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The Construction of Gay Identity in Chile

By Daniel Lyons

This paper describes ways in which gay Chileans perceive gay identity in Chile. Two central questions originate this text: What are the key factors that socially construct gay identity in Chile? How do lesbian and gay Chileans respond to this social production of gay identity?

Context

Most visitors who come to Chile arrive in the Santiago Airport and acquire their initial impressions of the country from the nation's capital. Many are shocked to find that it is not the Latin America that they expected. Chile is a widely Eurocentric country with a cosmopolitan capital. Many Chileans boast of their European heritage, setting them apart from the rest of Latin America. It is undeniable that this can be largely attributed to Spanish conquistadores, however much of the credit is given to the seventeen-year dictator, Augusto Pinochet. Pinochet introduced a neo-liberal economy, which has made Chile one of the strongest economies in Latin America¹. As a result of neo-liberalism, Chile has also experienced globalization to a great degree. North American commodities, as well as concepts, have trickled down to Chile with little resistance.

Also attributed to the Spanish conquistadores is the reining dominance of Catholicism in Chile. 77% of all Chileans are Catholic. There is a Church located on almost every block in highly populated areas. It is common when riding a crowded micro (local transit bus) to see everyone on the bus do the sign of the cross when passing a church. It is also common in the Micros or Colectivos (short distance taxi) to see a cruci-

fix hanging from the rear view mirror or an alter displayed on the dash-board. Many Catholics, like the family I lived with, are casual within their practice of Catholicism, in that they only attend church on holidays and rarely or never preach to non-Catholics². Chilean leftist magazines frequently critique the overbearing influence that the Catholic Church has in legislature and Chilean politics.³

September 11th, 1973 was the day on which President Salvador Allende was violently overthrown. La Moneda, the presidential palace, was bombed and gutted by the Chilean air force, led by General Augusto Pinochet. It remains speculative whether President Allende was murdered or committed suicide that day. Allende had been Chile's first socialist president. When elected in 1970, he had preached a glowing vision of economic and social equality; but nationalization and collectivization brought economic disaster.⁴ The cold war climate was also against him. Although he had seemed a savior to many at home, the United States could not tolerate a Marxist in power within the same hemisphere. American officials, Nixon and

¹ *The other September 11th*. Economist; 9/6/2003, Vol.368 issue 8340, p32.

² I lived with the Thiznau Family from September 3rd to November 28th, 2003

³ *The Clinic* and *Rocinante* are two weekly readers that I bought often, both were widely popular and extremely critical of the Chilean government.

⁴ *A Nation of Enemies* – chapters 1 & 2

Kissinger encouraged the coup, and rejoiced when it succeeded.⁵ Allende's fall brought Augusto Pinochet into power for 17 years. His dictatorship ushered in free market reforms that led to Chile's rapid growth in the 1990's, however it also unleashed appalling violence. An estimated 3,000 people were killed with 1,200 still missing. Hundreds of thousands of men, woman and children were captured and tortured in order to keep Pinochet in Power.⁶

The year of 1973 also marked the emergence of civil rights movements, including gay liberation, in much of Latin America. Inspired by the gay US movement that followed the event of stonewall in 1969 and the radicalism of the Vietnam War era, gay liberation swept the continent. By 1973 Brasil, Argentina, Ecuador, Mexico, Costa Rica as well as Chile had evolving gay rights movements to varying degrees.⁷ What existed of lesbian and gay public visibility in Chile in 1973 was thwarted by the dictatorship and shoved underground. The lesbian and gay community as well as all other groups of subordination were silenced during the epoch of Pinochet, until 1989.⁸

The truth about the Pinochet Dictatorship's human rights violations has trickled out only slowly in the last 14 years. A national Truth and Reconciliation Commission reported three years ago that many of those who disappeared during the dictatorship were exhumed in the late 1970's and dumped into the sea.

Chile has now enjoyed 14 years of elected government, the last 4 of them under a socialist president, Ricardo La-

gos. And half of all Chileans living now were not yet born in the year the coup occurred.⁹ However the divisions it caused have not yet healed. Currently there are political debates televised nightly on prime time that exemplify this division.¹⁰ Allende socialists and Pinochet neo liberalists are ideologies that clash often in Chile. Both have supporters of many generations, old and young. Nevertheless, not one gay person interviewed, for obvious reasons, had an ounce of sympathy for Pinochet or his supporters.

AIDS made the continuation of gay liberation difficult for Chileans. Pinochet was elected out of office in October of 1988, but did not actually leave office until January 1989. Unfortunately for sexual minorities in Chile this was a difficult time to recapture a movement due to the height of the AIDS epidemic. Much of the gay visibility that was generated soon after Pinochet left office was AIDS based, such as the spread of educational pamphlets as well as lectures and workshops. Much was done to compensate for the lack of AIDS education during the dictatorship.¹¹

As a result of some of these workshops, gay Chileans began to express socio-political ideologies in the interