people must organize jointly to effectively combat homophobia and related oppressions.⁶

Scholars of gender, sexuality, and the state in Latin America have emphasized the importance of understanding gender and sexuality as socially constructed and of documenting how power is negotiated at all levels of society.⁷ Like recent works in Latin

⁴Yaoyólotl Castro, “Porqué el referente histórico del movimiento lésbico feminista mexicano es Marcela y no Nancy Cárdenas?” Folder 1976, Archivo Histórico del Movimiento de Lesbianas Feministas en México 1976-2013 Yan María Yaoyólotl (AHMLFM-YMY).

⁵ Yan María Yaoyólotl Castro has utilized variations of her name over the years. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will refer to her as Yan María Yaoyólotl Castro or, in short, Y. Castro, the name she currently goes by.

Y. Castro, “Sobre el Sujeto Histórico en Torno al caul Se Elaboró la Presente Historia,” AHMLFM-YMY and Monique Wittig, *Les Guerilleres* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

⁶ I will use LGBT to refer to Mexico’s broader movement of “diversidad sexual”. I do not use this acronym to discuss activism between 1968 and 1991 because transgender and bisexual identities were not generally included or discussed within lesbian and homosexual activism.

⁷For example see Elizabeth Dore and Maxine Molyneaux, eds., *Hidden Histories of Gender and the State in Latin America*, (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000), Jocelyn Olcott, *Revolutionary Women in Postrevolutionary Mexico*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), Jocelyn Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughn, and

American gender history, I draw on Gramscian and Foucaultian conceptualizations to understand the ways in which lesbian activists responded to, resisted, and negotiated power. I analyze the ways in which, via discourse and social protest, lesbian activism has confronted state repression, worked for social change, as well as assess how state institutions and societal norms have informed and transformed sexual politics in Mexico.⁸ I also utilize feminist ideas of intersectionality to investigate the ways in which activists' negotiated the interlocking systems of power of homophobia, sexism, racism, imperialism, and classism.⁹ Such an analysis, though not referred to as "intersectional" by activists themselves, has been central to the ideological positioning and organizational strategies of both autonomous lesbian feminist and mixed gender lesbian and homosexual activism in Mexico City.

Left Internationalism, Human Rights, and Solidarity

Offering what might be considered an early post-colonial analysis, Mexican lesbians located themselves within the geopolitics of the Cold War and articulated their oppression as directly related to U.S. imperialism and capitalism, as well as to historic systems of sexism and homophobia. For instance, in the 1970s and 1980s, Mexican lesbians allied with the political Left both in an outside of Mexico, offering their support

Gabriella Cano, *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

⁸ Molyneux defines the "state": "states can be defined as a set of coercive and administrative institutions that have as their objects the exercise of various forms of power...while states necessarily exert some influence over society, they are also permeated by it through the absorption of prevailing discourses, practices, and social relations..." Dore and Molyneux 2000, 37.

⁹ For more on intersectionality as a method, see Kimberlé William Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43: 6, 1241–1299. Similar to intersectionality, the idea of the "matrix of domination" considers gender as a relational context. See Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990).

to socialist and anti-imperialist groups such as the Trotskyist IV International and the Sandinistas. In turn, surveillance documents from the Mexican secret police reveal that the Mexican state treated lesbian and homosexual organizations as they did other movements on the Left, monitoring and harassing lesbians and their organizations in an effort to weaken the groups' influence on civil society. Confronting this state repression, as well as increasing economic instability throughout the 1980s, Mexican lesbian activists organized in coalitions with local, national, and international actors, mounting campaigns to defend sexual as well as human rights and working towards the democratization of the Mexican state.

While tensions over the degree of separatism that lesbians should take from homosexual men have divided the lesbian movement, the belief that Mexico's lesbian and homosexual movement should practice "left internationalist" politics by linking itself to other national and international movements for social justice was prevalent amongst most all lesbian and homosexual organizations during the time under study. Since beginning to organize politically in 1978, Mexico City lesbian and homosexual organizations clearly conceptualized their movement as international. They stood in solidarity with revolutionary struggles in Central America, and lent support to leftist lesbian and homosexual struggles in other parts of the globe. As early as 1979, Mexican lesbian and homosexual organizations joined with the newly founded International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA), as well as participated with the Third World Gay Caucus of the First March on Washington for lesbian and homosexual rights. Utilizing historian David Churchill's differentiation, I argue that the Mexico City lesbian and homosexual movements' ideology was based in "left internationalism" as opposed to

“liberal internationalism,” the former advocating for socialist politics as a means of transforming everyday life and the latter reliant on rights discourse and concepts of liberal citizenship.¹⁰ As Churchill explains, this demarcation between “left” and “liberal” resonates with theoretical distinctions made by such scholars as Nancy Fraser between a “politics of redistribution” that strives for social equality and a “politics of recognition” that seeks affirmation of difference.¹¹ As left internationalist organizations, many Mexico City based lesbian and homosexual organizations initially relied on ideologies based in redistribution, but by the mid 1980s the majority tended to employ a politics of both redistribution and recognition.

Challenging European and U.S. understandings of the use of human rights discourse as a liberal construct, my research reveals that lesbian and homosexual activists use of human rights discourses began with their participation in the Left. In examining Mexican lesbian activists’ use of human rights discourse, I draw from Adriadna Estevez’s contention that “both foundationalist and relativist ideas of human rights that attribute human rights authorship exclusively to European thinkers of liberal thought in general lead us to the false belief that human rights are ‘the gift of the West to the rest.’”¹² Building from the work of Upendra Baxi and Enrique Dussel that advocates for a “contemporary and decolonized conceptualization of human rights,” Estevez argues for a “regional understanding of human rights based on social struggles rather than purely

¹⁰ David Churchill, “Transnationalism and Homophile Political Culture in the Postwar Decades,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and gay Studies* 15:1 (2009):34-35.

¹¹ Nancy Fraser, “Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition, and Participation,” in Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition: A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (London: Verso, 2003): 7-109.

¹² Adriadna Estevez, *Human Rights and Free Trade in Mexico: A Discursive and Sociopolitical Perspective* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008): 13.

European politico-legal philosophy.”¹³ Similarly, historian Jessica Stites Mor has described what can be considered a Latin American understanding of human rights discourse,

With the end of the global Cold War, the struggle for human rights has emerged as one of the most controversial forces of change in Latin America. Many observers seek the foundations of that movement in notions of rights and models of democratic institutions that originated in the global North. Challenging that view, this volume argues that Latin American community organizers, intellectuals, novelists, priests, students, artists, urban pobladores, refugees, migrants, and common people have contributed significantly to new visions of political community and participatory democracy. These local actors built an alternative transnational solidarity from below with significant participation of the socially excluded and activists in the global South.

Likewise, my research reveals that Mexican lesbian activists’ use of human rights discourses was grounded in their work with anti-imperialist movements in Latin America to democratize the state from the grassroots. They used human rights rhetoric not only to uphold individual civil and political rights, but in order to demand social and economic rights and to express solidarity with other marginalized groups working to democratize authoritarian states in Latin America.¹⁴ Borrowing from Hannah Arendt, I also contend that activists were asserting their “right to have rights,” including the right to difference, rather than only making claims on already defined rights.¹⁵ As conceptualized by Brazilian political scientist Evelina Dagnino in relation to the Gramscian-inspired turn within the Latin American Left, from a focus on the worker to civil society, this “...includes the invention and creation of new rights, which emerge from specific

¹³ Estevez 2008, 15.

¹⁴ Jessica Stites Mor, ed., *Human Rights and Transnational Solidarity in Cold War Latin America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013). My description here also borrows from Estevez’s differentiation between political and civil versus social and economic rights. Estevez, *Human Rights* 2008.

¹⁵The theory of the “right to have rights” was first developed by Hannah Arendt in Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich) 1968 edition. My use of this theory derives from Evelina Dagnino’s interpretation in “Culture, Citizenship, and Democracy: Changing Discourses and Practices of the Latin American Left,” *Cultures of Politics, Politics of Culture* (Boulder: Westview Press) 1998: 33-63

struggles and their concrete practices. In this sense, the very determination of the meaning of ‘right’ and the assertion of some value or ideal as a ‘right’ are themselves objects of political struggle.”¹⁶ In the context of my own work, lesbian and homosexual rights can be conceived as “new” rights.

Thus, like Estevez, Stites Mor, and Dagnino my research seeks to complicate dominant understanding of human rights and solidarity. In particular, this study focuses on the anti-imperialist politics that Mexican lesbians brought to international organizing for lesbian and homosexual liberation and to the politics of lesbian and homosexual liberation that they sought to instill in the Mexican Left. Much of my study focuses on analyzing what has motivated and sustained such solidarity. Mexican lesbians both expressed and requested solidarity in various forms including via organizational statements and individual letters condemning human rights abuses and/or expressing solidarity with workers and revolutionary movements, petitions, demonstrations, the organizing of events and conferences, and through financial contributions. In conjunction with the division between reformist versus revolutionary politics that divided the lesbian and homosexual movement, I differentiate between what I refer to as rights-based, anti-imperialist, and economic solidarity. These three kinds of solidarity were not necessarily exclusive of one another, and at times all three were expressed at once. As a result of global economic inequities, Mexican activists often sought financial assistance from Northern organizations in order to run their programs and maintain community spaces. On the other hand, when activists appealed for rights-based solidarity, they were generally seeking the reform and liberalization of state structures to defend the constitutional rights of lesbians and homosexuals. Finally, anti-imperialist solidarity was

¹⁶ Ibid, 50.

requested and extended in condemnation of authoritarian governments and in support of democratization and revolutionary struggles in Latin America. In their solidarity work, Mexican lesbians promoted an intersectional model of lesbian activism, which connected issues of lesbian rights to struggles of anti-imperialism and democratization in Latin America.

Historical Context

Influenced by the Napoleonic Code and its separation of private and public spheres, Mexico, like much of Latin America, decriminalized homosexuality in 1871. Roughly twenty years later, the international rise of sexology as a discipline defined the “homosexual” as a sexual deviant. As Rob Buffington has documented, such characterizations were prevalent in Mexico and often resulted in the criminalizing of those with homosexual behaviors by medical experts.¹⁷ Furthermore, penal codes enforced norms of public morality and have historically justified the policing of “public” homosexuality ever since. Yet, private displays of homosexuality were also at times prosecuted as occurred with the famous case of “the 41” in 1901. On November 18, 1901 police raided a private party in Mexico City, arresting forty-one men, many dressed in women’s clothing and dancing together. Many of the men arrested were from prominent families of the *Porfiriato* and it was rumored that one of the men arrested was actually General Porfirio Diaz’s son-in law.¹⁸ The press responded to the arrests by publishing homophobic accounts of the party and by demonizing those arrested as “sexual inverts”

¹⁷ Rob Buffington, “Los Jotos: Contested Visions of Homosexuality in Modern Mexico,” in Daniel Balderston and Donna J. Guy, eds., *Sex and Sexuality in Latin America* (New York: New York University Press, 1997): 118-132.

¹⁸ Robert McGee Irwin, Edward J. McCaughan, and Michelle Rocío Nasser, Eds. *The Famous 41: Sexuality and Social Control in Mexico, c. 1901* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

and immoral. Partially because of the social status of those arrested, the arrests incurred extensive media coverage and Mexican artist Jose Guadalupe Posada created a series of lithographs graphically representing the scandal. Interestingly, the governor, rather than a judge, eventually ruled that because the party had occurred in private, no violations of public morality had occurred.¹⁹ However, 19 of the men were eventually sentenced to conduct hard labor while the remaining were able to negotiate private dealings with the governor to avoid such humiliation. Drawing from Foucault's "repressive hypothesis," as well as Mexican cultural critic Carlos Monsiváis' analysis of the rise of homosexuality in Mexico, in the introduction to their edited volume Robert McKee Irwin, Edward J. McCaughan, and Michelle Roció Nasser argue that at this time "homosexuality becomes a concept in Mexico and incites a new discourse" as a result of the public discussion generated by Posada's artwork and media coverage of the case.

Furthermore, as Rafael de la Dehesa has documented, though private homosexual behaviors were not considered criminal in liberal-era Mexico, in the twentieth century threats to "public morals and good customs" were generally met with official repression.²⁰ According to de la Dehesa, this occurred because of the rising influence of eugenics and positivist criminology in early 20th century Latin America, "shifting the discourse from religious and moral abstractions to the empirical realm of science, police precincts established specialized laboratories to develop taxonomies of homosexual personality types which could serve as public profiles for potential criminals."²¹ As an example, he chronicles allegations of public homosexual conduct made in 1959 against

¹⁹ Ibid, 3.

²⁰Rafael de la Dehesa, *Queering the Public Sphere: Sexual Rights Movements in Emerging Democracies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010): 31.

²¹ de la Dehesa 2010, 34

Manuel Rodríguez Lozano, a member of the group of writers and artists known as *Los Contemporáneos*. According to Monsiváis, various members of *Los Contemporáneos*, including Rodríguez Lozano and the well-known writer Salvador Novo, were openly homosexual and because of this, the whole group was often characterized this way and at times targeted by both private citizens and public officials for threatening norms of morality.²²

While open defiance of gender and sexual norms remained largely uncommon throughout much of the first half of the twentieth century, the student movement of 1968 has been said to have ushered in a period of “sexual revolution” or “sexual opening.” in Mexico City.²³ During this time youth involved in both hippie culture and leftist politics began to publicly confront norms of morality and gender. Many of the activists that I interviewed for my dissertation discuss the importance of the feminist movement that followed ’68 in changing social norms around gender. Likewise, various scholars have recently studied the role of gender in the movement and point to changes incurred by the 1968 student movement as significant.²⁴ By interviewing various women who were involved in the student movement, Lessie Jo Frazier and Deborah J. Cohen found that the movement changed personal relationships and challenged prior conceptions of sexuality

²² de la Dehesa 2010, 28.

²³ Elaine Carey, *Plaza of Sacrifices: Gender, Power, and Terror in 1968 Mexico* 2005 (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), Monsiváis 2008, Eric Zolov, *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1999) Activist Trinidad Gutiérrez refers to this time period as one of “sexual revolution” while Agustín refers to the time period as one of “sexual opening. Trinidad Gutiérrez, interview with the author, Cuernavaca, Morelos, June 12, 2010. José Agustín, *Tragicomedia Mexicana: La Vida en Mexico de 1970 a 1988*, Volume 2 . (Mexico DF: Editorial Planeta, 2007).

²⁴ Activist Trinidad Gutiérrez refers to this time period as one of “sexual revolution” while Agustín refers to the time period as one of “sexual opening. Gutiérrez, interview. José Agustín, *Tragicomedia Mexicana: La Vida en Mexico de 1970 a 1988*, Volume 2 . (Mexico DF: Editorial Planeta, 2007).

and personal relationships, including homosexuality.²⁵ Likewise, Elaine Carey has termed women involved in '68 as “gender rebels” and documented the ways in which female participation in the student movement inadvertently led to women’s empowerment, and later to second wave feminism.²⁶ While neither Carey or Frazier and Cohen provide any specific analysis of lesbian sexuality, their findings support contentions made by my interviewees that '68 was significant in changing norms of sexuality and gender.

As José Agustín and Eric Zolov have documented, both scarred and disillusioned by the massacre of student protestors at Tlatelolco and its political aftermath, many young middle class students also challenged gender and other societal norms through their participation in *La Onda*. According to Zolov, “La Onda became a pretext for *desmadre*, for openly defying the *buenas costumbres* of family and society through drug consumption, liberated sexual relations, and in general replacing familial dependency with independent living.”²⁷ This culture adopted hybridized versions of U.S. hippie culture, refusing traditional gender and class roles and attempted to create alternative communities and musical genres. For activists such as Y. Castro, who would go on to form Mexico’s first lesbian organization in 1977, participation in hippie counterculture led her to join Mexico’s second wave feminist movement in the mid-1970s. The transnational contacts that she and others made through participation in 1970s counterculture and feminist and leftist organizations were also formative for the onset of public lesbian and homosexual organizing in 1978.

²⁵ Lessie Jo Frazier and Deborah J. Cohen, “Defining the Space of Mexico ’68: Heroic Masculinity in the Prison and ‘Women’ in the Streets.” *Hispanic American Historical Review*. 83:4 (Nov. 2003):652.

²⁶ Carey 2005, 177.

²⁷ José Agustín, *La Contracultura en México* (Mexico City: Random House, 1996): 82-85 and Zolov 1999, 132.

In order to analyze what motivated lesbian activists' ties with local revolutionary groups and transnational alliances, we must understand the nature of Cold War politics, the emergence of neo-liberal economics, and the restriction of self-expression and activism associated with these politics. As Gilbert Joseph has contended, the Cold War further internationalized life in Latin America as Latin American states used Cold War rhetoric to justify repression of citizens.²⁸ Yet, In contrast to the trajectory of Cold War historiography regarding the U.S., conceptualizing Mexican history during this time period as part of Cold War history is a recent development. This began to change in the late 1990s, when the National Security Archive initiated its Mexico project and since the early 2000s when the Fox administration released secret police records to the AGN, revealing never before exposed complexities in U.S.-Mexican Relations and documentation of the Dirty War.²⁹ As recently revealed by the National Security Archive's Mexico Project, the politics of the Cold War upheld surveillance and frequent repression of those considered leftist or deviant, including gays and lesbians.³⁰ While it does not seem that repression of lesbians and homosexuals was always politically motivated or linked to their revolutionary participation, it is clear that Cold War ideology allowed governments throughout Latin America to stigmatize all members of society considered "dissident" due to differences of race, gender, sexuality, and political

²⁸ Gil Joseph and Daniela Spenser, eds. *In From the Cold: Latin America's New Encounters with the Cold War* (Duke University Press, 2008).

²⁹ In his book *Represión y Rebelión en México*, Enrique Condés Lara (History, MA), a former student activist and prisoner in Lecumberrí writes about the realities of the Cold War and Dirty War in Mexico from 1959-85. This text also contains a CD with copies of various DFS and IPS documents found at the AGN.

³⁰ National Security Archive, "Official Report Released on Mexico's Dirty War," National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 209. November 21, 2006.
<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB209/index.htm>

affiliation.³¹ As a result, during the 1970s and 1980s the Mexican government closely monitored the actions of many socialist, leftist, and lesbian and homosexual organizations, secretly infiltrating the movements in order to report on their actions. Thus, during the time period under study, lesbians and homosexuals in Mexico City faced consistent harassment, extortion, and violence from the police.

As a result of economic troubles related to the worldwide economic crisis in 1982 and austerity measures placed on the government by international lenders such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Mexico turned to an increasingly neo-liberal economic and political model during the last decade of the Cold War. In the early to mid 1980s lesbian and homosexual activists protested the connections between neoliberal reforms and a rise in social conservatism and moralizing politics. Claiming their place within civil society, after the 1985 earthquake that devastated areas of Mexico City, lesbian activists worked alongside urban popular movements to rebuild, create a seamstresses union, and demonstrate against neo-liberal politics. However, the Mexican state's support of neoliberal economic policies also inadvertently led to international pressure on the Mexican state to protect lesbian and gay rights. By 1991, newfound recognition from the state created a paradoxical situation where lesbian activists continued to bring intersectional and anti-imperialist politics to local, national, and international organizing, while also increasingly using liberal discourses of human rights and citizenship.

Chapterization

³¹ See Thomas Blanton, "Recovering the Memory of the Cold War: Forensic History and Latin America," in Joseph and Spenser 2008.

Focusing primarily on Mexico City, the center of the most effective and visible lesbian organizing since the 1970s, my study begins in 1968 by examining the experiences of participants of the student movement who would go on to found lesbian and homosexual organizations. In 1968 students and their allies in Mexico City protested the authoritarian Mexican state and demanded its democratization. The movement was brutally repressed by the government on October 2, 1968. According to such scholars and journalists as Daniela Spenser, Elena Poniatowska, and Carlos Monsiváis, the origins of the Mexican Dirty War- the state and police repression of perceived dissident and deviant individuals and groups of the 1970s and early 1980s, can be considered to have originated in 1968 with the brutal repression of the student movement.³² Chapter one examines the ideological commitments and transnational connections of pre-movement lesbian activists in Mexico City. In the chapter, I chronicle the activism of two pioneers of lesbian activism in Mexico City, Nancy Cárdenas and Y. Castro in both the partisan and revolutionary left. Though Cárdenas and Y. Castro were the first to take public actions in favor of lesbian and homosexual liberation, because of the repressive political atmosphere of the 1970s most organizing around lesbian and homosexual issues occurred underground. Thus, early lesbian and homosexual activists protested the discrimination, harassment, physical assault, and extortion that homosexuals and lesbians experienced at the hands of the police by writing editorials, petitions, and position papers, and, at times, by speaking out. They also met in consciousness-raising groups and networked internationally, establishing ideological justifications for a lesbian and homosexual

³² Carlos Monsiváis, *“No Sin Nosotros”: Los Dias Del Terremoto 1985-2005* (Mexico DF: Ediciones Era, S.A. de C.V, 2005). Elena Poniatowska, *Noche De Tlatelolco* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991). Daniela Spenser et al. *Especjos de la Guerra Fria: Mexico, America Central y el Caribe* (Mexico DF: Centro de Investigaciones Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, 2004).

movement aligned with the left. I argue that this under-studied time period of lesbian and gay activism was politically formative, creating the building blocks for a social movement to emerge in 1978 alongside political liberalization with the support of various segments of the left and the feminist movement.

Chapter two looks at the response of the Mexican state to Mexico City's emerging lesbian and homosexual movement's use of left internationalist politics. During this time, lesbian and homosexual activists established organizations, worked with organizations of the Mexican left, and attended international conferences, joining part of transnational networks for lesbian and gay liberation and rights. I contend that Mexico's lesbian and homosexual movement sought to bring politics of lesbian and homosexual liberation to the Left, at the same time as working to instill a commitment to anti-imperialist politics in the international lesbian and homosexual movement. Because of the movement's ideological positions and ties with the left, the Mexican government treated lesbian and homosexual organizations as they did the left, conducting surveillance and harassing them in order to diminish their impact on civil society.

Chapter three considers how neoliberal reforms and moralizing politics affected lesbian and homosexual activism and how activists responded to and negotiated with such political, social, and economic realities. I show that the discourse of "moral renovation" inadvertently opened the door for homosexual and lesbian activists to create counter-discourses and participate in transnational counter-movements. In Mexico City, lesbian and homosexual activists worked alongside urban popular movements in efforts to organize for democratization and resist incipient neo-liberal politics. Internationally, they coordinated with the ILGA in global efforts to gain recognition of lesbian and gay

rights as human rights. Yet, at the same time as activists strengthened international ties and increased organizing with urban popular movements, factionalism within Mexico's lesbian and homosexual movement increased. While initially many lesbians and homosexual activists in Mexico City attempted to work in coalition with one another, due to the effects of the 1982 economic crisis, the rise of AIDS, and increasing internal disagreements over political ideologies and alliances, by 1984 most lesbians began to work separately from gay men.

Chapter four examines both the increasing institutionalization of lesbian activism and Mexican lesbians' participation in global and regional lesbian and homosexual networks during the late 1980s and early 1990s. I analyze the negotiation of power dynamics within national and transnational lesbian organizing and reveal the ways in which Latin American lesbians emulated an intersectional model of lesbian activism, which connected issues of lesbian rights to struggles of anti-imperialism and democratization in Latin America. The dissertation closes with an examination of the Thirteenth Annual ILGA conference held in 1991 in Mexico. The conflicts that arose among Mexican activists over participation in the ILGA and concerning the increasing institutionalization of lesbian organizations via funding from international NGOs represent a point of rupture in Mexican LGBT history. Operating within a neo-liberal context, after 1991 Mexican lesbians and homosexuals debated the costs and benefits of incorporating with the state and seeking out international funding, as well as over the use of liberal versus Latin American centered human discourses. Thus, the tension between reformist versus revolutionary tactics remained contentious, albeit within a neo-liberal versus Cold War context.

Review of the Literature

Much of what has been written and distributed about lesbian and homosexual organizing both before and after the onset of political activism in 1978 comes from first hand accounts by activists. Thus, my research builds upon this work as well as that of scholars who have chronicled the histories of gay, lesbian, queer, and transgender activism and identities in Mexico and Latin America. The first lesbian and homosexual writings in Mexico City took the form of local activist journals publishing political and personal pieces that voiced varying opinions on how to accomplish lesbian and homosexual liberation. Sometimes internationals connected with Mexican organizations translated and republished these pieces in the U.S., Canada, and Europe. Yet, while activists began recording their written histories in the 1970s, academic scholarship on Mexican lesbians did not appear until 2000. In contrast, the first academic scholarship on lesbians and queer women in Latin America discussed cases in Nicaragua and appeared in the 1990s.

Participants and sympathizers with the Sandinista revolution (1979-1990) wrote the majority of early academic and activist writing on lesbians in Nicaragua. As activist Margaret Randall, a U.S. citizen who participated in the Nicaraguan revolution and feminist and lesbian communities in Nicaragua during the 1980s has posited, the Sandinista revolution inadvertently opened up a space for feminist and lesbian organizing. International solidarity activists visiting and residing in Nicaragua during the Revolution also influenced Nicaraguan consciousness-raising and the formation of these movements.³³ Scholarship on Nicaraguan lesbians, such as that by Millie Thayer,

³³ Margaret Randall, "To Change our own Reality and the World: A Conversation with Lesbians in Nicaragua," *Signs* 18:4. *Theorizing Lesbian Experience* (1993): 907-924.

Florence Babb, and Cymene Howe has revealed that, while connections to the transnational lesbian and gay movement were important for Nicaraguan activists, these transnational currents were negotiated for Nicaraguan purposes and understandings, resulting in a uniquely Nicaraguan lesbian and gay organizing culture³⁴ For example, Howe's recent ethnographic study considers how both revolutionary rhetoric and transnational links influenced the specific "communitarian" nature of lesbian and homosexual activism, and finds that lesbian and homosexual experiences in *Sandinismo* during the 1980s resulted in a "distinct kind of identity politics in post-revolutionary Nicaragua."³⁵ Like I seek to do in my own study, these authors encouraged others to think about Latin American lesbian and gay organizing as a result of processes of cultural hybridity, rather than a mere product of global lesbian and gay politics.

Yet, while Nicaraguan lesbian activism has garnered a good deal of scholarly attention, Mexico has the longest history of sustained lesbian and homosexual activism in Latin America, and a correspondingly long scholarly life in regards to publications regarding gay men. Of the earliest works, the majority were written by North American scholars who had been immersed in Latin American gay cultures and politics for a number of years. In the late 1970s and 1980s, activist scholars Ian Lumsden and Joseph Carrier sought to both study gay male sexual identities and chronicle the development of homosexual liberation in Mexico.³⁶ Whereas Lumsden paid particular attention to state-

³⁴ Millie Thayer, "Identity, Revolution, and Democracy: Lesbian Movements in Central America," *Social Problems* 44:3 (1997), Florence Babb, "Out in Nicaragua: Local and Transnational Desires after the Revolution," *Cultural Anthropology* 18:3 (2003): 304-328.

³⁵ Cymene Howe in French, William E. and Katherine E. Bliss, Eds. , "Making Histories and Cultural Politics in Nicaragua, 1979-1991" in *Gender, Sexuality, and Power in Latin America since Independence* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007): 231 and 257.

³⁶ Ian Lumsden, *Homosexuality, Society and the State in Mexico* (Toronto: Canadian Gay Archives) 1991 and Joseph Carrier, *De los Otros: Intimacy and Homosexuality among Mexican Men* (New York: Columbia University Press) 1995.

civil society relations and Carrier to gay men's relations with general society, both condemned Mexico as "repressive" of gay men and encouraged the development of international ties in order to ostensibly liberalize Mexican culture and politics. Founding their claims on ethnographic research, both authors also limited their scope to the subject of gay men, citing their lack of familiarity with lesbian communities. Conducting ethnographic research during this same general time period, Annick Prier studied the gender construction and societal reception of male transexuals and cross-dressers in Mexico City. More recently, other scholars such as anthropologist Rodrigo Laguarda have analyzed gay male identity formation in Mexico City in relation to global and local constructs and processes.³⁷ Drawing from interviews conducted in 2005, his recent book examines local and international influences on the adoption of a global gay identity by middle and upper class men in Mexico City in the 1970s and early 1980s. Laguarda contends that most gays were apolitical during this time and that the homosexual movement's socialist ideology actually alienated most middle class gay men. In conflict with my own analysis and ignoring Lambda and other organizations' like Colectivo Sol's histories of mobilization between 1981 and 1985, Laguarda goes on to problematically claim that a gay movement only existed between 1978 and 1981 in Mexico City and is thus, largely historically insignificant.³⁸ Laguarda's argument also fails to adequately account for the fact that many of the lesbian and homosexual movement's early gay male leaders and participants, like Marco Osorio of Lambda and Ignacio Alvarez of Colectivo Sol, died of AIDS in the 1980s and were therefore unavailable to complete

³⁷ Rodrigo Laguarda, *Ser gay en la ciudad de México. Lucha de representaciones y apropiación de una identidad, 1968- 1982* (Mexico DF: CIESAS, 2010).

³⁸ Laguarda 2010, 85-87, 147. To make this argument Laguarda relies on interviews and documents from the FHAR which dissolved in 1981.

interviews/provide another perspective in 2005. Differently, my research reveals that, despite increased factionalism within the lesbian and homosexual movement, activism between 1982 and 1985 was not historically insignificant. Instead, I argue that a different story emerges by taking account of mixed gender lesbian and homosexual activism in the 1980s and through an analysis of the movements' relationships with the Left and transnational lesbian and gay movements. As I have sought to demonstrate, during this time lesbian and homosexuals were active participants in broad-based movements against neo-liberalism and moralizing politics. Between 1981 and 1985 lesbian and homosexual activists' forged productive relationships with the Mexican left that influenced political parties to advocate for lesbian and homosexual rights liberation, as well as brought anti-imperialist political to international organizing.

In contrast to the above authors' focus on male sexualities, Norma Mogrovejo's groundbreaking study *El Amor Que Se Atevíó Decir Su Nombre* (2000) discusses the history of lesbian movements in Latin America. Citing a lack of written documentation, Mogrovejo, in addition to using archival sources from the *Centro de Documentación y Archivo Histórico Lésbico de Mexico y America Latina Nancy Cardénas* (CDAHL), relies largely on oral interviews in order to piece together her history and analysis of lesbian identity and activism. She predominantly focuses on Mexico, where this Peruvian scholar participated in lesbian movements during the 1990s, and offers a narrative that emphasizes the similarities in the evolution of the lesbian feminist movements in Latin America. Borrowing from European feminist and post-structuralist theory, Mogrovejo contends that the Latin American lesbian movement has passed through three stages, though debate about the merits and pitfalls of these strategies

continue. According to Mogrovejo, lesbians have sought equality (liberal feminism), claimed power through difference (radical feminism), and most recently embraced sexual diversity, rejecting oppositional gender binaries and uniting with all sexual dissidents.³⁹

While this book makes a valuable contribution by chronicling Mexican and Latin American lesbian activism, it also problematically relies on a Eurocentric model, leading to an over-determined argument which centers the influence of feminism and lends support to the idea of a “universal lesbian” in Latin America (regardless of nation, race, or class) at the expense of local and cultural specificities. My work responds to these limited conclusions by focusing on the politics of Mexico City based lesbian activism in relation to both state and transnational economic and ideological processes. Also different than Mogrovejo, I analyze surveillance documents, as well as consult multiple archival collections to understand lesbian activists’ efforts to democratize the state, work in solidarity with revolutionary movements, and bring anti-imperialist and intersectional politics to international lesbian and gay organizing. My study is the first in Mexican LGBT studies to have sought out and interpreted Mexican secret police records on the lesbian and homosexual movement.

Though Mogrovejo’s book has never been published in English and has generated significant controversy within Mexico, it was the first monographic work to discuss Latin American lesbian movements and thus has been widely cited within the field of international LGBT studies.⁴⁰ After Mogrovejo’s book was published, in 2003 Angela

³⁹ Norma Mogrovejo, *Un amor que se atrevió a decir su nombre: la lucha de las lesbianas y su relación con los movimientos homosexual y feminista en América Latina* (México, D.F.: Centro de Documentación y Archivo Histórico Lésbico, 2000): 58.

⁴⁰ It is important to note that many women interviewed by Mogrovejo feel that she both misrepresented their words and the history of the movement, and have consequently worked to defame the book. Furthermore, allegedly after receiving such criticism, Mogrovejo “stole” the archive, of which she was a

Alfarache Lorenzo, a Mexican anthropologist, published her dissertation on lesbian identities in Mexico City. In her ethnographic study, Alfarche documents the construction of feminist lesbian identity amongst ten women, focusing on individual and collective experiences of transgression within a “patriarchal” society.⁴¹ In 2006, Yolanda Pineda López, now a professor and director of Women’s and Gender Studies at the *Universidad Autónoma de la Ciudad de Mexico*, wrote an unpublished thesis entitled “Militancia, Sexualidades, y Vida Cotidiana,” examining the organization *Lambda de Liberación Homosexual*. Using oral interviews and Lambda publications and writings from the personal archive of Trinidad Gutiérrez, Pineda López highlights the intersections between sexuality, discourse, social movements, and daily life amongst former female members of Lambda. In contrast to Mogrovejo, her contributions emphasize the unique social construction and fluidity of lesbian sexualities in Mexico, as well as the creation of counter-discourses to male homosexual and feminist ideologies.

Like studies on the politics of gender and sexuality during the Cold War, other recent scholarship on sexuality has drawn from interdisciplinary methods from political science, sociology, American Studies, and anthropology, as well as from the use of methodologies of transnationalism and social movement theory in order to understand the changing nature of LGBT and feminist activism under the influence of increasingly neo-liberal politics in the 1980s. Recent works by sociologists Rafael de la Dehesa and Salinas Hernández seek to understand relationships between the broader lesbian and

collective member, and until recently when it was transferred to a public holding, only allowed limited access to its contents. For example see a mass email sent out by the magazine *LesVoz* on 2/21/00 to various international lesbian activists, including one of directors of the Lesbian Herstory Archive in New York City.

⁴¹ Ángela G. Alfarche Lorenzo, *Identidades lésbicas y cultura feminista: Una investigación antropológica* (Mexico DF: Plaza y Valdés, 2003).

homosexual movement and the Mexican state from the late 1970s to the present. Both authors analyze the lesbian and homosexual movement as a heterogeneous entity, rather than focus on any one segment of it or effectively address the politics of autonomous lesbian feminism. de la Dehesa compares the development of lesbian and homosexual activism in Brazil and Mexico, focusing on the ways in which activists have interacted with the state, largely via political parties. Similar to Babb, de la Dehesa also identifies the ways in which Mexican and Brazilian lesbian and homosexual activists communities both borrowed from transnational “cultures” of lesbian and gay activism as well as retained national intricacies, thus forming “global communities” and “hybrid cultures.”⁴² Like de la Dehesa, Salinas Hernández examines interactions between lesbian and homosexual social movements and the government, clearly identifying a major shift in political climate with the onset of neo-liberal politics and the AIDS crisis during the 1980s. According to the author, in the 1970s the government and broader society turned its shoulder to emerging lesbian and homosexual movements, whereas in the 1980s gay men were pursued and persecuted for having caused the AIDS crisis. The bulk of Salinas Hernández’ study analyzes how these social movements gained a sense of collective identity, surviving the crisis of the 1980s in order to emerge stronger in the 1990s, thereafter influencing government policy in favor of lesbian and homosexual rights in Mexico City. While both de la Dehesa and Salinas Hernández offer important insights into the historical development of lesbian and gay activism, like Mogrovejo, they privilege a narrative of a post 1980s inclusive lesbian and gay movement, thereby slighting the long history of autonomous lesbian feminism. Whereas many lesbians

⁴² de la Dehesa 2010.

identify with the broader lesbian and gay movement, other lesbians have consistently organized autonomously and often separately from gay men and transgender people. They have also continued to resist rights-based discourses and recognition from the state. Therefore, these activists do not fit either Mogrovejo's schema that the third phase of Mexican lesbian activism has been characterized by embrace of difference, nor de la Dehesa's contention that the homosexual movement moved from a focus on liberation to rights in the 1980s.⁴³ In contrast, rather than provide a formulaic analysis or a narrative of steady progress towards inclusiveness, my work seeks to document a multiplicity of lesbian activisms during this time. Similar to de la Dehesa, I am particularly interested in transnational influences on lesbian activism, particularly those that are multidirectional.

To provide broader historical context for Mexican lesbian activists' engagement with transnational spheres, I draw from both historical studies of transnational feminism and LGBT movements in Latin America as well as studies of international feminist and LGBT movements.⁴⁴ Scholars of transnational feminism such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Inderpal Grewal have long critiqued both unequal power relationships between women in the global South and North, as well as the essentialism of the "Third World" woman.⁴⁵ Likewise, various scholars in post-colonial queer studies have critiqued constructions of universal lesbian and gay identities that assume linear progress towards a

⁴³ Ibid, 5.

⁴⁴ I discuss transnational feminist activism in Latin America in more detail in chapter four. For more on this topic see Sonia Alvarez, "The NGOization of Latin American Feminism" *The Cultures of Politics/Politics of Cultures: Re-Visioning Latin American Social Movements* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), Millie Thayer, *Making Transnational Feminism: Rural Women, NGO Activists, and Northern Donors in Brazil* (New York: Routledge, 2010), Amalia Fischer, "Los complejos caminos de la autonomia," *Nouvelles Questions Feministes* 24:2 (2005): 54-78, and Yuderlys Espinosa Minoso, *Escritos de una lesbiana oscura: Reflexiones críticas sobre feminismo y política de identidad en América Latina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial en la Frontera, 2007).

⁴⁵ For example see Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," *Feminist Review* 30 (Autumn 1988), 61-88 and Inderpal Grewal, *Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neo-liberalisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

globalization of Western based LGBT identities.⁴⁶ For example, Martin Manalansan IV has critiqued international lesbian and gay organizations such as the ILGA for assuming a universal gay identity based upon presumed commonalities between gays in the global South and North. Like scholars of Latin American sexuality such as Lionel Cantú and Cymene Howe, he problematizes the idea of a universal gay identity and instead advocates for analysis of how local and national understandings of sexuality negotiate and contest Eurocentric “international” understandings. In his study of gay male tourism in Mexico, Cantú also interrogates common assumptions about the evolution of non-Western sexualities and sexual liberation movements. He shows that Mexican gay male sexualities along the border have transformed as a result of both commodification and liberation asserting, “Should not Mexican sexual identities also be understood as multiply constituted and intimately linked to the structural and ideological dimensions of modernization and development? If so, then to what extent are Mexican sexualities and the dimensions that shape them ‘Mexican’ and to what extent are they global?”⁴⁷ Likewise, Cymene Howe has argued that “Nicaraguan queer activists create forms of queer subjectivity and ways to enact queer politics that engage international discourses of identity and human rights, but are not ruled by them.” Rather, Howe argues that Nicaraguan queers have “negotiated and transformed” the concept of the universal queer subject to fit their own needs and goals.⁴⁸ Complementing research on how international

⁴⁶ For example see Martin Manalansan IV, “In the Shadows of Stonewall: Examining Gay Transnational Politics and the Diasporic Dilemma” in Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd, Eds., *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), Dennis Altman, “Global gaze/global gays,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and gay Studies* (1997): 417-436, and Cymene Howe, “Undressing the Universal Queer Subject: Nicaraguan activism and transnational identity,” *City and Society* XIV (2002), 237-279.

⁴⁷ Lionel Cantú, “De Ambiente: Queer Tourism and the Shifting Boundaries of Mexican Male Sexualities,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 8:1-2 (2002): 141-2.

⁴⁸ Howe, “Undressing...” 2002, 239.

ties influenced local feminist and lesbian and gay organizing, Emily Hobson's recent scholarship examines the motivations behind U.S. lesbian and gay activists' solidarity with the Nicaraguan revolution, finding that desire, as well as political affiliations influenced relationships formed between Nicaraguans and people in the U.S.⁴⁹ Likewise, my work analyzes the dynamics of solidarity expressed between Mexican and international activists and attempts to provide historical context for present day queer anti-imperialist movements and discourses.

Like Hobson, rather than only focus on how the global has influenced Mexican activism, my work examines the multidirectional influences of international LGBT organizing. Ali Mari Tripp has shown that the current norms regarding international women's rights are the result of a history of "multidirectional influences" between the North and South, and contends that feminist movements throughout the world have continuously learned from one another, while also maintaining "independent trajectories and sources of movement."⁵⁰ Similarly, my research examines how Mexicans' anti-imperialist politics influenced international LGBT organizing, particularly that organized through the ILGA. To assist my understanding of Mexican activists' relationships with the ILGA and the ILIS, I also employ Mary Louise Pratt's conception of "contact zones" between the global North and South described by Gilbert Joseph as "simultaneously sites of multivocality, of negotiation, borrowing and exchange, and of redeployment and reversal."⁵¹ In particular, I consider international conferences and meetings as "contact

⁴⁹ Emily Hobson, "Si Nicaragua venció: Lesbian and gay Solidarity with the Revolution," *Journal of Transnational American Studies* (2012).

⁵⁰ Ali Mari Tripp, "The Evolutions of Transnational Feminisms: Consensus, Conflict, and New Dynamics" in Mayra Marx Ferere and Tripp, *Global Feminism: Transnational Women's Activism, Organizing, and Human Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

⁵¹ Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," *Profession* 91 (1991): 33–40. I am quoting from and draw specifically from Gilbert M. Joseph's adaption of Pratt's theory in "Close Encounters: Towards a New

zones” where relationships of power and understandings of lesbian and gay politics are created and resisted.

Scholars of international LGBT studies like Joseph Massad and Jasbir Puar have been extremely critical of the work done by international LGBT human rights organizations in the global South. Massad claims that the ILGA and other LGBT human rights organizations seek a “universal transhistorical gay,” and in this mission, impose Western Orientalist notions of homosexuality and liberation on cultures of the Arab world.⁵² Rather, Massad claims that homosexuals do not exist in Arab cultures and that those who have adopted a gay identity are middle and upper class men influenced by Western ideals and norms. Analyzing the ways in which biopolitics regulate “how queers live and die,” Jasbir Puar argues that by embracing heteronormative citizenship and nationalism some queers support an agenda of “homonationalism” at the expense of those treated like “queers” in the War on Terror⁵³. According to Puar, such homonationalism obscures U.S. imperialism, as well as violations of human rights committed by the U.S., by highlighting the persecution of queers in Middle Eastern cultures. While neither Massad nor Puar discuss Latin American issues, both theorists expose issues relevant to my study including: the analysis of power relations in international LGBT organizing, the negotiation and contestation of a universal global gay identity, as well as consideration of the motivations behind solidarity expressed around issues of LGBT rights.

Cultural History of U.S.-Latin American Relations” in Joseph, Catherine C. Legrand, and Ricardo D. Salvatore, Eds., *Close Encounters of Empire: Writing the History of U.S. Latin American Relations* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).

⁵² Joseph Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

⁵³ Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

Methodology

This study uses the term “lesbian” to refer to self-identified “lesbiana” activists. There are many terms used in Mexico to refer to same-sex sexual encounters and relationships between women, however “lesbiana” is the term used in the majority of movement literature that I refer to as well as by the activists I interviewed in my research. Referencing debates in international LGBT studies as well as recent work on Mexican lesbian and gay identity formation, it is important to acknowledge that though “lesbian” and “lesbiana” are cognates, they do not necessarily have the same meaning across language and culture.⁵⁴ It is also important to note that in Mexico City “lesbiana” is a term that currently is most used by middle and upper class lesbian feminists, many of whom began their activism in the 1970s and 1980s.⁵⁵ I use the phrase “lesbian and homosexual movement” to refer to a broad social movement created and maintained by lesbians and homosexuals in Mexico City between the years of 1978 and 1991. I use “lesbian and homosexual” rather than “homosexual,” “LGBT,” or “queer” because the majority of the movement’s activists identified with these terms during this time. However, subsuming lesbianism within homosexuality, chroniclers of this movement have often simply referred to it as the “homosexual” movement. Indeed, many original documents from the 1970s and 1980s use the all-encompassing term “homosexual” to refer to both homosexual men and lesbians. Yet, Mexican men have identified much more with the term “homosexual” than women have, and since the time period under

⁵⁴ On the problems of direct translation, see Lisa Rofel, *Qualities of Desire: Imagining Gay Identities in China*, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 5:4 (1999), 451-474 and Katie King, "There Are No Lesbians Here": Lesbianisms, Feminisms, and Global Gay Formations," in *Queer Globalizations*, edited by Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé and Martin F. Manalansan IV, New York : New York University Press, 2002, pp. 33-48.

⁵⁵ Anahi Russo Garrido, “El Ambiente According to Her: Gender, Class, Mexicanidad, and the Cosmopolitan in Queer Mexico City,” *Feminist Formations* 21:3 (Fall 2009): 24-45.

study, lesbians have sought for the movement to be referred to as the “lesbian and homosexual movement.” Thus, to affirm their claims, I will use the term “lesbian and homosexual movement.”⁵⁶

The main sources of my research are organizational materials, correspondence, popular journals and newspapers, intelligence reports, and oral history interviews. I conducted the bulk of my archival research in collections of personal papers, and in state and organizational archives. In considering documents found in various collections, I have sought to be cognizant of the formation and purpose of the archive and what may be missing from it because of censorship and/or disorganization. In working with both written and oral sources, I employ social historical and longitudinal methodology in order to assess change over time. I also draw from feminist methodologies to analyze the ways in which power is negotiated between the researcher and informants, as well as to address the subjectivity and constructed nature of the historical research process. As Antoinette Burton has stated in reference to the archival process, “history is not merely a project of fact-retrieval...but also a set of complex processes of selection, interpretation, and even creative invention-processes set in motion by, among other things, one’s personal encounter with the archive, the history of the archive itself, and the pressure of the

⁵⁶ During the time period under study, transgender people were largely invisible in the lesbian and homosexual movement, and female to male individuals continue to remain largely invisible and/or face marginalization in today’s lesbian and gay movement in Mexico. Marc Stein offers a similar argument in regards to referring to social movements as “lesbian and gay” versus “LGBTQ” in the United States in *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2012): 5-9. Furthermore, I do not use the term “queer” to refer to the movement because this is not a term that activists in Mexico utilized at this time, nor use very often today. For example, at a recent hemispheric gathering of Latin American lesbians, many participants expressed concerns over what they see as the inappropriateness of queer politics in Latin America where activists are fighting to assert a “lesbian politic and identity. See Ileana Jiménez, “Latina and Latin American Lesbian Feminists Convene in Guatemala,” *Feminist Teacher* (blog), November 2010, <http://community.feministing.com/2010/11/01/latina-and-latin-american-lesbian-feminists-convene-in-guatemala/>.

contemporary moment on one's reading of what is to be found there."⁵⁷ Therefore, in order to better comprehend the complexity of the history I am recounting in this dissertation, I have also conducted oral interviews with various activists. As Burton has also contended, oral history has the power "to queer conventional notions of what counts as an archive" by providing otherwise unavailable historical accounts.⁵⁸ Thus, oral interviews form a kind of "living archive" of material inaccessible in traditional archives.

The majority of sources I examined from the Archivo General de la Nación (AGN) in Mexico City were intelligence and police reports from the *Departamento de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales (IPS)* and the *Dirrección Federal de Seguridad (DFS)*. My goal in investigation of written documents from the AGN was to understand both the nature and perception of state repression of lesbian and homosexual activism. That documents found at the AGN are largely surveillance documents from the Mexican secret police speaks to government agents' perceptions of lesbian activists as dissident and/or threatening to normative structures. Despite the *Ley de Transparencia* which opened up public access to surveillance documents, archivists often do not grant access to DFS files.⁵⁹ I was only allowed access to DFS files after making several requests, and I had to sign a special form of consent to access them, as well as be escorted into the room where they are held. Ultimately, I believe that I was able to view such documents because I am an academic, and perhaps also because I was a foreign scholar. It is very difficult for Mexican citizens to get access to these files because they are surveillance documents that

⁵⁷ Antoinette Burton, Ed., *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 8.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 12.

⁵⁹ The AGN also only grants access to DFS and IPS files up until the year 1982.

are highly classified.⁶⁰ Because it has been so difficult for Mexican citizens to gain access to such files, I deposited a digital copy of the documents I photographed with the AHMLFM-YMY archive. However, though I found hundreds of surveillance documents, they were not as useful as I anticipated. While they serve to substantiate claims that the Mexican government was monitoring the actions of Mexico's lesbian and homosexual movement, they relay limited information as to motivation on the part of government.

Thus, the majority of the archival material used in my dissertation comes from organizational and personal collections held in Mexico, the U.S., and Canada. These include the Centro de Documentación y Archivo Histórico Lésbico de México, América Latina y el Caribe “Nancy Cárdenas The Nancy Cárdenas (The Nancy Cárdenas Center of Documentation and Historic Lesbian Archive for Mexico, Latin America, and the Caribbean), the Archivo Histórico del Movimiento de Lesbianas-Feminista en México 1976-2013 Yan María Yaoyólotl (Yan María Yaoyólotl Historic Archive of the Lesbian Feminist Movement in Mexico, AHMLFM-YMY), The Lerdo de Tejada Library, Comunicación, Intercambio y Desarrollo Humano en America Latina (Communication, Exchange, and Human Development in Latin America, CIDHAL), The Canadian Lesbian and gay Archive in Toronto, the Human Sexuality Collection at Cornell University, the Lesbian Herstory Archive in New York City, and the One National Lesbian and gay Archives in Los Angeles, CA. I also consulted and heavily utilize the personal collection of Trinidad Gutiérrez and Marco Osorio held at a private residence in Mexico. In organizational and personal collections, I have examined organizational documents in order to understand lesbian and queer subjectivities as well as organizational formation in

⁶⁰ Thomas S. Blanton, “Recovering the Memory of the Cold War: Forensic History and Latin America” in Joseph and Spenser 2008.

relation to the state and transnational networks. Like Salinas Hernández has acknowledged, my study highlights the experiences of movement leaders because the vast majority of archival materials represent their perspectives. Furthermore, materials available at these archives are also a reflection of the willingness of movement participants to donate their personal materials and these individuals' relationships with those responsible for the archive. Therefore, these practices favor a movement narrative that is heroic.

The CDAHL collection was first composed in 1995 as part of a collective effort to preserve the history of lesbians and lesbian activism in Latin America. Many of the documents came from Oasis, an earlier documentation and retreat center run by Safuega, a Dutch lesbian who lived in Mexico for a number of years. Oasis was first located in Tepotzlán, Morelos and later moved to Guadalajara, Jalisco. The archive is named in honor of Nancy Cárdenas, a pioneer of lesbian activism in Mexico City who passed away in 1994. Though primarily focused on Mexico, the collection contains original organizational materials, correspondence, posters, magazines, and copies of articles and papers written about lesbian activism in Latin America since the 1970s. Mogrovejo, who is responsible for recently (2012) transferring the archive to remain at a place of public holding, utilized much of this material to write her dissertation. While Mogrovejo granted me access to this archive, until recently, the CDAHL collection had generally only been made available to scholars, and was difficult for many local activists and scholars, including original collective members to access. Thus, the status of the archive is very controversial and precarious and activists such as Y. Castro, Trinidad Gutiérrez, as well as the lesbian collective *LesVoz* have been vocal in their accusation that Mogrovejo

“stole” the archive after receiving substantial criticism of her research methods and outcomes.⁶¹

For these reasons and others, Y. Castro, founder of various Mexico City lesbian organizations, and once a member of the collective that created the CDAHL, recently compiled the AHMLFM-YMY, a narrated archive of the autonomous lesbian feminist movement. In order to preserve the history of this segment of lesbian activism in Mexico City, Y. Castro has organized and catalogued thousands of original and copied documents.”⁶² In the archive Y. Castro provides an extensive introduction to the project, including descriptions of her methodology in creating it and her ideological perspectives on lesbian feminism. The archive also includes many unpublished and published essays on lesbian feminism authored by Y. Castro herself over the past thirty-four years. Y. Castro’s archive is biographical in that she provides narration for many of the events that she highlights over the 35-year history of lesbian feminist activism. She is in the process of digitalizing the collection and has dedicated it to women who helped form her political consciousness including Angela Davis and various Mexican women leaders such as Comandanta Ramona from the Zapatistas. In her narration of the collection Y. Castro claims that the trajectory of autonomous lesbian feminist organizing is different from other Mexican lesbian and gay histories and has been ignored and/or marginalized. In this regard she states:

⁶¹ It is important to note that many women interviewed by Mogrovejo feel that she both misrepresented their words and the history of the movement, and have consequently worked to defame the book. Furthermore, allegedly after receiving such criticism, Mogrovejo “stole” the archive, of which she was a collective member, and, for a number of years, only allowed limited access to its contents. For example see a mass email sent out by the magazine LesVoz on 2/21/00 to various international lesbian activists, including one of directors of the Lesbian Herstory Archive in New York City. Also, see Y. Castro’s discussion of the controversy on her blog, <http://yanmaria.blogspot.com/>.

⁶² Though Y. Castro and Les Voz are looking for a permanent place to store the archive, it is currently located in Y. Castro’s house. To access the materials, one must contact Y. Castro.

The documents contained in this archive are fundamentally important because the history of the lesbian feminist movement in Mexico has been totally negated or simply omitted by official historians of Mexico, it has been negated or omitted for the obvious reasons of heterosexism, misogyny, and lesbophobia...But what is most unfortunate is the omission and/or scarce documentation of this history by homosexual and gay historians, it is often considered insignificant or subordinate to the history of the homosexual movement...⁶³

As I argue elsewhere in this dissertation, lesbian activists have often organized separately and distinctly from homosexual men, and it is thus problematic to assume a cohesive history of lesbian and homosexual activism. As I mention above, it is also true that most historians and other academics who discuss lesbian and homosexual Mexican activism have either subsumed or marginalized Marxist feminist lesbian organizing within histories of both lesbian and homosexual and autonomous lesbian activism. Various lesbian activists and scholars of Mexican lesbian activism have also contended that Y. Castro's political vision has been more divisive than productive and therefore, have tended to disregard her historical contributions. In this regard, the introduction to an extensive interview with Y. Castro published in the Mexican magazine *Les Voz*, states,

She keeps the history of the lesbian feminist movement alive. People either hate or love Yan, there is no in between, they question her or admire her, recognize or dismiss her, but what is un-debatable is that she has been a persistent and proud activist over the years, and is perhaps the only one who has continually worked in the movement for thirty years.⁶⁴

As this quote indicates, Y. Castro is an undeniably controversial and important figure in Mexican lesbian politics. I would also say that, as the author of scores of essays on lesbian feminism she can be seen as a kind of "organic intellectual." During the summer of 2010 I had the opportunity to spend approximately forty-fifty hours with Y. Castro

⁶³ Y. Castro, "Importancia histórica y política de las referencias documentales," AHMLFM-YMY.

⁶⁴ Mariana Pérez Ocaña, "Entrevista Exclusiva: Yan María Yaoyólotl Castro, 30 Años del Activismo Lésbico Feminista," *Les Voz* 11:37, December 2007-Enero 2008, 18-23.

both interviewing her and consulting her archive. While acknowledging that Y. Castro's ideological viewpoints are controversial and not widely shared, this study seeks to provide a more complete analysis of the historical trajectory of autonomous Marxist lesbian feminism than other works thus far have.

I also conducted oral interviews with eight other participants of Mexico City's lesbian and homosexual movement. Most interviews lasted between 2 and 3 hours. However, like with Y. Castro, because of her own sustained interest in my project, I had the opportunity to conduct a number of interviews with Alma A from the organization Lambda de Liberación Homosexual. During both academic and personal visits to Mexico, such as my participation in a Zapatista women's conference held in Chiapas in 2007, I initiated relationships with lesbian activists whom I later interviewed. Originally meeting me in a non-academic context seemed to lend me credibility amongst my research subjects as an activist-scholar versus someone completely removed from Mexican social movements. After first conducting interviews with the women I had previously met at the conference, I continued to seek out a broad-base of voices from a diversity of political ideologies and backgrounds as well as use a snowball method in order to seek out further informants.

Feminist and queer oral historians have widely discussed the importance of the historian being self-reflexive, a consideration I also take seriously in contending with my own biases and social position as a white, U.S. born, middle class, queer identified, academic.⁶⁵ As also analyzed in the above-cited anthologies, there is always an unequal

⁶⁵ For example, see the anthologies Sherna Burger Gluck and Daphne Patai, *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (New York: Routledge, 1991) and Nan Alamilla Boyd and Horacio Roque Ramírez, *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

power dynamic between the interviewer and informant that must be acknowledged and analyzed. Furthermore, a relationship of trust must exist in order for an informant to agree to an interview. As I indicate above, the subjects whom I interviewed agreed to meet with me either because they had met me in another context or because a friend of theirs had suggested it. I also first interacted with a few interviewees via facebook, which allowed them to see my profile and learn a little about me before the interview. I am also facebook and “real life” friends with a couple people who became acquaintances, but yet never followed up about an interview. Many of the activists whom I interviewed expressed initial hesitance about conducting an interview because they contend that Mogrovejo manipulated the interviews they did with her for her book. I believe that similar experiences may be the reason why others never followed up with me about an interview, yet remain acquaintances. I hope that by practicing feminist oral history methodology, my work contributes to repairing these fractured relationships between interviewer and interviewee.

As movement leaders, all of the people I interviewed were eager to have their voice represented in history. As Horacio N. Roque Ramírez contends in relation to queer Latino history, “For communities excluded, outcast, and marginalized, voice can speak to power: it is literally a weapon of evidence against historical erasure and social analysis that fails to consider the experiences of individuals and communities on their own terms.”⁶⁶ Due to the severe lack of written sources that do not criminalize and demoralize homosexuality, the use of oral testimony has been necessary in reconstructing the diversity of LGBT histories that have been silenced due to oppression and prejudice.

⁶⁶ Horacio N. Roque Ramírez, “A Living Archive of Desire: Teresita la Campesina and the Embodiment of Queer Latino Community Histories,” in Burton 2005, 111-136

LGBT history was not only ignored until recently, it was also consciously hidden and at times destroyed as archivists took homosexuality out of the archives in the name of “preservation.” At the same time as the “overtly political function and...liberating quality” of queer histories is acknowledged, the limitations of the oral history method must be considered. In a recent article on the subject, historian Nan Alamilla Boyd contends with critiques of the presumed stable subject of oral history brought about by queer theory.⁶⁷ Boyd considers questions of how historians should represent a subject who only becomes knowable through discourse and modern understandings of identity. Arguing that history and queer studies can draw from one another, she posits that oral histories, while not stable, can still be a reliable source for the historian or ethnographer if understood as contingent, constructed, and discursive.⁶⁸ In my own work, I have sought to interpret oral histories in these ways. While my use of “living archives” has allowed me to understand historical perspectives and complexities that written documents could not offer, in my analysis I account for the subjectivity of experience and the constructed nature of all historical sources whether they be archival or testimonial.

For the interview process itself, I borrow from the methodology of Daniel James on oral testimony that advocates for an interview process that is conversational, and reflective on the power dynamics between the interviewer and informant. Thus, the interviews were open-ended in order to garner individuals’ own interpretations of their lives and better engage informants’ personal experiences, social views, and interpretations of events. I believe that this format allowed informants to answer the

⁶⁷ For example see Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

⁶⁸ Nan Alamilla Boyd, “Who is the Subject? Queer Theory Meets Oral History,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 17:2 (May 2008): 182.

questions that interested them most and helped to decrease my bias as an interviewer. However, because of the contested nature of memory and the subjectivity of experience, I often received more than one explanation of the same event and had to work to best interpret and represent divergent points of view. Also, because lesbian activists felt that Mogrovejo's discussions of the role that affective relationships played in lesbian organizing was inappropriate and fracturing for their movement, I have chosen to limit my discussion of such relationships. While I realize that relationships were important in the histories that I discuss, and that my limiting of such discussions might take away from documenting the complexity of the histories I am recounting, for reasons of privacy this is not an area of emphasis in my research. Finally, because it is the understanding between my informants and myself that this dissertation when turned manuscript will be translated into Spanish and made available to them as a history of their movement, I have attempted to solicit early feedback and critique of my findings. Though I have not actually received feedback, via email I have shared my research with English-speaking research informants, as well as with other academics in Mexico. Therefore, as I turn the dissertation into a manuscript, I intend to present my research findings in various locations in Mexico City. I also would like to have my dissertation informally translated for my research subjects to review before I attempt to publish it.

Today, as in many parts of the globe, lesbian activists in Mexico City continue to struggle for civil rights for lesbian, gay and transgender people, while also remaining a committed part of transnational movements for human rights and against neo-liberal economic policies they see as contributors to social and economic injustice. Thus, understanding the history of Mexican lesbian activism within an international context and

in relation to the state is important to understanding today's transnational movements for LGBT rights as well as broad based struggles for human rights and democracy.

Furthermore, for the particular case of Mexico, documenting the history of lesbian activism during the Dirty War and the Cold War, a time of severe political repression, forms part of the struggle towards attaining justice for all those who have been and continue to be persecuted by the government.

**CHAPTER ONE: FORGING “SEXUAL OPENINGS” AND CONTESTING
SOCIAL NORMS: INCIPIENT LESBIAN AND GAY ACTIVISM IN POST-
TLATELOLCO MEXICO CITY, 1968-1977**

As various scholars and cultural critics such as Elaine Carey, Eric Zolov, José Agustín, and Carlos Monsiváis have contended, the 1968 student movement ushered in a time of social, cultural, and political change, including what has been termed a “sexual revolution” or “sexual opening.”⁶⁹ The majority of popular and academic histories of the Mexican lesbian and gay movement identify the influence of the 1968 Mexican student movement as crucial to the onset of lesbian and gay organizing in the early 1970s.⁷⁰ Many of the people who became leaders in gay and lesbian organizing in the 1970s were either participants in or active supporters of the Mexican student movement. Others were active in segments of the Mexican Left and counterculture movements, which both transformed as a result of the state’s deployment of open violence against student organizers in Tlatelolco plaza in 1968.⁷¹ Yet, though lesbians and homosexuals in Mexico City began organizing clandestinely as early as 1968, and the first mixed gender and lesbian feminist organizations began in 1971 and 1977 respectively, activists would not form a public movement until 1978. Consequently, there has been little study of lesbian and homosexual organizing before 1978, and the kinds of activism that took place during

⁶⁹ Carey 2005, Monsiváis 2008, Zolov 1999. Activist Trinidad Gutiérrez refers to this time period as one of “sexual revolution” while Agustín refers to the time period as one of “sexual opening. Trinidad Gutiérrez, interview with the author, Cuernavaca, Morelos, 2010. José Agustín, *Tragicomedia Mexicana: La Vida en Mexico de 1970 a 1988*, Volume 2. (Mexico DF: Editorial Planeta, 2007).

⁷⁰ For example see Mogrovejo 2000 and Max Mejía. “Mexican Pink” in Peter Drucker, *Different Rainbows: Third World Queer Liberation* (London: Gay Men’s Press, 2000): 43-69.

⁷¹ See Carey 2005 and Elena Poniatowska, *La Noche de Tlatelolco: Testimonios de Historia Oral* (Mexico DF: Ediciones Era, 1971).

this time have often been considered “cultural guerilla” actions rather than political.⁷² In general, lesbian and gay consciousness-raising occurring during this time period has been characterized as having occurred largely in private due to state repression of homosexuality. Yet, despite this hostile climate, some lesbian and homosexual groups as well as individual activists such as Nancy Cárdenas and Yan María Yaoyótl Castro (Y. Castro) organized during this time. Cárdenas was born in 1934 in Parras, Coahuila to a landholding rural family and died of cancer in 1994 in Mexico City. A well-known Yale trained playwright, actress, director, poet, and member of the Communist Party, Cárdenas was a founder of Mexico’s first homosexual liberation organization in 1971. Beginning in the 1970s, Cárdenas utilized her career as a playwright and public figure to introduce themes of homosexuality into Mexican society. Though significantly younger than Cárdenas, Y. Castro had also lived abroad immediately prior to initiating work on lesbian issues in Mexico.⁷³ Y. Castro, known during this time period through various pseudonyms, was born in the 1950s into an upper-middle class conservative family in Mexico City. Her early organizing for lesbian and homosexual liberation grew out of her experiences with La Onda, the Left, and the feminist movement. Between 1971 and 1977, Cárdenas, Y. Castro, and other lesbians and homosexuals met in consciousness-raising groups, created publications, corresponded with international organizations, and wrote op-ed pieces in local newspapers and letters of protest to government officials. This organizing, both within and outside the bounds of the Mexican state, created the building blocks for a social movement to emerge in 1978 with the support of various segments of

⁷² Claudia Hinojosa, “Expanding the Social Justice Agenda in Mexico: A Lesbian Feminist Perspective.” Paper prepared for delivery at the 1998 meeting of the Latin American Studies Association, Chicago, IL, September 1998.

⁷³ This topic will be further discussed in chapter two.

the left and feminist movements. As a result, this study considers the 1968-1978 period a formative, rather than a pre-political period for lesbian and homosexual activists.

During the 1970s, president Luis Echeverría Alvarez (1970-1976) sought to dismantle Mexico's reputation as an authoritarian state by implementing a "democratic opening," which included the creation of social, educational, and political programs. These programs particularly sought to incorporate youth, including former members of the student movement, into the political process. Yet, despite such democratic advances, the Echeverría government utilized Cold War discourses to continue to repress people considered socially or politically dissident, and the government maintained its corporatist structure. Echeverría championed himself as a democratic, nationalist, and anti-imperialist leader in Latin America and actively supported Allende's socialist government in Chile, later giving political asylum to many Chileans, including Allende's widow, who fled the U.S. backed dictatorship put in place after the 1973 coup. Yet, it was also with Cold War ideology that the Mexican government justified its own Dirty War which repressed "dissidents," including homosexuals. Using Cold War rhetoric, the government could claim anyone challenging their authority or working to change social conditions to be an internal security threat or a communist.⁷⁴

Furthermore, lesbians and homosexuals lived with the constant threat of being charged with violating public morality and *buenas costumbres*, accusations that most often resulted in extortion, but could also result in physical assault by police, or land one in jail. Thereby inspired to create social change, many people who had been active in the student movement, including lesbians and homosexuals, later participated in the formation of second wave feminism, in countercultural currents, in socialist and

⁷⁴ Historical Report to the Mexican Society, 2006, National Security Archive, 22.

communist political parties, as well as in urban guerilla movements. In the early 1970s, Mexican counterculture, commonly referred to as “la Onda,” meaning the “wave” or the “movement” became more politicized in opposition to the authoritarian state. La Onda was composed of mostly middle-class youth and drew inspiration from cultural change and protest in both Latin America and the U.S.⁷⁵ Empowered by their participation in the student movement, the second wave of feminism also emerged in Mexico City in the early 1970s and was also predominantly a middle class phenomenon. Similar to other parts of the world during this time, both feminists and *los onderos* challenged middle class values of “buenas costumbres,” or family values, including gender and sexual norms.⁷⁶

As Rodrigo Laguarda has documented for the case of middle and upper class gay men from Mexico City, during this time period many people took advantage of a favorable economic climate in Mexico and low fares offered for travel to Europe and the U.S. Middle class Mexican lesbians and gays frequently visited cities considered gay and lesbian meccas such as New York City and San Francisco.⁷⁷ Thus, from the 1970s onwards, many lesbian and gay activists in Mexico City operated in transnational cosmopolitan circles including within artistic, activist and intellectual communities. In turn, their knowledge of and participation in international movements informed involvement within Mexican protest movements and countercultures. For example, Cárdenas and Y. Castro spent significant time abroad in Europe and the U.S. in the

⁷⁵ Zolov 1999, 132-166.

⁷⁶ Zolov 1999, 132-166.

⁷⁷ Laguarda 2010.

1970s, where they established contacts with lesbian and gay activists.⁷⁸ They brought back literature from abroad that consciousness-raising groups discussed in Mexico City during the mid-1970s, as well as created lesbian and homosexual liberation organizations.⁷⁹ The focus of this chapter will be to analyze these global connections and interactions.

However, compared to organizational documents available for the time period after 1978, there is a paucity of archival sources available to analyze lesbian and gay organizing between 1968 and 1977. Thus, though I will discuss organizational histories to the extent possible, this chapter will highlight the experiences of Cárdenas and Y. Castro as public leaders. Though they and the organizations they led often worked in coalition with one another, Cárdenas and Y. Castro's relationship was fraught with conflict, both personal and political. Both activists identified with communism and considered themselves anti-imperialists, yet Cárdenas politics were reformist, and Y. Castro's revolutionary. Furthermore, Cárdenas worked in mixed gender organizations, advocating for homosexual liberation while Y. Castro organized and led autonomous lesbian groups. Because of the public dialogue on lesbianism that Cárdenas initiated at the United Nations' International Women's Year conference held in Mexico City in 1975, she has often been considered the pioneer of lesbian activism in Mexico City.⁸⁰ However, because she disagrees with what she interprets as Cardenas' reformist politics and mixed gender homosexual affiliations, Y. Castro claims herself and two other women who

⁷⁸ In Mexico City until the early 1980s activists most commonly referred to their movement as of "homosexual and lesbian" liberation.

⁷⁹ Juan Jacobo Hernández Chávez, founder of the Frente Homosexual de Acción Revolucionaria (FHAR) in 1978, also spent considerable time abroad in the 1970s, and brought back materials for discussion in Mexico. However, this chapter focuses on the activism of female activists, Cárdenas and Y. Castro.

⁸⁰ For example see Mogrovejo 2000 and Hinojosa 1998.

started the autonomous lesbian feminist current in Mexico City as the actual pioneers of Mexican lesbian feminism.

While their activism took different forms, both Cárdenas and Y. Castro were able to “come out” publically during this time because they enjoyed the economic comforts of middle class life and because they were inspired and supported by international events and contacts. Thus, both women can be considered exceptional, rather than necessarily representative of the broader lesbian and homosexual community during this time. Yet, the global connections and local organizing forged by Cardenas and Y. Castro, as well as other openly lesbian and homosexual activists, allowed for the emergence of a strong and visible liberation movement in 1978.

Political and Sexual Openings: The New Left and “La Onda” in Cold War Mexico

Cárdenas’ political activism began in the 1950s when she became involved with the Communist Party. Her participation in queer subcultures also seems to have begun at this time. As a student at the National Autonomous University in Mexico City (UNAM), Cárdenas met and soon became close friends with the cultural critic Carlos Monsivaís (1938-2010) who later chronicled the early years of their friendship in an article written in the style of a letter to her. This letter offered little documented information about her life in the 1950s and 1960s. Both were part of bohemian culture in the 1950s and participated in *Poesía en Voz Alta*, a poetry collective. Describing their “masculine” dress and confident demeanor, he portrays the ways in which both Cárdenas and her close friend and acclaimed *ranchera* singer, Chavela Vargas challenged normative conventions of the time:

Wearing clothes considered exclusively masculine in an age before unisex dress was considered acceptable, you and your friends proudly decided to live your lives in the ways that you chose, transcending-without apology, with lucidity, the limits of a culture known for its repression of all heterodoxies, on a scale from ‘distortion’ to ‘perversion.’⁸¹

Though she did not formally “come out” until 2001, beginning in the 1950s, Vargas subverted heteronormative understandings, openly singing her romantic songs to women and often performing in men’s clothing. While Monsivaís writes of Cárdenas’ and Vargas’ friendship during this time, there has unfortunately been very little written about communities formed by “queer” women in Mexico City between the 1950s and 1970s.⁸² Thus, while the insight into Cárdenas’ social life provided by Monsivaís sparks fascinating questions about the nature of queer female communities during this time, the written record of Cárdenas life primarily documents her political activism.

Inspired to maintain what they saw as the legacy of the Mexican Revolution, in the 1940s and 1950s, Cárdenas, like many artists and intellectuals in Mexico City became active in the National Communist Party (PCM). At this time, the corporatist PRI was generally intolerant of competing political parties, claiming that the PRI represented all Mexicans’ best interests. Also, in the early years of the Cold War, the PCM faced repression from the Mexican government, encouraged by the U.S. to root out communist dissidents.⁸³ Yet, Monsivaís and Cárdenas, and many others, were drawn to what they saw as its commitment to economic and political reforms that would further social justice

⁸¹ Carlos Monsivaís, “Envío a Nancy Cárdenas, activista ejemplar.” *Debate Feminista* 10:5 (September 1994): 258

⁸² Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano. “Crossing the Border with Chabela Vargas: A Chicana Femme’s Tribute.” In *Sex and Sexuality in Latin America*. (New York: New York University Press, 1997): 33-44. Taking into mind that during this time period people with non-normative sexualities did not commonly use specific terms to identify their sexual orientations, I use the term “queer” here in order to encompass a broad spectrum of sexually non-normative behaviors and identities.

⁸³ Barry Carr, *Marxism and Communism in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press), 1992.

within Mexico. Cárdenas' understandings about politics were also informed by her time spent living abroad. From 1960-1 Cárdenas left Mexico to study film and theater at Yale University, continuing her education in Lodz, Poland in 1963, studying Polish language and literature. Returning to Mexico in 1964 she finished her doctorate at the UNAM by the late 1960s, a time of burgeoning student activism. In 1968 she and Monsivaís became active members of the *Alianza de Intelectuales, Escritores y Artistas en Apoyo al Movimiento Estudiantil* (The Alliance of Intellectuals, Writers, and Artists in Support of the Student Movement), which upheld the general goals of the student movement against authoritarianism and for democratic reform within Mexico. Through their leadership in this organization, Monsivaís and Cárdenas, by this time becoming well known intellectuals in Mexico City, provided moral, logistical, and financial support for the movement by writing editorials for local newspapers in support of the movement, condemning government repression of the left, and critiquing the state bias of the media in local newspapers.⁸⁴ As Barry Carr has contended, the '68 student movement, taking inspiration from the Cuban Revolution, signaled the "birth of a New Left" within Mexico. According to Carr, "student and campus politics rejected the old corporatist student organizations and went beyond the 'liberal' demands for preservation of university autonomy to include the slogan of democratization of Mexican society as a whole."⁸⁵ As with the PCM, the Mexican government saw this "New Left" as a direct threat to its authority and quickly accused student leaders and their supporters of being dupes of an international communist conspiracy, based in the USSR. Mexico City was scheduled to hold the Olympic Games in October and government officials wanted to

⁸⁴ For example see Nancy Cárdenas, "Letanía." In *La Cultura en Mexico*, supplement to *Siempre!* (September 30, 1968).

⁸⁵ Carr 1992, 228.

present an image of order and progress. Thus, under the leadership of then Secretary of State Echeverría, the future president of Mexico, the government decided to enact a large-scale crackdown on the movement. Though government statistics of the number of deaths differ from those of civil society, the government's repression of the movement was extremely violent. Cárdenas was actually at Tlatelolco plaza in Mexico City on October 2nd for a student protest when the police massacred approximately 300 participants, the majority of them students.⁸⁶ Barely escaping the grim fate of so many others, Cárdenas thereafter went into a temporary depression.⁸⁷

Yet, interviews with Cárdenas describe her soon re-emerging from the traumas of 1968 even more determined to continue political activism, and in 1970 beginning to organize for lesbian and homosexual liberation. Reflecting on the inspiration that her participation in the student movement had given her to continue to work for social justice this time in the form of homosexual liberation, she stated, "In many ways, the strength that I had in '70 was a product of '68, a difficult product of my personal process of acceptance."⁸⁸ Others, like Xabier Lizárraga Cruchaga and Trinidad Gutiérrez, who later became leaders in 1970s lesbian and homosexual organizing, also point to their participation in 1968 protests as formative to their political consciousness.⁸⁹ In an interview Gutiérrez describes her self-described leftist origins, including participation with ecclesiastical base communities (ECBs), religious groups that supported ideals of liberation theology, as well as her participation in 1968,

⁸⁶ The exact number of dead is unknown. The government put the official death toll at 49, however most popular accounts put the estimate at closer to 300. See Carey 2005, 139, Monsiváis 2008, 188.

⁸⁷ María Amparo Jimenez, "Cardenas confronts homophobia in Mexico" originally appearing in *Outlines*, 1991. "Bajo Mi Relieve" Blog by Amparo Jimenez.

⁸⁸ Juan Jacobo Hernández and Rafael Manrique. "Adiós a Nancy Cárdenas: entrevista inédita." In *Del Otro Lado* Numero 15 1994: 11. Originally published in *Nuestro Cuerpo* 16 de septiembre de 1984.

⁸⁹ For the remainder of this chapter, I will use the term "homosexual activism" rather than "gay activism" because this was the most common term used during the early to mid-1970s.

As a young woman I began to be a social activist, but I began working in the ecclesiastical base communities, no?...my history of activism begins there, at 17 years old. But, I was already part of the left, when I was 15 years old I was an activist in the 1968 movement, I participated in marches, in meetings, I was often accompanied by my sister, friends, and my mom and dad—they all supported the 1968 movement, so I was involved in this, my origins are in the left.⁹⁰

While Gutiérrez fondly remembered her participation in the student movement, when asked whether she remembered the movement discussing themes of sexuality, she immediately responded negatively, stating, “It seems to me that in general the left in this country is asexual. There had been no talk about sexuality. I think that we introduced the topic to them, no? The discussion of sexuality and politics.”⁹¹ Though Gutiérrez contends that there was little discussion of queer sexuality in either the ECBs or the left in 1968, she does discuss the importance of the feminist movement that followed ’68 in changing social norms around gender that had traditionally upheld rigid ideals of masculinity and femininity. Others whom I interviewed also highlight the significance of feminist and countercultural movements in challenging ideologies of machismo and in promoting alternative ideas of sexuality and sexual relationships.

Mujeres en Acción Solidaria (Women in Solidarity Action, MAS), Mexico City’s first second wave feminist organization formed in 1971. At this time, inspired by second wave feminism in the U.S., Rosario Castellanos and Marta Acevedo, both prominent Mexican writers, published articles in support of the development of a second wave feminist movement within Mexico. In 1971 writing in the newspaper *Excelsi6r*, Castellanos discussed feminist support for a strike of domestic workers’ in the U.S., encouraging Mexican readers to challenge gender norms and inequality that existed between women and men in the workplace. In the same year, Acevedo, writing in

⁹⁰ “Trinidad Gutiérrez, interview with the author, Cuernavaca, Morelos, 2010.

⁹¹ Ibid.

Siempre!, *Excelsior's* weekly cultural supplement, reported on a feminist demonstration in San Francisco that she attended, calling Mexican women to organize their own feminist movement. Demonstrating the broadness of the U.S. movement, she also mentioned the presence of Chicana and “gay” women at the San Francisco demonstration. The articles published by Castellano and Acevedo galvanized other Mexican women to organize with Acevedo thereafter starting up the Unión de Mujeres which would later become known as MAS. The group’s first action was a protest set for Mother’s Day in 1971 where they circulated feminist statements that were widely aired by the press, including “Behind every Mexican macho, is a sacrificing mother.”⁹² MAS considered themselves to be ideologically connected to the Mexican Left and employed Marxist politics in their feminist analysis.

Countercultural movements also encouraged resistance to traditional cultural norms of gender and sexuality.⁹³ Rejecting mainstream middle class Mexican culture, as a teenager, Y. Castro herself ran away from home to live with a group of self-described hippies, where she learned mysticism and developed spiritually as well as politically. In an interview with the author and in her writings, she describes the importance of these national and international social movements and social processes both to herself, as well as to the emergence of feminist and lesbian organizing in Mexico City.⁹⁴ Specifically, she mentions the influence of transnational flows of information about civil rights organizing that occurred due to hippies from the US traveling south to Mexico. In this regard, she

⁹² Carey 2005, 181.

⁹³In September of 1971, Avándaro, a music festival modeled after Woodstock took place, becoming Mexico’s rock movements’ preeminent event thus far. The holding of the festival was highly contentious and heavily debated in the media and local governments as a result of the perceived threat that this group of young people, perceived as promiscuous and drug-using, would have on society. Zolov 1999, 201-33.

⁹⁴ Yaoyólotl Castro, Interview with the Author, Mexico City, August 16, 2010, and Yan María C. and Luz María M., “Una Experiencia dentro de los grupos lesbicos de Mexico, Anos 70s, linea autonomista Lesbos y Oikabeth.” Lesbian Herstory Archives, New York, NY.

describes literature about the civil rights, black power, and feminist movements being introduced into Mexico through such processes.⁹⁵ Thus, while Y. Castro was too young to participate in '68, she characterizes her participation in post-'68 Mexican counterculture as politically and ideologically influential to her activist trajectory. In general, the events of '68 and the subsequent repression activated the Mexican New Left to work harder for democratization, as well as inspired the forging of stronger transnational networks amongst leftist movements internationally.

Incipient Liberation Movements: The First Homosexual and Feminist Organizing

By instilling a culture of critical resistance, 1968 also impacted the formation of the first homosexual organization in Mexico. As recounted above, clearly various people who became activists for lesbian and homosexual liberation during the 1970s participated in the movement and were changed by the experience. Others who were not a part of it themselves have consistently pointed to the significance of 1968 as pivotal in opening space for the creation of a lesbian and homosexual liberation movement. For example, in an interview Max Mejía contends,

...As we have seen, all the social movements that emerged after 1968 have exposed and denounced the repressive and antidemocratic nature of the Mexican government, its authoritarianism. We brought to the surface the ways in which authoritarianism functions in environments considered private, this had never before been spoken about. Thus, we completed the circle that opened up in '68, up until this point we had been missing....⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Yaoyólotl Castro, "Breve Referencia al Contexto Económico, Político y Social Internacional y Nacional en la Segunda Mitad del Siglo XX y Específicamente de la Década de los 70s y el Surgimiento del Movimiento de Lesbianas Feministas en México," Folder 1976, AHMLFM-YMY, Mexico City.

⁹⁶ Max Mejía, interview by Colectivo Sol A.C., 23 de agosto de 2000, p. 10, transcript, "Nuevas Identidades de Género, Procesos Culturales y Cambios Socio-Históricos. El Movimiento Gay en México (1970-1980) a través de la voz y la mirada de sus protagonistas," Archivo Colectivo Sol, Mexico DF.

Thus, clearly, if not the events themselves, the legacy of 1968 as an anti-authoritarian movement was very significant to the onset of lesbian and homosexual organizing in the 1970s. Yet, despite references to organizing beginning at this time, there are no first hand accounts of lesbian or homosexual demands being incorporated into the discourse of the student movement. When asked about later claims by activists that Cárdenas brought gay rights signs to protest events, Xabier Lizárraga Cruchaga, who also attended many of the same events, states that he does not remember this happening and furthermore, highly doubts that it would have been possible at this point of time because of the high level of political repression.⁹⁷ However, in writing about Cárdenas' life, Monsivaís recalls the origins of discussion around lesbian and homosexual organizing as beginning a few months after the massacre at Tlatelolco. He recounts,

Months later you decided to be more focused and to begin to struggle for the rights of sexual minorities...I remember that at a dinner in 1969 you informed everyone about what had recently happened in New York. The gay liberation movement had risen up and you were excited.⁹⁸

Pointing to the lack of coverage of international homosexual and lesbian liberation movements in the Mexican press, Lizárraga Cruchaga also remembers learning about the events that occurred at Stonewall from friends.⁹⁹

While there is no evidence to indicate that the Stonewall riots themselves had a significant impact on the development of lesbian and homosexual organizing in Mexico City, rhetoric and references made in Mexican organizational documents make clear that early lesbian and homosexual organizing in both the U.S. and Argentina influenced the

⁹⁷ Max Mejía, "Mexican Pink" in Peter Drucker, *Different Rainbows: Third World Queer Liberation* (London: Gay Men's Press, 2000): 43-69 and Hinojosa 1998. Xabier Lizárraga Cruchaga, interview with the author, Mexico City, July 20, 2010.

⁹⁸ "Monsivaís 1994, 261.

⁹⁹ Lizárraga Cruchaga, interview.

formation of the Frente de Liberación Homosexual (The Homosexual Liberation Front, FLH), the first homosexual liberation group in Mexico founded in 1971. The term “liberation front” was used in solidarity with the Vietnamese National Liberation Front. Exemplary of transnational solidarities during this time period, groups with the same name emerged first in New York City in 1969, and immediately thereafter in Argentina and London. Like other lesbian and gay groups calling themselves “liberation fronts,” Mexican and Argentine activists “elaborated an ideology that combined sexual and national liberation.”¹⁰⁰ In an interview from 1984, Cárdenas explains that between 1969 and 1971 she received various documents from friends in both London and New York, including “Twenty Questions about Homosexuality, Twenty Answers” and “I am Lesbian, I am Beautiful.”¹⁰¹ She and other English-speakers translated and disseminated copies of these articles and pamphlets amongst the community in Mexico City. Though the FLH did not formally put together an organizational statement until August 1971, according to Cárdenas, a group of women and men met more informally beginning in 1970. The group met on Sundays at Cárdenas’ house with up to 60 people attending meetings over the two-year course of the organization.¹⁰² In discussion of the formation of the group, Cárdenas stated, “What most pointedly motivated us, specifically those of us who participated in the group which began in 1970, were the writings of homosexuals in New York...”¹⁰³ For Cárdenas and others, these documents would serve as inspiration for the formation of the FLH. She continues, “Those of us who had read those first

¹⁰⁰ James N. Green, “(Homo)Sexuality, Human Rights, and Revolution in Latin America,” in Jeffrey Wasserstram, Greg Grandin, Lynn Hunt, and Marilyn B. Young, Eds., *Human Rights and Revolutions* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2007): 141.

¹⁰¹ Hernández and Manrique 1994, 12.

¹⁰² Amparo Jiménez 1991.

¹⁰³ Hernández and Manrique, 12.

documents began to feel historically obligated; there was no longer a way to avoid it... In this spirit we formed the FLH of Mexico. We assessed the organizational statements of the U.S. and English groups and with them made our own platform.”¹⁰⁴ This platform, distributed both locally and internationally, would help form the basis for a common understanding of homosexual (female and male) oppression to organize around during the years to come. Similar to leftist groups in New York and London, various FLH members such as Cárdenas were dual militants with the PCM and felt strongly that the homosexual liberation movement be connected to other struggles for social and political liberation. The group demanded an end to police violence, job discrimination, stigmatizing by psychiatrists and the media, and all other forms of discrimination practiced against homosexual men and women. Uniting their experiences of oppression with those of other oppressed peoples, their statement ended by proclaiming “homosexual liberation is part of social liberation.”¹⁰⁵

However, as various scholars and activists have indicated, in 1971 it was the firing of several employees from a Mexico City Sears Roebuck store on the basis of homosexuality that served as a “call to arms” and initiated the first official action of the organization.¹⁰⁶ The group made plans to start a boycott publically denouncing the injustice and began to write editorials and create flyers about what activists considered an “unconstitutional” firing. However, after some deliberation, the FLH decided not to publically protest the firing because of the repressive political climate in Mexico City at this time. Instead, they continued to write anonymous editorials condemning what they

¹⁰⁴ Hernández and Manrique, 12.

¹⁰⁵ Frente de Liberación Homosexual de México, “Documentos Mexicanos.” Septiembre 1971. Nancy 5, 82 “La liberación de los homosexuales es una forma más de la liberación Frente de Liberación Homosexual de México.”

¹⁰⁶ See de la Dehesa 2010 and Mogrevejo 2000.

considered a homophobic and unconstitutional act as well as the general nature of the repressive state apparatus.¹⁰⁷ In June 1971 the *halcones* (a paramilitary group trained by the government) violently attacked a student demonstration in Mexico City, beating and injuring dozens of students. Elaine Carey has contended that,

The attack on students on June 10, 1971, exemplified the government's continued willingness to use force to maintain a political monopoly. Echeverría may have been reaching out to students and allowing greater democratic freedom at some level, but the culpability of the administration in the June 10 incident revealed that the president and certain sectors of the PRI demanded the right to arbitrate which civil liberties would be respected and which voices would be heard.¹⁰⁸

Thus, due to such political instability and threats of violence, the FLH decided to focus on internal consciousness-raising. For the next year of the group's existence, they also continued to engage with the public sphere through what Claudia Hinojosa has coined "cultural guerilla actions," that included "informing journalists, intellectuals, psychologists and psychiatrists in private sessions about the seriousness of social discrimination against lesbians and gay men."¹⁰⁹ However, by 1973, the FLH disbanded, and other consciousness-raising groups began to arise.

While Y. Castro was not involved in homosexual consciousness-raising groups, during this time she participated in Marxist study groups and underground lesbian bar culture. Both her experiences of marginalization within the revolutionary left, as well as her fear of police persecution for both her leftist activities and her emerging lesbianism, shed further light upon the nature of political repression in 1970s Mexico City. As a student, Y. Castro became particularly involved in labor struggles and participated as part of a cell of the urban guerilla organization *Liga 23 de Septiembre* active in the

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Carey 2005, 169.

¹⁰⁹ Hinojosa 1998.

Department of Philosophy at UNAM. Though not an official member of *La Liga*, through these activities at UNAM she participated in Marxist study groups and supported urban guerilla struggles in Mexico. At the same time as she was becoming active in leftist politics, she was introduced through a friend to underground lesbian bar culture within Mexico City. She describes these bars, though not exclusively lesbian, as a place of refuge because during this time there was no other place to interact with other lesbian women. At the same time, she recalls the many difficulties of bar culture; particularly the heavy drinking, subsequent fighting, as well as frequent police raids.¹¹⁰

However, as she became more comfortable with her lesbian identity, she became increasingly uncomfortable with the prominent understanding within Marxist circles in Mexico City that homosexuality was a bourgeois import from the capitalist North.¹¹¹ Thus, while she ideologically supported this movement, because of rampant homophobia within the Mexican left she experienced many contradictions between her militancy as a Marxist Leninist and her sexual orientation, “I wanted to be openly lesbian within La Liga, to not have to hide my sexual orientation. But, I didn’t do this. For me it was very difficult to be a revolutionary and to be a lesbian, it seemed like a contradiction. That’s why I never actually entered into the formal organization of *La Liga*, I never became a militant.”¹¹² After the failed kidnapping of then presidential contender Lopez Portillo’s sister in August 1976, government repression of suspected militants increased. Reports from the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City in 1976 admit human rights violations on the part of the Mexican government, including torture, disappearance, and murder of those

¹¹⁰ Pérez Ocaña, “Entrevista Exclusiva: Yan María Yaoyólotl Castro,” 21.

¹¹¹ This idea comes from Stalinism and was supported by later Communist leaders, such as Fidel Castro. Mexican Marxist and Communist political parties supported such ideology until the late 1970s/early 1980s, a subject I will discuss in more detail in chapter two.

¹¹²Y. Castro, Interview.

considered “terrorists.”¹¹³ Such political “dissidents” were sometimes considered “homosexual” whether or not they truly were.¹¹⁴ In discussion about the urban guerilla movement in his 1976 *Informe de Gobierno* that was broadcast and distributed throughout the nation, Echeverría stated that many youth who joined the guerillas came from broken-homes and had “... a noted tendency to be sexually promiscuous and to be both male and female homosexuals...”¹¹⁵ This assertion can be seen as an example of the stigmatization of homosexuality during this time on the part of the Mexican state.

Cárdenas as Public Figure: Challenging Social Norms and Raising Consciousness

Despite the dissolution of the FLH in 1973 and a climate of continued political repression, Cárdenas and others continued to work to support other homosexuals and lesbians and to challenge societal conceptions of homosexuality. Beginning around 1974 two male homosexual activists also began new groups, one named Sex-Pol, focused on consciousness raising and the study of homosexual politics.¹¹⁶ Now known as a defender of sexual rights, in 1973 Cárdenas was invited by Jacobo Zabludovksy to talk about homophobia and gay liberation in the U.S. on the very popular television program “24 hours.” Fearful that violence could be inflicted on her family, Cárdenas did not openly identify as a homosexual on the show, but talked frankly about the realities of homophobia in both the U.S. and Mexico and why gay liberation movements were emerging internationally in order to create visibility and demand civil rights for lesbians

¹¹³ “Human Rights Evaluation Report, US Embassy in Mexico City, confidential airgram. Human Rights and the Dirty War in Mexico, Documents 6 and 9, 2006, The National Security Archive.

¹¹⁴ Jorge Mendoza Garcia, “Reconstruyendo la guerra sucia en Mexico: del olvido social a la memoria colectiva,” (http://www.psicopol.unsl.edu.ar/dic2007_notas9.pdf): 12.

¹¹⁵ Luis Echeverría Alvarez, *Sexto Informe de Gobierno*, Mexico City, 90.

¹¹⁶ Though there are no sources that discuss these organizations in significant detail, the group Sex-Pol is frequently cited as a consciousness-raising group in which many activists who later formed political lesbian and gay organizations participated.

and homosexuals. Yet, in an interview twenty years later, Cárdenas recalls that though she did not speak openly as a lesbian, everyone assumed that she must have been a lesbian because she so frankly discussed homophobia and gay liberation.¹¹⁷ Two other gay men were interviewed by Zabudovsky for this segment, but with their backs turned to the camera. Cárdenas was the only person who chose to reveal her identity. In another interview discussing her appearance on the show, Cárdenas remembers the intense fear she felt, describing how she also warned Zabudovsky of possible implications that talking about homosexuality in a positive light could have for him. She advised him, “If I say I am a homosexual and that I am happy and successful in my job and that I have friends and family that accept me, you could be considered an accomplice to a crime. Permitting me to say these things could be seen as an invitation to vice.”¹¹⁸ This quote sheds light on the lack of democratic liberties and the level of political impunity that existed during the Echeverría administration. As discussed in the Introduction and will be discussed at greater length in the next chapter, during the 1970s and 1980s, homosexuals, particularly men routinely suffered harassment, extortion, arrest, and physical violence from the police for violating codes of “la moral pública.” Yet, according to Cárdenas, despite her fears of state and societal retaliation to what became the first public discussion of homosexuality in Mexico, the response to the interview was much less hostile than she had expected and actually served to inspire her to continue her activism.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ María Amparo Jiménez, “Cardenas confronts homophobia in Mexico” originally appearing in *Outlines*, 1991. “Bajo Mi Relieve” Blog by Amparo Jiménez.

<http://bajomirelieve.blogspot.com/2010/08/safuega.html>

¹¹⁸ Hernández and Manrique “Adios a Nancy Cárdenas,” 219.

¹¹⁹ Amparo Jiménez, “Cárdenas Confronts Homophobia.”

In particular, Cárdenas utilized her career as a playwright to introduce themes of homosexuality into Mexican society. In 1973 she decided to adapt Mark Crowley's "The Boys of the Band" to a Mexican context, which included changing scenes to mirror the physical and social communities of homosexuals in Mexico. The following is an excerpt from a reprinted interview with Cardenas that appeared as part of *Gay Sunshine's* (San Francisco, CA) Winter 1975-6 issue dedicated to discussion of homosexuality in Latin America.¹²⁰

Q: Why did you select this work for presentation in Mexico?

Nancy Cárdenas: Because it seemed healthy and charming in spite of the fact that young homosexuals are very different, especially since 1968, the year in which the work of the gay liberation movement began. Besides, it's in the line with my own predilection for bitter humor. I try to win people over with laughter so as to show something we unconsciously recoil at.

Q: What result can the presentation of a theme which continually eludes the Mexican public have?

Nancy Cárdenas: Positive results. To bring out of the closet those to whom the theme applies. Not to speak of it as sick... An open discussion will benefit homosexual and heterosexual Mexicans.¹²¹

The rest of the article chronicled the struggle Cárdenas faced in showing "Los Chicos de la Banda" in Mexico City. The play was originally scheduled to open in fall 1973 at a theatre in the historic center of Mexico City. However, due to significant public scandal about the homosexual content of the play, the show did not open until May of 1974. A local government representative in the area of the city where the play was originally scheduled to appear protested it on the basis of immorality. His protest actually led to an

¹²⁰ Earl Gavin translated the introduction and interview.

¹²¹ Earl Gavin, Translator. "Interview" in *Gay Sunshine A Journal of Gay Liberation* 26/27 (Winter 1975-6): 7, CLGA. The same issue of *Gay Sunshine* offered a history of Mexican gay life and accounts of sexual encounters between Mexican and U.S. men. It also included a copy of a statement of protest against gay and lesbian oppression signed by over 80 Mexican intellectuals in response to the severe homophobia exhibited by the Mexican government and press after Cárdenas publically "came out" at the 1975 United Nations International Women's Year Conference held in Mexico City.

intervention by President Echeverría, who stated his empathy for the concerns of the government official, but hoped that the play could be performed somewhere else in the city.¹²² The fact that Echeverría supported Cárdenas' right to produce her play at the same time as the state severely repressed expressions of public homosexuality suggests that perhaps Cárdenas' status as a cosmopolitan public figure served to deter Echeverría from censoring the performance of the play. As a result, the *Teatro Insurgentes* in the south of the city agreed to host the play which, as a result of all the controversy and publicity surrounding it, became very popular with approximately 250,000 people attending in two months. Advertisements for the play encouraged civil society to open their minds to the theme of the play, stating "you have the right to inform yourself."¹²³ In an interview, Cárdenas engaged with the debate around the play's suggested immorality stating, "For me, a moral play is one that makes us reflect and question our behavior, that's why *Los Chicos* is an incredibly moral play."¹²⁴

As indicated by Gavin in the interview with Cárdenas excerpted above, reviews of the play varied from being explicitly homophobic to congratulatory. A review in the popular daily newspaper *El Universal* termed the play "immoral" stating, "Considering the scandal that preceded the opening of this play, we have been prepared to consider it immoral, as it is well known that homosexuality is simply a sickness that can be prevented by various factors..."¹²⁵ In an article with a homophobic hint, another reviewer in *Siempre!* stated mockingly, that the play encouraged viewers to think "...Poor things,

¹²² "Teatro," *Siempre!* (Mexico City), no. 1094 (Junio 12 de 1974): 50.

¹²³ Teatro," *Siempre!* (Mexico City), no. 1094 (Junio 12 de 1974): 50.

¹²⁴ Lita Paniagua, "Los Chicos de la Banda", *La inmoralidad, la Censura; con Nancy Cárdenas: Francotiradora de la Política*, *Siempre!* (Mexico City), no. 1154 (August 1975): 44.

¹²⁵ Martin Gomez Iglesias, "Escenario: Los Chicos de la Banda," *El Universal*, May 24, 1974, Sec. 1, p. 24.

those faggots, so full of complexes and problems because the world doesn't understand them...”¹²⁶

Yet, *Siempre*'s official review of the play, published in the same issue, offered a much more sympathetic discussion of the play. The fact that Monsivaís, Cárdenas' long time friend and colleague, was the editor of the cultural supplement to *Siempre!* during the 1970s perhaps plays no small part in the kind of reception that the play received in this issue.¹²⁷ The theatre critic begins the review by proposing that readers should become more open to homosexuality, particularly in light of the problems of overpopulation threatening the nation, “the theme of the play, which in times not so far away from us, could have been considered immoral and antisocial, can now, on the contrary, due to the changing times, be seen as almost patriotic. In a certain sense it could be seen as very smart propaganda for population control, much more effective than the pill, as well as more natural.”¹²⁸ Summarizing his larger review of the piece, he goes on to applaud Cárdenas on her production: “Mark Crowley's play, translated and adapted by Nancy Cárdenas is a play that has everything it should. It is not a sketch, not a farce, not a circus. It is not perfect, but it has more virtues than defects. She has done a serious and brilliant job, that, with the greatest enthusiasm, we would like to congratulate her...”¹²⁹ Thus, rather than demonize the play for threatening Mexican morals and customs like other journalists had, the above review affirms Cárdenas' production for its seriousness and timeliness. That homosexuals could be considered patriotic for presumably not conceiving is in itself a fascinating spin on the discourse of population control prominent

¹²⁶ Felix Cortes Camarillo, “Gay Saber: El Derecho de Jalar” *Siempre!* (Mexico City), no. 1094 (June 1974): 41. lerdo 204.

¹²⁷ Carr 1992, 240.

¹²⁸ “Teatro” *Siempre!* 1094, June 12, 1974, 50.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

during this time that contended that UN efforts to control population in the “Third World” went against traditional Mexican customs.¹³⁰ By presenting a depiction of gay lives to the Mexican public, Cárdenas’ production of “Los Chicos de la Banda” both raised consciousness around homosexuality and spurred debates that challenged common understandings of morality versus immorality.

Forging International Ties

As discussed in Cárdenas’ interview with *Gay Sunshine*, her adaption of “Los Chicos de la Banda” and the controversy surrounding it became internationally known when the collective published an interview with Cárdenas in winter ’75-’76. As previously mentioned, this interview appeared in an issue of the movement’s newspaper focused on Latin America, the first known issue of any U.S. gay or lesbian newspaper dedicated entirely to discussion of happenings in Latin America. In addition to the interview with Cárdenas, the issue focused on male homosexuality in Mexico and, except for one article written by a Mexican, contained articles written from the perspectives of men from the U.S. who had visited or lived in Mexico. Bob Figueroa, a leader of one of the Mexico City based consciousness-raising groups wrote about oppression of gay men in Mexico City (exercised in the forms of extortion and bar raids), attributing discrimination and repression to cultures of machismo and state corruption. The issue also contains an article on the history of homosexuality in Mexico by the anthropologist

¹³⁰ During the 1970s, international development entities, including the United Nations pressured developing countries such as Mexico to enact procedures to reduce population growth. However, Echeverría contested the implementation of such measures, suggesting they were imperialist and instead defending Mexico’s strong family values and significant population as a cultural strength. For example see, N.A., “Habla Echeverría a ‘Le Monde Diplomatique: Más que Control Demográfico Debemos Pugar por Mejorar los Niveles Producción, Bienestar, y Modernización.’” In *El Sol de Mexico*, May 6, 1971.

Clark L. Taylor, as well as various articles describing gay male cruising and sexual expression, including recommendations on how a foreigner could find and socialize with Mexican gay men.

However, though coverage of Latin American gay life was usually not this extensive in gay media in the U.S., interest in Latin America homosexualities was not necessarily a new phenomenon. As such scholars as David Churchill and Leila Rupp have documented, early homophile and gay liberation groups based in the U.S., Canada, and Europe sought out information about homosexualities in the Global South, particularly in the form of anthropological studies, in order to confirm a “universal homosexuality that was nonetheless contingent on the temporally and spatially located, not to mention racialized other.”¹³¹ Being able to cite the existence of a universal homosexuality served to uphold human rights claims made by transnational homophile and gay liberation activists as early as the 1950s. Yet, different from homophile activists of the 1950s and 1960s, by the 1970s some gay liberation activists actively sought to correspond with and meet homosexuals and lesbians in Latin America and other parts of the global South in order to foment an international movement. According to Emily Hobson, “1966...marks a transition in queer politics, as a movement organized for ‘homophile rights’ began to give way to militancy inspired by the New Left, Third World Left, global anti-colonialism, and emerging feminist activism.”¹³² Thereafter, the country’s first gay liberation groups that formed in the wake of the 1969 Stonewall Riots

¹³¹David Churchill, “Transnationalism and Homophile Political Culture in the Postwar Decades,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and gay Studies* 15:1 (2009):34-35., Leila Rupp. “The Persistence of Transnational Organizing: The Case of the Homophile Movement,” *American Historical Review* 116:4 (2011): 1014-1039.

¹³²Emily K. Hobson, *Imagining Alliance: Queer Anti-Imperialism and Race in California, 1966-1990* (PhD Dissertation: University of Southern California, 2009): 5.

tended to connect gay liberation with anti-imperialism and socialism. In the 1970s some Northern gay and lesbian liberation activists began to take interest in happenings in Latin America in order to support efforts not just for gay liberation, but for anti-imperialism. Perhaps one of the most obvious examples of this was queer participation in the Venceremos Brigades, groups of U.S. youth who traveled to Cuba to work in support of the revolution.¹³³ Thus, during this time there existed both desire on the part of many U.S. groups to defend the universality of homosexuality and to support anti-colonial and gay liberation movements located in the global South.

While various international lesbian and gay liberation groups sought to create relationships of solidarity with emerging lesbian and homosexual activism in Mexico, Robert Roth (1950-1990), a lawyer from New York City, and the editor of the International List of Gay Organizations and Publications, part of the *Gay YellowPages*, actually worked to connect Mexican lesbians and homosexuals with one another.¹³⁴ As a member of the New York based Gay Activists Alliance, Roth began corresponding with gay organizations throughout the world in 1972 when he began to write and publish the list. According to his correspondence, he was particularly interested in the “formation of an international gay movement in Latin America” and thus paid particular attention to fostering communication with Latin America.¹³⁵ Inherent in his desire to see gay liberation extend into Latin America, was the assumption that homosexuality is universal

¹³³ Ian Lekus, “Queer Harvests: Homosexuality, the U.S. New Left, and the Venceremos Brigades to Cuba.” *Radical History Review* 89 (Spring 2004): 57-91.

¹³⁴ Though Roth served as the primary contact in the U.S. for various Mexican gay organizations, individual Mexicans had various other contacts with U.S. citizens, including with the anthropologist Clark L. Taylor Jr. See Clark L. Taylor Jr., “Mexican gaylife in historical perspective”, in Winston Leyland (ed.), *Gay Roots*, (San Francisco: Gay Sunshine Press): 190-202.

¹³⁵ Robert Roth (NY, NY) to John Hubert (Hollywood, CA), August 20, 1978, Robert Roth Papers, Subject Files, Box 1, Folder 11, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY. R63

and that the struggle for lesbian and gay rights is global. Roth himself described the significance of the role he took on as an international contact for gay organizations throughout the world:

From 1974 to 1978, I took on the responsibility of searching for and replying to these letters from Third World countries. I asked all of the Gay organizations and publications in New York, and several publications from other countries, to supply me with copies of any letters received from anyone in Asia and Latin America. I found that frequently several letters would be received by different organizations, from different people in the same country, or even the same city, who were all interested in starting a Gay movement in their country, but who did not know each other. What I did was simply introduce them to each other, and very soon an organization would form.¹³⁶

As well as facilitating contact between various people in Mexico City interested in gay liberation, Roth also connected gay groups in Mexico City with groups in Puerto Rico. Through correspondence, Roth began putting Mexicans in touch with one another in 1973, by which time there were three homosexual groups functioning in Mexico City, which were primarily focused on consciousness-raising and the study of homosexuality. According to various correspondence found in Roth's archive, one group was directed by Cárdenas, another by Roberto Figueroa, and another by Javier Yopez referred to as the Seminario de los Domingos.¹³⁷ Figueroa's correspondence with Roth reveals that Roth put Yopez' group in touch with Figueroa's in late 1973. Other topics of this correspondence included reports on group activities, bar life, and the political climate in Mexico, requests for organizational materials in the U.S., discussion of creating Mexican publications, and the encouragement, on the part of Roth, of the development of gay liberation within Mexico. Desiring to foment his connections in Mexico, Roth visited

¹³⁶ Robert Roth, "Memorandum to the IGA Third Annual Conference Workshop on the Third World and Eastern Europe Need for Resource Support Groups and Publications," April 14, 1981, Robert Roth Papers, International Files, Box 4, Folder 25, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY. 94-95

¹³⁷ Unfortunately, I have been unable to find contact information for either Yopez or Figueroa.

Mexico City in early 1976. While there, Roth met for the first time many of the people he had been in correspondence with for the previous three years, including Cárdenas. After visiting, Roth continued to communicate with Mexican groups, sending them international periodicals such as the *GayYellow Pages* and *Gay Sunshine*, distributing information about Mexico internationally, and connecting them with the gay organization *Comunidad de Orgullo Gay* in Puerto Rico.¹³⁸ Throughout the late 1970s Roth also received letters from individuals in other parts of Mexico interested in gay liberation, and he helped to put them in touch with groups in Mexico City, as well as offered advice on how to start up organizations and newsletters. Perhaps partially due to his encouragement, an anonymous gay publication called the *Noticiero* began circulating in Mexico City in 1976. The newsletter offered articles affirming gay and lesbian identities, critiqued police repression, contained editorials, and republished correspondence with groups in other parts of the world, including Puerto Rico and Argentina.¹³⁹ In content and message it looked similar to U.S. gay and lesbian newspapers of the time, condemning discrimination against and repression of lesbians and gays and calling for liberation. The inclusion of information on gay liberation in Argentina and Puerto Rico indicated an understanding that the concerns of lesbians and gays in Mexico were at least regional in scope, if not global. Thus, as a foreigner invested in supporting gay liberation in Latin America, Roth facilitated contact between Mexican activists that, at least in part, made the production of this newsletter possible, and that put Mexicans in touch with Puerto Ricans. Based in his presumption of a universal homosexuality, Roth seemed to have

¹³⁸ Robert Roth (NY, NY) to Nancy Cárdenas (Mexico City), March 27, 1976 and Roth to Mexican group, March 28, 1976, Robert Roth Papers, International Files, Box 5, Folder 31, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY.

¹³⁹ *Noticiero #2* (Mexico City), July 1976, Robert Roth Papers, International Files, Box 5, Folder 32, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY. Roth 200.

assumed that Latin American gays would want to follow the Western model of liberation, by “coming out” and organizing against repression and discrimination. Indeed, this is what the Mexican FLH had sought to do in the early 1970s, but had been forced underground because of Mexico’s hostile climate for lesbians and gays. Thus, through his work, Roth provided much needed support in fostering communication between individuals in Mexico and Latin America interested in working for gay liberation despite the country’s social and political conditions. His advocacy and international credibility also quite likely fomented desire on the part of Mexican lesbians and homosexuals to form a public movement.

Mexican Lesbians “Come Out” to the Nation and the World

While the Mexican government was far from supporting the interests of gay liberation, as an effort to showcase Mexico’s “modernity” and progressive stance on women’s rights, president Echeverría volunteered to host the 1975 United Nations International Women’s Year (IWY) Conference in Mexico City.¹⁴⁰ The first world conference on the status of women, it fueled the UN Decade for Women (1975-1985) that sought to organize a global movement to promote gender equality and end gender based discrimination. Thousands of participants attended both the official intergovernmental conference and the NGO Tribune, held apart from the general conference. Both the conference and the tribune were widely covered by both the Mexican and international press. As Jocelyn Olcott has aptly described, the 1975 IWY conference was fraught with tensions over the introduction of the topic of sexual rights, in particular lesbian rights.

The day after an Australian woman “came out” publically as a lesbian, participants

¹⁴⁰ At this time Echeverría also saw himself as a contender for the position of Secretary General of the United Nations and was, thus committed to most all efforts of the UN.

organized an open forum on lesbianism, to which Cárdenas was promptly invited.¹⁴¹ As part of the forum, Cárdenas read a document entitled the *Declaración de Las Lesbianas de México* which affirmed lesbian desires and condemned police and state repression of male and female homosexuals. The statement attributed the lack of organizing on gay and lesbian liberation in Mexico City to the threat of state repression, but optimistically encouraged international solidarity, “We are confident, however, that the organizational tactics of our brothers and sister in other parts of the world will help us to find our own path.”¹⁴² As various other scholars have discussed previously, Nancy Cárdenas’ open discussion of lesbianism at the IWY conference represented a turning point in lesbian and homosexual activism in Mexico City.¹⁴³ It was the first UN conference in which lesbian participants demanded that their issues be seriously addressed and thus also represents a critical juncture in transnational feminism. Though prominent U.S. feminists such as Betty Friedan were actually very unwilling to discuss lesbian issues, Southern participants generally viewed Northern activists as more interested in supporting the rights of lesbians and prostitutes than discussing the practical gender interests of women living under the realities of Western imperialism.¹⁴⁴ Thus, Cárdenas struggled to negotiate what appeared to many a contradiction: her open support for lesbian rights and anti-imperialism. As stated by Olcott in reference to the conflict surrounding Cárdenas’ at the IWY conference, “Nancy Cárdenas’ political performance required her to balance

¹⁴¹ Olcott, 23.

¹⁴² “Declaración de Las Lesbianas en Mexico.” Mexico City, June 1975, Centro de Documentación y Archivo Histórico Lésbico (CDAHL), Mexico City.

¹⁴³ See Claudia Hinojosa, *Lesbians Travel the Roads of Feminism Globally* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University, Center for Women’s Global Leadership, 2000), Mogrevejo 2000, and Jocelyn Olcott, “Cold War Conflicts and Cheap Cabaret: Sexual Politics at the 1975 International Women’s Year Conference,” *Gender and History* 22: 2 (November 2010): 733-754.

¹⁴⁴ Olcott.

carefully between exploiting the support and solidarity of ‘visiting lesbians’ and insisting that Mexican lesbians were not simply dupes of cultural imperialism.”¹⁴⁵

By reading this statement and thus openly identifying as a Mexican lesbian, Cárdenas’ actions also fueled an already heated discussion of lesbianism in the Mexican press. Up until this point, the Mexican press had attributed lesbian presence at the conference to foreign agitators. Thus, Cárdenas’ actions resulted in predominantly negative media coverage, as well as prompted a protest, widely thought to have been staged, where locals attacked Cárdenas, chanting such slogans as “Death to Nancy Cárdenas.”¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, in an interview with Mexican feminist Elena Poniatowska in *Siempre!* Friedan accused lesbians, using Cárdenas as an example, of someone perhaps led by secret agents, to distract attention away from the primary demands of the conference.¹⁴⁷ As Olcott has noted, the Mexican press, including that of the left, responded primarily with coverage and editorials that condemned the onset of Mexican lesbianism as pathological and a product of Western imperialism. In regards to the debate spurred by this discussion of lesbian rights, Olcott states, “Cosmopolitan lesbianism emerged as the opposite number to nationalist maternalism, a public celebration of Mexican motherhood as a national treasure not to be adulterated by foreign materials.”¹⁴⁸

Despite the overwhelmingly hostile response to Cárdenas’ actions in the Mexican press, like in 1974 when she produced “Los Chicos de la Banda,” the cultural supplement *Siempre!* deviated from the norm, opening up space for dialogue on the issue and

¹⁴⁵ Olcott, 21.

¹⁴⁶ Olcott, 11.

¹⁴⁷ Elena Poniatowska. “Mosca en la Sopa de Ojeda Paullada: Las Lesbians son Usadas para Desacreditar el Movimiento Feminista en el Mundo.” *Siempre!* (Mexico City) no. 1154 (August 1975): 16.

¹⁴⁸ Olcott, 25.

interviewing Cárdenas on her perspectives on political activism and the conference.¹⁴⁹ In the interview, Cárdenas discusses her trajectory of political activism and focuses in specific on the role she sees theatre having in society. She stated, “I have always been a person who acts on political issues. All the works that I have presented have a political intention. Furthermore, as a citizen and a public figure I have the obligation to denounce the voices that be when things are unjust.”¹⁵⁰ Thus, construing her activism as a civic duty, Cárdenas appealed for state reform that would condemn the harassment and intimidation of homosexuals. She goes on to discuss her decision to criticize the government’s treatment of homosexuals during the IWY conference and the response it prompted, both negative and positive. The most significant positive response to her actions was a letter published in the same issue of *Siempre!* rebuking police and state repression of homosexuals and signed by over eighty prominent Mexico City intellectuals. The letter specifically referenced the harassment Cárdenas faced during the IWY conference.¹⁵¹ Yet, in her interview in *Siempre!* she appears to speak primarily to the repression of homosexual men in Mexican society and doesn’t specifically mention the “Declaración de las Lesbianas.” While we cannot know for sure why there was not mention of lesbians in this interview, we can consider that perhaps Cárdenas chose to emphasize the more violent persecution of homosexual men versus lesbians. It is also possible that this seemingly glaring omission was the result of censorship by the interviewer. However, the fact that *Siempre!* provided an interview with Cárdenas where she defends her actions at the IWY contrasts sharply with virtually all other press coverage on lesbianism and the UN conference. Yet, as Hinojosa has contended, while

¹⁴⁹ Paniagua, “ ‘Los Chicos de la Banda, 44-5

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 44.

¹⁵¹ Gavin, 7.

much of the coverage of Cárdenas actions was negative, this international spectacle generated the first public discussion of lesbianism in Mexican society, bringing the realities of lesbian lives into the open for the first time, thereby inadvertently encouraging the development of lesbian and homosexual political activism.¹⁵² For these reasons, Cárdenas has often been considered as the pioneer of lesbian activism in Mexico.

Lesbos: Mexico's First Lesbian Organization

Despite Nancy Cárdenas' history of activism for lesbian and homosexual liberation in the 1970s, not all Mexican lesbians claim her as a pioneer of lesbian activism. Rather, in her personal archive Y. Castro claims herself, and two women named Marcela and Cristina V. as the authentic pioneers of Mexican lesbian feminism in the late 1970s.¹⁵³ Cárdenas, she contends, was not a feminist and therefore a "homosexual" versus a "lesbian" leader.¹⁵⁴ Drawing from Marxist feminist and lesbian separatist writings largely from the 1970s, Y. Castro argues that a "lesbian" must be foremost committed to feminism and the liberation of women from patriarchy. She makes a further differentiation between groups that are specifically lesbian versus mixed gay and lesbian, arguing that because of patriarchal oppression women must organize separately from men. In a piece in her narrated archive entitled "Why is Marcela and not Nancy Cárdenas the historical referent for the Mexican lesbian feminist movement?" Castro accuses other Mexican lesbian activists of having purposely erased Marcela's history and that of radical

¹⁵² Claudia Hinojosa and Charlotte Bunch, "Lesbians Travel the Roads of Feminism Globally," In John D'Emilio, William B. Turner, and Urvashi Vaid, (eds). *Creating Change: Sexuality, Public Policy, and Civil Rights*, (NY: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

¹⁵³ No formal biographical information exists for Cristina.

¹⁵⁴ While Y. Castro and Cárdenas long disagreed about whether lesbians should organize autonomously from men, Y. Castro's differentiation between "lesbians" and "female homosexuals" is a recent ideological position she has taken.

separatist lesbian feminism in general, in order to foster a sense of a shared history of activism among lesbians and gay men in Mexico City.¹⁵⁵

According to Y. Castro, in approximately 1976 Marcela organized Acratas, the first feminist organization open to lesbian participation. Returning to Mexico City from France where she worked with the feminist movement, she created Acratas as a feminist separatist consciousness-raising group with an anarchist structure. Also working during this time with the leftist Movimiento de Liberación de la Mujer (The Women's Liberation Movement), Y. Castro briefly joined Acratas because of its openness to lesbianism. Though little lasting documentation is preserved, according to Y. Castro, Acratas, like the FLH, only existed for a short time because of the climate of political repression in Mexico during this time. Yet, Y. Castro attributes Acratas as the inspiration for the group Lesbos, which she created in 1977.¹⁵⁶

Y. Castro's own history as a leftist, as well as her international experiences, also clearly influenced her decision to form Lesbos in 1977. As a result of the political and sexual insecurity she felt as a leftist activist and a lesbian in Mexico during mid-1970s, Y. Castro decided to leave Mexico and her studies in 1976.¹⁵⁷ She spent approximately a year living in London working side jobs and making various acquaintances, including with Latin American political exiles living in England. According to Y. Castro, her relationships with political exiles influenced her political ideologies to be more Latin-American and *tercermundista* (Third World) focused. At the same time, she began her

¹⁵⁵ Y. Castro does not actually refer to such activists as "lesbians," but as "homosexual or gay women." Yaoyótl Castro, "Porqué el referente histórico del movimiento lésbico feminista mexicano es Marcela y no Nancy Cárdenas?," Folder 1976, AHMLFM-YMY, Mexico City.

¹⁵⁶ Y. Castro, interview with the author and Yaoyótl Castro, "Acratas 1976-1978: Antecedentes del movimiento lésbico feminista en México," Folder 1976, AHMLFM-YMY, Mexico City.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

first lesbian relationship with an English woman from South Africa. Y. Castro explains the significance that this relationship had on her political understandings,

Her parents were English people who went to Africa to support the struggle of Black Africans. So, through her, I gained a profound understanding of the nationalist struggle of Blacks in Africa. Her parents had to flee from Zambia, and from there they went to South Africa, because they were white English communists. So, she taught me a lot about Third World struggles in Africa.¹⁵⁸

Through this same girlfriend in London, Y. Castro became involved with Marxist feminist organizing, working with such women as the English feminist Selma James who advocated for mixed gender and working class revolutionary theory and struggle. During the 1970s James founded the Marxist feminist organization International Wages for Housework which is still active today. The group Wages Due also began in 1975 as a lesbian segment of the International Wages for Housework campaign demanding an end to all forms of discrimination against women. In her work with these organizations, Y. Castro developed a clearer understanding of how Marxism and lesbian feminism could be combined and her work with Wages Due later served as inspiration for Y. Castro to form a Marxist lesbian feminist group in Mexico.¹⁵⁹

During this time, Y. Castro also became particularly influenced by the writings and activism of Angela Davis who was active with both the U.S. Communist Party and the Black Panthers. According to Y. Castro, Davis's was the first Marxist analysis that she was aware of that made connections between race, sex, and class oppressions. Thus, while the English women she worked with helped her make connections between Marxism, feminism, and lesbianism, Davis's ideas assisted in her understandings of racial

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Y. Castro, interview.

oppression and her own position as a Third World Marxist lesbian feminist.¹⁶⁰ As a sympathizer with Latin American revolutionary struggles during this time, Y. Castro also clearly identified with social movements like those Davis was involved in, which sought the overthrow of the state. As discussed in the recent documentary “The Black Power Mixtape 1967-1975,” Davis became a symbol of liberation for the world in the 1970s when she was unjustly accused of kidnapping and killing a judge.¹⁶¹ While imprisoned for 18 months and throughout the 1970s, Davis continued to vocally condemn the racism of the U.S. prison system, and advocate for the overthrow of the U.S. government. Because of both her symbolism and the foundational impact that Davis had on her theoretical understandings of Marxism, feminism, and racism, Y. Castro includes a page in her collections citing Davis’s activism and seminal book *Women, Race, and Class*.¹⁶²

Upon her return to Mexico in 1977, Y. Castro sought to continue activism within the feminist movement and began collaborating with the newly formed Coalition of Feminists who worked for abortion rights and to end violence against women.¹⁶³ Yet, when Y. Castro and a friend, Cristina attempted discussion of lesbian issues with the Coalition, they met fear and apprehension about organizing on lesbian issues.¹⁶⁴ As occurred in other countries during this time, heterosexual feminists feared that if they adopted lesbian issues as part of their work, all feminists would be labeled as lesbians and thus taken less seriously. In a conference paper later written reflecting on this conflict, Y.

¹⁶⁰ Y. Castro, “Sobre el Sujeto Histórico en Torno al cual Se Elaboró la Presente Historia,” AHMLFM-YMY

¹⁶¹ Göran Hugo Olsson, writer and director and Annika Rogell, prod., *The Black Power Mixtape 1967-1975* (New York: Lovture Films, 2011).

¹⁶² Y. Castro, email correspondence with author, November 7, 2011. As previously mentioned, Y. Castro also provides a dedication to Davis in the introduction to her archive

¹⁶³ The Coalition of Feminists began in 1976 and was the first coalition of feminist organizations in Mexico City.

¹⁶⁴ Yan María M. and Luz María M., “Una Experiencia dentro de los grupos lesbicos de Mexico,” Lesbian Herstory Archives of the Lesbian Herstory Educational Foundation, Inc. (LHA), Brooklyn, New York.

Castro compares the arguments made by members of the Coalition to those of Marxists who claimed that women's liberation would come with the revolution, "The feminists argued that as lesbians we would obtain freedom when feminism was accomplished. According to this idea, feminism itself would result in our liberation."¹⁶⁵ Y. Castro and Cristina rejected this analysis and decided to form a specifically lesbian feminist group in order to focus on lesbian feminist issues.

Thus, Lesbos was founded in 1977 and defined itself as a separatist lesbian feminist consciousness-raising group. It was separatist in that they did not work with any male organizations. They did however continue to collaborate with the Coalition of Feminists. The mission of Lesbos was framed in Marxist and feminist ideologies:

The group LESBOS has risen up as a political organization, united with the struggles of all marginalized sectors, against the repressive socioeconomic systems and for the construction of a new social organization... Our organization is composed of women, in no way do we seek to imitate masculine roles, lesbianism cannot be reduced to sensuality, but rather implies a new attitude towards life; it is the refusal to submit ourselves to the traditional role of women.¹⁶⁶

While some of the rhetoric in this statement is resonant of that of the FLH, the discourse of lesbianism as a "new attitude towards life" is very distinct. During this time, Y. Castro first began giving speeches on her political perspectives on lesbianism, such as at the First Mexican and Central American Symposium on Women held in Mexico City in November of 1977. Using the pseudonym Jeanne Beltrán, Y. Castro came out publically as a socialist lesbian feminist in her speech "Lesbianism and its Social Significance." The speech included the principle arguments of Lesbos as explained in their mission

¹⁶⁵ Yan María M. and Luz María M., "Una Experiencia dentro de los grupos lesbicos de Mexico," Lesbian Herstory Archives of the Lesbian Herstory Educational Foundation, Inc. (LHA), Brooklyn, New York.

¹⁶⁶ "Lesbos," *Fem* 2:5 (Mexico City), 1977, p. 30.

statement and was reproduced in the newly founded left-leaning newspaper *Uno más Uno*.¹⁶⁷ In later writings, Castro explains that she chose to use a pseudonym because of the intense state and police repression towards lesbians during this time. Mexican secret police reports reveal the reality of this situation as the government began monitoring the work of Lesbos and the Coalition of Feminists in the spring of 1978, months before Lesbos actually claimed a public presence.¹⁶⁸

Luz María Medina, a third leader of Lesbos met Y. Castro at the above-mentioned conference. She had recently returned from living in England and France where she was working with feminist and lesbian organizations. In order to solicit more members for the group, Y. Castro, Medina, and Cristina frequented lesbian and gay bars and distributed flyers about the group. However, in a later published position paper, Y. Castro and Medina reflect that it was often very difficult to recruit women for political meetings and they claim that most of the women who came to meetings did so in order to meet other women and often preferred drinking and socializing over discussing the politics of lesbian feminism. Conflicts also emerged early on between women who wanted to be active politically and openly lesbian and those who did not. The sector of Lesbos which wanted to be actively and openly involved in politics made alliances with the *Frente Nacional de Liberación y los Derechos de la Mujer* (FNLDM) In March 1978 they participated in Mexico's first march on International Women's Day. Yet, similar to their initial experience with the Coalition of Feminists, lesbians met hostility from some

¹⁶⁷ Patricia Cardona, "El Lesbianismo, reto al sistema, dice la escritora Jeanne Beltrán." *Uno Más Uno*, November 10, 1977, Folder 1977, AHMLFM-YMY.

¹⁶⁸ While it is unclear exactly when and why the state via the Bureau of Political and Social Investigations, began monitoring the feminist movement, descriptions of Lesbos' activities appear in surveillance documents of the Coalition of Feminists in June 1978, months before members of the group actually "come out" publically. See "La coalición de mujeres feministas, tiene programado un mitin para el proximo 9 de Julio en las afueras de la secretaria de turismo a fin de protestar por la celebración del certamen 'Miss Universo.'" 7 de junio de 1978. AGN, IPS, Box 1954B, Folder 2.

heterosexual feminists and the *Unión Nacional de Mujeres*, a women's group affiliated with the PCM, actually broke ties with the FNLDM over the open involvement of Lesbos in the event.¹⁶⁹ However, though Lesbos never formally united with the Coalition of Feminists, they did continue to collaborate with them and *El Colectivo de Mujeres Trotskistas* throughout 1978.¹⁷⁰ Ultimately, in the fall of 1978, a group of women split from Lesbos in order to form Oikabeth, a militant lesbian activist group whose history of activism will be chronicled in chapter two.

Conclusion

Within the contours of the Cold War and the Mexican Dirty War, this chapter has sought to reveal the ways in which lesbians and homosexual men engaged with local, national, and international arenas between 1968 and 1977, the time period immediately prior to the onset of a public lesbian and gay liberation movement in 1978. As various other activists and scholars have documented, the lesbian and gay movement that emerged in 1978 took influence from the 1968 student movement and its founders were dual militants in both the Mexican Left and feminist movement. My research shows that international connections forged by activists such as Y. Castro and Cárdenas were equally important to the formation of Mexico's first lesbian and homosexual organizations as was the national culture of social protest created by '68. These groups read and distributed foreign literature on homosexuality and lesbian and homosexual liberation, created contacts with international organizations, and adapted their early organizational statements and models from foreign models. Yet, the political and social

¹⁶⁹ Y. Castro, "Primeras Jornadas del 8 de marzo de 1978," Folder 1978, AHMLFM-YMY.

¹⁷⁰ Luz María M and Yan María C, "Una Experiencia."

conditions of 1970s Mexico City severely limited public organizing for lesbian and homosexual liberation during this time. By promoting activism and speaking publicly about lesbianism, Cárdenas and Y. Castro helped plant the seeds for a public lesbian and homosexual liberation movement to develop in 1978 as the political climate grew more permissive of social protest. Due to persistent threats of police and government repression, most people who formed part of homosexual consciousness-raising groups and/or who were active in feminist and leftist movements in the 1970s did not publically identify with lesbian and homosexual liberation politics. Up until 1976 when Y. Castro also publically discussed lesbian issues (albeit using a pseudonym), Cárdenas was the only known exception. Throughout the 1970s, she utilized her status as a theatrical director and cosmopolitan public figure to initiate discussion on homosexuality and to condemn repression and discrimination of lesbians and homosexuals. Similar to feminist and countercultural movements of this time period, through engagement with the media and the arts, as well as via international trips and correspondence, Cárdenas and Y. Castro challenged social norms and state repression. Thus, this understudied time period of lesbian and homosexual activism can be considered politically formative rather than “pre-political.” Chapter two will further examine the ways in which the state intimidated and antagonized the emerging lesbian and homosexual liberation movement, as well as assess the continuing significance of socialist/communist politics and international ties to lesbian and homosexual organizing in Mexico City.

**CHAPTER 2: “NO ONE IS FREE UNTIL WE ARE ALL FREE”: LESBIAN AND
HOMOSEXUAL ACTIVISM, SOCIALIST POLITICS, AND
INTERNATIONALISM, 1978-1982**

Upon invitation, in October 1979 four members of the *Grupo Lambda de Liberación Homosexual* (Lambda Group of Homosexual Liberation, Lambda) from Mexico City traveled to Washington D.C. to participate as part of the Third World Caucus in the National March on Washington for Lesbian and gay Rights.¹⁷¹ Juan Jacobo Hernández Chávez of the The Homosexual Front for Revolutionary Action (Frente Homosexual de Acción Revolucionaria, FHAR), another Mexico City based group, also participated in the conference and demonstration. At the conference, the Coalition of Latin American Lesbians and Homosexuals formed and participants proposed that the next conference of Third World Gays, inclusive of all people of color living in the U.S., be held in Mexico in 1981.¹⁷² Claudia Hinojosa, one of Lambda’s founding members, reflects on the significance of her group’s participation in this landmark event:

It was incredible, for me participating in this march was an experience that marked my life forever. In the caucus we made a statement...It was totally incendiary, we said that we did not want rights, but wanted to subvert the social order. Then in the march we carried a pink banner that said ‘gays and lesbians for socialist feminism.’...because of our banner, in their news coverage, *The Washington Post* reported that we were a group of Latin American guerillas. Within the context of the Cold War, they immediately interpreted our statement on socialism to mean that we were guerillas (laughs)...But, in reality our discourse had nothing to do with civil rights, we wanted justice and to change the world.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ This conference was organized by the National Coalition of Black Gays and was primarily composed of people of color who during this time referred to themselves as “Third World.” Tony Henry, “Report on the Third World Lesbian and gay Conference,” Latin America box, Lesbian Herstory Archives of the Lesbian Herstory Educational Foundation, Inc. (LHA), Brooklyn, New York.

¹⁷² Max Mejia, “Manifestación de 200 mil en EUA contra el sexismo,” *Bandera Socialista*, November 5, 1979, 5. CDAHL.

¹⁷³ Claudia Hinojosa, Interview by the Author, September 27, 2010.



Figure 1: Photograph from the 1979 March on Washington, Personal Collection of Trinidad Gutiérrez and Marco Osorio.

As indicated in the above excerpt and quote, Mexico's lesbian and homosexual movement envisioned the struggle for lesbian and homosexual liberation in transnational terms, and were active participants in left internationalism. In the context of the Cold War, such political affiliations made Lambda suspect in the eyes of the Mexican state. Research in the archives of Mexico's secret police (DFS and IPS divisions) reveals that agents from both organizations infiltrated lesbian and homosexual organizations monitoring their meetings and events, such as the annual pride march in June that began in 1979. Many lesbian and homosexual activists were not only dual militants in the Mexican left, but also actively participated in international organizing for lesbian and homosexual liberation, forging networks and offering their ideological perspective as Latin American anti-imperialist socialist feminists. According to Alma A., after participating in the 1979 conference and march in Washington D.C., Lambda began to

use the rainbow flag to show solidarity with international movements whereas before they had used just the pink triangle and the Greek Lambda symbol.¹⁷⁴ However, as Hinojosa indicates in the above quote, though Mexican lesbians and homosexual activists identified with the international lesbian and gay movement, often adopting its symbols and working in coalition with it, their rhetoric and goals also supported socialist ideology and human rights rhetoric prevalent in Latin America at the time. Activists therefore employed human rights discourses in order to condemn authoritarian politics and political repression and adopted Trotskyist and Gramscian ideas concerning international revolution and democratization via civil society.

Lambda grew out of the consciousness-raising group Sex-Pol and was a mixed gender group, determined to “dar la cara” or “show their faces” in the struggle for lesbian and homosexual liberation and against state repression. It was one of three lesbian and homosexual organizations to emerge in Mexico City in 1978. The FHAR also formed in the spring of 1978 to combat state and police repression of homosexuality and organize a movement for homosexual liberation. Though the group included women, it was mostly composed of homosexual men, transvestites, and dragqueens. The organization Oikabeth, first formed as a lesbian cell of the FHAR, soon split off to create an autonomous lesbian feminist organization. The leaders of all three organizations were of middle and upper class origin, identified with socialist and anti-imperialist politics, and allied themselves with broad based struggles for social justice. The majority of participants in Lambda and Oikabeth were middle-class, while the FHAR organized primarily with the working-class. However, though they often coordinated actions, they also differed ideologically from one another, as well as practiced distinct organizational strategies. Lambda and

¹⁷⁴Alma A., interview by the author, Mexico City, August 5, 2010.

Oikabeth advocated for lesbian and homosexual liberation, feminism, and anti-imperialism, while the FHAR did not generally adopt feminist politics.¹⁷⁵ There were also disagreements both within organizations themselves and amongst the three organizations over whether the lesbian and homosexual movement should work to overthrow or to reform the Mexican state. All three organizations supported revolutionary developments elsewhere in Latin America, as well as communicated with international lesbian and gay organizations, particularly those that were leftist in political orientation. Of the three organizations, Lambda sustained the most long-term connections with such international organizations. Yet, as evidenced in various national and international communications, the FHAR considered itself to be the vanguard of homosexual activism in Mexico City and has therefore often been recorded as such in historical accounts.¹⁷⁶ In contrast to other histories of lesbian and homosexual activism in Mexico City during this time, this chapter focuses on feminist and internationalist queer politics, and thus does not consider FHAR to have been a vanguard organization¹⁷⁷

I contend that Mexico's lesbian and homosexual movement of the late 1970s simultaneously sought to bring the politics of lesbian and homosexual liberation to the Left, and instill a commitment to anti-imperialist politics in the international lesbian and gay movement. Lesbian and homosexual activists encouraged and incorporated a discourse of the inter-relationships between lesbian and homosexual and class and political repression. As left internationalist organizations, Lambda and other Mexico City

¹⁷⁵ Mogrovejo's research supports this contention, Mogrovejo 2000, 93-100.

¹⁷⁶ For example see Pat Brown, "The last radio-communicque of the FHAR to KPFA- Berkeley, A summary," Mexico Files, Canadian Lesbian and gay Archives (CLGA), 216. This conflict was also mentioned in various interviews, including with Alma A., Gutiérrez, Hinojosa, and Lizárraga Cruchaga.

¹⁷⁷ In her unpublished master's thesis Yolanda Pineda López also focuses on lesbian experiences within Lambda. Pineda López, "Militancia, Sexualidades, y Vida Cotidiana." 2006.

based lesbian and homosexual organizations initially relied on ideologies based in redistribution, but by the mid 1980s tended to employ a politics of both redistribution and recognition.¹⁷⁸ The time period under study in this chapter (1978-1982) is often considered the peak of early Mexican lesbian and homosexual activism and has been well documented and studied by activists and scholars.¹⁷⁹ Yet, little attention has been paid to activists' left internationalism, which included participation in transnational lesbian and gay networks, organizing with the Trotskyist IV International, and acting in solidarity with revolutionary movements in Latin America. Via their left internationalism, Lambda, in particular, brought Latin American perspectives to transnational lesbian and gay organizing, influencing such networks to support broad based campaigns for human rights and democratic reform in the Global South. Many of Lambda and Oikabeth's female members went on to become prominent leaders in lesbian and homosexual organizing in the 1980s and some continue through the present. At the same time as they worked to influence the ideological politics of transnational lesbian and gay organizing, Lambda and Oikabeth pushed the Mexican left to incorporate the politics of lesbian and homosexual liberation. The first part of the chapter will chronicle Lambda and Oikabeth's early activism within Mexico, examining both the historical context in which the groups emerged as well as their efforts to work in coalition with the Left. The second part of the chapter will concentrate on Lambda's participation in lesbian and gay transnational networks and the impacts such involvement made on both their own organizing and that of international groups. My intent in centering histories of

¹⁷⁸ This shift in political tactics coincides with Dagnino's contention that during this time of democratic transition, many Latin American social movements experienced a Gramscian inspired turn from revolutionary to democratic politics.

¹⁷⁹ For example, see de la Dehesa 2011, Mogrovejo 2000, and Pineda López 2006.

transnational activism is not an attempt to universalize the histories of lesbian and gay movements globally, but to understand why an international vision of lesbian and gay liberation and the forging of transnational networks were so important to Mexico City lesbian and homosexual activists.

Mexico's "Doble Discurso:" Political Reform Amidst continued Government Repression

The political environment in which Mexico's homosexual and lesbian movement emerged publically in 1978 can be characterized as both one of reform and one in which the left continued to face intimidation and repression from the government. In using the term "left," I am referring to both the partisan and revolutionary left. The former was composed of socialist and communist political parties that sought to seize control of the state through electoral participation, and the latter were organizations, many influenced by Maoism, that wanted to overthrow the state in violent revolution.¹⁸⁰ All segments of the left opposed prevailing authoritarian politics in Mexico. In 1976 Mexico's economy faced considerable trouble, including high inflation, debt, and a peso devaluation. Seeking to stabilize the economy, upon leaving his presidency, Echeverría signed an agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for 1.2 billion dollars.¹⁸¹ In return, the Mexican state agreed to austerity measures which severely cut funds allotted to public services, and in 1977 president José López Portillo (1976-1982) decided to increase oil exports exponentially in order to bolster the economy. As a result of the

¹⁸⁰ For more information on the partisan left and Mexican lesbian and gay activism see de la Dehesa 2011, 61.

¹⁸¹ Francisco E. González, *Dual Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Institutionalized Regimes in Chile and Mexico, 1970-2000* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 2008): 64.

strengthening of Cold War international human rights mechanisms under the leadership of U.S. president Jimmy Carter, the Mexican government also became more concerned with portraying itself as a country which supported democratic principles. The best example of such efforts to expand democracy is the enactment of what has become known as the “reforma política” or political reform through the enactment of the Political Reform Law (Ley de Organizaciones Políticas y Procesos Electorales, LOPPE) in December 1977. This law allowed oppositional political parties such as the PCM to legally register and compete in elections.¹⁸² Attempting to appease protesters and clear Mexico’s human rights record, in September 1978 López Portillo also passed an amnesty law which purported to release all political prisoners except those accused of murder or domestic terrorism. Yet, this measure was highly criticized by the left because many non-violent leftist militants accused of terrorism were not released. In an article published in the journal *Análisis Político* in 1979, the author explains,

At the same time as Mexico tries to instate the Political Reform, it attempts to present itself to outside powers as a country with a representative democratic system. At the same time, the Mexican government lends unconditional support to the newly formed Nicaraguan government; meanwhile within Mexico intellectuals, movie producers, workers and farmers are repressed, all this occurs as the Mexican government disregards the same laws that they have decreed-this is the case with the Amnesty Law passed in September 1978...the majority of radical dissidents did not benefit from this law.¹⁸³

Hinojosa has referred to such political contradictions as part of Mexico’s “doble discurso,” or double standards during this time period where the government created the “reforma política,” and supported leftist movements in Latin America, yet repressed what

¹⁸² Agustín 2007, 14 and Carr 1992, 280.

¹⁸³ N.A., “Análisis: La Debilidad de los Perseguidos,” *Análisis Político* 71 (8/13/1979), 246, AGN, IPS, Box 1636-A, Folder 1. Also see Elena Poniatowska, “Los Que Desaparecan en México, Jóvenes y Pobres,” *Proceso* 171 (2/11/1980), 6-9, AGN, IPS, Box 1636-A, Folder 1.

they considered leftist dissidence within its own borders.¹⁸⁴ In many ways the “reforma política” reinvigorated civil society sparking a resurgence of the movement for democratization that continued to gain prominence throughout the 1980s with the rising influence of urban popular movements. Yet, prominent intellectuals like Elena Poniatowska, political parties such as the PCM and the PRT, as well as the newly formed *El Frente Nacional Contra la Represión* (The National Front Against Repression and for Democratic Liberties and Solidarity, FNCR), a coalition of groups headed by the National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners, the Persecuted and Disappeared also critiqued this “doble discurso” and condemned the amnesty law for not releasing many leftist dissidents. Likewise, in 1979 Amnesty International accused Mexico of human rights abuses, specifically kidnappings, tortures, and assassinations, which the López Portillo government quickly and widely refuted. According to the Mexican government officials, there were no longer political prisoners in Mexico and the government imprisoned “terrorists” who were threatening the state only in order to protect “national security.”¹⁸⁵ The Mexican government’s claim that those considered by human rights agencies to be political prisoners were actually terrorists were remarkably similar to those offered by dictatorial regimes in Chile and Argentina, also accused of human rights violations during this time.¹⁸⁶

While these reforms were significant in terms of increased access to the electoral system and the release of some political prisoners, repression of the left continued during

¹⁸⁴ Hinojosa, interview.

¹⁸⁵ N.A., “Mexico ya preocupa a Amnistía Internacional,” *Proceso* 118 (2/5/79), 95, AGN, IPS, Box 1636-A, Folder 1 and Edith Jiménez, “Ningún Preso Político; hay Reos de Crimen o Robo: JLP,” Journal title not visible (2/22/1980), AGN, IPS, Box 1636-A, Folder 1.

¹⁸⁶ For example see James N. Green, *We Cannot Remain Silent: Opposition to the Brazilian Military Dictatorship in the United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010): 209 and 217.

the administration of López Portillo. Various agencies of the government including the *Brigada Blanca*, a paramilitary government agency under the direction of Miguel Nazar Haro, monitored, intimidated, and under certain circumstances, violently repressed leftist social movements and political parties.¹⁸⁷ As discussed in chapter one, lesbian and homosexual gatherings were often raided by the police and participants extorted and arrested. Because the lesbian and homosexual liberation movement emerged in 1978 aligned with the left, the government immediately treated them as such, monitoring the activities of and harassing members of these organizations. Research in the archives of the Dirección Federal de Seguridad (DFS) and the División de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales (IPS) reveals that agents from both organizations infiltrated Lambda, the FHAR, and Oikabeth monitoring their meetings and events, such as the annual pride march in June that began in 1979. Secret police reports show that agents, including Nazar Haro, the director of the DFS, followed the actions of movement leaders, reporting on their activities and taking numerous photographs of activists at demonstrations.¹⁸⁸ Thus, as stated by Yolanda Pineda López, in the late 1970s and early 1980s “the social situation of lesbians and homosexuals was of repression, oppression and extortion manifested in ‘moral lynching’ and physical suppression”¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ See Sergio Aguayo Quezada, *La Charola: Una Historia de los Servicios de Inteligencia en México* (Mexico DF: Editorial Grijalbo, 2001) and Jorge Torres, *Nazar, La Historia Secreta: El Hombre detrás de la Guerra Sucia* (Mexico DF: Random House Mondadori, 2008).

¹⁸⁸ I found various secret police reports about Lambda, the FHAR and Oikabeth from 1978-1986. The AGN only holds IPS records until 1982. The majority of DFS report from the late 1970s and early 1980s were signed by DFS Director, Nazar Haro.

¹⁸⁹ Pineda López 2006, 71.

Lesbian and Homosexual Liberation Groups Organize

On July 26, 1978, FHAR became the first Mexican homosexual or lesbian group to demonstrate publicly, marching as a contingent in a commemorative march for the Cuban Revolution. After reading in the newspaper about a group of men from the FHAR marching in the July 26th demonstration in solidarity with Cuba, Y. Castro and Medina formerly of Lesbos contacted the men and decided to form a lesbian contingent called Oikabeth as part of the larger group. According to Y. Castro and Medina, the term Oikabeth derives from Mayan words that roughly mean “a guerilla women’s movement that opens a path to grow flowers.”¹⁹⁰ In September 1978 Lambda, the FHAR, and Oikabeth created a coalition thereafter referred to as the Coordinating Committee of Homosexual Groups (CGH) in order to combat police repression, and for the rights to employment, free association, expression, and meeting.¹⁹¹ The first event in which they collaborated was a march on October 2, 1978 in remembrance of the 1968 student massacre at Tlatelolco in which all three groups walked together as a contingent. Protestors carried banners connecting lesbian and homosexual liberation to struggles for democratization and shouted such chants as “ No hay libertad political sin libertad sexual” (“There is no political liberty without sexual liberty“), and “Nadie es libre hasta que todos seamos libres” (No one is free until we are all free), chants that would live on over the years. In a flyer distributed at the march, Oikabeth sought to identify with the struggles of the Mexican left and self-described themselves as a “revolutionary” lesbian group. The flyer described lesbians as suffering from a quadruple oppression, 1) for being part of a country colonized by imperialism 2) as workers exploited by the capitalist class

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Jeanette Becerra Acosta, “Protestas por las razzias que realiza la policia en contra de los homosexuales,” *Uno Más Uno*, September 30, 1978, 28. CDAHL.

3) as women dominated by patriarchy and 4) as lesbians oppressed by a homophobic culture.¹⁹² Interesting and perhaps coincidental, this conceptualization of a quadruple oppression was similar to those first made by various women of color lesbian organizations in the U.S. during the late 1970s. Like the Boston-based African-American lesbian feminist organization the Combahee River Collective whose organizational statement was published and began circulating in 1977, Oikabeth articulated the varying oppressions they experienced as Third World lesbians as interlocking.¹⁹³ Both groups employed Marxist and feminist theories to explain their status as multiply oppressed women of color and lesbians. Yet, the two groups' analyses differed in that Oikabeth women, who were differentially situated in the global order as Mexican nationals, articulated their struggle as one against imperialism, rather than against racism. Various members of the group also sought to bring both indigenous and Buddhist based spiritual philosophy to the group.

According to participants, the contingent of lesbians and homosexuals in the October 2nd march met both apprehension and unforeseen support from the left. Lambda's Alma A. remembers that the PCM left almost a block's distance between their contingent and that of the lesbians and homosexuals so nobody would think that they were together. Yet, she also recalls that many spectators applauded them upon entering the Plaza of Tlatelolco.¹⁹⁴ The media also covered the event, reporting on the participation of lesbians and homosexuals, and identifying Cárdenas and Y. Castro as already known leaders, who according to news reports, collaborated with one another in this demonstration. For example, the day after the march, the prominent daily newspaper

¹⁹² Grupo de Lesbianas Oikabeth, Organizational Flyer, AGN, DFS, October 2, 1978.

¹⁹³ Combahee River Collective, "The Combahee River Collective Statement," 1977.

¹⁹⁴ Alma A., interview.

Excelsi3r reported “The theatre director Nancy C3rdenas and Yan Mar3a Castro, led a mixed a group of homosexuals that were demanding the end of sexual and political repression.”¹⁹⁵ Media coverage of lesbian and gay participation served to increase public awareness of the emerging movement.

As well as participating in mass demonstrations, Lambda and Oikabeth held meetings and events to raise consciousness of lesbian and homosexual issues and to organize against discrimination and state repression. Four of Lambda’s founders, Alma A., Hinojosa, Xabier Liz3rraga Cruchaga, and Jos3 Ram3n, all members of Sex-Pol, had marched together in Barcelona’s first gay and lesbian pride march, the year prior. Alma A., Hinojosa, and Enriquez went to Spain to visit Liz3rraga Cruchaga who was studying in Barcelona during this time period and there decided to attend the pride march. Though Franco had recently left power the political environment was still highly repressive and marchers were attacked with rubber bullets. Yet, the fact that Spanish lesbians and homosexuals were willing to demonstrate publically under such conditions served as an inspiration to the four to do the same upon return to Mexico. Thus, Lambda formed in June 1978 as a membership-based organization and persisted until 1985. Members met both in large assemblies and in smaller committees, including a feminist committee headed by Hinojosa and Alma A. There were also a few active members of Lambda from the United States, one of whom edited the newsletter, *Nuevo Ambiente*.¹⁹⁶ Throughout its duration, Lambda also helped to form other homosexual liberation organizations in Mexico, such as The Liberation Group for Gay Pride (GOHL) in Guadalajara. The main way in which Lambda advertised their meetings and events was through street graffiti

¹⁹⁵ Pineda L3pez, 74.

¹⁹⁶ Though I feel it is important to mention their participation, I unfortunately have been unable to establish contact with any of these people.

inviting people to join their movement. At night, Lambda members would risk police harassment and possibly arrest in order to seek out new members and to get their messages across to the public.

As previously mentioned, many of the groups' first members had been active in Sex-Pol where they read and discussed such works as Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics*, as well as texts by Karl Marx and William Reich. Through communication with various gay leftist groups in the U.S. and Europe, Lambda activists continued to receive and read socialist, feminist, and gay left literature produced abroad. In its seven year existence Lambda produced an impressive amount of their own publications that, like the foreign literature they read and discussed, established connections between homosexual and lesbian liberation, feminism, socialism, and anti-imperialism. Like elements of the gay left in the U.S., particularly Third World organizations like Boston's Combahee River Collective, allying with other groups working for social justice, including feminists and socialists, was central to Lambda's mission.¹⁹⁷ In a publication entitled "Rojas, Liberadas, y Diferentes (Red, Liberated, and Different)" Lambda explained the use of these ideologies:

...when we talk about socialist feminism and of the necessity for a comprehensive revolution as a condition for our emancipation, we are not saying that we will wait until the advent of a new society in order to live our homosexuality openly. For us it is clear that if we fight for feminist socialism it is because we do not accept current classist relations, sex roles, racism, and ageism. Rather, we seek...ways to be in solidarity and in relationship with all oppressed peoples.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ Tommi Aviccolli Mecca, ed., *Smash the Church, Smash the State!: The Early Years of Gay Liberation* (San Francisco: City Light Books, 2009), Emily K. Hobson, *Imagining Alliance: Queer Anti-Imperialism and Race in California, 1966-1990* (PhD Dissertation: University of Southern California, 2009), and Zillah Eisenstein, "The Combahee River Collective Statement" in Barbara Smith, ed., *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (New York: Kitchen Table Press, 1983).

¹⁹⁸ Lambda, "Rojas, Liberadas, y Diferentes," no date, Personal Archive of Trinidad Gutiérrez and Marco Osorio.

Thus, similar to the gay and lesbian left in the U.S. and segments of the feminist, gay, and lesbian movements in Mexico, Lambda believed that ending capitalism would result in the destruction of the nuclear family as the primary economic and social unit.¹⁹⁹

Oikabeth held to similar beliefs, and also sought to unite the lesbian feminist movement with local and international Marxist struggles as indicated in their mission statement:

To be lesbian is the capacity to love another woman. To be consciously lesbian is the capacity of women loving each other, to struggle for a new society. Oikabeth is struggling for the following objectives: 1) For the eradication of the sexual discrimination and repression against lesbians in particular and homosexuals and women in general; 2) For the abolition of capitalist and patriarchal class oppression based on the exploitation of labor, sexism, racism, and ageism; 3) For the participation of organized lesbians in the construction of socialism.²⁰⁰

Oikabeth split with the FHAR at the end of 1978 after activists became tired of the multiple instances of sexism they experienced from their male counterparts, including verbal assault from certain members.²⁰¹ Oikabeth was not alone in their feelings that the FHAR, as a majority male organization often exhibited chauvinistic attitudes towards lesbians, marginalizing their issues and experiences. It was for these very reasons that Lambda formed separately from the FHAR as a mixed gender feminist homosexual liberation organization. According to Y. Castro, Oikabeth decided to organize autonomously because they realized that gay men were part of the patriarchy and thus not “naturally” inclined to support lesbian struggles.²⁰² Thereafter, Oikabeth centered their efforts on creating coalitions with other lesbians and with heterosexual feminists rather

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, Hobson 2009.

²⁰⁰ Oikabeth organizational statement, translated into English, n/d circa 1978. LHA, New York, NY.

²⁰¹ While organizational documents found do not elaborate on whether there was a specific instance of sexism that triggered Oikabeth to formally cut ties, and, in an interview with the author, Y. Castro discusses a series of events leading up to the split, Mogrovejo quotes Y. Castro as citing a specific instance of verbal aggression that resulted in Oikabeth’s split from the FHAR. Mogrovejo 2000, 82.

²⁰² Y. Castro, interview.

than gay men.²⁰³ For example, in December 1978 lesbians from various organizations, including Lesbos, Oikabeth, Lambda, Lesbianas Socialistas y Lesbianas del FHAR met at The First Lesbian and Feminist Gathering at the house of Nancy Cárdenas in Cuernavaca, Morelos.²⁰⁴ This meeting was the first in which heterosexual and lesbian feminists met together to discuss the goals of lesbian liberation. As a result of new understandings generated at the conference, lesbian and heterosexual feminist organizations of the left began to work together more collaboratively than they ever had.

Thus, as an autonomous lesbian feminist organization, Oikabeth worked in coalition with feminist organizations and the FHAR and Lambda, but organized separately. Group activities included consciousness-raising circles, political theory discussion groups, and workshops focused on culture and the arts. Like Lambda and FHAR, leaders recruited members by using street graffiti and flyers announcing meetings, as well as through participation in leftist and feminist demonstrations and conferences. Yet, though Oikabeth's leaders espoused Marxist feminist beliefs, there was significant conflict within the group over how politically involved they should be, as well as about what kind of political commitment prospective members should be expected to make. According to Medina, in the first year of its existence, up to sixty women filed in and out of group meetings which were held in members' homes and another 200 people sporadically attended group activities.²⁰⁵ Due to substantial interest in the group, but somewhat sporadic attendance, leaders formed a sub-group called Pre-Oikabeth for new integrants. In order to enter into Oikabeth women were required to read five books:

²⁰³ Y. Castro, interview

²⁰⁴ N.A., "Primer Encuentro de Lesbianas y Feministas," in *Política Sexual: Cuadernos del Frente Homosexual de Acción Revolucionaria*, 1979, LHA, New York, New York.

²⁰⁵ Luz María Medina, Unnamed document attributed to Medina describing the composition and organizational structure of Oikabeth, AHMLFM-YMY.

Capital by Karl Marx, *The Origin of the Family* by Friedrich Engels, and *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir, *The Art of Loving* by Erich Fromm, and *Human Sexual Response* by William H. Masters and Virginia E. Johnson. These books were meant to give participants grounding in the Marxist feminist ideologies supported by Oikabeth's founders.²⁰⁶

Yet, inherent in the expectation of reading such texts was the assumption that group members would be educated and interested in political philosophies. Oikabeth leaders soon realized that this was not necessarily the case. As a result, by the end of the first year of the group's existence, such political schisms led to the formation of two currents within the larger group.²⁰⁷ Y. Castro and Medina led the group alternatively known as *Lesbianas Socialistas Feministas* and *Lesbianas Feministas Comunistas* and Patria Jiménez, a younger integrant to Oikabeth, organized a group of women known as *La Comunidad Creativa*. Between 1978 and 1982 these groups met with very different agendas, but at the same time did not exist totally exclusive of one another and some women worked in both factions. As described in 1979 by Jiménez in the magazine *Círculo Once* "this community is composed of twenty-five young women divided in communes which dedicate themselves to create traditional craftworks, drawings, paintings, designs, artistic photography, and research related to homosexuality in Mexico and the rest of the world."²⁰⁸ Members of the *Comunidad Creativa* also collaborated with women from Lambda actively participating in the "Jueves de Mujeres," a weekly cultural event just for lesbians that often included music and poetry. At the same time, *Lesbianas*

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Mogrovjo's documentation of these conflicts has been highly critiqued by both of these women, as well as by other lesbian activists in Mexico City.

²⁰⁸ Verano, "Jueves... Juventud y Talento," *Círculo Once* 1:1 (September 1979), AHMLFM-YMY.

Feministas Comunistas continued to uphold Oikabeth's original mission and organized with local Marxist groups and other members of the homosexual liberation movement to support workers struggles within Mexico and to protest what they saw as the U.S.'s imperialist politics in Central America. However, due to ever-increasing ideological and personal differences, in 1982 *Lesbianas Feministas Comunistas* split off from Oikabeth and Jiménez became known as Oikabeth's leader.

Banners and slogans employed by Oikabeth in demonstrations articulated sexual liberation as a transnational struggle against imperialism, capitalism, and sexism and included "Lesbians with the people of El Salvador," "Lesbianism is a Dignified Lifestyle," "Machismo Represses Lesbianism," and "People, Lesbians are in the Struggle with You."²⁰⁹ According to Y. Castro, in Oikabeth's first year more than 200 women from the group participated in union and anti-imperialist marches and distributed 20,000 fliers and 4,000 posters, educating the public about the group's goals and beliefs. For example, they created pamphlets for distribution to students and labor unions such as one entitled "Lesbianism and Society" which explained their political principles. This flyer pictures two women clad with rifles holding hands and, drawing from writings of Marx and Engels and more recent Marxist feminist theories, argued that because lesbians did not perform the economic function of "woman," they were inherently subversive in the threat they posed to patriarchy and the very structure of capitalism. According to the authors of this pamphlet and others distributed by the group, when lesbians adopted a socialist perspective opposing all forms of oppression, they would become revolutionaries. Thus, attempting to bring queer politics to the left, *Lesbianas Comunistas*

²⁰⁹ AGN, IPS, 1954B, Folder 3, 28 de junio de 1978, "Marcha Homosexuales-Lesbianas" and 1898B, Folder 4, "Comemoración 10 de Junio," 11 de Junio de 1981.

encouraged their fellow Marxist and heterosexual feminists activists to understand lesbians as revolutionaries acting in resistance to capitalism, imperialism, and patriarchy.²¹⁰

Different from segments of Oikabeth and Lesbianas Feministas Comunistas, Lambda did not generally work to overthrow the state apparatus, but sought to transform everyday realities via social and political reform and the incorporation of socialist parties into the state.²¹¹ A significant portion of their work revolved around increasing visibility of lesbians and homosexuals through education and the writing of position papers presented at a variety of academic and activist conferences. For example, in a paper entitled “A lesbian perspective on lesbianism” presented by Hinojosa at the IV World Congress on Sexology held in Mexico City in December 1979 she critiques psychiatry for repressing lesbian sexuality stating,

The time for justification has passed and the moment has come to confront the institutions that have legitimated the repression and stigmatizing of lesbianism. There is no problem with lesbianism, the problem is the society that we lesbians live in. To put it in so many words, the causes of the lesbian ‘problem’ are purely ideological.²¹²

Throughout their tenure, Lambda members consistently used such academic and medical venues to challenge institutionalized repression and discrimination against lesbians and homosexuals. In these spaces, as well as within feminist circles, lesbians also sought to increase discussion specifically about lesbianism and the particular struggles that lesbians faced as women in society.

²¹⁰ Oikabeth, Pamphlet, “Lesbianismo y Sociedad,” 1980. and Lesbianas Socialistas, Flyer, “Lesbianismo,” 1981, AHMLFM-YMY.

²¹¹ Carr 1992, 236.

²¹² Claudia Hinojosa, “Una perspectiva lesbiana del Lesbianismo,” IV World Congress on Sexology, Mexico City, December 12, 1979. Personal Archive of Trinidad Gutierrez and Marco Osorio.

In 1979 Lambda and Oikabeth became members of the National Front for the Liberation of Women (Frente Nacional de Lucha por la Liberación de la Mujer, FNALIDM), a feminist organization with ties to the Trotskyist *Partido Revolucionario de Trabajadores* (Revolutionary Workers Party, PRT) and the PCM. Lambda women simultaneously encouraged activism around lesbian politics within the FNALIDM and feminist politics within Lambda. Lambda and Oikabeth participated actively in FNALIDM, for example attending marches and rallies for abortion rights and against violence against women. Yet, for fear of themselves being labeled as lesbians, FNALIDM leaders hesitated to actively support lesbian and homosexual liberation and reciprocate solidarity for Lambda or Oikabeth's causes.²¹³ Within Lambda itself, men and women adopted feminist ideologies and to varying degrees, participated in the feminist movement. As mentioned previously, Lambda formed as a feminist organization with the understanding that gender and homosexual repression were intrinsically bound, one needing the other to be abolished. Reflecting on the dynamics of being a mixed gender feminist group, in 1979 lesbian activists from Lambda stated in a circulated document,

Lambda has arisen circumstantially as a mixed group and we consider that our participation as lesbian feminists is very important within the general movement for homosexual liberation. Throughout our past year of work, we have made significant accomplishments, many of our male members have not only expressed interest in our problems, but have dedicated time and work to women's activities that we have organized within our group. Some have begun to change their ways of relating to women in general and have learned to be critical of our sexist society.²¹⁴

In interviews, Alma A., Hinojosa, and Gutiérrez all described making a conscious decision to work with a mixed gender group rather than a lesbian group like Oikabeth in

²¹³ Pineda López, 98.

²¹⁴ Grupo Lambda de Liberación Homosexual, "II Reunión de Mujeres." Cuernavaca, Morelos, June 23, 1979, Personal Archive of Trinidad Gutiérrez and Marco Osorio.

order to foster relationships with gay men as a way to work towards the abolition of sexism and sexual repression. In fact, according to these women from Lambda, men adopting feminism and changing macho attitudes was a new and rare phenomenon in Mexico City, and one which they thought that the broader left should emulate.

Forging Alliances with Mexican Left

Members of Lambda were committed to “dar la cara” introducing discussions of sexuality and feminism into medical fields, as well as within the heterosexual feminist movement and the socialist/communist left, in particular with the PRT the FNCR. Whereas Lambda’s Hinojosa, Lizárraga Cruchaga, and Alma A., the latter two with backgrounds in psychology, attended the 1979 sexology conference seeking to challenge psychiatric conceptions of homosexuality, other members of Lambda like Max Mejía, Danny Laird, and Gutiérrez had come to the group with experience in the left, both in Mexico and in New York City. Mejía moved from Colima to Mexico City in 1974 to attend la Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia (ENAH). He had participated with the PRT in Colima and continued to do so in Mexico City where he fast became a well known leader within the party.²¹⁵ In the late 1970s Laird moved to Mexico City from New York City where he had worked with the Trotskyists. In Mexico City he also became active with the PRT before working with Lambda. The PRT formed in 1976 and was connected to the IV International though all party decisions were made on the national level. As de la Dehesa has discussed in more detail, the PRT was largely a youth movement and much of the leadership of the PRT

²¹⁵ Max Mejía, correspondence with the author, August 30, 2010.

and the early gay and lesbian liberation groups came out of '68 organizing and countercultural movements.²¹⁶ de la Dehesa explains,

In both Brazil and Mexico transnational frames reinscribing the body, sexuality, and the political influenced youth countercultures challenging dominant constructions of nationhood; homoerotic subcultures recasting sexual identities and ultimately left party militants crafting new appeals that resonated with specific, more receptive audiences.²¹⁷

Thus, coinciding with a general trend amongst the Latin American left beginning in the late 1970s, the PRT's approach could be considered Gramscian in approach emphasizing the emancipation of civil society, rather than simply workers.²¹⁸ As a political party led by a majority of young people who either had participated in or been influenced by countercultural currents, the PRT essentially "queered itself," immediately supporting the emerging lesbian and homosexual liberation movement in 1978. In turn, lesbian and gay activists, a majority from Lambda, sought to establish organizational ties with the PRT. As Trotskyists, the PRT believed in the idea of permanent worldwide revolution and thus, like Lambda, held a very internationalist perspective on socialist activism. In an interview, Hinojosa attributes much of Lambda's formative internationalism to the affiliation between Lambda and the PRT, "...I became very good friends with Max Mejía who was a member of the PRT, much of the enthusiasm for internationalism came from there, from the IV International and conversations with people from the PRT...."²¹⁹

After the first public demonstrations of gays and lesbians in Mexico City, the PRT immediately published its support for the struggle within its weekly newspaper, *La Bandera Socialista* and began to publically defend homosexual and lesbian

²¹⁶ de la Dehesa 2010, 70-77.

²¹⁷ de la Dehesa 2010, 85.

²¹⁸ Evelina Dagnino, "Culture, Citizenship, and Democracy: Changing Discourses and Practices of the Latin American Left," *Cultures of Politics, Politics of Culture* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998): 33-63.

²¹⁹ Hinojosa, interview.

liberation. In a public statement they criticized segments of the left who either failed to support or ridiculed gay and lesbian rights activists and said, “This first step in the organizing of this minority group that has been oppressed for centuries should be wholeheartedly received by organizations of the Left and all progressives...”²²⁰ At this moment, following the current that the United Secretariat of the IV International (Trotskyist) would take in 1979, the PRT abandoned the dominant socialist line that homosexuality was bourgeois and broke with nationalist and socialist ideas maintaining the centrality of the heterosexual family as the backbone of “the struggle.” According to Hinojosa, up until this point it was common for the left to say that the gay and feminist movements were part of a conspiracy plot of the CIA to infiltrate Latin American leftist movements with American ideas and destabilize them.²²¹ As discussed briefly in chapter one, the Mexican left, similar to in other countries, considered male homosexuality as a “loss of masculinity” and therefore a form of “political treason” against the movement.²²² Likewise, the official line of the ruling PRI relied on the idea of Mexico as one big nuclear “revolutionary family” where men and women had clearly defined gender specific roles. According to Eric Zolov, this “gendered order” that translated over into all aspects of Mexican life, “was one in which the father was stern in his benevolence, the mother saintly in her maternity, and the children loyal in their obedience.” Such an order offered no room for deviance from heteronormativity.²²³

²²⁰ La Bandera Socialista, “Saludo al FHAR,” *La Bandera Socialista*, October 7, 1978, NACLA Mexico Reels, 8-11, University of New Mexico.

²²¹ Hinojosa, interview .

²²² For example see *El Bilingue*, “The Left Talks about Homosexuality in Mexico,” *El Bilingue*, Folder 15, Latin America collection, LHA, New York, New York.

²²³ Zolov 1999, 4-5.

In contrast, the PRT actively supported the lesbian and homosexual movement from that time forward, attending meetings and demonstrations and advocating on a national level for lesbian and homosexual rights. In 1978 the PRT created the Homosexual Work Commission “with a dual agenda of raising awareness of homosexual liberation in the party and a socialist agenda in the movement.”²²⁴ Throughout 1979 and 1980 weekly editions of the PRT’s paper *La Bandera Socialista* spoke of issues related to political repression of the left, specifically concerning the impunity of the government in regards to oppression of those considered politically dissident, including lesbians and homosexuals.²²⁵ Thus, like much of the left, a primary goal of the PRT was to challenge the police and political repression of the 1970s and 1980s, in which many lesbians and homosexuals were directly victimized. The PRT, the FNCR, Lambda, Oikabeth, the FHAR, amongst others, actively contested such political impunity and demanded that their constitutional rights be respected. For example, in an article published in the late 1970s entitled “Neither Lesbianism or Homosexuality are Crimes,” Hinojosa condemned the daily anti-constitutional harassment of gays and lesbians by both uniformed and non-uniformed police. In an interview with the author she describes being the victim of such intimidation,

They conducted campaigns of intimidation against us, similar to what they did to leftist activists, no? For example, they broke into my car—they didn’t rob anything, but went through everything—this was typical, no? This also happened at my house and in my work, they were attempting to relay the message, ‘ we have you controlled and you should be very careful about what you say.’ And this happened during the time of ‘political reform’, the government continued to intimidate.²²⁶

²²⁴ de la Dehesa 2011, 82.

²²⁵ *La Bandera Socialista*, “Por que participa el movimiento homosexual en las elecciones,” *La Bandera Socialista*, NACLA Mexico Reels, 8-11, University of New Mexico.

²²⁶ Hinojosa, interview.

Alma A. also discusses personal experiences of extortion and harassment from the police and recalls having her agenda taken from her and the police subsequently calling her personal numbers “outing” her to colleagues. As a result, she lost a scholarship to the university.²²⁷ She also discussed how men who were harassed by the police were often forced to put wigs and lipstick on for pictures that would then appear in tabloids like *Alarma*. According to Alma A., this kind of harassment made organizing for lesbian and homosexual liberation very challenging, “the actions of the police reflected those of the government, it was very difficult to organize, it was nothing easy.”²²⁸ Yet, lesbians and homosexuals did organize multiple demonstrations in response to police harassment and violence. Members of feminist groups and of the PRT often attended such demonstrations in solidarity. Thus, though timed to occur in conjunction with pride celebrations in the U.S., Mexican activists generally utilized early “pride parades” as opportunities to protest repression rather than focus on the celebration of lesbian and homosexual identities.

As de la Dehesa’s research elucidates, the PRT’s support for gay and lesbian rights and activists from Lambda, Oikabeth, and the FHAR’s support for socialism, garnered attention within the broader left. The influence of such alliances is exemplified by the PCM’s changing stance towards homosexuality. While they did not attract as much support from the lesbian and homosexual movement to their party in the early 1980s as the PRT did, the Mexican Communist Party passed a resolution in 1980 supporting the rights of gays and lesbians stating “A proletarian or revolutionary sexuality nor a bourgeois or reactionary sexuality exists, there are no normal or abnormal forms of sexuality, each individual should have the rights to express his/her sexuality as

²²⁷ Alma A., interview.

²²⁸ Alma A., interview.

he/she understands it.” This statement referred to as the 29th Thesis of the PCM elicited significant enthusiasm within Lambda and the broader lesbian and homosexual movement and its accomplishment was generally attributed to the rising influence of lesbian and homosexual activism on the Mexican left.²²⁹ While this research does not focus on the history of the PCM because Lambda leaders tended to work with the PRT, it is important to point out that this statement in support of homosexual liberation marked a significant process in which the PCM sought to re-make its image as a progressive movement entirely separate from the ruling PRI party. At this time, the PRI made no formal attempt to support homosexual liberation. Thus, while there is some validity in assertions that the partisan left at times offended and distanced the gay and lesbian movement, and that they championed the idea that women’s and gay and lesbian rights would be fulfilled after the coming of the revolution, this was not always true, particularly in the case of the PRT and of the PCM.²³⁰

Though some members of Oikabeth and *Lesbianas Feministas Comunistas* were dual militants of the partisan left, as an organization they focused on gaining legitimacy within the revolutionary left, rather than working directly with political parties. Through their activism, Oikabeth sought to queer the left. In their statements they frequently proclaimed, “we claim their right to participate in the construction of socialism.”²³¹ To advertise the group and promote lesbian visibility, Y. Castro and other artists within the group including Patria Jiménez often created artwork to help get their Marxist feminist messages across. For example, after receiving a donation from a university affiliated

²²⁹ Gutiérrez, interview, and Lambda, “Comentario del Grupo Lambda a la Tesis 29 del PCM,” Personal Collection of Trinidad Gutiérrez and Marco Osorio.

²³⁰ For example, see Mogrovejo’s analysis, Mogrovejo 2000.

²³¹ Grupo de Lesbianas Oikabeth, Organizational Flyer, AGN, DFS, October 2, 1978.

union, Y. Castro and Jiménez made a poster advertising the second national gay pride march featuring a picture of a woman and the slogan “lesbianism and revolution.”



Figure 2: Oikabeth, Flyer for the 2nd National Homosexual and Lesbian Pride March, “Lesbianismo y Revolución,” 1980, AHMLFM-YMY.

The flier called for women to “choose lesbianism,” to stop living in silence, and to claim their space in the world. According to Y. Castro, they posted the flyer throughout many working class neighborhoods and in the process were constantly running from the police who during this time made a practice out of harassing lesbian and gay activists. As with Lambda, if activists were caught hanging posters or writing graffiti advertising their group’s activities, it was common practice for police to extort money and/or threaten to publically humiliate lesbians and gays through such measures as publishing compromising photographs of them in Mexico City’s daily tabloids. In order to monitor what was considered Oikabeth and *Lesbianas Feministas Comunistas*’ “subversive” activities and political alliances, government surveillance agencies consistently planted

agents in meetings and demonstrations. Secret police reports reveal that government agents monitored Oikabeth and *Lesbianas Feministas Comunistas* work with labor unions, feminist, and human rights organizations such as the National Front Against Repression, FNALIDM, and the Group in Solidarity with El Salvador.

Though Oikabeth as a group did not take an official position on guerilla warfare, images that Oikabeth used during this time period could be seen to be advocating for armed struggle against the government and featured women as guerillas clad with rifles. For example, in a flyer entitled “Lesbianism and the Class Struggle” two women appear jointly holding a rifle above a caption that states, ”sexual repression is one of the most effective political arms of social control.”²³²

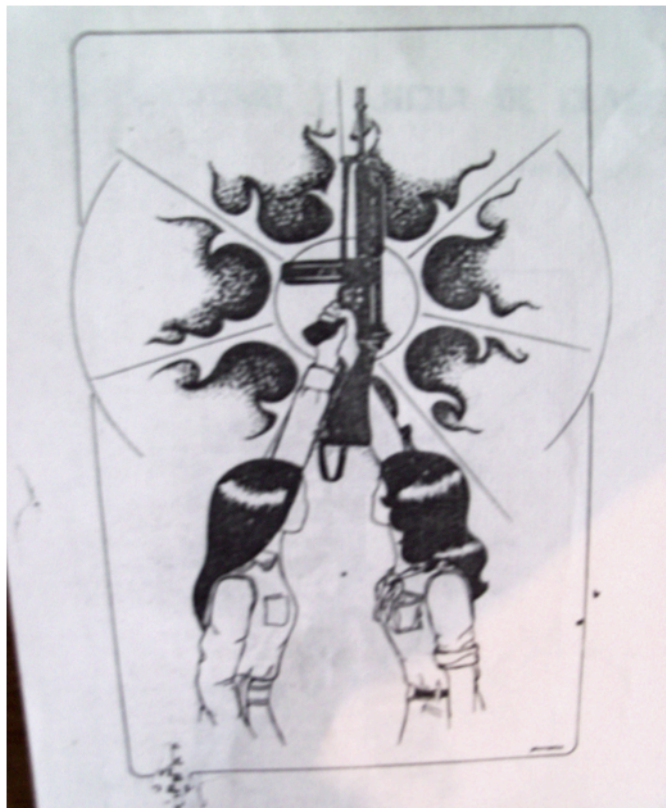


Figure 3: Yan María Castro, Flyer, “Lesbianismo y Lucha de Clases,” n.d., AHMLFM-YMY.

²³² Yan María Castro, Flyer, “Lesbianismo y Lucha de Clases,” n.d., AHMLFM-YMY.

Similar to the article referenced above, the pamphlet goes on to argue that a Marxist revolution will only be accomplished when lesbians join it and when the proletariat adopts the lesbian struggle as their own. Together, the topic of the article, the image, and the caption, put forth the ideas that class struggle can be violent and that, lesbians will gain freedom and power by becoming part of the class struggle. Y. Castro, as a representative for *Lesbianas Socialistas* also often gave public speeches that advocated the revolutionary overthrow of government structures, such as at the annual pride march in 1981,

This is a march of homosexual and lesbian pride- considering that the state has refused to allow us to develop our activities as we would like, in socialism- sexual liberation does not exist, protections for women should exist- That's why we are asking, above all else, for lesbian liberation, everything that opposes this has to do with North American imperialism. Everyone should have physical and material freedom and without homosexual liberation it will not be possible to achieve revolution, without lesbianism this march would mean nothing, that's why everyone should support sexual liberation. With sexual liberation and a struggle against repression we can make a revolution-whether it be in North America or China. We again pronounce our support for all the workers in Poland who continue their struggle for liberation, and we congratulate Cuba and Nicaragua for their revolutions, and El Salvador, socialism without sexism and homophobia!²³³

Looking back on what she sees as the political threats that lesbian revolutionaries, such as she herself faced during this time, Y. Castro states in an interview published in 2008, "In fact, from when we began Oikabeth, we had prepared to die because our struggle was revolutionary, so revolutionary that we knew that they could kill us."²³⁴ Though it is impossible to know how threatening the government may have seen Oikabeth's politics to have been, the fact that government agents recorded this speech as well as monitored

²³³ Realización de la tercera gran marcha nacional por el orgullo homosexual,"AGN, IPS, 1898B, Folder 4, 27-6-81.

²³⁴ Perez Ocaña, " Entrevista Exclusiva: Yan María Yaoyótl Castro," 17.

the group's activities, tells us that they saw Oikabeth to be part of the left and, in turn, treated them as they did the left. As revealed by the National Security Archive's Mexico Project, the politics of the Cold War upheld surveillance and frequent repression, manifested in both violent and more subtle forms, of those considered leftist or deviant, including gays and lesbians.²³⁵ Thus, we can consider Y. Castro's concerns regarding the violent government repression of the Left to have been well founded during this time.

Left Internationalism and Human Rights

In addition to supporting leftist political parties, Mexico City's lesbian and homosexual movement also worked with the National Front Against Repression (FNCR) to combat state repression of the left, and to defend the rights of lesbians and gays to meet and demonstrate without police harassment and intimidation. As discussed in my Introduction, like other movements in Latin America against authoritarianism and for justice for the disappeared, the FNCR utilized a language of human rights to demand accountability from the government.²³⁶ Reflecting on this history, historian and politician Michael Ignatieff has stated, "human rights has gone global not because it serves the interests of the powerful but primarily because it has advanced the interests of the powerless. Human rights has gone global by going local, imbedding itself in the soil of cultures and worldviews independent of the West, in order to sustain ordinary people's struggles against unjust states and oppressive social practices."²³⁷ Despite earlier contentions that their work was not about "rights," but about social liberation, through

²³⁵ Kate Doyle, "Official Report Released on Mexico's Dirty War." National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 209 (2006), <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB209/index.htm>.

²³⁶ Estevez 2009.

²³⁷ Michael Ignatieff, "Human Rights as Politics" in Amy Gutmann, ed., *Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2001): 7.

their work with the FNCR, Lambda also adopted this transnational rhetoric in order to make claims on the state for lesbian and homosexual rights to be seen as human rights.²³⁸ Thus, demanding justice as part of a movement against government repression and for democratization, the defense of human rights adopted by Lambda, Oikabeth, and the FHAR resonated with left internationalist discourse in Latin America in the early 1980s. The lesbian and homosexual movement's work with the FNCR, particularly that of Lambda, resulted in the beginning of an established discourse within Mexico affirming lesbian and homosexual rights as human rights.²³⁹ In 1979, the year the FNCR formed, Lambda, Oikabeth, and the FHAR participated in the Oct 2nd commemorative march against police and state repression as well as in the 1st annual FNCR sponsored march on December 10th, International Human Rights Day. In December 1980 as part of Lambda's first week of events dedicated to lesbian and homosexual rights, activists collaborated with the FNCR and participated in the December 10th march against repression sponsored as well as the first National Forum on Human Rights Violations.²⁴⁰ In response to Lambda's claims that gays and lesbians were victims of police raids, extortion, jailing, harassment, and physical violence, the forum included in their proclamation on human rights a statement condemning police repression based on homosexuality. Thereafter, Lambda participated annually in the FNCR's December 10th protest against repression and in 1983 Lambda became the first lesbian or homosexual organization to form part of the National Board of the FNCR. Lambda's position on the FNCR board lent further

²³⁸ James N. Green argues that a similar process occurred in Brazil. See "(Homo)Sexuality, Human Rights, and Revolution in Latin America," in Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, Greg Grandin, Lynn Hunt, and Marilyn Young, *Human Rights and Revolutions*, 2nd Edition (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers) 2007.

²³⁹ In chapter four I will discuss in detail how the discourse and movement for gay and lesbian rights to be viewed as human rights evolved throughout the 1980s.

²⁴⁰ "El grupo Liberación Homosexual 'Lambda' organiza la Primera Semana de los Derechos de las Lesbianas y Homosexuales," IPS, Box 1954B, Folder 3, 11/25/80.

credibility to the discourse of lesbian and homosexual rights as human rights which was now becoming more accepted within the partisan Left as evidenced by the PRT and PCM's adoption of policies in support of lesbian and homosexual rights.²⁴¹

As can be seen both through their participation in human rights struggles, as well as in demonstrations for lesbian and homosexual liberation and against US intervention in Latin America, Mexican lesbian and homosexual activists articulated their struggles in internationalist terms. Their identification with Trotskyism and growing utilization of human rights discourses clearly impacted their internationalist understandings. As I demonstrate in this chapter and the next, while the FHAR and Oikabeth also employed left internationalist rhetoric to varying extents, Lambda, as a group, more consistently and successfully translated such rhetoric into action by engaging in transnational networks organizing with activists across borders.²⁴² Speaking in an interview about early organizing in Mexico City, Hinojosa states,

In general there was clarity that our movement was an international movement and that we could learn a lot from what was happening in other countries. There was also significant interest from the U.S., England, and the Netherlands, about what we were doing in Mexico... We sent them our publications and they sent us theirs... we learned a lot about mobilization strategies and how to work with and respond to the media... basically there existed a fruitful dialogue that involved much learning, all with the idea that the movement should grow internationally.²⁴³

Through transnational networks they were a part of, the lesbian and homosexual movement began participating in international campaigns in 1978, the same year they formed. In November 1978 Lambda, FHAR, and Oikabeth participated in the international campaign against Proposition 6, also known as the Briggs Initiative in

²⁴¹ de la Dehesa 2010. de la Dehesa covers these developments in much greater detail in chapter two of *Queering the Public Sphere*, 61-87.

²⁴³Hinojosa, interview.

California, legislation which proposed to prohibit lesbians and gay men from working in the public schools and criminalize any teacher who supported gay and lesbian rights. In a press release circulated in Mexico City and internationally, the three groups voiced their opposition to the initiative, linking homophobia, classism, racism, and imperialism in California,

...declaring this initiative to be fascist, they also asserted that it is not isolated from the repressive racist and sexist context that predominates in California for minorities and oppressed groups. 'We just have to think about the continued attacks that Chicanos and the undocumented suffer in order to understand how Briggs' promotion of sexist and homophobic hysteria is related and forms part of a well organized plan that is attempting to 'fence off' all possibility of revolutionary upheaval arising in the heart of imperialism.²⁴⁴

The argument made and the language used in this statement is similar to that of Bay area leftist lesbian and gay organizations who asserted a "multi -issue stance" against the Briggs Initiative.²⁴⁵ In discussing the organization of the campaign, Hobson quotes from two prominent gay socialist leaders in the Bay area and explains, "decentralization also made the campaign conducive to a wide-ranging discussion of the broader impacts that anti-gay policies could carry across sexuality, race, ethnicity, gender, and class, nurturing what Ward and Freeman termed a radical 'consensus...that the Proposition 6 fight should be used to warn people of the dangers of the New Right and to form alliances with others under attack.'"²⁴⁶ As many activists and academics have documented, the gay and lesbian liberation movement that arose after the Stonewall Riots in 1969 had many ties to the U.S. left, including with groups as diverse as the Black Panthers and the Socialist Workers Party. As historian and activist Terrance Kissack quotes in his article describing

²⁴⁴ Lambda, Oikabeth, and FHAR, Boletín de Prensa: La Iniciativa Briggs, Terrorismo Antihomosexual," Robert Roth Papers, International Files, Box 4, Folder 21, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY.

²⁴⁵ Hobson 2009.

²⁴⁶ Hobson 2009, 216.

the history of the Gay Liberation Front, “ Gay Liberation sought to transform American society, not gain admittance to it.”²⁴⁷ Lambda’s goals were quite similar. Like their leftist lesbian and gay counterparts in the U.S., they connected their struggles for rights to larger processes of capitalism and imperialism. An excerpt from the statement released by Lambda attendees at the Second Conference of Women held in Mexico in 1979 demonstrates activists’ commitment to institutional and revolutionary change rather than simply a defense of legal rights,

Different than other groups, for example as is the case with various North American groups that work almost exclusively for civil rights- Lambda critically analyzes the function and significance of our daily lives—family and other socially relevant structures, and on a global scale, the patriarchal capitalist system in which we live.²⁴⁸

Thus, as did their leftist counterparts in the U.S., Lambda asserted their commitment to changing social norms and structures by differentiating themselves from liberal gay and lesbian organizations that simply sought accommodation within the state. To further their struggles within Mexico, they allied themselves with U.S. lesbian and gay leftists, as well as the broader Latin American left.

As can also be seen in their statement about the Briggs Initiative, members of the lesbian and homosexual movement in Mexico felt a particular affinity towards the struggles of Latinos in the U.S. In order to foster transnational ties with U.S. Latinos and allies, during this time Lambda and the FHAR developed relationships with lesbian and gay organizations including Paz & Liberación first based in California and then in Texas,

²⁴⁷ Terrance Kissack. “Freaking Fag Revolutionaries: New York’s Gay Liberation Front, 1969-1971,” *Radical History Review* 62, 57-91 (Spring 1995): 108.

²⁴⁸ Lambda, “Un Año de Trabajo: Lesbianas del Grupo Lambda,” II Reunion de Mujeres, Cuernavaca, Morelos, June 23, 1979, p. 4. Personal Collection of Trinidad Gutiérrez and Marco Osorio.

and the *Comité Homosexual Latinoamericano* (COHLA) in New York City. They also became member organizations of the *Coalición Latinoamericana Lesbiana/Homosexual*. With support from Robert Roth, John Hubert formed Paz & Liberación in 1979 with the mission of the group being a “point of communication” between groups in the Hispanic world, including the U.S.²⁴⁹ For ten years they produced a quarterly bulletin in both English and Spanish free of charge to organizations in Latin America to which Lambda and the FHAR frequently sent news about happenings in Mexico. Also, by means of the newsletter, Hubert suggested that people in the U.S. could help support the work of Latin American organizations by subscribing to their newsletters.²⁵⁰ In turn, via news from Mexico received in Paz y Liberación bulletins, Lambda received communications from various parts of the world, including in the U.S. and Europe and various international organizations began to subscribe to Lambda’s newsletter, *Nuevo Ambiente*. During this time, Lambda and the FHAR also established relationships with gay leftist newspapers in the U.S., most notably the *Gay Community News* (GCN) in Boston. Exchanging information, Lambda often reprinted articles from the GCN in *Nuevo Ambiente* and the GCN frequently reported on events occurring in Mexico City. Yet, because of the climate of repression within Mexico, Lambda used the fictional name Violeta L. de la Rosa for contact in all their communications. Letters were rarely addressed to or signed by actual members of the organization. To avoid harassment and tampering of mail, Lambda was officially registered with the government under the name “Comité Científico y

²⁴⁹ John Hubert, Letter accompanying the first issue of “Paz & Liberación,” May 1, 1979, Robert Roth Papers, Subject Files, Box 1, Folder 10, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY.

²⁵⁰ Hubert, “Can you help somehow?,” Paz y Liberación, November 1983, Robert Roth Papers, Subject Files, Box 1, Folder 10, Separated Materials, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY.

Humanitario de Mexico (The Scientific and Humanitarian Committee of Mexico).²⁵¹

Despite such barriers to clearer communication, this networking allowed U.S. activists to stay informed about what was occurring in Mexico and vice versa, in turn creating opportunities to further network internationally.

Similar to Paz y Liberación, COHLA sought to foster communication between Latino lesbians and gays living in the U.S. and in Latin America. After establishing a relationship with Lambda, Mexican members were invited to participate in the 1979 March on Washington and thereafter continued to network with COHLA. As highlighted in the introduction to this chapter, Lambda marched alongside COHLA as part of the Third World Caucus at the 1979 March on Washington for Lesbian and gay Rights. The four members of Lambda who went to Washington including Hinojosa, Alma A., and Mejía, also attended the first Third World Gay Conference held before the march. Hernández of FHAR also attended yet did not collaborate with Lambda in most activities due to personal and ideological tensions previously mentioned. The National Coalition of Black Gays sponsored the widely attended conference and the well-known poet Audre Lorde gave the keynote address. Various socialist groups were active in the conference including representatives from the Freedom Socialist Party and Radical Women. At the conference, members of Lambda gave talks and workshops on their work in Mexico. In an article reporting on the conference in the *Freedom Socialist*, Robert Crisman describes the impact Lambda members had on the conference,

Lambda inspired the conference with its ideological clarity and fighting spirit...two standing ovations greeted Claudia Hinojosa and Max Mejia of Lambda during the opening night general session when they called for a

²⁵¹ Licenciado Alejandro E. del Valle Palezuelos, Notaria No. 149, “Copia Certificada: de la escritura número 5, 707, Escritura Constitutiva de la Sociedad denominada ‘Comité Científico y Humanitario de Mexico,’ Asociación Civil, Personal Collection of Trinidad Gutiérrez and Marco Osorio.

feminist, internationalist, and anti-capitalist gay movement. ‘Our struggle consists of the subversion of all concepts and practices which have defamed lesbians and gay men, and subjugated women in general. The struggle against sexism, racism, imperialism, and class oppression is integral to gay liberation. We wish to leave no aspect of daily life unchallenged.’²⁵²

In addition to their inspiring call for a feminist, internationalist, and anti-capitalist gay and lesbian liberation movement, Mexican participants passed a resolution encouraging the conference to protest police repression in Mexico which read, “Be it resolved that this conference send a telegram, letter, and petition to López Portillo and other government heads, signed by all conference participants, demanding that the Mexican government immediately stop all police repression, imprisonment and genocide of Mexican citizens.”²⁵³ As mentioned in my earlier discussion of the significance of Mexican participation in this conference and march, it was also recommended that the next Third World Gay Conference be held in Mexico. However, according to Alma A. this became impossible due to continued police repression of lesbians and gays in Mexico.²⁵⁴

By 1980 there were also increasing tensions within Mexico’s lesbian and homosexual movement that influenced the extent to which individual organizations affiliated with one another in the international arena. Though they sought to portray a united front on the local level and collaborated in various activities between 1978 and 1981, the year in which the FHAR disbanded and Oikabeth entered a new phase of work, the three groups that composed the movement had many conflicts with one another concerning political and organizational ideology. As evidenced in various national and

²⁵² Robert Crisman, “History made: first lesbians/gays of color conference,” *The Freedom Socialist Winter ‘79/’80*, National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays (NCBLG) Folder, One National Gay and Lesbian Archives (One), Los Angeles, CA.

²⁵³ “Struggles Reach New Levels: National Third World Lesbian and gay Conference Resolutions” *The Gay Insurgent* 6, Summer 1980, p. 17, NCBLG Folder, One, Los Angeles, CA.

²⁵⁴ Alma A., interview.

international communications, the FHAR considered itself to be the vanguard of homosexual activism in Mexico City and accused Lambda of being bourgeoisie and reformist.²⁵⁵ In contrast, the FHAR championed itself as truly revolutionary and the only group that represented and advocated for the most “oppressed” members of the homosexual community, including working class prostitutes, drag queens, and transsexuals. As mentioned earlier, the FHAR’s leadership and constituency were composed almost entirely of biological men. While they espoused revolutionary politics, members largely objected to participation with the institutionalized left, such as the PRT and did not sustain relationships with feminist organizations. Though Oikabeth and Lambda had a somewhat stronger working relationship than Lambda did with the FHAR, some members of Oikabeth, particularly Lesbianas Comunistas, also considered Lambda’s politics to be reformist. While, like Lambda, Lesbianas Comunistas utilized human rights discourses in the tradition of Latin American movements against authoritarianism, they largely opposed any sort of negotiation with the state that could defer their priorities to those of political parties. These ideological divisions concerning to what extent the lesbian and homosexual movement should ally with political parties and negotiate with the state would continue to divide the movement throughout the 1980s and will be discussed in more detail in chapter three.

Though all three organizations had leaders from middle class backgrounds, in the 1980s class differences amongst the membership of these organizations also increasingly created divisions within the movement. However, despite the majority of Lambda’s

²⁵⁵ For example see Pat Brown, “The last radio-communique of the FHAR to KPFA- Berkeley, A summary,” Mexico Files, Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives (CLGA), Toronto, Canada. This conflict was also mentioned in various interviews, including with Alma A., Gutiérrez, Hinojosa, and Lizárraga Cruchaga.

leaders middle and upper class backgrounds, in various interviews with the author, informants defended their group's demographics contending that there were working class members of the group, including a few drag queens and transgender people. Yet, these interviews also reveal that acceptance of drag queens and transgender people was an issue that created rifts within the lesbian and homosexual movement during this time. Reflecting back on these conflicts, Lambda and Oikabeth members also relate that there were many members of their organizations who were critical of men who dressed up as women, believing that such behavior further objectified women.²⁵⁶ Alleging that the FHAR failed to understand women's oppression and did not acknowledge sexist behavior that isolated lesbians, Lambda and Oikabeth members generally argued that lesbians, not drag queens or transgender people should be visibly at the forefront of the movement.²⁵⁷ Thus, though Lambda, Oikabeth, and the FHAR still sought to collaborate on the local level, by the 1980s they often reached out to international organizations as separate groups with distinct organizational philosophies.

Solidarity with Central America and Critique of Cuba

Joining a chorus of international voices condemning the U.S. sponsored wars in Central America, lesbian and homosexual activists participated in various campaigns and marches in solidarity with Central American revolutionary movements throughout the 1980s. As socialists advocating left internationalism lesbian and homosexual activists supported Central American revolutionary efforts. However, they also actively criticized

²⁵⁶ Gutiérrez, Yaoyólotl Castro, interviews.

²⁵⁷ Alma A., Gutiérrez, Y. Castro, interviews, and Marta Nuulart, interview with the author, August 18, 2010.

expressions of homophobia in the Cuban Revolution. Demonstrations were the most common medium through which Mexican lesbian and homosexual activists exercised both their solidarity with revolutionary movements, and their opposition to state sponsored homophobia. One such demonstration occurred in March 1980 in condemnation of the murder of Archbishop Oscar Romero in El Salvador. Resonant with their “doble discurso” in regards to the Mexican left, during the 1980s the Mexican government led the Contadora group of nations in opposition to U.S. intervention in Latin America.²⁵⁸ Lambda, FHAR, and Oikabeth were all active in the Mexican Committee in Solidarity with the Salvadoran People, attending meetings and demonstrations. Though the Mexican government opposed U.S. intervention in Central America, they criticized the revolutionary Sandinista government in Nicaragua and did not offer support to the revolutionary movement in El Salvador. At the same time, they monitored and at times harassed groups within Mexico that supported these movements.²⁵⁹ After Romero, an outspoken advocate for the poor, was assassinated by Salvadoran death squads on March 24, 1980, the Mexican lesbian and homosexual movement took an active part in his memorial and the protesting of his murder. On April 2nd approximately 4,000 people participated in a march/pilgrimage to the Basilica of Guadalupe, a sacred cite in the north of Mexico City.²⁶⁰ The participation of the left and of the lesbian and homosexual movement in this event was widely reported on in Mexico City newspapers, some of

²⁵⁸ Kate Doyle, “Double Dealing: Mexico’s Foreign Policy Toward Cuba,” National Security Archive March 2, 2003, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB83/index.htm>.

²⁵⁹ Many police reports in the IPS files cover activities in which the MLH and the Comité Mexicano de Solidaridad con el Pueblo Salvadoreño collaborated.

²⁶⁰ Rosa Rojas, “Homilias y Discursos en Memoria del Arzobispo Romero,” *El Dia*, April 4, 1980, CDAHL.

which criticized the participation of “communists and homosexuals” in such a space.²⁶¹

In turn, homosexuals and communists immediately responded to accusations that they did not belong in the Basilica, asserting that they were Christians who sided with all oppressed peoples.²⁶² These proclamations created significant journalistic debate in various city papers for the next couple of weeks. In interviews, Lambda members Alma A. and Gutiérrez recall the significance of lesbians and gays’ open participation in this demonstration. Gutiérrez, who had as a teenager participated in ecclesiastical base communities describes how Lambda’s participation in this event helped them to gain greater acceptance within the left,

...In 1980 Archbishop Oscar Romero was assassinated. Obviously, he was a very important figure in the democratic movement in Latin America. So, a march of pilgrimage to the Basilica de Guadalupe was organized and this was the first time, the only time that as lesbians and homosexuals we have entered in the Basilica of Guadalupe. This event was very important, I think because the left saw that we were there, together with the ecclesiastical base communities. If you look at the newspapers from the time this should all be very well documented. It seems to me that this was very important—it brought about discussions of sexuality within popular democratic movements. Surely, when they saw us there they said to themselves, ‘those people are on the same wavelength as us...’²⁶³

Likely at least partially a result of the lesbian and homosexual movement’s highly visible collaboration with the left on issues regarding El Salvador, members of various unions, as well as representatives from feminist organizations and the PRT and the PCM attended the June 1980 lesbian and homosexual march. Activists also utilized the annual demonstration attended by over 5,000 people as an occasion to demonstrate against US

²⁶¹ For example see Monseñor Francisco Aguilera, “Los sacerdotes que organizaron la misa en homenaje a Romero se dejaron ‘instrumentalizar’ por Partidos,” *Uno Más Uno*, April 4, 1980, p. 3.

²⁶² For example see Marta Lamas, “Cristianos, Homosexuales, y Comunistas en la Basilica,” *El Universal*, April 8, 1980.

²⁶³ Gutiérrez, interview.

intervention in El Salvador. In an eleven page report by the secret police on this demonstration, Y. Castro from Oikabeth is quoted as explaining “ sexuality is not apart from political ideology because it has been used politically ...we struggle for a social homosexuality, based in the principles of liberty...that’s why lesbians and homosexuals are united in the struggle for Latin American revolution.”²⁶⁴ Slogans and posters at the event included, “Lesbians with the people of El Salvador,” “Lesbians support the Cuban Revolution, and Not sick or criminal, simply homosexual.” A representative from El Salvador’s FMLN in attendance is quoted as thanking the crowd for their support and proclaiming “ Viva Mexico, for its young women and homosexuals.”²⁶⁵ The political alliances emphasized at this march demonstrate the lesbian and homosexual movement’s commitment to the defense of broad-based human rights and democratization in Latin America. The sheer number of allies who attended and participated also attests to the successes that the movement were having in forging solidarity with the left

However, despite such manifestations of international solidarity with Marxist inspired movements, it is important to acknowledge that, while they critiqued imperialism and embraced various Latin American revolutionary movements, lesbian and homosexual activists stood against Cuba’s treatment of its homosexual and lesbian populations. Thus, in May 1980, in response to the Mariel Boatlift, a voluntary migration to the U.S. which included a mass exile of lesbians and homosexuals, Mexico’s lesbian and homosexual movement held a demonstration in front of the Cuban Embassy and sent

²⁶⁴ “Marcha Homosexuales y Lesbianas,” AGN, IPS, Box 1954B, Folder 11, June 28, 1980.

²⁶⁵ “Marcha Homosexuales y Lesbianas,” AGN, IPS, Box 1954B, Folder 11, June 28, 1980.

a letter of protest to Cuban president Fidel Castro.²⁶⁶ In an excerpt from the letter sent to Cuba and later published internationally, members of the lesbian and homosexual movement in Mexico City stated,

It is necessary to stress the importance of criticizing the errors of those of us who are fighting for socialism...concealment of reality is inconsistent with revolution; as such it is counterrevolutionary...the way the Cuban government has classified homosexual refugees reflects a progressive bureaucratization of the revolution, reveals the problem of a lack of freedom of political dissent and bears witness to the twenty-one years of marginalization and persecution of homosexuality...²⁶⁷

In line with their general stance in support of human rights and socialist politics in Latin America, the letter went on to claim that Cuba's violations of the human rights of lesbians and homosexuals served to bolster U.S. President Jimmy Carter's "imperialist" campaign against Cuba allowing him to portray Cuba as an undemocratic country.²⁶⁸ Thus, similar to as in the U.S., where socialist gay and lesbian activists had condemned Cuban repression of homosexuality as far back as 1971, Lambda activists were aware and openly critical of Cuba's treatment of gays and lesbians.²⁶⁹ For example, the New York City based La Asociación Lesbiana continued to support the ideology of the Cuban revolution while aiding refugees. After the Mariel Boatlift, they sent out a letter soliciting sponsors for lesbian refugees in 1980s stating, "We recognize the many good things that have happened in Cuba since the Revolution. The quality of life has improved greatly for many people. Unfortunately, this is not true for lesbians and gays and we must face this

²⁶⁶ It is estimated that thousands of gays and lesbians fled Cuba during the Mariel Boatlift as a result of renewed repression. Warren Brown, "Cuban Boatlift Drew Thousands of Homosexuals," *Washington Post*, July 7, 1980, A1.

²⁶⁷ "Message from Mexico: Questions for Cuba," (1980) in Mark Blasius and Shane Phalen, Eds., *We Are Everywhere: A Historical Sourcebook of Gay and Lesbian Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1997): 470-71.

²⁶⁸ Oikabeth, FHAR, and Lambda, "Carta Embajada contra la Homofobia," May 1980, Folder 1980, AHMLFM-YMY.

²⁶⁹ Lekus 2004.

fact.”²⁷⁰ Like La Asociación Lesbiana, while they adhered to socialist ideals, Mexico’s lesbian and homosexual movement was uncompromising in their allegiance to the struggle to end homosexual and lesbian oppression. However, according to Hinojosa, the Mexican left, including the PRT, opposed Lambda’s stance on Cuba on the basis that criticizing the Cuban revolution was anti-revolutionary and played into the hands of the imperialists. Reflecting on this conflict, she states,

...the first time that we publically critiqued Cuba, even the Trotskyists who were the most progressive, said that it was incorrect of us to do this. It was a scandal... ..At this moment in time, the left took this stance badly. And I, my political position during this time, was to defend Cuba against those people that attacked her, and critique its homophobic politics with those people who defended her, in order to preserve balance, no? But, this was one of the biggest disasters of the Cold War, the way in which the debate became so dichotomous. As a result, it was very difficult...very difficult for us as a public presence that identified with the left to accept that things had to be this way.²⁷¹

In this case, the Mexican left prioritized the defense of revolutionary socialism over the defense of lesbian and homosexual human rights. Though, in their defense of lesbian and homosexual rights in Cuba, the lesbian and homosexual movement contrasted Stalinism’s undemocratic politics and rigid heteronormative positions against Trotskyism’s commitment to social justice and rhetorical support for non-normative expressions of sexuality and gender, the Trotskyists, supposedly their staunch ally, failed to support their lesbian and gay constituents. As I will discuss further in chapter three this was not, however, indicative of a trend. PRT support for lesbian and homosexual liberation strengthened throughout the mid 1980s and many Lambda members became more involved in the party. Yet, though this collaboration was very significant for Lambda on

²⁷⁰ La Asociación Lesbiana, “Cuban Lesbians Need Your Help!” Latin American Collection, Folder 14, LHA.

²⁷¹ Hinojosa, interview.

the local level, on an international level the groups' ties to the International Lesbian and gay Association (ILGA) also became extremely important in their efforts to combat police harassment and intimidation.

Participation in the ILGA

Lambda sought international support from the ILGA to pressure the Mexican government to defend the human rights of lesbians and homosexuals. However, through their participation in the ILGA, Mexican lesbians and homosexuals also pushed the organization to understand the intersectionality of oppressions and adopt a left internationalist versus liberal internationalist stance on gay and lesbian liberation. First known as the International Association of Gay Men (IGA), the IGA was founded in Coventry, England in 1978 by mostly gay men from Europe, North America, and Australia. Though keeping the acronym IGA, they soon changed their name to the International Lesbian and gay Association and today are known as the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association (ILGA). Responding to years of pressure on the part of lesbians demanding greater representation within the organization, in 1986 members voted to officially change the name to the International Lesbian and gay Association and the acronym to ILGA. According to a promotional flyer from 1979 "the IGA works for liberation of gay people throughout the world by coordinating concerted political pressure on governments and international bodies in pursuit of gay and lesbian human rights."²⁷² Lambda and the FHAR became active as member and associate member organizations with the IGA in the late 1970s and The Liberation Group for Gay Pride (GOHL) in Guadalajara also became very active within the ILGA during the 1980s.

²⁷² IGA promotional flyer, 1979, ILGA Files, Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives (CLGA).

Mexican organizations were listed as members in some years and as associate members in others depending on money available or if an organization from the North could sponsor them via what became known as the Twinning Project by paying their membership. Throughout the 1980s, as a result of the worldwide economic crisis and increasing economic inequities between the global North and South, the payment of membership dues based on European income standards became an especially controversial subject within the IGA.²⁷³

Participation in the ILGA was decidedly important to many members of Lambda as they shared in the long-term goals of the ILGA regarding the international defense of lesbian and gay rights as human rights. This work included seeking consultative status with the United Nations and the World Health Association, and gaining recognition for crimes committed against lesbians and gays from Amnesty International. In the late 1970s and early 1980s Lambda frequently sent updates on the state of lesbian and gay human rights in Mexico and the organizing that they engaged in to promote democratic change. In turn, others around the world became informed on the state of lesbian and homosexual organizing in Mexico and Mexicans learned about what was occurring throughout the world. Upon request of Lambda, international activists sent letters protesting repression of lesbians and homosexuals to Mexican officials. For example, in 1980 Lambda sent an update for the IGA Bulletin, organized by the Information Secretariat in Dublin, speaking to the effects of such transnational solidarity and the IGA reported,

The Grupo Lambda in recent communication with Dublin say the success of the march has resulted in an escalation in police repression and threats

²⁷³ For example, in 1982 the membership fee was \$50/year. The Body Politic (Toronto, Canada), Memorandum urging the payment of IGA's 1982 membership fee, ILGA Files, CLGA.

against the gay community. However, continuing international interest in Mexico has helped gay organizations there to combat the campaign of intimidation by the government authorities.²⁷⁴

This statement clearly indicates the importance Lambda saw in international solidarity for lesbian and gay rights in Mexico. Also indicative of their commitment to expanding a Latin American movement for lesbian and gay rights, in 1981 Lambda agreed to serve as the ILGA contact for Latin America.

However, from the beginning of their participation in the ILGA, Mexican and other Latin American participants also struggled for self-determination and to negotiate their concerns in a European dominated organization. In a letter to the International Gay Association (ILGA) in 1981 Robert Roth accused the ILGA of lacking in communication with the Third World, and therefore not truly being an international organization. In order to have their demands for equality taken seriously by the United Nations, he encouraged the ILGA to better support gay organizations in the “Third World.”²⁷⁵ Resonant of debates ensuing concurrently in international feminism, Latin American, and other participants from Africa and Asia demanded that the ILGA defend democratic change and all human rights struggles in the Global South not just those related to lesbian and gay rights. At the same time, they also demanded that their autonomy be respected. Conferences were often the spaces where such discussions played out. At ILGA’s 1981 conference held in Turin, Italy and the first attended by various members of Lambda, debates ensued concerning relationships between activists in the global North and South.

²⁷⁴ “Gay Pride Week: Mexico City” in the *IGA Memorandum* (Coventry, England: November 1980), ILGA Files, CLGA.

²⁷⁵ Robert Roth. “Memorandum to the IGA Third Annual Conference Workshop on the Third World and Eastern Europe Need for Resource Support Groups and Publications,” April 14, 1981, Robert Roth Papers, International Files, Box 4, Folder 25, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY.

The following statements from the 1981 conference both encourage transnational collaboration as well as demand that “Third World” organizations direct these relationships themselves. In different sections of the same report activists asserted, “we expect IGA and its members to promote and support our efforts to strengthen existing organizations and to establish new movements in the area and “In the discussion about IGA’s future involvement in the Third World, we state that IGA should not institute actions unless requests or approaches are made by the Third World groups themselves. And then they should be assisted only to assist themselves.”²⁷⁶ The caucus rejected the use of the term “Third World” and called on future meetings to refer to regions of the Global South with reference to specific geographical regions.²⁷⁷ As a result, by 1982, the IGA officially used the acronym LAAA (Latin America, Africa, Asia) to refer to these regions. To foster future exchanges, both the Third World Caucus and the Women’s Caucus also encouraged the development of a fund to help sponsor delegates from the global South to attend annual ILGA conferences.

Promoting linkages with other human rights struggles, at the Turin conference and thereafter at other annual conferences throughout the 1980s, activists from Latin America and their allies also wrote and passed resolutions condemning repression and U.S. intervention in Central America. The 1981 Third World Caucus report outlined an emergency resolution, later passed by the ILGA, concerning recent murders of lesbians and gays in El Salvador. Because the U.S. government was funding counterinsurgent forces in El Salvador, the statement demanded that letters be written to both the

²⁷⁶ “Report From Workshop X: Third World,” *IGA Third Annual Conference Report* (Torino, Italy: April 17-20, 1981) ILGA files, CLGA.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

Salvadoran and U.S. governments condemning these atrocities.²⁷⁸ Whereas only Lambda's Alma A. was able to attend ILGA's 1982 conference in Washington D.C., the LAAA Caucus passed another resolution on Central America. This resolution called on the ILGA to express solidarity with Central American revolutionary movements and "continue and extend this ongoing dialogue and concrete interaction with these movements and support groups."²⁷⁹ Like in 1981, it also condemned U.S. military intervention in Central America. Per earlier requests of the LAAA caucus to increase communication and solidarity with the Global South, participants of the 1982 conference decided to create an Interim Communication Office in New York City to focus on work with Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Thus, as will be discussed in further detail in chapter three, between 1982 and 1985 Lambda activists increased their involvement with the ILGA, often leading efforts for the ILGA to better represent the interests of LAAA lesbians and homosexuals.

Conclusion

Lambda and Oikabeth emerged as socialist, feminist, and left internationalist organizations during the first wave of lesbian and homosexual activism in Mexico City. Their activities centered around creating visibility, countering the repressive state apparatus, and promoting the transformation of everyday life through socialist and feminist politics. Factions of Oikabeth also advocated revolutionary change through socialist revolution. By working in coalition with international lesbian and gay organizations and by forging ties on the national level with feminists and the left,

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ "Workshop 8: IGA in Latin America, Africa, Asia" IGA, *Conference Papers* (Washington D.C., 12th-17th July 1982), ILGA Files, CLGA.

between 1978 and 1982 the lesbian and homosexual movement often successfully created support for lesbian and homosexual issues and, in turn transformed the everyday lives of many lesbians and homosexual men in Mexico City. By emphasizing the significance of Trotskyist support for lesbian and homosexual organizing in Mexico, I contest claims by some scholars that the left largely “failed” the gay and lesbian rights movement.²⁸⁰ In her scholarship Norma Mogrovejo briefly describes the connections between facets of the lesbian movement and the left in the 1970s and 1980s. Yet, her research focuses on dynamics of lesbian organizing in relation to the feminist movement in the 1980s and 1990s, and by conflating Mexican activism as representative of Latin America and equating the trajectory of Latin American lesbian organizing with that of European feminist organizing, tends to downplay the significance that alliances between lesbian activists and other segments of the left may have had in the formative years of the movement. Instead Mogrovejo finds such collaborations to have been part of a struggle for “equality” that failed largely because leftists did not put gay and lesbian rights on the front burner.²⁸¹ In contrast, complementing de la Dehesa’s scholarship, this chapter documents various examples of effective collaborations forged between the left and the Mexican lesbian and homosexual movement. Thus, not only did the work of the lesbian and homosexual movement transform everyday life for many lesbians and homosexuals by creating visibility and legitimacy, it incorporated the politics of lesbian and homosexual liberation into sectors of the left.

Upholding their left internationalist vision, the Mexican lesbian and homosexual movement worked to defend the human rights of all oppressed people and stood in

²⁸⁰ Drucker 2000 and Mogrovejo 2000.

²⁸¹ Norma Mogrovejo, “Lesbian visibility in Latin America: reclaiming our history,” Peter Drucker, ed., *Different Rainbows*. (Chicago, IL: Gay Men’s Press, 2000).

solidarity with the Mexican left as well as with Latin American revolutionary movements. They also consistently engaged with transnational lesbian and gay movements both expressing and seeking out solidarity for lesbian and gay liberation politics. In these relationships, they also began to challenge Northern organizations to adopt a Latin American-based understanding of human rights struggle that advocated for broad based social justice and condemned not just homophobia, but racism, sexism, authoritarianism, and imperialism. As will be shown in chapter three, Lambda and other autonomous lesbian organizations continued this activism throughout the mid-1980s. However, the formation of collaborative relationships within the lesbian and homosexual movement became increasingly challenging between 1982 and 1985. As Lambda's role in the PRT generated more controversy, some lesbian activists sought out more autonomy, and activists faced insecurities presented by the economic crisis and the onset of AIDS in Mexico. Yet, as conflict within Mexico City's lesbian and homosexual escalated during this time, Lambda and Oikabeth would seek to strengthen transnational ties and activists' own participation in the formation of local, regional, and international human rights movements.

CHAPTER 3: ECONOMIC CRITICS, LESBIAN AND HOMOSEXUAL ACTIVISM, AND TRANSNATIONAL SOLIDARITIES, 1982-1985

At the 1984 meeting in New York City for the International Year of Gay Action, Mexican representatives presented the situation for lesbians and homosexuals in Mexico City in the following excerpted statement:

We came here to denounce that in Mexico the economic crisis has accentuated the traditional repression against lesbians and homosexuals. By invoking morality as a method of order used to protect the citizens and thus making police repression a form of government, the Mexican government has instilled a climate of fear and insecurity amongst the people. In a rapidly deteriorating social situation, lesbians, gays, and young people in general are considered vagrants, prostitutes, and delinquents because we frequent certain public places, we have been converted into intolerable subjects and suffer violence, harassment, and extortion at the hands of the government. Police raids, which are unconstitutional, continue to be a daily reality that violates our most fundamental human rights.²⁸²

This statement juxtaposes the idea of the state treating gays and lesbians as “intolerable subjects” with that of the state upholding the “human rights” of lesbians and gays. The remainder of the statement took on international issues condemning the repression of lesbians and homosexual throughout the world, as well as called for the United States’ withdrawal from Central America. By participating in international activism, Lambda hoped to focus attention on the situation of lesbians and homosexuals in Mexico and, in turn pressure the government to address human rights abuses. Activists also worked to build solidarity for broader human rights struggles throughout Latin America.

As also described in the above statement, during this time lesbian and homosexual activists in Mexico City confronted an authoritarian state apparatus, economic austerity

²⁸² Lambda, Statement to the Conference on the Global Movement for Lesbian and Gay Liberation,” (New York City), September 1984, CDAHL, Lambda Documents.

measures, and moralizing politics. The issues of economic crisis and rising social conservatism, as well as the onset of AIDS affecting Mexican lesbians and homosexuals during this time took place in the context of international communication and solidarity. In this chapter I will consider how neoliberal reforms and “moral renovation” affected lesbian and homosexual activism and how activists responded to and negotiated with such political, social, and economic realities.²⁸³

Whereas most scholars agree that the stated goals of “moral renovation” to eliminate corruption in the Mexican government were largely a failure, there has been little study of the ways in which neoliberal reforms were connected to social conservatism and moralizing politics during this time period.²⁸⁴ While penal codes in Mexico City had criminalized violations of “public morality” for many years and there was a history of policing “sexual deviants” on the basis of such accusations, the official discourse of “moral renovation” inadvertently opened the door for homosexual and lesbian activists to create counter-discourses and participate in transnational counter-movements.²⁸⁵ On a local level, activists networked with urban popular movements and the political left to counter burgeoning neo-liberal politics and work towards democratic pluralism. Lambda activists also continued to maintain transnational ties and participate in international

²⁸³ Other scholars have examined similar questions concerning the relationships between neo-liberalism and forms of lesbian and gay activism. For example, see Lisa Duggan, *Twilight of Equality?: Neo-liberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003) Rosemary Hennessey, “Queer Visibility in Commodity Culture,” *Cultural Critique* 29 (1994-5): 31-76, and Rafael de la Dehesa. *Queering the Public Sphere in Mexico and Brazil: Sexual Rights Movements in Emerging Democracies*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

²⁸⁴ See Lorenzo Meyer, “The Second Coming of Mexican Liberalism: A Comparative Perspective,” in *Cycles of Conflict, Centuries of Change: Crisis, Reform, and Revolution in Mexico*, eds. Elisa Servín, Leticia Reina, and John Tutino (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007): 271-304 and Juan Miguel Mora, *Ni Renovación, Ni Moral: Crónica del Mal Gobierno que Nos Aflige*. (Mexico DF: Anaya Editores, 1985).

²⁸⁵ Various scholars of Latin American history have examined constructions of sexual deviancy in relation to colonial and liberal politics. For example, see Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) and Eileen Findlay-Suarez, *Imposing Decency: The Politics of Sexuality and Race in Puerto Rico, 1870s-1920* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

lesbian and gay conferences and events, encouraging solidarity in their struggles for democratization and human rights.

In utilizing human rights rhetoric, Mexico City's lesbian and homosexual movement sought to claim their space alongside urban popular movements in the movement for democratization in Mexico City. Invoking Dagnino's interpretation of the concept of the "right to have rights," I show that activists were demanding "new rights" such as difference, rather than only making claims on already defined rights.²⁸⁶ Using Fraser's conceptualization introduced in chapter two, I will also demonstrate that during this time Lambda and their allies clearly sought both redistribution and recognition. In other words, as socialist anti-imperialists they continued to defend the human rights of all oppressed peoples while at the same time making claims on the state to protect the "new" rights of lesbians and gays. Different from predominant Northern understandings of "rights" which seek to enshrine those rights within state institutions, Lambda and its allies continued to seek fundamental institutional change in the form of democratization and socialist politics. Thus, while the increasing use of the term "rights," as well as the Anglo word "gay," used to refer to both homosexual men and lesbians during this time, resonate with the politics of lesbian and gay rights in the North America and Europe, the employment of such discourses is distinct and specific to the Latin American context of opposition to authoritarian governments.

However, Lambda and its allies' work for human rights also created ideological conflicts within the group as well as between Lambda and other segments of the lesbian and homosexual movement. Tensions within Lambda, as well as between Lambda and

²⁸⁶ Evelina Dagnino, "Culture, Citizenship, and Democracy: Changing Discourses and Practices of the Latin American Left," *Cultures of Politics, Politics of Culture* (Boulder: Westview Press) 1998: 33-63

other lesbian and homosexual groups were about both the use of rights discourse in appeals to the state, as well as about feminism and women's leadership or lack thereof. Groups like Colectivo Sol and Seminario Marxista Leninista de Lesbianas Feministas (The Seminary of Marxist Leninist Lesbian Feminists, Seminario) accused Lambda and their allies of reformist politics and instead advocated for autonomous grassroots organizing of the working class. Relief efforts after Mexico City's 1985 earthquake offered Seminario the opportunity to take to the streets working as part of broader civil society to rebuild, as well as protest the state's efforts to enact neoliberal reforms. While Seminario worked in coalition with gay male groups like Colectivo Sol, as well as with urban popular movements, they as well as some women from Lambda and other lesbian groups, were also increasingly frustrated with what they termed "lesbofobia" within both the broader lesbian and homosexual movement, as well as within other social movements with whom they organized. As a result, more lesbians were becoming interested in organizing autonomously from men and creating a stronger lesbian movement. Therefore, due to ideological differences and varying organizational strategies amongst individual lesbian and homosexual groups, during this time activists created multiple counter-discourses that both challenged the legitimacy of the state itself, as well as sought to reform it. Yet, despite increased factionalism within the movement, an analysis of a broad array of archival documents, including organizational statements and newspaper articles, reveals that lesbian and homosexual activism between 1982 and 1985 had a considerable impact on Mexican society. By forging alliances with other social movements in Mexico and abroad, Mexican lesbian and homosexual activists played an active role in resisting neo-liberal and moralizing politics.

Economic Crisis and the 1982 Election

In 1982, various activists from the lesbian and homosexual movement, primarily from Lambda, formed the Lesbian and Gay Committee in Support of Rosario Ibarra (CLHARI) to support the presidential candidate for the PRT in 1982. Mexico's first female presidential candidate, known during this time period as the face of the popular struggle against the Dirty War, Ibarra was the mother of a disappeared activist son and the founder of the FNCR. As Rafael de la Dehesa has amply documented, lesbians and homosexuals played significant roles in supporting Ibarra's candidacy as well as those of six lesbian and homosexual candidates including Max Mejía, Claudia Hinojosa, and Pedro Archeta of Guadalajara for deputy positions.²⁸⁷ CLHARI encouraged the broader lesbian and homosexual community to vote against the PRI and instead support the PRT because it stood with the oppressed and discriminated against. In turn, while it is questionable to what degree Ibarra actually supported lesbian and homosexual rights, the PRT was an outspoken advocate of lesbian and homosexual rights and called for an end to police and state repression.²⁸⁸ Yet, CLHARI often met resistance to their political participation such as in March of 1982 when approximately fifty agitators, allegedly with the support of the police, violently attacked a demonstration held in support of the lesbian and homosexual candidates. Attackers accused CLHARI and its supporters of being "reds," "degenerates," and "anti-priistas" as they physically assaulted participants and

²⁸⁷de la Dehesa 2010 and PRT, "Por que participa el movimiento homosexual en las elecciones: palabras de apertura a la conferencia nacional de lesbianas y homosexuales," *La Bandera Socialista* (1 March 1982). Mexico: NACLA Archive of Latin Americana, Reel 10, Microfilm.

²⁸⁸ Many activists I have spoken with claim that Ibarra was actually very verbally homophobic towards lesbian and homosexual activists involved with the PRT. Author Interviews with Lizárraga Cruchaga and Alma A.

threatened to rape women.²⁸⁹ In response, sectors of the left, feminists, and various intellectuals within Mexico City expressed solidarity with CLHARI, writing a petition to president López Portillo later printed in the daily newspaper *Uno Más Uno*.²⁹⁰ Indicative of the strength of the movement's transnational ties, the attack also made headlines in U.S. based lesbian and gay newspapers and radio shows such as *the Gay Community News* and The International Gay Information Center radio show out of New York City. Finding little support from the local police in condemning and prosecuting the attack, Lambda used the experience as an opportunity to both increase efforts at international solidarity and highlight police and other state sanctioned repression throughout the rest of this election year.²⁹¹ After the attack, invoking the conception of the “right to have rights” CLHARI utilized the slogan, “Luchando por Nuestros Derechos, Luchando por Nuestras Vidas” (Fighting for our Rights, Fighting for our Lives).²⁹² As de la Dehesa has concluded, CLHARI's primary reasons for participating in this election were to bring visibility to their movement and its demands:

The activists in CLHARI had no illusions about their chances of victory. They approached the election as a stage for political theatre and a source of symbolic capital, to increase the movement's visibility and mobilize support. With a platform calling for an end to police violence, to the sexual harassment and rape of lesbians and homosexuals, to media sensationalism; respect for constitutional

²⁸⁹ John Kyper, “Response a 'Triumph of Gay Resistance' Paramilitary Gang Attacks Gay Rally in Mexico City,” *Gay Community News*, May 1, 1982, 1.

²⁹⁰ Ibid and de la Dehesa 2010, 90.

²⁹¹ Some activists contend that members of the ultra-right wing militant anti communist Catholic group known as MURO (*Movimiento Universitario de Renovadora Orientación*) attacked them, as they also had in the past. MURO's actions have often been considered to have been accepted, if not supported by various people within the Mexican government. Author Interview with Alma A, August 2010. For more information on MURO see Edgar Gonzalez Ruiz, *Muro, Memorias y Testimonios, 1961-2002* (Puebla, Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, 2003).

²⁹² Comité de Lesbianas y Homosexuales en Apoyo a Rosario Ibarra, “Luchando por Nuestros Derechos, Luchando por Nuestras Vidas” (Poster for a workshop on homosexual liberation, no date, circa 1982. Personal Collection of Trinidad Gutiérrez and Marco Osorio.

rights of expression and association; and for a sex education free of sexism, electoral activities that year focused largely on campaign rallies and public protests as tools for community organizing.²⁹³

CLHARI's collaboration with the PRT also resulted in the PRT's increased direct involvement with the lesbian and homosexual movement, particularly with Lambda. This included the PRT helping Lambda to obtain an office space in October 1982²⁹⁴ Lambda's office was the first for the lesbian and homosexual movement and promised new opportunities for organizing and community engagement. In an international communiqué announcing the opening of their office Lambda stated,

Despite many problems, the Grupo Lambda de Liberación continues working on a permanent basis and we are now realizing one of our principal projects, that of opening a central office, open to the public...With this office we will continue being a strong part of the national and international gay liberation movement...Being that these inauguration activities will be a big event for our group and the Mexican gay movement, we would like to receive your messages of support, congratulations and solidarity in relation to the opening of our office.²⁹⁵

In turn, Lambda did receive significant international support in the form of communiqués of solidarity. However, at the same time as the opening of Mexico's first lesbian and gay community center heightened morale amongst the lesbian and homosexual movement, many activists, including within Lambda, also remained skeptical as to the strengthened relationship with the PRT that resulted from CLHARI's activism.

“La Renovación Moral”

During the presidential campaign of 1982, the country's ruling party, The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), also campaigned for change in government-civil society relations. Extending the traditional use of rhetoric of revolutionary nationalism,

²⁹³ de la Dehesa 2010, 90.

²⁹⁴ Mogrovejo 2000, 114.

²⁹⁵ Grupo Lambda de Liberación Homosexual, international press release, Mexico City, October 1982.

de la Madrid ran on a platform calling for "moral renovation," with the supposed intent of stamping out corruption and delinquency within the Mexican government and society.²⁹⁶ The former Minister of Budget and Planning in the administration of José López Portillo was also widely known to be a social conservative and an increasing supporter of neo-liberal economics. Campaigning in 1982 at the height of the worldwide economic crisis affecting Mexico, de La Madrid presented the instatement of neo-liberal reforms and economic austerity measures as necessary for the further opening of Mexican markets and for the eventual prosperity of the country.²⁹⁷

During his last days in office after de La Madrid won the presidency in the summer of 1982, acting president López Portillo signed two controversial agreements, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) agreements and a law that would become popularly known as the "Obscene Decree." The government signed the IMF agreement in order to reduce the national debt that had been accumulating steadily throughout the 1970s, largely as a result of worldwide decline in oil prices.²⁹⁸ The IMF agreement included the implementation of severe austerity measures, policies that were sure to incite public dissent and unrest amongst the Left. Coincidentally or not, in this same month López Portillo signed new legislation that would extend social control of perceived dissidence. Invoking language of "traditional" Mexican morality and *buenas costumbres* (family values) The Regulation of Obscene Objects and Publications, published in full in the *Diario Oficial* on November 26, 1982, used vague language to criminalize all

²⁹⁶ Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), Presidential records, box 3, exp. 18, vol. 27.01.00, "La Renovación Moral de la Sociedad" n/d, circa 1983.

²⁹⁷ For example, in 1985, paving the way for the North American Free Trade Agreement, Mexico joined the General Agreements on Tariffs and Trade.

²⁹⁸ José Agustín 2007.

publications that might contain any material, written or visual, related to sexuality.²⁹⁹ For example, Article 6 of the decree stated that any kind of “sexual perversion” displayed or written about in publications would be considered criminal.³⁰⁰

Journalists, artists, feminists, and lesbian and homosexual activists, among others, immediately denounced and organized against this legislation. In an editorial in the political commentary magazine *Proceso*, Carlos Monsiváis stated with irony, “It doesn't make much sense to debate about what should be considered more obscene; repression and corruption, or a show with sexually stimulating content.”³⁰¹ In particular, lesbian and homosexual activists saw this measure as a direct attack on their organizing and as a threat to their ability to publish newsletters and other materials. The “Obscene Decree” indicated the possibility of a new surge in intolerance and repression of lesbian and homosexual activism in Mexico City and suggested that the policing of lesbians and homosexuals for their lack of *buenas costumbres* could become enforced by national policy, rather than simply arbitrarily enacted on local levels.

For others opposed to the law, such as intellectuals, journalists, and artists, the “Obscene Decree” threatened to censure their reporting and creative license. Thus, they interpreted this law as an effort to rescind constitutional guarantees to free speech and as running contrary to changes in society that had been spurred by the influence of countercultural movements and the “sexual opening” of the 1970s.³⁰² Intellectuals interviewed in the same issue of *Proceso* condemned the ambiguity of the language used,

²⁹⁹ Eric Zolov defines “buenas costumbres” as “family values” and provides a history of PRI campaigns to promote buenas costumbres. Zolov 1999.

³⁰⁰ The decree was an alteration of a previous regulation entitled the “Regulation of Publications and Magazines.” *El Diario Oficial*, Mexico, November 26, 1982.

³⁰¹ Carlos Monsiváis, “Un Decreto Que Parece Irreal,” *Proceso*, 6 de Diciembre de 1982, 50-51.

³⁰² Agustín 2007.

as well as the assumption that Mexicans share a set of commonly understood morals or customs. In response to a survey conducted by the magazine in regards to the decree, an anonymous respondent questioned, “What is the ‘public morality,’ who determines what is moral or immoral, what are ‘good customs,’ who determines them, and what are acts against the ‘law (?), education, and international solidarity,’ in sum, what would be the criteria to judge all of this?”³⁰³ Thus, working to overturn the law, journalists, artists, intellectuals, and lesbians and homosexuals organized in coalition in order to enact quick widespread protest. Coalitional efforts benefited from the double militancy on the left of many of those involved and formed around personalities like Monsiváis and Elena Poniatowska who were active on many political and cultural fronts. For these reasons, the efforts of this oppositional coalition were ultimately successful and de la Madrid, without offering an explanation, overturned the law almost immediately upon taking office.

However, while activists rejoiced in this victory and rare demonstration of solidarity within the left, repression of lesbians and homosexuals would continue throughout the term of de la Madrid.³⁰⁴ Within weeks of taking office, he added his own amendments to the civil and penal codes, making "moral damage" a crime and the publishing of materials “disloyal” to the government punishable by substantial fines and up to seven years in jail.³⁰⁵ Perhaps telling of what was to come during his administration, in an article published in the *New York Times* during his presidential campaign de la Madrid explained,

³⁰³ María Esther Ibarra y Fernando Ortega Pizarro, “Intelectuales, Artistas y Juristas Impugnan El Reglamento contra la Obscenidad: Fascistoide, Peligroso y Obsceno,” *Proceso*, 6 de Diciembre de 1982, 49.

³⁰⁴ Ernie Potvin, “Mexican Moral Renovation Targets Gays,” no newspaper name or date, Personal Collection of Trinidad Gutiérrez and Marco Osorio. Trinidad Gutiérrez, interview with the author.

³⁰⁵ Christopher Dickey, “Mexico Sharpens Debate on Press Freedom,” *Washington Post*, December 30, 1982.

I think that politics always involves reconciling interests...But, I think that this conciliation is valid and useful only if it serves the national interest. I am not one of those who think that all should be conciliated at whatever cost and all kept happy at the same time. If the aspirations of some group do not coincide with the national interest, I'm not interested in keeping them happy.³⁰⁶

As with other subjective language frequently employed by his administration, who exactly defined the “national interest” is left unclear in this statement. In fact, de la Madrid would go on to justify the “cleaning up,” or policing of delinquency of certain areas of Mexico City, as mandated by the “national interest” via citizens whom he met with in regional forums. Falling in line with this perception of lesbians and homosexuals as “delinquent,” the government and the media immediately blamed homosexuals for the onset of the AIDS crisis in Mexico in 1983, a subject I will discuss in more depth later in this chapter.³⁰⁷ Alma A., a founder of Lambda, contends that the administration of de la Madrid represented a time of “moving backwards in regards to what had been gained in the early years of lesbian and homosexual liberation.” With “moral renovation” and the regulations of the IMF, came campaigns that, though in support of family planning, also promoted the nuclear family (featuring a working father, stay at home mother, and two children) as normative and “traditional.”³⁰⁸ Quite obviously lesbians and homosexuals did not easily fit into the government’s vague, yet decidedly heteronormative idea of “Mexican” morals and customs.

“Moral renovation” also extended to de la Madrid’s dealings with the police and his administration claimed that the stamping out of police corruption was a crux of this

³⁰⁶ Alan Riding, “Getting Mexico Moving Again,” *New York Times*, July 4, 1982.

³⁰⁷³⁰⁷This is obviously a significant area of study that scholars have discussed in detail. See Carrier 1995 and Hector Miguel Salinas Hernandez 2008.

³⁰⁸ Alma A., interview by the author.

campaign. In 1984 he instituted The Law of The Police and Good Government ostensibly to define the police' role as public servants and to limit public disorder, but in effect, leaving the door open for them to restrict public meetings or demonstrations.³⁰⁹ In 1985 the Mexico City police issued a decree to increase the policing of "delinquency," including making it illegal to adopt attitudes or use language contrary to "las buenas costumbres."³¹⁰ In Guadalajara in 1983, the newly elected mayor and governor both vowed to "clean up" the homosexual presence in the city. They referred to homosexuality as "anti-social conduct," closing all gay bars and arresting many of their patrons.³¹¹ According to activists, in the first nine months of de la Madrid's "moral renovation" repression in the form of extortion and raids on lesbian and homosexual bars throughout the country increased. Activists also implicated paramilitary and government operations of the murders of lesbians and homosexuals.³¹² In an article in Lambda's newsletter *El Nuevo Ambiente*, Max Mejía asserted, "Obviously, the populations most frequently targeted in the raids are prostitutes, young people, and homosexuals. In this way extortion practiced by the police continues to occur daily, only that now it is justified with moralizing arguments."³¹³ Thus, while police harassment of homosexuals and lesbians was nothing new, the justifications for it were becoming increasingly formalized through the application of the Regulation.

³⁰⁹ Grupo Lambda de Liberación Homosexual, "Report on the Present Situation from Grupo Lambda" in the International Gay Association's Information Secretariat Bulletin, 1984, CLGA.

³¹⁰ Raymundo Ramos, "Buen Gobierno: La Ambigüedad en las Leyes," *Uno más Uno*, August 24, 1985, AHMLFM-YMY.

³¹¹ Grupo Lambda de Liberación Homosexual, "Tercera Semana de los Derechos de Lesbianas y Homosexuales: Avances y Limitaciones del Movimiento Gay," June 2, 1984. Personal Archive of Trinidad Gutiérrez and Marco Osorio.

³¹² Trinidad Gutiérrez, interview by the author, and Alma A., interview by the author.

³¹³ "Max Mejía, "Renovación Moral (?)...Lucha Homosexual!" *Nuevo Ambiente* 4 (Abril-Mayo de 1983). In Lambda Documents, CDAHL.

Lesbian and Homosexual Responses to “Moral Renovation” and the Economic Crisis

As was the case with lesbian and homosexuals’ quick response to the “Obscene Decree,” activists spent the first years of de la Madrid’s administration confronting the politics of “moral renovation” and repression and marginalization of lesbian and homosexual communities and organizations that stemmed from it. They challenged these politics by demanding that the government protect their civil and human rights. Yet, though the economic crisis took its toll on Lambda and other lesbian and homosexual groups’ abilities to organize, Lambda members protested what they saw as the governments’ exacerbation of the economic crisis by the instatement of austerity measures and sought to create alliances with other groups demanding economic justice. During the fall of 1983, Lambda and Oikabeth actively participated in efforts of popular urban and *campesino* organizations to enact a work stoppage in protest of the privatization of public services and government entities, as well as high unemployment rates. For example, in September 1983 Lambda organized a meeting with the Mexico City Minister of Justice to discuss the unconstitutionality of arrests and extortion of homosexuals, lesbians, prostitutes, and the unemployed, that her office ordered. Lambda stated,

It is degrading that citizens are considered delinquents only because they are unemployed or for their homosexual preference. It is clear that the raids constitute a discriminatory act against the most vulnerable sectors of society, that in addition to the economic and homophobic oppression that they suffer daily, they must also suffer the persecution of the police.³¹⁴

³¹⁴ Letter from Lambda to the Attorney General of Mexico City, September 9, 1983. Personal Archive of Trinidad Gutiérrez and Marco Osorio.

Lambda intentionally timed their protest to coincide with the work stoppage to express their solidarity with other social movements.

Urban popular movements, often led by women, began to organize in conjunction with one another beginning in the early 1980s criticizing the effects of economic austerity measures on the urban poor and demanding improvements in housing and public services. As scholars such as Edward McCaughan, Diane Davis, and Guillermo de la Peña have discussed, urban neighborhood struggles for democratization began to take precedent over New Left politics in Mexico City during this time, leading to what has been referred to by Carlos Monsiváis as the rise of “civil society” after the earthquake in 1985. As occurred during the *paro cívico*, segments of the lesbian and homosexual movement, including Lambda and Oikabeth expressed solidarity with these movements, as well as sought to insert lesbian and homosexual issues into popular discourses around democratization of the Mexican state.

As indicated in the statement read by Lambda at the Minister of Justice’s office, in addition to demanding the protection of their rights, during this time period Lambda and Oikabeth members increasingly contended with unemployment as a result of the economic crisis. Young middle and upper middle class lesbian feminist activists who had before been more easily able to gain economic independence, struggled to attain and retain employment and those that had steady jobs were unlikely to “come out” publically for fear of retaliation. For working class women the burden of their double and triple workloads became heavier and time for socializing diminished. According to Hinojosa, it became increasingly difficult for single women, including lesbians, to afford to live on

their own. In a presentation reflecting on the history of Mexican lesbian feminism she explained:

...one of the most significant social consequences of the economic crisis was that the extended family became again in the urban areas a site for economic survival. The worsening of the economic situation heightened the difficulties for lesbians to gain the economic independence needed to live their lesbianism more openly. This meant that some lesbian women came back to live or work with their families, that others concentrated in working extended hours to keep their jobs, finding it harder to be activists at the same time, and that family groups were reinforced in their central role in society.³¹⁵

A 1983 statement entitled “Manifiesto to the Homosexual Community and to the People in Movement” also discusses the effects of economic austerity measures on lesbians and homosexuals and uses socialist rhetoric to express solidarity with the broader working-class in their struggle for just wages and job security,

...In this country we are living through an unprecedented economic, political, and ideological crisis, which the government claims to have resolved through the imposition of a doubly repressive program: austerity measures and ‘moral renovation’...It is within this context that homosexual liberation movement has adopted as their own demands for wage increases and job security...These circumstances have obligated us to rethink the priorities of our movement and focus our struggle on the defense of job security and other basic rights of our community.³¹⁶

Representatives of Lambda wrote the manifesto and various other lesbian and homosexual organizations signed on to it on the occasion of the fifth annual lesbian and homosexual march. It begins by briefly explaining the recent history of lesbian and homosexual organizing in Mexico, denouncing the Mexican government’s politics of

³¹⁵ Claudia Hinojosa. “Expanding the Social Justice Agenda in Mexico: A Lesbian Feminist Perspective.” Paper presented at the eleventh International Congress of the Latin American Studies Association, Chicago, 1998.

³¹⁶ Lambda, “Manifiesto a la Comunidad Homosexual al Pueblo en Movimiento,” *Uno Más Uno* (June 25, 1983).

austerity and “moral renovation,” and demanding that the government respect the basic rights of lesbians and homosexuals as Mexican citizens. It then goes on to call for the lesbian and homosexual movement to unify across ideological differences to rebuke increased persecution on the part of the police and assert their struggle to defend employment as a “basic right of their community.”

Yet, the reality was that at this time the lesbian and homosexual movement was far from unified, exemplified by the fact that two separate marches occurred in June 1983. Approximately 4-5,000 people participated in the first which Lambda and Oikabeth led and representatives from newer homosexual organizations like *Fidelidad de Homosexuales Católicos* and *Nueva Batalla de México* attended. Activists from feminist groups, the PRT, the newly formed United Socialist Party of Mexico (PSUM), and the FNCR also joined the march and gave short speeches in solidarity. Participants of this march rallied around the slogan “Rompiendo el Silencio” or Breaking the Silence and advocated for civil and human rights chanting “Tenemos derecho a vivir” (we have the right to live). Meanwhile *Lesbianas Comunistas* and *The Red Lhoca*, headed by many previous leaders of the FHAR including Juan Jacobo Hernández and Ignacio Alvarez of *Colectivo Sol* led a second march demanding that the lesbian and homosexual movement return to its roots as a politically autonomous and radical movement without sectarian influences. The march was attended by a couple hundred people including many transvestites and punks, and despite participation by a few lesbians, including Y. Castro of *Lesbianas Comunistas*, most participants were biologically male. This march largely rejected the rights discourse articulated by Lambda and Oikabeth, as well as what they

saw as the increasing influence of political parties such as the PRT and the PSUM on the politics of lesbian and homosexual liberation.³¹⁷

By 1982, Lesbianas Comunistas had split from Oikabeth. As both Y. Castro and Mogrovejo have documented, the majority of Oikabeth's members were increasingly less interested in following Y. Castro's militant ideas about socialism and sexual liberation.³¹⁸ As a result, Y. Castro stopped working with Oikabeth and instead lent support to the organizing of the group Lesbianas Socialistas Morelenses led by Marta Solé and based in a community outside Cuernavaca, approximately an hour and a half from Mexico City.³¹⁹ Lesbianas Morelenses formed in June 1982 with two members and marched in the Mexico City based pride parade at the end of that same month. Solé worked with the state government and received funding from her boss, ostensibly a closeted lesbian, to start a "comuna" or commune. Beginning in July the group rented an apartment with the idea of forming a commune and published a newsletter called "Lesbos." Echoing Oikabeth's early writings, the newsletter advocated lesbianism as a "subversive" lifestyle and served as a platform for discussing socialist feminist politics founded in the theories of Marx and Engels. By the next year, the group obtained a house and started a commune called the "Casa de la Mujer Lesbiana" which included a feminist café, documentation center, library, movie club, communal garden and farm, housing, herbal medicine and acupuncture, an artisan coop.

³¹⁷ John Kyper, "Two Mexico City Marches Celebrate Gay Pride Week," *Gay Community News* (Boston: July 30, 1983): 3.

³¹⁸ Mogrovejo 2000, 81-93

³¹⁹ Whereas Solé herself no longer participates in lesbian activism and declined to an interview, according to Y. Castro, "Solé is a very important person who has been forgotten because she is indigenous," Y. Castro, interview with the author.



Figure 4: Lesbianas Morelenses, image in the newsletter *Lesbos* Año 1: 2 (July 1982), AHMLFM-YMY.

Though there exists scant documentation from the group, what does exist indicates that up to sixty women, including internationals, were involved with the commune in 1983. According to Y. Castro, as opposed to Oikabeth, in which the majority of members were middle class, most of the women who worked with Lesbianas Morelenses were working class and/or indigenous.³²⁰

However, the commune's existence was short-lived. In late 1983 Solé's boss warned her that the state government planned to accuse the group of being armed guerillas. This threat resulted in the quick demobilization of the group, as women fled the

³²⁰ During this same time period, another commune was started in nearby Tepotzlán, Morelos by a woman from Holland who referred to herself as Safuega. Mogrovejo 2000, 191-95.

state of Morelos.³²¹ In a letter to the feminist community connecting their situation to the broader movement and to the politics of “moral renovation” *Lesbianas Morelenses* denounced the threats made against them, stating:

We are in exile and without a home. Without materials our work is diminished, that is why we are calling for your solidarity and attention so that you will not be the next victims of these dirty and underhanded politics called “moral renovation.”³²²

The letter also included an image of a policeman flanked with the words “moral renovation,” who pointed his gun at a women’s symbol that was being blown apart.

While there exists little further documentation concerning the accusation of terrorism or the disbandment of the group, their statement is helpful for understanding how lesbian feminist activists understood the politics of moral renovation as threatening to women and, in particular, to lesbians. It also brings up questions of how activists may have seen the realities of moral renovation as connected to Dirty War-like policing of the left for supposed connections to guerilla struggles.

Fomenting International Solidarities

As state repression of lesbians and homosexuals continued, members of Lambda increased transnational ties and participation in international organizations, conferences, and demonstrations. During this time Lambda frequently communicated with international organizations, requesting both financial assistance and their support in the form of writing letters to the Mexican government that condemned the repressive laws instated by the Mexican government during the early 1980s. In turn, lesbian and homosexual media in the U.S., Europe, and Canada, including newspapers and radio

³²² Lesbianas Morelenses, “Lesbianas Morelenses Denuncia.” AHMLFM-YMY.

programs, frequently reported about the increasingly dangerous situation for Mexican lesbians and homosexuals under the politics of moral renovation and austerity. For example, radio programs and newsletters of such organizations as Paz y Liberación (Houston, TX), the Gay Information Service (NY, NY), Off our Backs and Lesbian and homosexual Latinos Unidos (GLUU, Los Angeles) frequently published news and interviews with Mexican activists about their experiences of activism and repression. The English-speaking members of Lambda generally engaged in this communication, relaying to other members of the groups the work they were doing. Foreign members of Lambda also helped in writing translations and Danny Leard edited *Nuevo Ambiente*.³²³ They also sought rights-based solidarity by encouraging letter writing to Mexican officials denouncing repression. For example, participants from the Sixth Annual Conference of the ILGA held in Helsinki in July 1984 which Marco Osorio of Lambda attended, wrote a letter to de la Madrid protesting repression by the Mexican government. A portion of the letter reads, “Through the Mexican press and through the international press we have been informed of the so called Campaign of Civic Protection and of the Law on the Police and Good Government...the signatories of this document...want to express our most vehement protest against the systematic violation of the civil rights of Mexican lesbians and homosexual men.”³²⁴

While international lesbian and homosexual newspapers such as the *Gay Community News* continued to consistently publish articles about happenings in Mexico, foreign socialist and feminist newspapers and journals also took an interest in the situation of Mexican lesbians and homosexuals. For example the in March 1984 the

³²³ Jens Rydstrom, correspondence with the author, February 2011 and Trinidad Gutiérrez, interview.

³²⁴ International Gay Association (Helsinki, Finland) to President Miguel de la Madrid (Mexico City), July 14, 1984, Personal collection of Trinidad Gutiérrez and Marco Osorio.

Workers World newspaper published an article entitled “Repression Grows in Mexico, But so Does the Fightback” discussing government repression of both gays and trade unionists.³²⁵ In 1985 the U.S. feminist journal *Off Our Backs* published an interview with an anonymous Mexican lesbian activist who denounced the connection between economic austerity and moral renovation. Explaining the political situation for lesbians and homosexuals in Mexico, she stated:

We need international support for our fight against this oppression and for our challenge to the way the government slogan for ‘moral regeneration’ is used to oppress us. We are in solidarity with political groups against paying the external debt because we know the debt is behind the repression and gays become scapegoats.³²⁶

Telling of the level of repression felt in Mexico during this time, the interviewee decided to remain anonymous because she had recently published a book entitled *Homosexual Liberation: Why Society Should Not Repress Sexual Minorities*, an international history of gay liberation of which the last chapter documents the political struggles of lesbian and gay organizations within Mexico.³²⁷ The author of the interview ended the segment by calling readers to protest oppression of lesbian and homosexuals in Mexico by writing letters to the Mexican government and to Amnesty International.

Lambda also sought international economic solidarity in dealing with their financial problems. In early 1984, just a little over a year after they opened their office, the group faced considerable financial debt and mounted an international campaign to

³²⁵ Bob McCubbin, “Repression Grows in Mexico, But so Does the Fightback,” *Workers World* (March 1984), One.

³²⁶ “Mexican Lesbian Speaks Out,” *Off Our Backs* XVI (1986): 6. CDAHL.

³²⁷ Ibid and Gina Fratti and Adriana Batista, *Liberación Homosexual: Por Que la Sociedad no Debe Reprimir a las Minorias Sexuales* (Mexico DF: Editorial Posada, 1984), One. Unfortunately this book went out of print by 1986.

raise \$3,333 U.S. dollars in 3 months. In flyers and news briefs Lambda explained that their office and cafe were open to the entire lesbian and homosexual movement as well as to feminist organizations for meetings and events and were the only public spaces like this in existence in Mexico.³²⁸ According to the group, their debt accumulated as a result of the costs of the office, special events, and the publication of their newsletter and the fact that inadequate funding was available in Mexico for civil society organizations. The group charged monthly membership fees and covers for parties and special events, but this money failed to cover all the cost of rent and of holding conferences and cultural events. In a letter to the international community in February 1984, Lambda explained,

In this very moment we're with a deficit of over a quarter of million and it means to us a very high risk to lose our center because of lack of money. It is very closely related to the situation of our country, which is in the deepest economic crisis in its history...The loss of our center means to us a disastrous step backward for the gay movement in our country...As part of our campaign we are looking for international solidarity to reach our goal.³²⁹

Despite receiving some international contributions, the campaign did not garner long-term financial support and Lambda closed their office and ceased publishing their newsletter in September 1984. The fact that Lambda did not receive sufficient funds from the international community to support their center is not surprising considering that most national and international lesbian and gay groups lacked consistent, institutional funding during this time. Jens Rydstrom, who lived in Mexico City working briefly with Lambda in the early 1980s, became a volunteer with ILGA's Information Secretariat in Stockholm, which produced the ILGA Information Bulletin. He then served as the

³²⁸ Press release from Grupo Lambda de Liberación Homosexual (Mexico City) to "the International Gay Community," "33,000.00 U.S. dollars to Rescue Grupo Lambda's Gay Center," February 1, 1984, Personal collection of Trinidad Gutiérrez and Marco Osorio.

³²⁹ Ibid

ILGA's Spanish speaking contact between 1985 and 1991. In correspondence with the author, he explains how lesbian and homosexual groups from the South often expected that the ILGA would have funds that were not actually available:

We were a rather small and vulnerable group, overwhelmed by the expectations that lesbian and gay groups and individuals around the world could sometimes have of us...the misconceptions about the ILGA were basically ...that the strength of the organization was exaggerated. Partly because we in the ILGA worked on our image, using the UN symbol (a wreath of laurel with a globe and a triangle within), and partly because of the need of something to hope for and believe in. I still think that just the knowledge of that there were activists on the other side of the planet who cared for your activism and shared many of your experiences meant a lot to many people. But it was hard to realize that we couldn't offer much more than writing letters of protest or letters of sympathy...³³⁰

Thus, though economic solidarity did not bare the fruits that Lambda hoped it could, international rights-based solidarity from the ILGA and others promised to put pressure on the Mexican government to consider lesbian and gay rights as human rights.

International Year of Gay Action

Throughout 1984 Lambda organized activities in Mexico City and New York City in correspondence with the International Year of Gay Action in 1984. Sponsored by IGA, these events sought to, for the first time on an international stage, frame "lesbian and gay rights as human rights" making such demands as an end to state and institutional violence against lesbians and homosexuals, the declassification of homosexuality as a disease by the World Health Association, equal rights and equal access to housing and employment, an end to anti-gay immigration laws, and an increase in funding for research and treatment of AIDS. Coordinated by the Lesbian and gay Organizing Committee for 1984, that included Mexican participants, the year of action culminated in a march on the

³³⁰ Jens Rydstrom, correspondence with the author, January 15, 2011.

United Nations on September 30th, the day in which plenary sessions for the UN began.³³¹ On this day demonstrators planned to deliver a list of grievances to the UN Human Rights Commission. Upon invitation by international activists, a few members of Lambda went to New York City in March of 1984 to plan actions and to bring back relevant information to Mexico City.³³² Thereafter, in coordination with transnational organizing, Lambda created various campaigns and events in Mexico City and Guadalajara such as collecting signatures in protest of repression to be delivered to de la Madrid on December 10th, the international day of human rights. Activists also planned conferences, a pride march, and a symbolic takeover of the *Zona Rosa*, the area of Mexico City where most raids of gay bars and harassment of individuals occurred. In March of 1984, connecting the economic crisis to increased police repression, Lambda with the support of various political parties and unions organized a demonstration in front of a police station in Cuauhtémoc, an area of Mexico City where police harassment was prevalent. A joint press statement between the various groups involved condemned police repression in the forms of harassment, intimidation, arrest, and violent confrontations, of the “young, unemployed, prostitutes, homosexuals, and lesbians” and demanded the repeal of the law of Police and Good Government which they alleged suppressed constitutional rights to meet freely and demonstrate.³³³ At the same time, Lambda reported on this situation and their plan of action in the ILGA Bulletin in March 1984,

³³¹ Pamphlet by the Lesbian and gay Organizing Committee for 1984, “International March for Lesbian and gay Freedom: Conference on the Global Movement for Lesbian and gay Liberation,” (New York City), September 1984. Personal Collection of Trinidad Gutiérrez and Marco Osorio.

³³² Marco Osorio, “Informe sobre la participación del Grupo Lambda en la primera reunión de planeación para la conferencia-marcha a las Naciones Unidas en NYC para septiembre de ’84,” March 12, 1984. Personal Archive of Trinidad Gutiérrez and Marco Osorio.

³³³ Ibid. Reinforcing these accusations, Amnesty International’s Report in 1984, though not speaking specifically about crimes committed against lesbians and homosexuals, also claimed that state and local police were routinely violating human rights in Mexico (Mora, *Ni Renovación, Ni Moral*, 95).

encouraging international solidarity in the form of letters written to the Mexican government denouncing repression.³³⁴

Unfortunately, international letters sent to the de la Madrid administration about these abuses seemed to have little impact on the practices of local police and paramilitary forces active in Mexico City. During this time international human rights bodies affiliated with the United Nations and Amnesty International also failed to take allegations of lesbian and gay persecution seriously. This changed by the late 1980s and early 1990s, when countries, particularly those in the global South, began to experience international pressure to sign on to human rights agreements, as well as create and to adhere to their own national standards. As I will discuss further in the next chapter, since this time it has become increasingly difficult for state officials to ignore international outcry against human rights abuses.³³⁵

However, in 1984, public support, as well as indifference for human rights violations committed against lesbians and homosexuals on the part of the state, most likely played a far larger role in allowing such abuses to go on. Though the lesbian and homosexual movement sought to create alliances with urban popular movements, they did not receive much, if any, support for lesbian and gay issues in return. Rather the majority of the Left, except for the PRT and PCM, hesitated, if not opposed, supporting lesbian and gay liberation and rights. Furthermore, public and international denunciations of police and state repression may have actually provoked more hostility towards Lambda. Police agents often monitored activities at the Lambda office, sometimes harassing people as they entered or exited. According to Eugenia Olsen, “This

³³⁴IGA, From IGA Information Secretariat, Bulletin 3/84, CLGA.

³³⁵ This topic will be dealt with in significant detail in chapter five.

was a way to let us know that they knew where we were, how to find us, as well as to let us know that they would come into our office whenever they wanted, and take people away if they wanted, while we could apparently do nothing.”³³⁶ Research in the DFS archives substantiates Olsen’s claim that agents frequented the Lambda office. For example, a DFS report from May 16, 1984 states that a Lambda meeting was cancelled, indicating that DFS agents consistently monitored meetings and events held by the organization.³³⁷ Immediately prior to the fifth annual pride march, on June 20, 1984 ten armed individuals violently attacked members inside the Lambda office, also destroying materials within the building.³³⁸ According to an article about the assault and break-in published in *Uno Más Uno*, when they entered the building the attackers yelled out “we don’t want fags in the Roma neighborhood.” Six people were hurt in the attack and the building was damaged.³³⁹ Immediately after the assault occurred, Lambda formally denounced the crime, yet heard no response from the authorities. The above-mentioned article also reported on Lambda’s June 23rd press conference announcing the pride march that would occur on the 24th and the demands that they planned to make in relation to violent repression and harassment of lesbians and homosexuals:

For unclear reasons, police aggression against us has recently intensified. They said that the raids would end. But, not for us. Because, day after day, night after night, at whatever time of day, they detain us. They say that it’s because of the way that we dress, or the way that we walk, that we are delinquents. They humiliate and laugh at us... There are many cases of this.... Armed with poles,

³³⁶ Olsen, Eugenia, interview by Colectivo Sol A.C., 2000, p. 5, transcript, “Nuevas Identidades de Género, Procesos Culturales y Cambios Socio-Históricos. El Movimiento Gay en México (1970-1980) a través de la voz y la mirada de sus portagonistas,” Archivo Colectivo Sol, Mexico DF.

³³⁷ DFS, Departamento de Información e Investigación Local, Sección I. “Extracto: Suspensión de la Reunión Organizada por el Grupo ‘Gay Lambda,’ ” May 16, 1984.

³³⁸ At the same time as Lambda’s office was attacked, the *Dirección Federal de Seguridad*, Mexico’s intelligence agency, was heavily monitoring the activities of the MLH by infiltrating meetings and events. AGN, DFS, “Conferencia de Prensa del Grupo Lambda de Liberación Homosexual,” June 29, 1984.

³³⁹ Mariclaire Acosta, Angelos Mastretta, Adolfo Gilly, y 162 firmas más, “Denuncia una agresión contra el grupo Lambda,” *Uno más Uno*, June 24, 1984.

tubes, and chains, a gang of young men raided Lambda's office where they beat up men and women. The only reasoning they offered for attacking us was because we were "faggots."³⁴⁰

The article then went on to explain, "And that is how activists explain the reality for lesbians and homosexuals as they march today and announce their participation in the international march for gay rights on September 30th where 50,000 people will gather in front of the UN in New York City." In condemnation of the crime committed against Lambda members in their office, sixty-five prominent intellectuals and public figures also signed a published letter of protest denouncing the lack of government attention towards the attack. Thus, while the lesbian and homosexual movement seems to have not received significant support from urban popular movements during this time, many prominent actors in the Mexican left continued to publically support their cause. Unfortunately, such exhibitions of solidarity remained largely symbolic and did not actually serve to halt state repression.

Inauguration and Dissolution: A Time of Change and Reform

Despite Lambda and other allied groups' drive to unify the lesbian and homosexual movement around the actions set forth as part of the International Year of Gay Action, ideological conflict within the movement actually increased during 1984 as groups such as Seminario and Colectivo Sol disagreed with the nature of international solidarity that Lambda sought out through their work with the ILGA. Furthermore, as a result of the realities of the economic crisis, the onset of AIDS, and the level of

³⁴⁰ Fidel Samaniego Reyes, "Estamos orgullosos; no viviremos más en el silencio; homosexuales," *El Universal* June 30, 1984. These demands were also reported on by DFS agents, DFS, Departamento de Información e Investigación Local, "Informe: Conferencia de Prensa del Grupo Lambda de Liberación Homosexual" June 29, 1984.

persecution and discrimination experienced by lesbians and homosexuals under “moral renovation,” the number of people actually participating in the lesbian and homosexual movement was rapidly diminishing. Yet, at the same time, the 1985 earthquake that struck Mexico City represented a turning point in opportunities for groups like Seminario to increase activism and outreach to new communities.

Y. Castro and Alma Ocegüera formed Seminario soon after the disbandment of the lesbian commune, and bridging off of the group Lesbianas Comunistas Feministas. Constituted as a group based primarily in the study of Marxist and feminist texts, Seminario immediately sought a public presence within the Left and also worked in coalition with similarly oriented gay male groups such as Colectivo Sol, La Guillotina, and El Colectivo Cuilotzin. A small group, approximately ten to fifteen women participated with Seminario throughout its three-year tenure.³⁴¹ Differentiating between patriarchal versus feminist socialism and reactionary versus revolutionary feminism, the group espoused a philosophy of revolutionary feminist socialism. Like Lesbianas Comunistas, their local goals focused on educating working class activists, primarily women, to support lesbian involvement in popular urban struggles. Other goals were more global in scope:

we seek to achieve that socialist organizations and countries cease all oppression and repression against lesbians included in their programs and political platforms and should constitute, for example, the inalienable rights of lesbians and homosexuals, and above all, the right for every woman and man to live their sexuality freely.³⁴²

Thus, different from Lambda who believed that rights discourse had the potential to change repressive policies and further democratization, activists from Seminario saw the

³⁴¹ Mogrovejo 2000, 167 and Y. Castro, interview

³⁴² Seminario Marxista Leninista Feminista de Lesbianas, untitled flyer, 1985. AHMLFM-YMY.

promotion of any kind of state reform as conceding to the interests of bourgeois and neoliberal understandings of individual freedoms. They, and other groups such as *Colectivo Sol*, opposed any kind of state reform and instead, supported either socialist revolutionary change or an anarchist inspired stateless society.

Factionalism within the broader lesbian and homosexual movement reached a peak at the annual 1984 pride march. Before the march, Lambda circulated a flyer calling for the lesbian and homosexual movement to overcome their differences and unify in the struggle against “official repression, economic repression, and the homophobia of the media.” In order to make a political statement about this persecution, Lambda called for march attendees to wear black in honor of the victims of state and police repression. However, radical elements of the lesbian and homosexual movement completely disagreed with the idea of wearing black, seeing it as representative of what they saw as Lambda and other allied groups’ reformist politics. At the June 30th pride march *Colectivo Sol*, a group of mostly biological men (including many transvestites and dragqueens) which was led by Juan Jacobo Hernández and spun off of the FHAR in 1981, distributed a five page pamphlet entitled “Eutanasia al Movimiento Lilo” roughly translated as “Death to the Gay Movement.” The pamphlet began by stating, “Gone are the days of the happy and combative marches of the “jotos” between 1978 and 1981. The spirit that motivated us, the work that sustained us, and the anger of the militants that pushed us on is also gone and irretrievable.”³⁴³ Throughout this pamphlet *Colectivo Sol* contended that the radical leadership of the lesbian and homosexual movement had essentially died in 1981 with the FHAR, an organization that was also virtually all male. Rather, they stated, that since this time Lambda had claimed to lead the lesbian and

³⁴³ *Colectivo Sol*, “Eutanasia al Movimiento Lilo,” June 30, 1984, AHMLFM-YMY.

homosexual movement as a revolutionary Trotskyist group, but actually just sought acceptance from the state and society and therefore did not represent the interests of the majority of lesbians or gays. The pamphlet went on to state, “Their tear-jerking and begging campaigns about the ‘persecution’ that they suffer are stubborn and boring. Lambda, the Group of Homosexual Lamentation, sends monthly letters abroad denouncing this country as the most perverse and machista in the world, presenting themselves as victims to the First World.”³⁴⁴ In sum, *Colectivo Sol* argued that Lambda’s central discourse against repression and machismo was flawed and disempowering because it made lesbians and homosexuals into victims and depended on response from an illegitimate state uninterested in the claims of civil society. The pamphlet concludes with the assertion that the lesbian and homosexual movement had committed suicide and 1984’s march should be interpreted as a funeral for the movement rather than a protest on behalf of victims of anti-gay oppression. The documents from Lambda and *Colectivo Sol* discussed above reveal the vast ideological differences between sectors of the movement, including between women and men. Though Lambda and most of its allies were hardly single-issue organizations, *Colectivo Sol* and *Seminario* perceived their appeals for recognition, including the use of international rights discourses, electoral politics, as well as their work to secure international funding, as essentially anti-revolutionary and neo-liberal.

³⁴⁴ *Colectivo Sol*, “Eutanesia al Movimiento Lilo,” 4.



Figure 5: DFS, AGN, Part II Reseña Fotografica of La Evaluación de la IV Marcha del Orgullo Homosexual Convocada por el Grupo de Lesbianas y Homosexuales Lambda de Liberación Homosexual, June 30, 1984.

Lambda, Oikabeth, and approximately ten other groups from around the nation decided to publically respond to the accusations put forth in Colectivo Sol's pamphlet. In a collective statement published in the Mexico City based newspaper *Uno Más Uno*, these groups defended their use of a mix of politics of redistribution and recognition and ridiculed the political stances of Colectivo Sol and other allied groups,

... We need to be vigilant of the great obstacles that confront us... some backwards sectors of the homosexual and lesbian movement are publically intolerant of us, amongst these groups, some people believe that any movement for civil rights is 'reformist.' One of these factions is led by Juan Jacobo Hernández, and caused a very unfortunate scene at the Sixth March. With the irrationality typical of the extreme right, these individuals sought to convert the march into a pathetic carnival of provocation.

A week later, nine feminist organizations including the internationally circulated magazine *FEM* condemned the actions of Colectivo Sol and their allies, “We forcefully condemn the violent provocation of the lesbian and homosexual movement at the Sixth Pride March. Feminists have also suffered aggressions from factions that, amongst other things, justify the infringement of rights and defend the phallocracy.”³⁴⁵ Thus, Lambda, Oikabeth, and their allies in the lesbian and homosexual and feminist community rebuked criticisms launched against them by Colectivo Sol by accusing them of sexism and sectionalism.

These conflicts only escalated by the annual pride march held in June 1985. A coalition of groups, including Y. Castro of Seminario and Juan Carlos Bautista of Colectivo Sol, organized the seventh annual pride march as a protest against economic austerity measures and the related persecution of the “oppressed,” including, but not limited to lesbians and homosexuals. Fliers for the event were inclusive of women and men and called for “lilos and tortilleras” to work to instate a socialist state.³⁴⁶ Yet, because of the conflict that had ensued the year before, many Lambda members decided not to participate.³⁴⁷ Though, Lambda as an organization did not formally disband until the fall of 1985, the group entered into an internal crisis earlier that same year and many of its founding and original members such as Alma A., Hinojosa, Lizárraga, Mejía, and Gutiérrez, had either left Mexico City and/or stopped working with Lambda by this time.

³⁴⁵ CIDHAL, Colectivo Feminista de Colima, Colectivo La Revuelta, Grupo Autónomo de Mujeres Universitarias, Madres Libertarias, Psicólogas Democráticas, Revista Fem, Taller del Museo del Chopo, Grupo Ven-Seremos, “A la Comunidad Homosexual de Mexico: A la Opinión Pública,” *Uno Más Uno*, July 12, 1984.

³⁴⁶ Ruiidho, Press Release, “Septima Marcha de Liberación Homosexual,” June 15, 1985, AHMLFM-YMY.

³⁴⁷ Grupo Lambda de Liberación Homosexual, Carlos Rejón, Gonzalo Aburto, Trini Gutiérrez, Manuel Alvarez, Carlos Bravo, Nayeli Fuentes, Marco Osorio y Leonardo Ellzaldo, “No habrá marcha del orgullo homosexual,” *La Jornada*, June 26, 1985, 12. AHMLFM-YMY.

Alma A. and Lizárraga left Lambda first between 1982 and 1983 because they opposed strengthening ties with the PRT.³⁴⁸ According to Alma A., after their work with CLHARI during the election, Lambda became known as a “lugar del partido” or as a party-affiliated organization.³⁴⁹ In interviews, Lizárraga and Nuulart both discussed how, after the election of 1982, there was an increasing expectation that Lambda members would ally with the PRT. Nuulart, the organizer of Lambda’s Jueves de Mujeres also became increasingly frustrated by working with men. Speaking to the importance of forming a women’s group within Lambda, Nuulart stated that, though Lambda was a mixed gender group and espoused a feminist ideology, the men often spoke more than the women, as well as resented women’s attempts to create their own spaces. In an interview she explained why she eventually left Lambda,

Women began to be more interested in creating our own spaces, in involving ourselves more in feminism, and in defending ourselves as a group of lesbians...when I left Lambda I told myself ‘I do not want to be in a group with men because clearly, in Lambda it was incredibly difficult to always have to be trying to convince the men that women had rights, and that women should come first- I have never seen in a march, never, that the women march ahead of the men. Why? Because men always believe that they have this right...’³⁵⁰

Though others agreed with Nuulart’s sentiments, some prominent women in Lambda such as Hinojosa, Alma A., and Trinidad Gutiérrez did not share the perspective that lesbians should only organize separately from gay men and, in retrospect, praise Lambda for how well women and men worked together.³⁵¹ Rather, they attribute the closure of Lambda in 1984 to differences in political ideology, the economic crisis, the rise of AIDS, and general feelings of having overworked themselves for too long. However,

³⁴⁸ Alma A., interview and Lizárraga, interview.

³⁴⁹ Alma A., interview.

³⁵⁰ Nuulart, interview.

³⁵¹ Alma A., Gutiérrez, and Hinojosa, interviews.

despite differing opinions between participants over the relative success of Lambda as a mixed gender group, it was the only group of its kind during this era of lesbian and homosexual activism in Mexico City.³⁵²

Despite Lambda's internal crisis, the 7th pride march was well attended by approximately 4,000 lesbians and homosexuals and their allies, including many PRT militants. Demonstrators echoed Lambda's politics demanding that they had the "right to have rights" as guaranteed under the constitution, claimed solidarity with other oppressed groups, and condemned U.S. imperialism.³⁵³ The success of the 1985 pride march demonstrates that, despite increased factionalism and the end of Lambda, lesbians and homosexuals were forming new organizations, as well as continuing to demand the democratization of the Mexican state.

Yet, the devastation wrought by the massive earthquake that struck Mexico City on September 19, 1985, as well as increasing understanding of the seriousness of AIDS, posed both new challenges and opportunities for alliance building with other social movements. For example, the nature of Seminario's work changed dramatically after the 1985 earthquake, when they took an active role in organizing women who had lost jobs and homes. Between September and December 1985 the group engaged in direct action in support of women affected by the disaster. As has been well documented by journalists such as Carlos Monsiváis and Elena Poniatowska, because the government responded

³⁵² Lizárraga formed the organization Guerilla Gay in 1983. According to Lizárraga, Guerilla Gay was a membership-based consciousness raising group formed primarily by ex-members of Lambda. Whereas Hinojosa, Gutiérrez, and Mejía remained supportive of Lambda's affiliation with the PRT, the three also became less militant in the group by 1985. In 1984 Hinojosa left the country to live in France where she participated with a women's choral group, Gutiérrez went to live in San Francisco in 1985, then moving temporarily to Guadalajara in 1986 where she worked developing lesbian organizing. Mejía left Mexico City in 1988 for Tijuana where he continued to work in gay liberation struggles.

³⁵³ DFS, AGN, 235, "Boletín de Prensa, Coordinadora de la Séptima Marcha del Orgullo Lesbico-Homosexual."

very slowly and ineffectively to the disaster, people from areas of the city unaffected by the earthquake turned out in droves to offer their assistance to the victims.³⁵⁴ In her work on women's urban popular movements in Mexico City, Vivienne Bennett described the situation as follows,

the massive earthquakes that struck Mexico City within days of each other in Sept. '85 served as catalysts for the formation of new urban popular movements. The catastrophic destruction of downtown housing and sweatshops-150,000 made homeless, 150,000 jobs lost, 1,326 garment factories destroyed-followed by highly inefficient and corrupt government handling of the crisis forced citizens to come together to address the major issues of replacement housing and work."³⁵⁵

Thus, the crisis created by the colossal loss of jobs and resulting economic instability resulted in intense popular mobilization in support of the earthquake's victims and against government use of neoliberal politics in reconstruction efforts. In his memoir on the earthquake and its legacy *No sin Nosotros*: *Los Días del Terremoto 1985 -2005*, Carlos Monsiváis describes this point in time as one of historical rupture as the concept of "civil society" in Mexico City took on new meaning and force in response to the earthquake. According to Monsiváis, civil society organized apart from and in rejection of the government's weak efforts to deal with the crisis. Organizing during this time resulted in the creation and fortification of social movements that would continue to challenge the viability of official government projects thereafter.³⁵⁶

As also discussed by Mogrovejo, Seminario put their revolutionary rhetoric into action and played an active role in organizing seamstresses from a factory whose

³⁵⁴ Carlos Monsiváis. *No sin Nosotros*: *Los Días del Terremoto 1985 -2005* (Mexico City: Editores Independientes, 2005) and Elena Poniatowska, *Nothing, Nobody: The Voices of the Mexico City Earthquake* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995).

³⁵⁵ Bennett, V. "Everyday Struggles: Women in Urban Popular Movements and Territorially Based Protests in Mexico." In Rodríguez, Victoria (ed) *Women's Participation in Mexican Political Life* (Westview Press, 1998): 122-23.

³⁵⁶ Monsiváis 2005.

employer abandoned their contracts and sought to remove all machinery days after the earthquake destroyed their factory in the center of Mexico City. In response, the seamstresses and their allies staged a sit-in in front of the factory, attempting to block the owners from coming in to remove the equipment. During this standoff, approximately seven members of Seminario approached the seamstresses as fellow workers and as union members, and brought them food and water. They and activists from other unions immediately started a camp where they stayed for the majority of three months supporting the seamstresses' blockage of the factory to their former employer. Women from Seminario, amongst others also assisted seamstresses in the formation of an independent union called the Sindicato 19 de Septiembre. According to a report by Seminario members published during this time in the prominent feminist magazine *Fem*, group members did not immediately identify themselves to the seamstresses as lesbians. Rather, they waited to inform the seamstresses that they were part of a lesbian action group until after they had clearly exhibited their solidarity as fellow women workers. According to Seminario this strategy was effective and the seamstresses came to accept their lesbianism:

... We explained to them that we are also an oppressed social sector...after having confronted the same enemy; the bourgeois state, including the government and its leaders, the demonized word 'lesbian' lost all its stigma of being a 'sickness,' a degeneration, or an 'abnormality,' and was converted into a fraternal word, in the camp they called us 'lesbian compañera' or 'the lesbian communist compañeras...' ³⁵⁷

Thereafter, part of Seminario's mission in the camp was to educate the seamstresses in Marxist and feminist politics. They offered workshops on such themes as collective organization, vegetarianism, abortion, orgasm, lesbianism and natural medicine.

³⁵⁷ Seminario Marxista Leninista Feminista de Lesbianas, "Una Expresión Lesbica en el Movimiento Proletario," *Fem*, December 1985.

According to their report, Seminario explained their political positions to the seamstresses as follows,

...lesbianism is one of the most decisive expressions of rebellion that women can take against the role that has been historically imposed on them. Communism is a new social system in which we as the workers take the reins of the government and direct production in order to benefit ourselves...³⁵⁸

This quote quite clearly echoes arguments made by earlier Marxist feminist lesbian groups encouraging fellow women and workers to see lesbianism as a revolutionary stance against capitalism and patriarchy. Seminario's coalitional work also posed a clear challenge to efforts to use moralizing politics as a wedge to divide those opposed to neo-liberalism.

Throughout the three months that Seminario worked with the seamstresses, they and other members of the lesbian and homosexual movement also participated in the formation of the *Coordinadora Unica de Damnificados* (Overall Coordinating Committee of Disaster Victims), as well as used public protests as a forum for connecting issues of state repression with the government's response to the crisis provoked by the earthquake. For example, they organized a contingent to march in a commemorative march honoring the victims of the Tlatelolco massacre on October 2, 1985. Activists entitled a flyer for the march distributed by a conglomeration of groups, including Seminario and identifying as the *Frente de Liberación Lésbico-Homosexual*, "2 de Octubre de 1968-19 de septiembre de 1985- Víctimas de Un Mismo Sistema (October 2, 1968-September 19, 1985-Victims of the Same System)." Making a broad critique of PRI corruption, they condemned the government for not providing properly for the earthquake victims and instead signing more agreements with the IMF. More specifically, the *Frente de*

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

Liberación Lésbico Homosexual demanded an end to debt payments and the reconstruction of homes and reinstatement of jobs for those who had lost them in the natural disaster.³⁵⁹ The day after the march, members of the lesbian and homosexual movement met to coordinate efforts to distribute needed supplies to those affected by the earthquake.³⁶⁰

Despite their active involvement in this solidarity movement, Seminario contends that they were eventually pushed out of organizing by another feminist organization whose members objected to their lesbian politics.³⁶¹ Furthermore, in the midst of a surge in discussions concerning the involvement of civil society in earthquake relief, most journalistic accounts fail to even mention the participation of Seminario in the seamstress solidarity movement.³⁶² While a special publication on the seamstress struggle by “Cuadernos de Insurgencia Sindical” cites the participation of Seminario, Y. Castro has contended that chroniclers of the history of the Sindicato de Costureras 19 de Septiembre, including self proclaimed leftists and feminists, purposefully ignored the participation of Seminario in the movement.³⁶³ In this regard she has stated, ...”This is because of the profound lesbophobia that prevails not only within the Left, but in the feminist movement itself. This is why they have ignored the fact that we lesbians began this struggle and that we sustained the organization of the camp during the first months,

³⁵⁹ AGN, DFS, Frente de Liberación Homosexual, flyer for march, October 2, 1985.

³⁶⁰ AGN, DFS, Report from the Ministry of the Interior, “Asamblea Convocada por el Movimiento de Liberación Homosexual,” October 3, 1985.

³⁶¹ Y. Castro, interview and Seminario, “Una Expresión Lesbica en el Movimiento Proletario.” *Fem*, December 1985, AHMLFM-YMY.

³⁶² Poniatowska, *Nothing, Nobody* and Monsivaís, *No Sin Nosotros*.

³⁶³ Cuadernos de Insurgencia Sindical, “Costureras: Un Sindicato Nacido de los Escombros” AHMLFM-YMY.

which were the most dangerous and difficult.”³⁶⁴ From the available sources it is hard to discern the accuracy of Y. Castro’s assertion that Seminario began and sustained the solidarity struggle in its early stages. However, the fact that newspaper accounts from the time as well as Poniatowska and Monsivaís’ journalistic accounts make no mention of Seminario’s participation is intriguing. Could the lack of mention of Seminario’s involvement and leadership in the seamstress solidarity movement have been purposeful? What motivated so called “lesbophobia” within the Left and the heterosexual feminist movement during this time? As discussed in the introduction to the dissertation, Y. Castro argues that, as a result of lesbophobia, historians have purposely ignored the work of autonomous Marxist lesbians. While my research thus far has been unable to provide comprehensive answers to these questions, the omission of Seminario’s participation in accounts of earthquake relief efforts lends support to Y. Castro’s contentions.

Conclusion

Despite internal disagreements over ideology and political strategies to counter “moral renovation” and resist policies of economic austerity, most lesbian and homosexual activists forged significant coalitional and transnational relationships during this time. Yet, at the same time that it lowered economic regulations and opened markets, the Mexican government sought greater social control through stricter penal codes. The politics of “moral renovation” created a climate in which the state could easily justify the repression of lesbians, homosexuals, and others considered non-normative. Whether or not activists worked with international organizations for human rights, or engaged in

³⁶⁴ Seminario Marxista Leninista Feminista de Lesbianas, Notes from a slideshow on Seminario’s participation in the seamstress solidarity movement, no date, AHMLFM-YMY.

grassroots work for revolutionary change, new regulations considered lesbians and homosexuals “intolerable subjects.” Lesbian and homosexual activists responded to “moral renovation” and the economic crisis by organizing transnationally and creating counter-discourses that linked neo-liberal ideologies to moralizing politics, thus denouncing the increased repression of marginalized sectors of society. As stated in a 1984 report detailing the “advances and limitations” of the gay movement, this organizing brought visibility and legitimacy to lesbian and homosexual rights issues and advanced the goals of the movement, “the situation for lesbians and gays in our country has experienced an undeniable advance....the elaboration of a plural counter-discourse about gay issues and the political presence of lesbians and homosexuals is irreversible.”³⁶⁵

Though the period between 1982 and 1985 marked the dissolution of Lambda, members of the organization, alongside other activists involved in the lesbian and homosexual movement, played active roles in efforts to democratize the Mexican state and protest neoliberal reforms. Contrary to contentions made by some chroniclers of Mexican lesbian and gay history that the years between 1982 and 1985 are largely historically insignificant, the events recounted in this chapter show that during this time lesbians and homosexuals built a vibrant movement with international connections, actively opposing repression and incipient neo-liberalism. Counter-discourses that championed the right of the oppressed to have rights prevailed as part of movements that sought greater social and economic equality. How such changes would come about

³⁶⁵ Grupo Lambda de Liberación Homosexual, “The Third Annual Week of Lesbian and Homosexual Rights: Advances and Limitations of the Gay Movement,” 1984. Personal Archive of Trinidad Gutiérrez and Marco Osorio.

continued to be a point of contention, a subject I explore much further in chapter four as I document histories of lesbian feminism through the early 1990s.

CHAPTER 4: GRASSROOTS AND GLOBAL?: FORGING TRANSNATIONAL NETWORKS, UTILIZING HUMAN RIGHTS DISCOURSES, AND INSTITUTIONALIZING LESBIAN ACTIVISM IN MEXICO

To support lesbian activism and challenge human rights abuses and incipient neoliberal politics occurring throughout Latin America, lesbian activists created regional and transnational networks, as well as worked with already existing international organizations. Throughout the late 1980s, Mexican lesbians participated in and held leadership roles within international organizing networks, attending ILGA, International Lesbian Information Secretariat (ILIS), and regional Latin American conferences. The first Latin American lesbian conference was held in Mexico in 1987, resulting in the creation of a Latin American Lesbian Network and a strengthened working relationship with U.S. based Latinas and Chicanas. Such collaborations between Latina lesbians further inspired Mexican activists to advocate for anti-imperialist and intersectional approaches to international lesbian and gay organizing.

In 1991, Mexican activists hosted the 13th Annual ILGA conference, the first time it was held in the global South. As documented in earlier chapters, as well as in this chapter, in international contact zones Mexican and other lesbian and gay participants from the global South confronted and negotiated power dynamics between activists in the global South and North, as well as the essentialism of the “Third World” woman.³⁶⁶ By contesting these neo-colonial dynamics from within, Latin American activists made the ILGA become both a more globally representative and a more anti-imperialist

³⁶⁶ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,” *Feminist Review* 30 (Autumn 1988), 61-88. In her seminal piece “Under Western Eyes,” Chandra Talpade Mohanty sought to dismantle the common assumption made by Northern feminists that Third World women are “victims,” and that because of cultural barriers to women’s mobilization, Third World movements are in need of “help” from their “sisters” in the North.

organization. At the 1991 ILGA conference, Latin American participants also successfully transformed the structure of ILGA to become more regionally focused and controlled. By considering international conferences and meetings as “contact zones,” I hope to reveal how relationships of power and understandings of lesbian and gay politics were created and resisted. I contend that we must look to these histories of contestation and negotiation in order to understand the ways in which Mexican lesbian activists have influenced the strategies and ideologies of transnational lesbian and gay organizations.

It is equally as important to analyze how international processes and politics affected local organizing during this time. Mexican activists faced not only the changes brought by democratization and neo-liberalism, but also contended with the international push to professionalize activism via what has been termed “NGOization.”³⁶⁷ Following an increasingly prominent international model, in the late 1980s the first Mexican lesbian organizations began to institutionalize via incorporation within the state and rely on international funding. As Sonia Alvarez and others have contended, the institutionalization of feminist activism has been directly linked to neo-liberal politics. Neoliberal states have supported the development of NGOs because they can use international funding to offer services and programs that the state cannot provide due to strict austerity measures.³⁶⁸ Many autonomous lesbian feminists throughout Latin America, including Y. Castro and Trinidad Gutiérrez, have strongly opposed the institutionalization of lesbian feminism as a turn away from movement politics and a turn towards reformist strategies.

³⁶⁷ Sonia E. Alvarez, “Advocating Feminism: The Latin American Feminist NGO ‘Boom,’” in Luciana Ricciutelli, Angela Miles, and Margaret H. McFadden, eds. *Feminist Politics, Activism, and Vision: Local and Global Challenges* (Toronto: Inanna Publications and Education Inc., 2004).

³⁶⁸ Ibid, Alvarez 2004.

Despite such internal divides over institutionalization, Mexican lesbian and feminist movements continued to heavily critique economic neo-liberalism during the 1990s. However, both lesbians and gay men involved in the organizing of the 1991 ILGA conference increasingly sought accommodation from the state and used new strategies to appeal to notions of liberal modernity and citizenship. In particular, activists utilized and re-framed the Mexican government's discourses on democratic modernization and economic restructuring through privatization. The use of such discourses and tactics during the planning of the 1991 ILGA conference shed light on the changing nature of lesbian and gay politics under a neo-liberal and progressively more democratic versus authoritarian state. Rupturing with up to then predominant ideologies of left internationalism and Latin American centered understandings of human rights, activists increasingly drew from liberal human rights discourses to defend their constitutional rights to free assembly. The Mexican state's support of lesbian and gay rights also represented a change in bio-politics—to quote Jasbir Puar, lesbians and homosexuals went “from being (only) figures of death to becoming tied to ideals of life and productivity.”³⁶⁹ In the context of organizing the 1991 ILGA conference, gay men also increasingly connected support for economic neo-liberalism with the protection of gay rights. By using homonationalist discourses to insist that the Mexican state support gay rights in order to gain admittance into NAFTA, these gay men sought to become “non-normative national subjects.”³⁷⁰ In this way, homonationalism was expressed by gay men through the adoption of conservative politics based in neo-liberal ideals. This chapter therefore offers insight into both the ways in which lesbian and gay rights have been used

³⁶⁹ Puar 2007, xii

³⁷⁰ Ibid, xiii

to advance neoliberal interests, as well as the ways in which activists have resisted conservatism, and instead advanced South-South solidarities.

Precedents to International Participation

As documented in earlier chapters, by the 1980s various gay and lesbian activists from Mexico City were active participants in international feminist and lesbian and gay organizing. Largely due to their English language skills, Claudia Hinojosa and Marco Osorio of Lambda, two of the younger members of the group, became the main contacts for transnational organizing around lesbian and gay liberation and rights. Hinojosa, a professional pianist and lesbian activist, first participated in such international events as the 1977 pride parade in Barcelona and the Third World Gay and Lesbian Conference and March on Washington in 1979. She then represented Lambda at the 1980 non-governmental (NGO) forum held parallel to the Mid-Decade United Nations World Conference on Women in Copenhagen. There she first met Charlotte Bunch, an academic and pioneer of lesbian feminist activism from the U.S. In a co-authored article “Lesbians Travel the Roads of Feminism Globally,” Hinojosa and Bunch describe meeting one another at this conference and the ways in which they found common ground with one another in this contact zone :

When we met...there was a spark of recognition between us that we shared a common vision and drive to connect our feminism with our lesbianism. Both of us had come eager to see feminism develop globally and determined that lesbianism be discussed there. We also knew that this issue can be used to divide women, especially along North-South lines, and wanted to challenge the stereotype that lesbians are all white, middle class and Western.³⁷¹

³⁷¹ Charlotte Bunch and Claudia Hinojosa, “Lesbians Travel the Roads of Feminism Globally” in John D’Emilio, William B. Turner, and Urvashi Vaid, (eds). *Creating Change: Sexuality, Public Policy, and Civil Rights* (NY: St. Martin’s Press, 2000): 3.

Furthering lesbian activist relationships between Mexico and the U.S., after Copenhagen, Hinojosa and Bunch continued to work with one another such as at the annual IGA meeting in 1981 in Torino, Italy, in Nairobi for the UN End of the Decade Conference on Women, and in Geneva for an ILIS conference in 1986.³⁷²

Outside of the structures of international organizations based in the Global North, Mexican lesbians also began fomenting transnational alliances amongst women in the Latin America and the Caribbean at regional feminist *encuentros*. These conferences have been held bi-annually since 1981 when the first was held in Bogotá, Colombia and have served as contact zones in which Latin American women “exchange experiences, ideas, and strategies for change.”³⁷³ The celebration of November 25th as the International Day of No More Violence Against Women, as well as regional campaigns for abortion rights have been concrete outcomes of these conferences. Despite some heterosexual feminists hesitance to work with lesbians, beginning at this first *encuentro* women from various countries also initiated dialogue on lesbian issues. Thereafter, at the second *encuentro* held in Lima, Peru in 1983 four women, including Hinojosa organized an informal workshop entitled “patriarchy and lesbianism.” Enthusiasm for the workshop surpassed organizers’ expectations and was attended by approximately 300-400 women.³⁷⁴ In an interview as part of an oral history project conducted by the Mexican organization Colectivo Sol, Cecilia Riquelme, a Chilean lesbian describes the conflicts at this workshop where women both ideologically and spatially divided themselves between those who identified as lesbians and heterosexuals. During the workshop Riquelme

³⁷² Lambda raised funds for Hinojosa and two other members to travel to Italy for the 1981 IGA conference.

³⁷³ Pieper-Mooney 2008, 164

³⁷⁴ Bunch and Hinojosa, “Lesbians Travel,” 9.

“came out” to herself and committed to become active in lesbian politics. In 1984 she began Chile’s first lesbian discussion group, Ayukilen. However, political repression in Chile seemed insurmountable to Riquelme and she soon fled the country, moving to Brazil where she immediately began working with a lesbian organization there that helped to organize the 1985 Latin American feminist *encuentro*.³⁷⁵ Though apparently no lesbian activists from Mexico attended this conference, at this meeting various workshops on lesbianism were held as part of the official program, dialogue amongst heterosexual and lesbian feminists increased, and participants first began to discuss the possibility of forming a Latin American lesbian network.³⁷⁶

As discussed briefly in the previous chapters, by the mid 1980s within Mexico lesbians and gay men increasingly organized separately from one another. After Lambda disbanded in 1985, throughout the rest of the 1980s into the 1990s almost all groups in Mexico were composed either entirely of lesbians or of gay men. Groups of gay men often focused significant attention to AIDS education within the gay community and pressured the government to respond productively to the crisis. Some individual lesbian and bisexual women such as Alma A. worked in AIDS education and most lesbian groups did varying levels of work to support gay men’s struggles with AIDS and accompanying societal backlash.

MULA (Mujeres Urgidas de un Lesbianismo Auténtico, Women in Urgent Need of an Authentic Lesbianism) is one of the lesbian groups that formed after Lambda split

³⁷⁵ Cecilia Riquelme, Interview for the project *Nuevas Identidades De Género, Procesos Culturales y Cambios Socio-Históricos: El movimiento gay en México (1970-1980) a través de la voz y la mirada de sus protagonistas* (New Gender Identities, Cultural Processes, and Socio-Historical Changes: Mexico’s Gay Movement from the Voice and View of its Participants), August 16, 2000. Organized by Juan Jacobo Hernández Chávez – Colectivo Sol A.C., Mexico City, CIESAS

³⁷⁶ “III. Encontro Feminista Latino-Americano E Do Caribe (The Third Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Conference)” (Sao Paulo, Brazil, 1985).” Latin America box, LHA.

apart. In fact, it was after meeting at one of Lambda's last events in 1984, that various former participants of Lambda, Oikabeth, and FHAR joined together to create the organization. The autonomous lesbian-feminist organization was a small, tight-knit group of mostly professional women and lasted for approximately three to four years. Leaders specifically chose to represent themselves with the acronym "mule" because of the animal's stubborn and industrious qualities. In addition to existing as a consciousness-raising group, between 1984 and 1986 MULA engaged in varied educational projects including offering workshops with lesbian and heterosexual women on topics of sexuality. The lesbian group Patlatonalli also established in 1986 in Guadalajara, Mexico's second largest city and today is the country's oldest lesbian organization. According to the group, "Patlatonalli," is a combination of two Nahuatl words which together mean "the energy or destiny of women who love each other."³⁷⁷ Similar demographically to other Mexican lesbian groups, in the late 1980s most of the Patlatonalli's participants came from middle class backgrounds and worked as professionals and artists. In their first years of operation they held workshops on such topics as lesbian identity, sexuality, lesbian mothers, self-defense, and sexual politics and racism. Unlike most lesbian organizations in Mexico City, from their beginnings Patlatonalli has sought broad involvement from the community. For example, the first activity the group organized in 1986 was a film series with community debate. Invitations for the event went out to various community organizations as well as to local government officials, many of whom attended. In the following years the group offered presentations on lesbianism in local high schools and universities, as well as theatrical and artistic

³⁷⁷ Patlatonalli, "An Open Letter from Patlatonalli: Women loving women in Guadalajara," AHMLFM-YMY.

presentations related to lesbian themes. At this time, other more informal groups of feminists and lesbians in Mexico created spaces such as Cuatro Creciente, a feminist cultural center in Mexico City begun by Virginia Sanchez Navarro, and Oasis, a retreat and documentation center in Tepotzlán, Morelos led by Safuega, a Dutch lesbian living in Mexico. The group *Madres Lesbianas* (Lesbian Mothers) also began to organize in Mexico City in 1986 in order to provide support services for lesbian mothers and their partners.³⁷⁸ Seeking to create a stronger and more inclusive autonomous lesbian movement not directly connected to left sectors like the PRT, during the mid to late 1980s in Mexico City and Guadalajara lesbian activism generally tended to focus on internal consciousness-raising, creating lesbian spaces and “cultural products,” as well as strengthening relationships with heterosexual feminists and forging transnational networks.³⁷⁹

International Lesbian Organizing: Conflict and Negotiation

In 1986 local organizing met the international as MULA members Lourdes Perez and Alida Castelán, along with Hinojosa and Sanchez Navarro received scholarships (paid for by the Dutch government) to attend the 1986 ILIS conference. Issues of unequal power relations between lesbians in the global South and North came center stage as Mexican lesbians began to participate in European dominated international lesbian organizing. Strongly critical of discourses of victimhood that essentialized Third World women, Latin American lesbians negotiated their need for financial support with their desire to organize and lead their own endeavors according to their own principles and

³⁷⁸ For more information on these groups see chapter four of Mogrovejo 2000.

³⁷⁹ Nuulart, interview with the author.

needs. Ultimately, such conflict would lead Latin American lesbians to limit participation of lesbians from the global North in the first Latin American lesbian conference.

However, increased communication and coordination with Chicana and Latina lesbians in the U.S. simultaneously resulted in a push for international lesbian organizing to employ intersectional analysis and adopt anti-imperialist politics.

European lesbians sought to offset economic disparities between lesbian organizations located in the Global South and North by acquiring funds to pay for the travel of women who otherwise would have been unable to attend their conferences. The power dynamics created by these financial relationships between lesbian organizations in Europe and Latin America would soon cause conflict. With funds from the Dutch government, ILIS was able to fund the travel of twenty women from the global South to the 1986 conference.³⁸⁰ As a result, whereas a vast majority of participants in ILIS' earlier conferences were European, women from over thirty countries attended the 1986 conference held in Geneva. As indicated in an announcement for the 1986 conference organizers sought to foster "global lesbianism" in the face of rising conservatism.³⁸¹ Via conferences of the UN, ILGA, and ILIS, activists such as Hinojosa had been working to advance lesbian rights globally since the late 1970s. Hinojosa and others engaged in this work because they believed that the commonalities of oppression shared by lesbians throughout the world outweighed cultural differences, and that there was an urgent need to protect lesbians' rights to live freely without the fear of discrimination or violence.

According to Hinojosa, ILIS spent at least a year contacting and recruiting women from

³⁸⁰ Bunch and Hinojosa, "Lesbians Travel," 10-11. At the 1985 conference in Nairobi the Dutch government spoke out in favor of global lesbian and gay rights and committed funds towards increasing participation from the Global South.

³⁸¹ ILIS, newsletter announcing the 8th International Meeting of ILIS to be held in Geneva from March 28-31st, 1986, Canadian Lesbian and gay Archives (CLGA), ILIS Files.

around the world, including women of color from the global North, to attend the 1986 ILIS conference. While there, with the encouragement of ILIS leaders, lesbians from such countries as Mexico, Peru, and Brazil met together to form a Latin American Lesbian Network to focus on fomenting lesbian activism within Latin America and the Caribbean. While still in Geneva, the network began to make plans for a Latin American lesbian *encuentro* to be held in Mexico in 1987, the week prior to the already planned fourth Latin American feminist *encuentro*.³⁸²

Yet, in planning for the lesbian *encuentro*, Latin American organizers faced issues with funding and recruitment. Funding from governmental and non-governmental entities was unavailable in Latin American countries. Furthermore, the newly formed Latin American Lesbian Network lacked connections with lesbian women in various parts of Latin America and the Caribbean. Thus, as in Geneva, the Dutch government provided funding for scholarships for Latin American women to attend the 1987 *encuentro* in Mexico. Sylvia Borren, a Dutch leader in ILIS, also received money for a recruitment effort within Latin America. Despite their lack of Spanish language skills, Borren and another woman traveled to Brazil, Chile, and Peru in early 1987 to work with lesbian organizations and solicit leaders to attend the lesbian conference in Mexico later that same year. As a result, three women from each country received full funding to attend the conference. Though exact amounts remain unknown, ILIS also provided funds to conference organizers in Mexico. Describing this initiative in the *Second Pink Book on Lesbian and Gay Rights* published by the ILGA, Borren justified the need for transnational lesbian solidarity, “Lesbians are beginning to organize in countries where their fight is literally a matter of life and death. I believe we Western lesbians can and

³⁸² Bunch and Hinojosa, “Lesbians Travel,” 11-12.

should collect resources to support them.”³⁸³ Based in the assumption that lesbians shared universal commonalities, Borren’s intentions went beyond providing financial assistance to Latin American lesbians, as she also sought to offer organizing advice. In this article, Borren went on to discuss the need for European women from ILIS to advise Latin American women on how to develop strategies to advance rights and increase consciousness-raising around lesbian issues in Latin America. Perez and Castelán, leaders of MULA who had attended the 1986 ILIS conference, led the Mexican-based organizing committee called “Latina Americana Lesbiana” (LAL). Other members of LAL included women from MULA and Seminario in Mexico City and Patlatonalli in Guadalajara.

Latina groups from the U.S., Lesbianas Unidas from Los Angeles and Las Buenas Amigas from New York City, also conducted fundraising for the *encuentro* and disseminated information in the US about the conference.³⁸⁴ In their organizational documents, Latinas Unidas, a subcommittee of the Los Angeles based Gay and Lesbian Latinos Unidos (GLUU), describes a history of communicating with and supporting Mexico City lesbian feminist organizations since the early 1980s.³⁸⁵ Based on this history of solidarity and the importance they saw in organizing a regional Latina lesbian *encuentro*, Lesbianas Unidas worked to financially support the conference by sponsoring and subsidizing participants from both the U.S. and Latin America. However, while most Latin American organizers appreciated the financial support offered by Lesbianas Unidas, Las Buenas Amigas, and ILIS, controversy soon generated over the level of

³⁸³ Sylvia Borren, “Lesbian Organizations in Latin America,” *The Second Pink Book* (ILGA: 1988), CDAHL.

³⁸⁴ M. Romo Carmona, “The Patlatonalli Manifesto,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and gay Studies* 3:4 (1997): 488.

³⁸⁵ For example, Lesbianas Unidas offered a workshop entitled “The Lesbian Feminist Experience in Mexico” at the 1986 International Lesbian and gay People of Color Conference in Los Angeles. International Lesbian and Gay People of Color Conference, Bulletin: “Joining Struggles: Making our Future,” September 1986, Subject Files, Lesbianas Unidas, 16-22, One.

involvement that Western women should play in the conference. In an interview about conference planning published in the U.S. magazine *Plexus* in August 1987, Perez voiced LAL's concern over relationships of power between women from the global North and South and questioned if women from the global North, particularly white women, would attempt to control the direction of the Latin American conference. Critiquing past experiences of racist interactions with lesbians from the global North, she stated, "These women are very paralyzed by their racism. There was this pretense, 'Oh, we'll send you our money' or 'we'll send you our leftover magazines.' There's a total lack of acknowledgement from them of what they do learn from us."³⁸⁶ This statement clearly challenges the presumed collaborative intentions of "global lesbianism" as articulated by Borren and ILIS. Mexican organizers obviously resented European women's presumptions that they had nothing to learn from Latin American lesbian activism. Therefore, in order to avoid possible attempts by women from the global North to "colonize" Latin American lesbian activism, organizers decided to limit the conference to 500 participants, with caps of 100 for U.S. based Latinas and 100 for non-Latina women.

Focusing attention on participants coming from Latin America, leaders took measures to provide a safe environment for the conference. Organizers were all too aware that holding a lesbian *encuentro* in Latin America at this point of time was a dangerous endeavor because of homophobia, political instability, and the prevalence of authoritarian rule in the region. Whereas Mexico was chosen to host the conference because of its relative level of democracy, LAL members were concerned about both the threat of police violence and the general climate of homophobia in Mexico. An article entitled

³⁸⁶ N.A., "Lourdes Perez and Alida Castela: Organizers of the First Encuentro of Latin American and Caribbean Lesbians," *Plexus* (August 1987). AHMLFM-YMY.

“Homosexual Conduct is a Crime” printed in Mexico City’s *El Dia* in May 1987 conveys the level of homophobia rampant in Mexican society during this time,

What is incredible is that those that call themselves “gays” demand rights in a society that repudiates them, or at best, sees them as a circus-like phenomenon. The authorities respect their unjustifiable rights, allowing them to have parades where the fags put on costumes and bras and the dykes unabashedly make out with their partners in vice and deviancy, all as part of an audacious public exhibition.³⁸⁷

Condemning the authorities for even allowing lesbians and gays to demonstrate, the author exposes a viewpoint that challenges the very idea that lesbians and gay should have their civil rights guaranteed. In consideration of this kind of hostility and intolerance towards lesbians and gays, organizers did not openly publicize the conference and kept the location secret until the last moment. In discussion of precautions made by LAL to protect the safety of participants Perez stated, “We must take into consideration at this *encuentro* that there will be women attending from such violent countries as Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile—we must provide maximum security. Can you imagine what problems a police raid would cost these women? It could mean jail or even death.”³⁸⁸ Perez’ comments pointedly address threats of anti-lesbian repression in both Mexico and the Southern Cone, exposing the reality of police violence in Mexico and the much more heightened risk of extra-legal imprisonment or murder in the Southern Cone.

Conflicts over the politics and intended purpose of the conference continued at the first nationwide lesbian *encuentro* sponsored by the autonomous lesbian group Patlatonalli in Guadalajara and held in late August 1987. The objectives of this meeting were to form a national coalition of lesbian organizations and to plan for the international

³⁸⁷ Guillermo Lopez-Portillo, “Las Conductas Homosexuales Como Delito (Homosexual Conduct as A Crime),” *El Día*, 12 May 1987, Biblioteca Lerdo de Tejada.

³⁸⁸ “Lourdes Perez and Alida Castela: Organizers of the First Encuentro of Latin American Lesbians,” *Plexus* (August 1987). AHMLFM-YMY.

conference in October. In order to solicit broad participation, LAL advertised the event (though not disclosing the location) in the national newspaper *La Jornada* and sent out letters to prominent activists inviting them to both the national and international conferences.³⁸⁹ Whereas the majority of participants were committed to providing a space of political plurality at the international conference, the national *encuentro* became fraught with conflict when a few lesbian Marxists insisted the conference embrace socialist politics.³⁹⁰ Women from Seminario demanded that the conference connect lesbian issues to larger struggles against capitalism and imperialism while the majority of other organizers, mostly from the collective MULA and Patlatonalli, disagreed contending that the conference should focus specifically on lesbian feminist issues. Resisting these priorities, Y. Castro and Alma Ocegüera wrote an extensive paper for the international conference entitled “El Lesbianismo: Una Cuestión Política” (“Lesbianism: A Political Question) that was never presented, but has been widely circulated since this time.

³⁸⁹ Letter sent to Trinidad Gutiérrez, Personal Collection of Trinidad Gutiérrez.

³⁹⁰ Y. Castro and the Seminario wanted the conference to be inclusive of workers and revolutionary issues. Y. Castro eventually resigned from the committee accusing the organizers of being bourgeoisie lesbians unconcerned with popular struggles in Latin America.

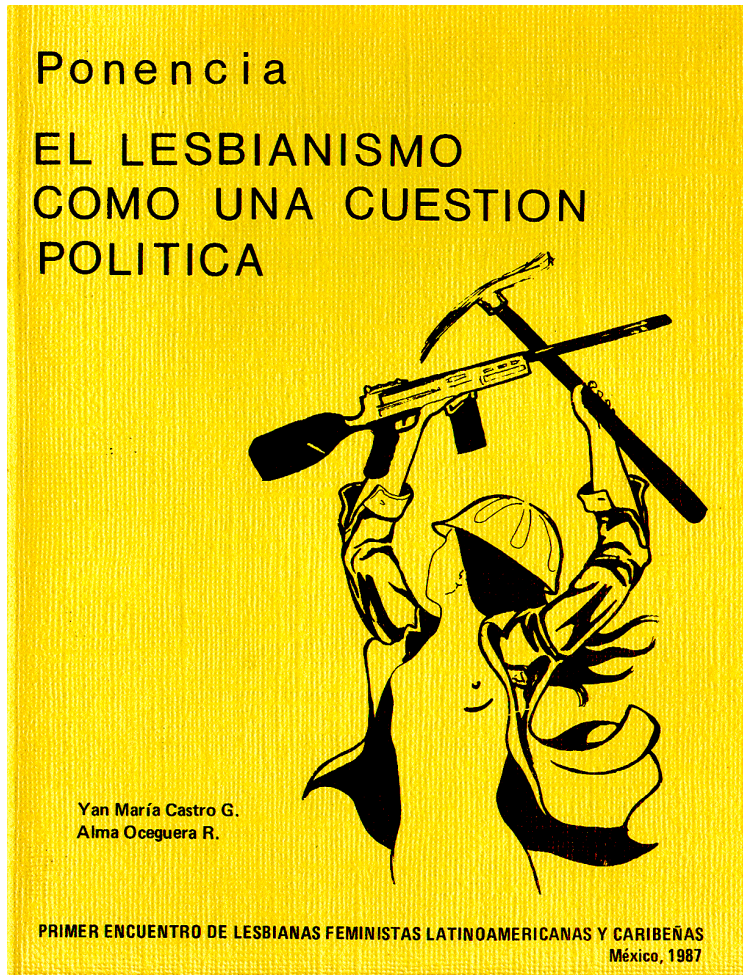


Figure 6: Yan María Castro G. and Alma Ocegüera R., AHMLFM-YMY.

In fact, Y. Castro left the organizing committee the week before the conference after hearing that she had supposedly been expelled from the committee in a secret vote. In a letter written to the organizing committee by Y. Castro, Osegüera, and two other women, they argue that the leaders of the organizing committee were communicating back and forth with ILIS representatives regarding the conference program and logistics and not sharing their decisions with the larger committee. There was also widespread concern

within LAL that Perez and Castelán were misusing funds that ILIS had allocated to them for the international conference.³⁹¹

In the end, women from approximately ten countries in Latin America attended the conference and workshops were offered by Latin American and U.S. Latina lesbian organizations and by ILIS. In workshops participants discussed such topics as lesbian identity and families, sexuality, political repression, racism and classism, religion, and how to overcome conflicts within lesbian organizations and forge stronger collaborations with the feminist and gay male movements.³⁹² Attendees also watched films, and performed theatre, dance, and poetry. Yet, the conference itself was plagued by the continuance of arguments amongst Mexican lesbians over priorities and political ideology. At issue were not just political ideologies and North-South relations, but the question of whether or not bisexuals should be in attendance and if Chicanas and other Latinas living in the global North should be allowed voting rights.

Alma A., as well as many others, expressed frustration with the conflict that ensued over whether Chicanas and Latinas living in the global North should be permitted membership in the newly formed Latin American Lesbian Network. Some Latin American women felt that Latina women, particularly in the U.S. enjoyed privileges not had by women living in Latin America. However, the approximately 30 U.S. based Latinas and Chicanas in attendance strongly contested this claim based on the racial and class discrimination they faced living in the U.S. A final vote on the subject gave Latinas

³⁹¹ N.A., "Primer Informe del Encuentro de Lesbianas Lat. y Del Caribe (The First Report of the Latin American and Caribbean Lesbian Conference)," June 2, 1988, AHMLFM-YMY

³⁹² Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, "Primer encuentro de lesbianas feministas latinoamericanas y caribeñas," in Norma Alarcón, Ana Castillo, Cherríe Moraga, eds., *Third Woman: The Sexuality of Latinas* (Third Woman Press, 1993): 143-146.

and Chicanas full rights to membership within the organization.³⁹³ Despite such turmoil at the conference, activists did formalize the Latin American Lesbian Network, deciding to hold the next *encuentro* in Peru in 1989 and to create a stronger presence in the Latin American Feminist *encuentros*.³⁹⁴ Reporting about the conference was widespread internationally in ILIS affiliated publications and in report-backs such as that organized by Mariana Romo-Carmona and Las Buenas Amigas in New York City.³⁹⁵ For instance, in their newsletter, Lesbianas Unidas discussed the significance of the conference, “The group attended workshops and did a great deal of networking and coalition building with Latina and Caribbean lesbians living all over the world. More importantly, however, the fruits of the *encuentro* included the formation of the first international network of lesbians from Latin America and the Caribbean.”³⁹⁶ As a result of relationships forged at the conference, coordination between Latina and Chicana women in the U.S. and in Mexico became stronger at future *encuentros*.

As well as desiring to strengthen their connections with Chicanas and Latinas in the U.S., many of the Mexican women involved in the regional Latin American and Caribbean lesbian *encuentro* left the meeting encouraged to create a stronger national network of lesbians. Activists created The National Coalition of Lesbians (CNLF) in late 1987. Throughout its three-year life, the group was composed of approximately thirteen national organizations, including from Tijuana, Veracruz, Morelos, Querétaro, San Luis Potosí, and Guadalajara. The expressed goals of the CNLF were to strengthen

³⁹³ Ibid, Yarbro-Bejarano, “Primer Encuentro.”

³⁹⁴ However, due to an increased climate of repression, the 2nd *encuentro* was moved from Peru to Costa Rica where it was held in 1990, despite threats from Costa Rica’s government to prohibit single women from entering the country for the conference.

³⁹⁵ Las Buenas Amigas, Flyer entitled “Come to the center and hear about the first encounter of Latin American and Caribbean Lesbian Feminists, which took place in Mexico, October 1987,” LHA.

³⁹⁶ Lesbianas Unidas, “Organizational Information.” One National Gay and Lesbian Archives, Subject Files, Lesbianas Unidas.

relationships between lesbians throughout Mexico and to defend their constitutional and human rights. While not explicitly proclaiming socialist politics like earlier organizations, their mission statement also upheld Mexican lesbians' long-standing commitment to anti-imperial politics and declared solidarity with "revolutionary and democratic struggles" standing against "sexism, classism, imperialism, racism and interventionism."³⁹⁷ They also committed to support gay men in their struggle with AIDS and to defend the human rights of all marginalized peoples in Mexico.

To mobilize international support for their organization's demands in the forms of rights-based and economic solidarity, The CNLF worked to strengthen relationships formed during the 1987 Latin American lesbian *encuentro* with Chicanas and Latinas from the U.S. For example, the group *Mujer a Mujer* formed in 1988 with the purpose of creating collaborative work between feminist grassroots organizers, union workers, and lesbians in the U.S. and in Mexico. Based in San Antonio, Texas and in Mexico City, they created a short-lived newsletter called *Correspondencia* that shared news about feminist organizing occurring in Mexico and the U.S. Lesbian activists from both sides of the border also continued to learn from one another in contact zones, such as at conferences held in the U.S. to which U.S. Latinas and Chicanas invited Mexicans. For example, in 1989 Mexican lesbians Y. Castro and Guillermina Quiróz attended a lesbian of color conference and visited Latina lesbian organizations in California like *Lesbianas Unidas*, *Amaranto*, and *Mujerio*.³⁹⁸ In an interview published in *Correspondencia*, Y.

³⁹⁷ N.A., untitled organizational statement from the National Coordination of Lesbian Feminists. AHMLFM-YMY.

³⁹⁸ Similar to *Mujer a Mujer*, *Amaranto*'s mission was to act in solidarity with lesbian and gay activism in Latin America, as well as educate the San Francisco bay area lesbian and gay community about the social, legal, and political situation for lesbians and gays in Latin America. ILGA, "Boletín del Centro de Información Gay/Lesbica para América Latina," September 30, 1988.

Castro commented on the “deep impact” that her participation in this conference had on her understanding of the need for Latina, Chicana, and Mexican lesbian women to organize together,

The Lesbians of Color Conference had a deep impact on me....At the San Francisco conference, we were able to live our lesbianism along with our cultural and national struggles...Even as Latinas, Chicanas, we have a lot to learn about each other. At our first Latin American Lesbian conference there were women who didn't think that Chicanas should be part of the Latin America network. They think that Latinas in the U.S. live easy lives. Some Chicanas see Mexico as a 'backward' country, but others want to get to know their roots in Mexico...I also realized that we still lack a more political perspective...Mujerío and the Coordinadora are going to hold a conference in Mexico City next July. We want Latinas and Chicanas from the States begin to know our realities, and we want to get to know theirs. We have to get rid of the myths so that we can truly begin to work together.”³⁹⁹

Y. Castro's embrace of transnational Latina lesbian organizing was quite different from her stance at the 1987 *encuentro* and was symbolic of a general trend amongst Mexican lesbians towards increased interest in U.S. based Latina lesbian activism. Soon after, in November 1989 Y. Castro and Nuulart from *Patlatonalli* were invited to participate in the Dynamics of Color Conference: Building a Stronger Lesbian Community, Combating Racism, Honoring Diversity” in California. The purpose of this conference was to discuss and contest racism within the broader Bay area lesbian community. Mexican activists offered inspiring stories of coalitional organizing through historical accounts of their efforts to work in solidarity with other oppressed groups in Mexico and abroad. Thereafter, in order to further strengthen connections between Latina lesbians in the U.S. and Mexican lesbians, *Mujerío* worked with the CNLF to organize the first bi-national Latina lesbian conference to be held in Mexico City in July 1990. In turn, activists in San

³⁹⁹ *Mujer a Mujer/Interchange*, “Lesbians of Color: Powerful Connections,” *Correspondencia* 6 (January 1990): 13-15. 51.8 Outside Publications, Interchange-IGLHRC 1990-200. Copies of this newsletter were provided to the author by Becky Smith.

Francisco held fundraisers for the CNLF and for *Colectivo Sol* in March of 1990.⁴⁰⁰ In a flyer for a benefit, San Francisco activists explained the need for solidarity with the CNLF in terms of financial support, “At this point, there is no autonomous women’s space in Mexico D.F. *La Coordinadora* needs a meeting place, a newsletter and, most of all, economic solidarity so that Mexican lesbians will be heard at this crucial time.”⁴⁰¹

Transnational networking and communication amongst Latina lesbians had been increasing throughout the 1980s as exemplified by the compilation of the first Latina lesbian anthology in 1987 (self-published), which included many oral histories from lesbians throughout the Americas.⁴⁰² During this time, the Third World Women’s Movement in the Bay Area was also gaining strength in both academic and community forums.⁴⁰³ Thus, fomenting ties with women in the global South and fostering a transnational anti-imperialist Third World women’s movement were of utmost importance to Bay Area women involved in supporting Mexican lesbian activism. In contrast to earlier relationships formed with Northern lesbians involved in ILIS, Latina lesbian organizations in the Bay Area sought to learn from Mexico’s movement rather than simply provide “assistance.” The conference held for three days in July 1990 celebrated the women’s common heritage and provided opportunities for lesbians from both sides of the border to learn from one another’s histories of activism. There were also various cultural activities such as Puerto Rican music, poetry reading, and Chicano theatre led by famed Chicana author Cherrie Moraga. At the conference lesbians from

⁴⁰⁰ Flier, “Noche de Ambiente, Sunday, March 4, 1990 at the Centro Cultural del Misión.” AHMLFM-YMY.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² Juanita Ramos, *Compañeras: Latina Lesbians* (New York: Routledge, 1994). The book was first self-published by the Latina Lesbian History Project in 1987.

⁴⁰³ For more discussion of this movement see M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

both sides of the border united around the common experience of having had their experiences as Latina lesbians marginalized in white dominated lesbian spaces such as at international and national conferences (in the US.). Activists hoped that building alliances between Mexican lesbians and Latinas in the U.S. would serve to strengthen intersectional analysis and increase Latina leadership within transnational lesbian and feminist organizing.

Human Rights Discourse and the NGOization of Lesbian Organizing

As an integral member of the CNLF, the group Patlatonalli from Guadalajara also played a large role in the organizing of the bi-national Latina lesbian conference in July 1990. Unlike earlier lesbian and homosexual organizations in Mexico City, by incorporating with the state, Patlatonalli has sought negotiation rather than confrontation with the regional government.⁴⁰⁴ During this time, Patlatonalli and other member organizations of the CNLF also increasingly drew from liberal human rights discourses to make claims on citizenship. Nuulart describes the local objectives of the group,

Now, what were our necessities in Patlatonalli? First, before anything, to make ourselves visible and participate as a sector, so that the people would begin to get used to interacting with lesbians. We never proposed a closed organization because we had a lot of needs that required coexistence, like needs for space, culture, and rights...⁴⁰⁵

By incorporating with the Mexican government as a civil association, roughly equivalent to non-profit status in the U.S., Patlatonalli was able to apply for international grants to fund its projects. Thus, unlike earlier lesbian and gay organizations they did not have to

⁴⁰⁴ Tripp, 63. According to Tripp, “the rights based advocacy approach stressed the need for coalitions of NGOs and local activists and other actors to lobby governments, corporations, international financial institutions, and other global and domestic actors to create the necessary political, economic, and human rights conditions for equality, sustainable human development, and social justice.”

⁴⁰⁵ Nuulart, interview with the author.

rely on membership fees and fundraisers in order to function, allowing for the development of long-term projects. Since the 1980s, when they became the first lesbian organization in Mexico to incorporate as a non-profit and seek both recognition from the local government and funding from international lenders, Patlatonalli has also participated in various transnational networks and international organizations. However, Patlatonalli's use of international funds has created significant controversy amongst Mexican lesbians over the costs and benefits of the NGOization of lesbian organizing.

As scholars such as Sonia Alvarez, Millie Thayer, and Amalia Fischer have critiqued in regards to Latin American feminism, the NGOization of social movements has often allowed funders in the global North to influence organizational activities.⁴⁰⁶ Such issues have also been a point of contention within Mexican lesbian activism since the 1980s when international funding began to become available. Such funding has caused competition and resentment between feminist organizations and, as a result, various groups have opted not to incorporate as civil associations or interact with international lenders.⁴⁰⁷ Yet, I think it is also important to point out that the contours of international relationships between lenders and lesbian organizations are different than those between international NGOs and women's groups.⁴⁰⁸ Whereas since 1975 and the beginning of the UN Decade on Women support for women's development issues in the form of international aid has been almost unequivocal, the UN, World Bank, and other

⁴⁰⁶ Sonia Alvarez, "The NGOization of Latin American Feminism" *The Cultures of Politics/Politics of Cultures: Re-Visioning Latin American Social Movements* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998) and Millie Thayer, *Making Transnational Feminism: Rural Women, NGO Activists, and Northern Donors in Brazil* (New York: Routledge, 2010). There is also a significant and growing literature within Latin America that critiques the NGOization of feminist and lesbian organizing. For example see, Amalia Fischer, "Los complejos caminos de la autonomía," *Nouvelles Questions Feministes* 24:2 (2005): 54-78 and Yuderkys Espinosa Minoso, *Escritos de una lesbiana oscura: Reflexiones críticas sobre feminismo y política de identidad en América Latina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial en la Frontera, 2007).

⁴⁰⁷ Gutiérrez, and Y. Castro, interview.

⁴⁰⁸ Fischer makes a similar point in regards to the varying power of funding agencies, Fischer 2005.

development oriented projects have hesitated to support lesbian and gay projects and organizations. As a longstanding international organization, The ILGA itself has been marginalized in global politics and did not hold consultative status with the UN until 2011.⁴⁰⁹ Thus, the grants that organizations like Patlatonalli usually receive come from relatively small and independent lenders such as the Astrea Foundation and MamaCash. While it is inevitable that any kind of lender may prescribe agendas, both of these organizations focus on furthering human rights via movement building versus overarching development objectives. Thus, theirs is undeniably a very different kind of support than that offered by UN and World Bank agencies, for example. The kinds of grants that Patlatonalli has received have largely allowed the organization to remain grassroots in its mission while also adapting transnational discourses to their own particular needs. In an article entitled “The Patlatonalli Manifesto” a confidant of the group, Mariana Romo-Carmona, a Puerto-Rican activist from Buenas Amigas in New York City discusses the history of Patlatonalli’s “anti-imperialist” and “grassroots” activism, providing a full translation of a paper read by the group at the above-mentioned conference on domestic violence. An excerpt from the translated statement reads,

The lesbians who are militants within the Grupo Patlatonalli do not consider men but rather the social structures to be the principal enemy; we do not fight only the sexist structures but also the classist ones; we do not fight only for lesbians, but for society as a whole. We have an identity as human beings, as women, as lesbians, as workers, as feminists.⁴¹⁰

Thus, similar to earlier lesbian groups in Mexico City, Patlatonalli actively sought to work in coalition and in solidarity with other groups struggling for social justice.

⁴⁰⁹ The ILGA first gained consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council in 1993, but lost it in 1994 because of member groups within the ILGA who lobbied against laws of consent. ILGA, “ECOSOC Council vote grants consultative status to ILGA,” July 25, 2011, <http://ilga.org/ilga/en/article/n5GebHB1PY> (access date: June 19, 2012).

⁴¹⁰ Romo Carmona 1997, 478-86

At the same time, Patlatonalli and other lesbian groups began to utilize liberal human rights discourses in order to seek state reform and make claims on citizenship. Though they maintained a commitment to a politics of redistribution and an intersectional analysis of lesbian identity and issues, Patlatonalli's incorporation within the state and use of liberal human rights discourses clearly strayed from earlier strategies that focused on liberation from the authoritarian Mexican state versus recognition from it. In a 1991 interview with the U.S. magazine *The Advocate*, Hinojosa reflects on this history,

I remember discussing the crisis of mobilization during a conference in 1982 or 1983...I asked, 'What do you do after you take the streets? Is it enough to leave the closet and scream, 'We're not Sick?' But there was a huge resistance to the idea of working within the system to create a reformist strategy of civil rights. In Mexico we don't have a liberal tradition as in the U.S. and some parts of Europe. Moreover, there's a huge mistrust of institutions.⁴¹¹

As Hinojosa indicates in this quote, because of mistrust in state institutions, until this time most activists associated with the Left had either rejected or hesitated to utilize liberal discourses that sought recognition from and/or negotiation with the state.

The late 1980s was an opportune time for lesbian activists to call upon liberal human rights discourses to condemn the repression of lesbians and gays within Mexico. As part of his campaign promise to modernize Mexico and open up the country to free trade, President Salinas created the Human Rights Directorate as a part of the Interior Ministry and in June 1990 replaced the directorate with the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH). In a speech inaugurating the new government-affiliated commission he declared "defending human rights means entering into modernization;

⁴¹¹ David Lida, Cover Story: "Mexicans Fight for Legal Rights: From Guadalajara to Mexico City, the Struggle Goes On," *The Advocate* (June 18, 1991): 34. CLGA.

ours is a modernization that will result in freedom.”⁴¹² Though he only narrowly won a very contested election with the leftist PRD contender Cuauhtémoc Cardenas, and neo-liberalism itself remained very contentious within Mexico, Salinas was determined to negotiate the trade deal with the U.S. and Canada that became known as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Most of his critics, such as Rosario Ibarra de la Piedra, interpreted the creation of the CNDH as a purely symbolic move made in order to ensure NAFTA’s passage.⁴¹³ Amnesty International criticized the Mexican government’s affiliation with the commission, contending that to be effective such a commission must be non-governmental.⁴¹⁴ Verifying such critiques, the day after inaugurating CNDH, the Mexican government completely rejected a report released by the Organization of American States condemning human rights violations within Mexico, stating that people outside of Mexico simply did not understand the inner workings of Mexican politics.⁴¹⁵ Thus, clearly Salinas created the human rights commission in order to gain legitimacy within the neoliberal world order.

However, the Mexican state’s creation of structures to defend human rights inadvertently helped open rhetorical space for lesbians to themselves utilize such discourses in order to pressure the government to live up to its policies. As a member organization of the CNLF, Patlatonalli hosted the first national Forum on Human Rights and Lesbians in June 1990. Approximately 120 women and men attended the forum and came from various sectors including lesbians from Guadalajara and Mexico City, as well

⁴¹²Gerardo Medina Valdes, “La desconcentrada CNDH es un fallido intento de bloqueo oficial a la CIDH,” *El Universal*, June 13, 1991, p. 6. Lerdo de Tejada Library.

⁴¹³ Rosario Ibarra de Piedra, “Herberto Castillo y Teresa Juárez presentes,” *El Universal*, June 12, 1990, p. 6.

⁴¹⁴Medina Valdes, “La desconcentrada CNDH es un fallido intento.”

⁴¹⁵ N.A., “Rechaza Mexico el informe de la OEA sobre violación de derechos humanos (Mexico Rejects the Organization of American States’ Report about Human Rights Violations),” *El Universal*, June 8, 1990, p. 1.

as health and education workers, and homosexual men and heterosexual feminists. According to a statement released to the public and published in the Mexican feminist magazine *Fem*, participants discussed framing the struggle for lesbian rights in terms of both national and international laws and legal mechanisms. In the published statement, Guadalupe Lopez García of Patlatonalli begins by explaining lesbian demands in the wider context of struggles for human rights in Mexico:

The defense of human rights in our country is most known in relation to the struggles for justice for the disappeared and political prisoners, for the indigenous, refugees, women, and for children. Only recently has there been discussion of homosexual rights... Few have supported the struggles for the rights of women with different sexual preferences: lesbians. We also have rights: to express ourselves, to meet together, to collaborate, to work, to health, to maternity if that is what we want- and to information and artistic and religious expression.⁴¹⁶

This quote and the larger statement do not explicitly reference the historic participation of lesbians and gays in coalitions for human rights in Mexico City, but highlight the continued marginalization of lesbians within these national debates, as well as the persistent threats to lesbian and gay human rights posed by “moralization campaigns” and the Law of the Police and Good Government.⁴¹⁷ The paper goes on to describe Mexican lesbians’ struggles in an international context suggesting that the United Nations add a clause to the Declaration on Human Rights protecting the right of sexual preference. A timeline ending the statement reads,

1948: Declaration of Human Rights

⁴¹⁶ N.A., “Tiempo de Entender: Foro sobre Derechos Humanos de Lesbianas,” *Fem* (Oct. '90): 13.

⁴¹⁷ In particular, participants are referring to laws and campaigns in Guadalajara. In September 1989 the Guadalajara city council initiated a moralization campaign to safeguard family values in the city. The campaign demanded the “confiscation of pornographic magazines and videos, the closing of video clubs, the persecution of sexual deviance, and the closing of “inconvenient sites. The government added new stipulations to the regulation in Guadalajara as of December 1989. New language added to the law declared that substantial fines would be assessed to people who practiced “ abnormal sexual practices in public places.” GLP, GOHL, Homosexual Cristianos, and the Committee of Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays,” *Boletín de Prensa: Jornada Cívica por el Respeto a los Derechos Humanos y Civiles*,” no date. AHMLFM-YMY.

1969: Beginning of the struggle for homosexual rights in New York
1978: The struggle for lesbian and homosexual rights begins and strengthens in Mexico.
1982: The World Health Organization stopped considering homosexuality as a disease.
1990: Time to Understand.⁴¹⁸

This timeline and the statement in general position Mexican lesbians as prominent participants and leaders in an international struggle for lesbian and gay human rights. Why, if, as Hinojosa contends, Mexican activists do not draw from liberal traditions, did Mexican lesbian activists choose to frame their struggle in terms of human rights? Some scholars might argue that it was their class positions and cosmopolitan identities that led them to adopt such Western notions grounded in Enlightenment ideals of the individual.⁴¹⁹ Yet, I would argue that such an understanding ignores the dynamic history of human rights struggles specific to Latin America. In particular, as López García indicates in the earlier mentioned quote, and as James N. Green has discussed in regards to Brazilian history, the use of such rhetoric is intimately tied to struggles for justice for the disappeared in such countries as Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, and Brazil.⁴²⁰ Thus, certainly not all lesbian and gay activists in Mexico would agree with the above timeline's privileging of the Stonewall Riots as a pivotal moment for lesbian and gay organizing in Mexico. Instead, as I have discussed elsewhere, it could be easily argued that 1968 was a much more significant point of rupture for Mexican lesbians and gays. Yet, what is indisputable is the extensive history of transnational networks formed by Mexican lesbians and gays in order to advance lesbian and gay rights on an international scale. Indicative of their level of activism internationally, in 1990 Patlatonalli as part of

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ For example, see Laguarda 2010 and Grewal 2005.

⁴²⁰ Green, "(Homo)sexuality.." 2007. I also cite this work in chapter one.

the CNLF participated in various international events including the second Latin American and Caribbean Lesbian *encuentro* in Costa Rica, a meeting of Latina lesbians in California, and the ILGA meeting in Stockholm where they agreed to co-host the 1991 conference.

The 13th Annual ILGA Conference “In Solidarity”

From the mid to late 1980s, the predominantly gay male organizations GOHL (The Homosexual Liberation and Gay Pride Group, Guadalajara) and *Colectivo Sol* (Mexico City) worked closely with the ILGA representing Latin American issues at international conferences and editing the newly formed ILGA bulletin in Spanish.⁴²¹ The Spanish language bulletin itself was the result of years of pressure on the ILGA to increase participation and representation in Latin America.⁴²² In 1985 during a workshop concerning lesbian and gay issues in the global South Latin American participants first suggested that the ILGA distribute the bulletin at no cost to groups in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, as well as hold a conference in Latin America and open an office in the region.⁴²³ Throughout the 1980s, Latin American participants encouraged the ILGA to create resolutions that connected human rights abuses in Latin America to U.S. intervention in and the predominance of authoritarian regimes in the region. For example, at the behest of Latin American participants, at the annual conference in 1986 members passed resolutions in support of revolutionary and democratic movements in Latin

⁴²¹ GOHL formed in 1981 as a sister group of Lambda. By the mid-1980s they had set up a cultural center and bar. They often faced severe homophobia from local conservatives and their office was firebombed in 1987. Like Lambda, GOHL practiced more of a reformist versus liberationist form of politics.

⁴²² For example, at the 1986 IGA conference “Lesbians and Gays Facing Crisis” participants passed a resolution “to increase co-operation between ILGA and lesbian and gay groups in Latin America,” ILGA, “Press Release: 8th Annual Conference meets in Copenhagen,” *ILGA Bulletin*, 3/86. CLGA.

⁴²³ ILGA, “Minutes of the ILGA Latin America, Asia and Africa (LAA) Workshop: Networking and Solidarity,” *The ILGA 1985 Conference Report*, July 4, 1985. CLGA.

America, and that pledged to increase coordination with lesbian and gay groups in the region.⁴²⁴ At the 1988 annual conference, Latin American groups again asked ILGA to more actively support Latin American liberation struggles, and to alter the organization's structure to allow participants from the global South more opportunities for leadership. Rita Arauz, then candidate for the position of secretary general from Nicaragua, generated significant controversy when she accused the ILGA of being Eurocentric in focus. In her candidacy speech she stated her belief that ILGA needed to connect lesbian and gay liberation to revolutionary struggles and processes of democratization in Latin America, as well as appoint more leaders from the region. She claimed that lesbian groups in Latin America were skeptical of participating in the ILGA because of its perceived sole focus on lesbian and gay rights.⁴²⁵ Arauz's sentiments echoed those of many Mexican participants in the ILGA, who firmly believed that lesbian and gay politics needed to be anti-imperialist and intersectional.

With the support of activists from other organizations in Mexico, at the 11th Annual ILGA Conference in 1989 conference in Vienna, Austria members from GOHL proposed that the 13th Annual Conference be held in Guadalajara, Mexico. Participants in the Latin American Caucus meeting in which GOHL offered to host the conference immediately recommended that lesbians also be involved in the organization of the conference.⁴²⁶ Thereafter, the ILGA made this a requirement. Argentine participants also proposed that ILGA declare 1990 the "Year of Solidarity with Latin America" with

⁴²⁴ ILGA Information Secretariat, "Press Release: 8th ILGA Conference Meets in Copenhagen, 1986, CLGA.

⁴²⁵ ILGA Information Secretariat, "Final Plenary: Intervention of Rita Arauz from Nicaragua: Nomination to the General Secretary," July 2, 1988, CLGA.

⁴²⁶ ILGA, "Minutes of the Latin America 2 Workshop," *The 11th ILGA Annual Conference Report*, July 19, 1989. CLGA.

campaigns to pressure Latin American governments to protect lesbian and gay rights as human rights.⁴²⁷

Adhering to ILGA's stipulations that lesbians have equal involvement in conference planning and hosting, in 1990 GOHL approached Patlatonatlli and proposed that they serve as co-organizers. Despite a history of conflict with GOHL and some disagreement within the CNLF over lesbian involvement with the ILGA, Patlatonalli agreed to work together in the organization of the conference. As Nuulart explains,

We have never had a good relationship with the gay organizations. For example, when we organized the ILGA conference, GOHL were the ones that proposed a conference in Mexico, but the ILGA suggested that a group of women also organize it. There was no other organization but us in Guadalajara, so we decided to do it, but our relationship with them, well we tried to focus on a few areas, on the marches, but really we knew that they were an undemocratic, macho, and misogynistic organization.⁴²⁸

Despite Patlatonalli having to contend with this sexism, in organizing for the ILGA conference the two organizations sought to appear united in the public eye. As lesbian and gay groups in Guadalajara began the Civic Campaign for the Respect of Human Rights in fall 1989, homophobia from the regional government in the form of moralization campaigns and repression of lesbian and gay people by the local police increased. As part of the campaign, the groups sought to increase dialogue with local government officials about lesbian and gay rights. However, rather than address these concerns, local government officials publically ridiculed the groups' efforts and the

⁴²⁷ILGA, "Minutes of Latin America 1," *The 12th ILGA Annual Conference Report*, July 3, 1990. CLGA. At the 1990 planning meeting organizers decided to change the international year of solidarity to 1991. Specific actions proposed by the planning committee included pressuring national human rights commissions to research and address the murders of lesbian and gay people and to give judicial status in order to protect lesbian and gay rights as human rights, sending letters to all presidents in Latin America, and continuing to pressure Amnesty International to address human rights violations of lesbians and gays. Meeting participants also proposed plans for the ILGA to fund Latin American participants to attend both the international conference as well as a regional lesbian and gay Latin American meeting in Guadalajara the week beforehand.

⁴²⁸ Nuulart, interview with the author.

mayor stated that he did not support holding the ILGA conference in Guadalajara in 1991, declaring that “neither the organizers or visitors would have any support from the local government.”⁴²⁹ In protest, on behalf of GOHL, Homosexuales Cristianos (Christian Homosexuals), and PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), in late January 1990 Patlatonalli submitted a formal denunciation of human rights violations to the National Human Rights Commission.

However, according to a press release sent to the ILGA by GOHL and Patlatonalli prior to the June 1990 ILGA conference in Stockholm, communications with the mayor had been improving and he had recently stated to the press that the conference would occur as planned in Guadalajara in June 1991. In the same letter GOHL and Patlatonalli expressed their excitement to be planning the conference and their hope that people from throughout the world and particularly from Latin America, would attend. Commenting on the significance of the conference organizers declared,

The fact that for the first time in the history of the ILGA the conference takes place in a so-called ‘third world’ country is an unprecedented historic event for lesbian and gay liberation in the world. The analysis and propositions that the Latin American women and men make in regards to our particular form of oppression, organizations, and struggle will be of utmost importance.⁴³⁰

To encourage wider participation in conference planning, at the Latin American caucus meeting held at the June 1990 ILGA conference, representatives, including leaders from the both Patlatonalli and GOHL, decided that the *Movimiento Homosexual de Lima* (The Homosexual Movement of Lima) would take charge of contacting organizations from Latin America and recruiting attendees, while the *Comunidad Homosexual Argentina*

⁴²⁹ Patlatonalli denouncement sent to the National Commission on Human Rights, “Asunto: Violación de Derechos Humanos de ciudadanas y ciudadanos de Guadalajara, Jal.-Bajo la excusa de estar emprendiendo el Ayuntamiento una ‘Campana de Moralización,’” January 26, 1990. LHA.

⁴³⁰ Patlatonalli and GOHL, Press Release to the ILGA, June 15, 1990. LHA.

(The Argentine Homosexual Community, CHA) would set the agenda for the conference.⁴³¹ Later that year Patlatonalli utilized their existing transnational ties sending a letter of invitation to participants of the international conference celebrating the vision of Audre Lorde “I Am Your Sister: Forging Connections Across difference.” In this letter Patlatonalli expressed their solidarity with lesbians of color in the U.S.’ struggles against racism and encouraged them to attend the ILGA conference in June 1991 in order to increase representation in an organization that, though international in scope, in actuality was very European.⁴³² From fall 1990 through the spring of 1991, both Patlatonalli and GOHL sent numerous more invitations out encouraging broad-based participation in the conference. During this time, the groups also secured the support of the National Commission on Human Rights and the president of Mexico. However, tensions with the mayor of Guadalajara, Gabriel Covarrubias Ibarra and Nicolas Orozco Ramirez, the mayor of the municipality of Xapopan, encompassing the city of Guadalajara, intensified and organizing for the conference became increasingly difficult. In February the newspaper *El Occidental* published an article detailing the majority of local government officials opposition to the conference. According to the article, officials declared that the only way the meeting could happen was if participants met in private. In this regard, in an interview around the same time, José Manuel Verdín, a politician representing Mexico’s most conservative political party, the *Partido de Acción Nacional*, stated his opposition to the conference,

In my opinion the law cannot prohibit them from meeting, but to permit this kind of amorality and meeting is another question. If they are going to have protests,

⁴³¹ Letter from Rebecca Sevilla of the Movimiento Homosexual de Lima, October 4, 1990. AHMLFM-YMY.

⁴³² Letter from Patlatonalli, “A Las Participantes de la Conferencia: Yo Soy Tu Hermana,” October 2, 1990. LHA.

practice prostitution, this could result in an immoral situation, one that could actually incite the practice of behaviors that the population rejects.⁴³³

In addition, the director of tourism for the region stated that granting a public meeting would offer homosexuals legitimacy and go against “las buenas costumbres” (family values) and moral norms of Mexican society.⁴³⁴ In March 1991, the mayor’s advisory board, including a representative from the group Bettering our Morals released a public statement in opposition to the conference claiming that such a gathering attacked Mexican customs.⁴³⁵ As Nuulart describes, as GOHL and Patlatonalli began to look for places to host the conference, Orozco Ramírez and Covarrubias Ibarra organized a campaign of homophobia and put extreme pressure on local businesses and organizations to not support conference organizers,

... We could not meet anywhere in the metropolitan zone. We even requested a conference space from a Jesuit priest who at first accepted, but then also told us no. The threat from the government was so intense –they said that they would not guarantee the integrity of the participants. There was graffiti in the street that said “putas we don’t want AIDS here,” “Go somewhere else” and other homophobic things.⁴³⁶

GOHL and Patlatonalli responded to this graffiti by posting their own combative phrases such as “the city is everyone’s” and “Nazis Get Out” and signing off as the Committee of Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays.⁴³⁷ They also released an official statement in condemnation of the government, translated into English and spread internationally,

A government...that does not respect equality and sexual freedom, the Right to Information and Freedom of Expression... becomes an authoritarian and despotic state. The transformations that have taken place within Mexican Society are denied, and above all, the definition of the State as a free, plural, secular, and

⁴³³ N.A., “Salvo el del PPS En Desacuerdo los Diputados se Haga Reunión Homosexual,” *El Occidental*, February 27, 1990. CDAHL.

⁴³⁴ N.A., “Opuestos los Alcades a la Reunión de Homosexuales,” *El Occidental*, February 24, 1991. LHA.

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

⁴³⁶ Ibid and Nuulart, interview with the author.

⁴³⁷ GOHL and Patlatonalli, Informal letter to the ILGA, May 19, 1991. CDAHL

democratic one, is violated. The savage treatment of minorities is a sign of incapacity to govern.”⁴³⁸

In order to condemn the opposition of the local government, in this press release organizers encouraged international supporters to send letters to local and national governmental officials in support of the conference being held in Guadalajara.

At the same time as they sought international solidarity, conference organizers evoked discourses of modernity resonant of those preached by Mexican President Salinas, claiming in petitions to the local government that the protection of human rights is symbolic of a “modern” democratic state.⁴³⁹ For example, in a press release distributed internationally in January 1991, the groups’ expressed hope that the Mexican government would recognize their rights as citizens, “...current national debates concerning modernity, human rights, and civic Participation, give us hope that Mexican lesbians and homosexuals will finally be treated as citizens.”⁴⁴⁰ Statements written by GOHL, such as that included in an informational packet sent to potential Latin American participants and described in local newspaper articles, also marketed the ILGA conference in terms of neoliberal globalization.⁴⁴¹ In an article circulated by *Reuters News* Jorge Romero, a leader of GOHL, stated, “The governments of Latin America are starting to realize that they can’t establish economic relations with First World countries where homosexuals

⁴³⁸ Untitled Statement from Patlatonalli, GOHL, Christian Homosexuals, and the Committee of Family and Friends in the *13th ILGA Annual Conference Report*. CDAHL.

⁴³⁹ Letter from Patlatonalli and GOHL to C. P. Gabriel Covarrubias Ibarra, Presidente Municipal de Guadalajara, April 8, 1991. CDAHL.

⁴⁴⁰ Press release from Patlatonalli and GOHL to the ILGA, January 2, 1991, *Comunicación e Información de la Mujer (CIMAC)*, Mexico City, 38-40

⁴⁴¹ For example, such arguments appeared in the brochure distributed by GOHL “I Conferencia Regional Latinoamericana de Lesbianas y Homosexuales-ILGA Guadalajara 1991.” Personal Collection of Trinidad Gutiérrez and Marco Osorio.

have attained visibility and acceptance, and at the same time persecute us.⁴⁴² Thus, according to this logic, in order to promote Mexico's respect in global politics and better integrate Mexico into the global economy, in effect ensuring the passage of NAFTA, the Mexican government must support lesbian and gay rights. As previously mentioned in reference to Romo-Carmona's article, Patlatonalli and the CNLF worked in coalition with various pro-labor and anti-imperialist groups and largely disagreed with such appeals to a neo-liberal agenda. However, in their condemnation of efforts to prohibit the ILGA conference, they posed human rights violations against liberal conceptions of modernity. For example, later that same month, Patlatonalli and GOHL sent a letter to the National Commission on Human Rights requesting their intervention and denouncing the local government's violations of their fundamental human rights according to the Mexican Constitution, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of *Discrimination against Women*, and other international agreements signed by Mexico.⁴⁴³ At the same time, the ILGA asked the United Nations to step in, an organization to which they were in the process of applying for membership.

Gaining coverage in the U.S., in June 1991 the popular U.S. gay magazine *The Advocate* published an extensive article documenting the history of struggle for lesbian and gay civil rights in Mexico City and Guadalajara. The article, written prior to the cancellation of the conference, interviewed several prominent Mexican activists including Hinojosa, Xabier Lizárraga Cruchaga, and Pedro Preciado, as well as a few government officials in Mexico City. The article documents both histories of activism in Mexico and

⁴⁴² N.A., "Una democracia que también llega para los homosexuales," Republished from Reuters in *El Economista*, July 4, 1991. From Los Archivos Economicos at the Lerdo de Tejada library, Mexico City.

⁴⁴³ Letter from GOHL and Patlatonalli to C. Dr. Jorge Carpizo, President of the National Commission on Human Rights, May 24, 1991. CDAHL

experiences of police repression and government homophobia, posing Mexico as a politically unstable and undemocratic place. There is also ample discussion of the government's inadequate response to the AIDS crisis and lack of financial resources dedicated to combating the disease.⁴⁴⁴ The language used in the article very much echoed Patlatonalli and GOHL's contentions that the Mexican state's repression of lesbian and gay rights contradicted its claims to "modernity." Arguably, the depiction of Mexican lesbians and gays as victims of a backwards and repressive state motivated solidarity from the U.S. In regards to international LGBT and feminist organizing, various scholars have contended that similar framings have enabled Western lesbians and gays "to become agents in the practice of 'rescuing' (non-Western) victims of human rights violations."⁴⁴⁵ In the case of the ILGA conference, it is important to consider what motivated international solidarity with Mexican lesbians and gays. If international solidarity proved successful in pressuring the government in Guadalajara to allow the conference to proceed, does this imply that U.S. activists "rescued" Mexicans from their abusive government, and can such "rescuing" be construed as a form of cultural imperialism? Certainly Mexican lesbians and homosexuals who opposed rights-based approaches would have interpreted it in that way. Yet, the actions of those Mexican activists working with the ILGA suggest that they saw such international solidarity as useful, if not necessary, in order to support the rights of lesbians and gays to meet and demonstrate publically. Rather than victims, these Mexican activists saw themselves as active participants in a transnational movement in which they had spent years working to solidify.

⁴⁴⁴ David Lida, "Mexicans Fight for Their Legal Rights: From Guadalajara to Mexico City the Struggle Goes On," *The Advocate*, June 18, 1991, 30-37.

⁴⁴⁵ For example see Grewal 2005, 153, Puar 2007, and Massad 2007.

However, GOHL, Patlatonalli, and the ILGA's appeals to human rights discourse and actual petitioning of the UN for assistance were unsuccessful in changing the positions of local governmental officials. By May local government officials had not budged on their stances towards the conference. According to a press release to the international community released on May 21, 1991 by Patlatonalli and GOHL, representatives of the local government were also trying to get the president of the Human Rights Commission to rescind support. Organizers stated, "We have been asked to find a 'safer' site in one of the 'Americanized' tourist areas, such as Acapulco, but we have responded that the conference must take place in Guadalajara where our people actually live and work."⁴⁴⁶ Unable to convince the Guadajarán government to adhere to national and international human rights statutes, Salinas' administration worked to move the conference. In May, Carpizo, on behalf of the National Human Rights Commission initiated dialogue with the governor of Guerrero who immediately agreed to host the conference and offered some possible discounts on hotel rates. As indicated above, GOHL and Patlatonalli disagreed with this proposal and desired for the conference to remain in Guadalajara. However, by early June when the Jalisco government continued to claim that they would not provide for participants' safety and in fact might arrest visitors, they decided to follow Carpizo's advise and cancel the conference.⁴⁴⁷ Beginning on June 13th, two days after GOHL and Patlatonalli released an international press release cancelling the conference, protests were held at Mexican embassies in San Francisco,

⁴⁴⁶ Author and Journal not Visible, "Activists Rally Worldwide to Pressure Homophobic local officials at upcoming International Gay and Lesbian Conference in Mexico," May 21, 1991. LHA.

⁴⁴⁷ "Patlatonalli and GOHL, "Press Bulletin, in *The 13th ILGA Annual Conference Report*, " June 11, 1991, CLGA.

New York, and Washington D.C.⁴⁴⁸ An article in the *San Francisco Chronicle* stated that the mayor of San Francisco Art Agnos wrote to Mexican officials urging them to “create an atmosphere of respect and tolerance...for all those who wish to attend.” This same article also indicates that activists were contacting leaders in Washington such as Nancy Pelosi to indicate to the Mexican government that NAFTA negotiations would be stalled if human rights violations continued.⁴⁴⁹ Soon thereafter, twenty-eight members of congress, led by Pelosi, sent a letter to Mexico’s ambassador condemning human rights abuses committed against gays and lesbians. It is believed that this was the first time that U.S. Congress members acted in support of foreign lesbians and gays.⁴⁵⁰ Though the letter did not make specific threats in regards to NAFTA negotiations, representative [and openly gay man] Barney Frank of Massachusetts explained, “Mexico is a country that wants things from America. Some of the members who signed the letter are supporters of a free trade agreement that Mexico wants with the United States. That shows that Mexico may have to pay a high price ...if it continues to indulge in bigotry.”⁴⁵¹ Thus, at the same time as GOHL and Patlatonalli denounced human rights abuses as symbolic of Mexico’s lack of modernity, members of the U.S. Congress indicated to the Mexican government that violations of international human rights agreements could stall neo-liberal efforts to enact a free trade agreement. Similar to contemporary Israeli “pinkwashing,” the practice of shining a spotlight on human rights protections afforded Israeli lesbians and gays while denying or downplaying state violations of Palestinian human rights, the above-

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁹ David Tuller and Dawn García, “Gays Call off Big Meeting in Mexico: Mexican official vowed to have police ‘intervene’ at international conference,” *The San Francisco Chronicle*, June 13, 1991, p.A23.

⁴⁵⁰ Rick Harding, “Members of Congress protest homophobia in Mexico,” *The Advocate*, September 10, 1991, 53.

⁴⁵¹ Harding 1991.

chronicled debate served to diminish U.S. violations of lesbian and gay rights by highlighting the “backwardness” of the Mexican state.⁴⁵² The fact that U.S. congressional members connected the protection of gay and lesbian rights to norms of neoliberal modernity also seems to stand in opposition to Patlatonalli’s anti-neoliberal politics. Indeed, this contradiction is one that had been brought up before by Marxist lesbians such as Y. Castro and Alma Ocegüera and suggests that rights-based and anti-imperial politics were becoming increasingly opposed to one another in the context of neo-liberalism. In this regard, we might also consider that the financial opportunity presented by holding the ILGA conference in Mexico, in addition to the international legitimacy granted for enforcing human rights norms, influenced Salinas’ decision to support it.

Despite the opposition from conservative factions, plans for the ILGA conference to be held in Mexico continued. Rather than cancel the conference entirely, Patlatonalli and GOHL decided to follow the advice of the National Human Rights Commission and move it to Acapulco. The ILGA and other people who had planned to attend the conference in Guadalajara also encouraged the conference organizers to hold it in Acapulco rather than not hold it at all. In the press Patlatonalli and GOHL were careful not to blame civil society for the cancellation of the Guadalajara conference. Rather, they implicated ultra-conservative groups such as Pro-Vida, the church, and the local and regional governments of Guadalajara and Jalisco. In an article entitled “In Guadalajara: Heterosexist Government, Plurisexual Society” conference organizers stated:

The government wanted it to appear like civil society was opposed to the realization of the conference, when in reality, this supposed “unanimous public opinion” was actually composed of a few letters, anonymous street graffiti, and a 40 person march—all of these actions identified with the REAL AND

⁴⁵² Puar 2007, 17.

UNCONSTITUTIONAL OPPOSITION of the municipal mayors of Guadalajara and Zapopan and the governor of the state of Jalisco...⁴⁵³

However, though appearing unified in the press, communication between GOHL and Patlatonalli also faltered during this time. Leaders of the Patlatonalli such as Nuulart and López Garcia contended that GOHL went behind their backs talking with the ILGA and meeting with representatives from the Guerrero government, including agreeing that participants in the Acapulco conference would not stage any public demonstrations.⁴⁵⁴ While the local government in Acapulco supported the conference, the Archbishop and conservative factions within the state of Guerrero, including the president of the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) enacted protests against the holding of the conference.⁴⁵⁵

However, despite such conflicts, the organizing committee and ILGA leaders generally regarded the conference “in solidarity” to have been a success. According to Lisa Power, ILGA’s Secretary General, “This conference... saw (experienced) the advent of groups from Latin America and their joining in the International Lesbian and gay Movement... this means a leap forward for the ILGA as well as for Latin America.” Likewise Patlatonalli leader López Garcia commented on the conference’s significance in terms of the support offered by the Human Rights National Commission stating,

This conference realized with the support of the Human Rights National Commission has had a great impact on Mexican Society... Public attention has been enormous. Finally, a more objective and constructive discussion on lesbianism and homosexuality has been made possible. This is a great victory for human rights in Mexico, Latin America, and the whole world.”⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵³ GOHL and Patlatonalli, “En Guadalajara: Gobierno Heterosexista, Sociedad Plurisexual,” no date or journal title. AHMLFM-YMY.

⁴⁵⁴ “Great disagreements” between GOHL and GLP are referenced in an editorial beginning the official conference booklet for the conference. ILGA, *13th ILGA Annual Conference Report*. CDHAL.

⁴⁵⁵ Laura Sanchez Granados, “Marcha de protesta en Acapulco,” *La Jornada*, June 30, 1991.

⁴⁵⁶ Patlatonalli and GOHL, “Press Bulletin” (June 11, 1991) in the 13th ILGA Annual Conference Report.

As had been previously planned, Latin American participants met two days before the actual conference in the first regional Latin American and Caribbean gay and lesbian conference where they decided to form a committee to coordinate solidarity efforts throughout the region and plan the first Latin American lesbian and gay conference to be held in 1993. Approximately 150 delegates from 35 countries attended the general ILGA conference.⁴⁵⁷ The majority of participants came from Latin America, including from Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Peru, the Dominican Republic, Brazil, Puerto Rico, Ecuador, and Chile. For the majority of Latin American participants this was their first ILGA conference.⁴⁵⁸ Caucuses were held focusing on specifically Latin American and lesbian concerns. For example, Nicaraguan attendees described their experiences “coming out” in the Sandinista Revolution and the subsequent birth of a lesbian and gay liberation movement in the late 1980s. Despite previous agreements made by GOHL and ILGA leaders to not demonstrate, Patlatonalli led a widely attended and supported public action for lesbian and gay rights and demanding the removal of Guadalajara’s mayor on the basis of human rights violations.

With Jens Rydstrom acting as ILGA’s main translator and contact with Latin Americans, throughout the conference Latin American participants continued to challenge the ILGA to better represent issues relevant to Latin American and other areas of the global South. At first ILGA leaders declared that because the conference was “in solidarity” rather than official, that it would be a non-voting conference. However, the

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁸ Teresa Gutierrez, “Historic Lesbian/Gay Conference a Success.” Eyewitness report from Mexico in *The Workers World*, July 26, 1991, p. 9. LHA. However, according to Nuulart only about a third of those who had planned to attend the original conference were able to attend, largely because of having cancelled tickets to Guadalajara and because of how expensive it was to travel to and stay in Acapulco. Nuulart, interview with the author.

predominantly Latino participants of the conference succeeded in overturning this decision claiming that the ILGA's first conference to have a majority of attendees from the global South should be officially recognized. Latin Americans also continued to push the ILGA to better support lesbian and gay rights in the Latin America and the Caribbean. Specific proposals included that while continuing to respect the autonomy of Latin American organizations, ILGA should create a document describing their specific plans for Latin American solidarity and better financially support a Lesbian and gay Information Center in Latin America. The issue of membership fees, a topic of contention since the early 1980s, also came up and participants recommended that rather than relying on the Twinning Project, fees be established in relation to the legal minimum wage of each country. Latin American activists were concerned that the Twinning Project created a paternalistic relationship between groups in the global South and North. During the conference, Latin American and Latina lesbians also met to discuss strengthening the already existing Latin American Lesbian Network, including planning for the Third Lesbian Conference in Puerto Rico in 1992 for which they were requesting assistance from the ILGA.

As a result of these proposals and others by Latin American participants, the structure of the ILGA radically changed in 1991 becoming more globally representative and regionally controlled. In a history of the organization written in 1994, Micha Ramkers states that the 1991 conference

proved to be an event of singular importance to the future of the ILGA. It was the first Annual Conference where representatives from the South outnumbered delegates from the Northern hemisphere. This brought out into the open the distortion of the power balance which existed in the organization. All its management bodies and most of its projects were controlled by Northern organizations and individuals. It became abundantly clear that, were the ILGA to

live up to its ambition of being a worldwide federation, the structures would have to change.⁴⁵⁹

Thereafter, the structure of the ILGA did drastically change. Regional ILGA conferences such as the one that occurred in Acapulco before the general conference became normative and constitutionally recognized. Also, in 1993 to further increase regionalization, the conference created six regional secretariats to coordinate activities and projects in their respective regions of the world.

Conclusion

Following the 1991 ILGA conference relationships between many Latin American lesbian groups and the ILGA strengthened and in 1992 Peruvian Rebecca Sevilla was elected ILGA's first Secretary General from Latin America or anywhere in the global South. In Mexico there was a general growth of lesbian organizations, including the ILGA affiliated NGO *El Closet de Sor Juana*, founded in 1992 and led by Patria Jiménez and Gloria Careaga, who presently serves as one of ILGA's two Secretary Generals. Leaders at the 1995 UN conference on Women in Beijing, Careaga and Jiménez became known by some as "Beijing lesbians," a term used to refer to lesbians working within the structures of international NGOs.⁴⁶⁰

Since the late 1980s there has existed significant tension over the institutionalization of lesbian organizations in Mexico. In an interview critiquing the financial ties between international NGOs and lesbian organizations in Mexico since the

⁴⁵⁹ Micha Ramakers, "The International Lesbian and gay Association Five Years Later: Towards a Truly Worldwide Movement?" in Mark Blasius and Shane Phalen, Eds., *We Are Everywhere: A Historical Sourcebook of Gay and Lesbian Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1997): 834-9.

⁴⁶⁰ Careaga and Jimenez participated in national, regional, and international preparations for the UN conference, taking on leadership roles and attending planning conferences in Argentina and New York.

1980s, Y. Castro stated, "For them (other lesbians), lesbianism is a market to obtain money and do business...ILGA has corrupted the movement as a capitalist and neoliberal project."⁴⁶¹ Thus, rather than incorporate with the state or affiliate with international NGOs, Y. Castro and other Mexican activists have continued to work in grassroots organizations that, like early liberation groups, accumulate funds largely through informal fundraising. They also continue to actively critique neo-liberal politics through coalitional organizing. Patlatonalli continues to receive funds from such organizations as the Astrea Foundation and MamaCash, but since 1991 has primarily focused their work on the local level.

Returning to the time period under focus in this chapter, I assert that the work of Mexican lesbian organizations during the late 1980s and 1990s used an organizational model that was both grassroots and global. Patlatonalli as part of the CNLF from 1987 to 1990 forged relationships with international organizations and appealed to liberal and Latin American centered human rights discourses while at the same time directing their organization from the bottom up. Throughout the second half of the 1980s in contact zones provided at numerous international conferences Mexican lesbian activists worked to create and strengthen transnational networks, and to connect the oppression of lesbians and gays to systems of power such as neo-liberalism and imperialism. Their activism forced the authoritarian Mexican state to contend with discrimination and repression of lesbians and gays and challenged the ILGA to live up to their international mission and goals by centering Latin American issues. Yet, I would also suggest that the successful holding of the ILGA conference in Mexico owed itself to contradictory processes of

⁴⁶¹Y. Castro, interview with the author.

transnational solidarity and neo-liberalism. Members of GOHL, U.S. governmental officials, and others supported neo-liberal interests by attempting to make the passage of NAFTA contingent on the protection of gay and lesbian rights. At the same time, Mexican and other Latin American participants in the ILGA conference successfully challenged cultural imperialism within the ILGA and transformed the ILGA's structure to be more globally representative and active on issues affecting lesbians and gays in the global South.

As discussed in this chapter, in Latin America, Mexican lesbians were the first to organize in local, national, and international contexts, participating early on in the conferences of the UN Decade on Women and in the formation of the ILGA. Also, throughout the 1980s, Mexican lesbians were leaders in regional organizations such as the Latin American Lesbian Network. By the late 1980s, Patlatonalli had become Mexico's most well known lesbian organization as lesbian activism in Mexico City temporary waned.⁴⁶² According to the organizational priorities of Mexican lesbians, their struggle was directly linked to that of lesbians throughout the globe fighting for recognition of their human rights. Yet, their activism was foremost concerned with issues specific to Latin American lesbians as exemplified by their leadership in creating a Latin American lesbian movement and in influencing the ILGA to defend broad-based human rights struggles in Latin America. As stated by Patlatonalli's Guadalupe López Garcia at the 1991 ILGA conference:

In Guadalajara, we experienced the difficulties and achievements of preparing the XIII ILGA Conference; in Solidarity, we are holding it in Acapulco...In Mexico, we already have been through many years of the Lesbian and gay Movement, in Guadalajara , 10 years; 5 years work from the group Patlatonalli ... It is difficult

⁴⁶² Many activists in Mexico City such as Hinojosa, Gutiérrez, Castro, and Alma A. also temporarily moved abroad during this time thus affecting the organizing potential of Mexico City lesbian groups.

to be a woman, to be a lesbian in the so called “Third World,” but no longer are we just talking about oppression, exploitation, and discrimination, we are talking about organization...Our condition as citizens must be respected. Apart from Acapulco, apart from Mexico, we too are strong; the reestablishing a Conference in Solidarity; the reestablishment too of our right to meet; the possibility of our meeting, us Lesbians and Gays from the whole world...Welcome to all! We do exist! We do have rights!⁴⁶³

Thus, in forging transnational networks, Mexican lesbians demanded not just solidarity against repression and imperialism, but to lead according to their own priorities.

⁴⁶³ Guadalupe López García, *The “13th ILGA Annual Conference in Solidarity*, Conference Booklet (In English). CDAHL.

CONCLUSION

As mentioned in the introduction to my dissertation, I attended the 2007 Zapatista Women's *Encuentro* with Women of the World, where I met long time lesbian activists from Mexico City, sparking my interest in the topic of my dissertation. Mexico City lesbian activists have supported the Zapatista movement in various facets since 1994 when the uprising began. The mission of the Zapatistas, an indigenous Mexican social movement based in Southern Mexico, includes governing autonomously from the Mexican government and neo-liberal economic policies as well as maintaining and reclaiming ancestral land and cultural traditions. In December 2007, long time activists in Mexico's lesbian rights movement traveled approximately 500 miles through rough terrain to the jungles of Chiapas in order to express solidarity with the vision of Zapatismo. People throughout the world can identify with the Zapatista ideals of dignity and political and economic autonomy, which is why I believe that so many women traveled into the Chiapas jungle to attend the *encuentro*. In the plenary sessions, Zapatista women condemned neo-liberal politics, corrupt governments, as well as the institution of machismo. While at the *encuentro*, I answered a public call to participate in a lesbian discussion group in which we discussed the significance of lesbian participation in the gathering. We talked about how promising it was that lesbian and gay rights have been championed by the Zapatistas. However, we also spoke of the fact that it is still difficult to be an openly gay or lesbian Zapatista or Zapatista supporter; all discussion of family continues to be heteronormative and open lesbian couples at the *encuentro* felt that they were at times met with unwelcome glances or stares. Desiring to express solidarity with the indigenous Zapatista women, we decided to use the open forum on the main stage to

read a statement of solidarity from lesbian participants that both congratulated the effort to stand up for the rights of all oppressed peoples and included our hope that homophobia would continue to be discussed within the movement. A section of our text read, “As lesbian attendees of this third encounter of Zapatistas and the first encounter of women Zapatistas with women of the world, we wish to greet you with our unconditional solidarity. We admire your work and we are sure that we are constructing a world of equality and justice together with you, from diverse trenches. We know that a ‘world where many worlds fit’ will have to recognize diverse forms of families and loving relationships...” Our short speech was met with applause and handshakes of support. In analysis, I suggest that by connecting support for Zapatismo and LGBT rights this public statement expressed both rights-based and anti-imperialist solidarity, a linkage that since the late 1980s has continued to be prevalent in Mexico’s LGBT movement.

Soon after the Zapatista women’s conference, in 2009 Mexico City legalized gay marriage, and thereafter, adoption rights for lesbian and gay couples. Celebrated widely across Latin America and internationally, gaining the right to marriage can be seen as the ultimate triumph of international LGBT rights-based movements. Also in 2009, Gloria Careaga, a prominent LGBT rights activists since the early 1990s, became the first Mexican to serve as secretary general of the ILGA, representing to some like Y. Castro the continued NGOization of Mexican LGBT organizing. Regardless of one’s ideological position on these issues, the recent progress made in LGBT rights in Mexico is remarkable. Yet, the combined use of rights-based and anti-imperialist solidarity by many Mexican lesbian groups continues to spark controversy amongst some sectors of the LGBT movement. Some lesbians like Y. Castro also continue to reject the notion that

lesbians and gay men or transgender folks share a common struggle and instead work for lesbian separatism and the revolutionary overthrow of the state. Essentially, after 35 years of public movement in Mexico, the tension between reformist versus revolutionary approaches to LGBT liberation remains prominent.

In this dissertation, I have recounted and analyzed histories of lesbian and homosexual activism in Mexico City between 1968 and 1991. During this time, the Mexican state utilized Cold War politics in order to justify the repression and harassment of lesbian and homosexual communities. Because lesbian and homosexual organizations worked in coalition with the Mexican Left, the state conducted surveillance of their activities and intimidated organizing, with the goal of diminishing the impact of the movement on society. In the early 1980s, the state began to adopt economic neo-liberalism, using moralizing politics to repress deviancy. Yet, by the late 1980s, the state also created mechanisms to protect human rights in order to gain international legitimacy as they sought to broker free trade deals. Lesbian and homosexual activists organized transnationally during this time both to put pressure on the Mexican state to protect the human rights of lesbian and gays and to express solidarity with revolutionary and anti-neoliberal social movements in Latin America. By examining relationships between lesbian activists, the Left, the Mexican State, and transnational networks like the ILGA, I have sought to complicate understandings of solidarity and human rights. In particular, I have revealed the ways in which Mexican lesbian activists worked to both instill the politics of lesbian and homosexual liberation in the Left and radicalize international LGBT activism advocating the adoption of anti-imperialist and anti-neoliberal positions that express solidarity with other communities marginalized by these politics.

In chapter one, I posit that lesbian and homosexual activism initiated by Nancy Cárdenas and Y. Castro between the years 1968 and 1977 was essential for the founding of a social movement in 1978. Inspired by the 1968 student movement and its subsequent “sexual opening,” Cárdenas and a few others founded Mexico’s first homosexual liberation organization in 1971, through which lesbians and homosexuals organized together for the first time, meeting in consciousness-raising groups and, through editorials and letters, anonymously shedding light on the repression faced by homosexuals and lesbians in Mexican society. Cárdenas used her position as a cosmopolitan public figure and theatre director to initiate public discussion of homosexuality, gaining support from prominent members of the Left and networking internationally to learn of strategies used by lesbian and homosexual activists abroad to “liberate” lesbians and homosexuals. Cárdenas’ public “coming out” at the 1975 UN International Women’s Year conference and reading of a “Declaration of Mexican Lesbians” further inspired Mexican lesbians and homosexuals to begin to organize.

At the same time as Cárdenas worked to make lesbians visible and organize lesbians and homosexuals to work together, in the mid to late 1970s Y. Castro began Mexico’s first autonomous lesbian feminist organizations. Influenced both by international lesbian feminist currents, as well as her own experiences of homophobia within the Mexican left, Y. Castro rejected reformist positions in relation to the state and sought to organize lesbian women to adopt Marxist revolutionary politics. Chapter two discusses the early years of political lesbian and homosexual movement building in Mexico City, focusing on the activism of Y. Castro’s autonomous lesbian organization Oikabeth and the mixed gender group Lambda. I examine the left internationalist politics

that Lambda brought to international organizing for lesbian and gay liberation, the revolutionary politics of Oikabeth, and the ways in which both organizations sought to instill the politics of lesbian and homosexual liberation in the Mexican left. Soon after its formation, Lambda began collaborating with leftist lesbian and gay groups in the U.S., as well as with the newly formed ILGA. Clearly envisioning lesbian and homosexual liberation as an international process, they both extended and received solidarity abroad. They consistently corresponded with international organizations, and attended international gatherings such as the 1979 March on Washington and ILGA conferences held annually in different European cities. Such collaborations were important because they strengthened international leftist lesbian and gay organizing and influenced the organizing strategies used by Lambda.

Despite their ideological differences, on a local level, Lambda, Oikabeth, and the predominantly gay male organization, the FHAR collaborated in forging alliances with the Mexican left. Many lesbian and homosexual activists considered themselves to be dual militants and all three organizations sought to encourage a discourse of lesbian and gay liberation within it. Lambda in particular worked with the Trotskyist PRT party to seek socialist change within the Mexican state. Lesbian and homosexual activists supported revolutionary movements in Latin America by participating in demonstrations and in their own rhetoric, connecting the struggle for lesbian and homosexual liberation with the struggle for the liberation of all oppressed peoples from imperialist capitalism. At this time they took influence from anti-authoritarian Latin American movements seeking justice for the disappeared and political prisoners and began to employ human rights discourses to defend lesbian and homosexual rights as human rights.

Suffering the effects of the worldwide economic crisis, the onset of AIDS, a massive earthquake, and increased factionalism within lesbian and homosexual organizing, activists suffered a hindrance in their organizing beginning in 1982. Because of such setbacks, many chroniclers of Mexican lesbian and homosexual activism have dismissed the time period between 1982 and 1985 as unimportant. My research shows otherwise and chapter three examines how lesbian and homosexual activists responded to neo-liberal reforms and moralizing politics resulting from the economic crisis, as well as how and why the broader lesbian and homosexual movement became increasingly factionalized. Beginning in 1982 incoming president de la Madrid enacted austerity measures in accordance with IMF policies, as well as began a politics of “moral renovation.” Ostensibly a program to root out corruption with the Mexican government, it relied on the enforcement of “traditional” and heteronormative notions of Mexican morality and “good customs.” Reforms in the penal code strengthened police powers to criminalize deviancy. In turn, the harassment, intimidation, and physical assault of homosexuals, lesbians, and others considered “deviant” increased. Yet, the politics of moral renovation also inadvertently encouraged solidarity with Mexican urban popular movements and transnational networking for lesbian and gay rights. Lambda activists worked with the ILGA to defend lesbian and gay rights as human rights on an international scale as Lambda and other activists from Oikabeth, Seminario, and Colectivo Sol demanded “their right to have rights” within Mexico. However, ideological divisions within Mexico’s lesbian and homosexual movement also increased during this time as Lambda increasingly sought both redistribution and recognition while revolutionary groups continued to reject state-centered demands that sought recognition.

Furthermore, lesbian activists within Lambda were becoming increasingly interested in organizing separately from men. The massive earthquake that hit Mexico City in 1985 only served to strengthen these various divisions and resulted in Lambda's demise. At the same time, other groups like Seminario strengthened as they worked in solidarity with those affected most direly by the earthquake. Therefore, due to ideological differences and varying organizational strategies amongst lesbian and homosexual groups, during this time activists created multiple counter-discourses that both challenged the legitimacy of the state itself, as well as sought to reform it.

Chapter four chronicles and analyzes Mexican lesbian activists' collaboration with international lesbian and gay organizations in the late 1980s and early 1990s, paying particular attention to dynamics of power between activists in the global South and North. The chapter also considers why during the late 1980s some Mexican lesbian organizations become increasingly institutionalized turning to an organizational model that sought recognition from the state, rather than the radical reform or overthrow of it. In particular, I provide an in-depth look at the ways in which lesbians and homosexuals appealed to liberal human rights discourse in their struggle to hold ILGA's 1991 annual conference in Guadalajara, Jalisco in 1991. In contact zones like the organizing of the ILGA conference, Mexican lesbian activists emulated an intersectional model of activism that connected issues of lesbian rights to struggles of anti-imperialism and democratization in Latin America. Yet, lesbians also began to articulate discourses of citizenship and gay male groups involved with the organizing of the conference used rhetoric that supported neo-liberal politics and that was increasingly homonationalist. Through the combined use of liberal and Latin American based human rights discourses,

transnational solidarity proved effective in protecting the rights of lesbians and gays to assemble for the ILGA conference. Mexican and other Latin American participants in the ILGA conference also successfully challenged cultural imperialism within the ILGA changing the ILGA's structure to be more globally representative and active on issues affecting lesbians and gays in the global South.

According to former Lambda activist in an interview with the author, Trinidad Gutiérrez, the 1991 ILGA conference represents a “point of rupture” in the history of LGBT activism as thereafter LGBT organizations became increasingly institutionalized. She went on to explain that The NGOization of LGBT organizing has often resulted in competition for international funding, creating conflict amongst Mexican organizations. As a result, rather than compete for international funding, she and other lesbian feminists have often chosen to work within university structures.⁴⁶⁴ At the same time, as exemplified by her participation in the Zapatista women's *encuentro*, she and others have continued to work creating solidarity between movements of the oppressed within Mexico. While Y. Castro did not attend the *encuentro*, as a leader of lesbian feminist activism she also has worked in solidarity with the Zapatistas, as well as has continued to be active within the Left.

Between 1968 and 1991 both Gutiérrez and Y. Castro can be considered to have been dual militants in the Left and the lesbian and homosexual movement. Like Cárdenas, the events of '68 inspired Gutiérrez to continue work with the New Left to democratize the Mexican state, as well as expand the “sexual opening” in Mexican culture that began during this time. Influenced as much by Cold War politics as their cosmopolitan identities, Y. Castro and Cárdenas began to organize for lesbian and

⁴⁶⁴ Gutiérrez, interview with the author.

homosexual liberation in the 1970s. The state repression and intimidation that they and others experienced shed light on the politics of the Cold War in Latin America and how the government used Cold War rhetoric to repress homosexuals and lesbians as “dissidents.” Thus, understanding the origins of Mexican lesbian and homosexual activism also helps us to understand the broader history of the Mexican Left and counterculture during the Cold War. Whereas recent Latin American Cold War studies have examined state oppression of Marxists, peasants, students, indigenous peoples, amongst others, these studies have not yet examined how Cold War politics affected lesbian and homosexual activists.

While examining a time period falling before what is commonly considered the era of globalization, my research also builds upon other studies of LGBT activism in Latin America and internationally that have shown the ways in which LGBT movements negotiate and resist rather than absorb and assimilate global discourses. Yet, rather than only focus on how the global has influenced Mexican activism, my work examines the multidirectional influences of international LGBT organizing. Specifically, my research examines how Mexicans’ anti-imperialist politics influenced international LGBT organizing, particularly that organized through the ILGA. Building on the work of Estevez, my examination of lesbian activists’ use of both Latin American based and liberal human rights discourses suggests that the prominent idea of human rights as a Western liberal discourse should be complicated and expanded upon. Like other recent works in international LGBT studies, this study also examines the effects of neo-liberalism on lesbian and homosexual politics, highlighting the correlations between moralizing politics and austerity, as well as the tensions that have emerged amongst

activists over the institutionalization of LGBT organizing. Whereas in the face of fear and political insecurity during the Cold War, Mexican lesbian and homosexual activists sought unity amongst themselves and with all oppressed people, neo-liberalism and democratization resulted in an increased reliance on liberal discourses of rights and citizenship. Gaining recognition from the state and abandoning the movement's origins in the Left, some activists, particularly middle-class gay men, have since participated in the commodification of Mexican gay culture. Yet, while Mexico's lesbian and homosexual movement has always maintained strong international ties, communication through the internet has also helped mobilize solidarity across borders, within Mexico itself and internationally. As exemplified by their solidarity with the Zapatista movement, resistance to the neo-liberalization of LGBT politics remains strong in Mexico City, particularly amongst lesbian activists.

GLOSSARY

CLHARI	Lesbian and Gay Committee in Support of Rosario Ibarra
CNLF	National Committee of Lesbian Feminists
FHAR	Homosexual Front for Revolutionary Action
FLH	Homosexual Liberation Front (Mexico City)
Lambda	Lambda Group of Homosexual Liberation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
PRI	Institutional Revolutionary Party
PRT	Revolutionary Workers Party
Seminario	Seminary of Marxist Leninist Lesbian Feminists

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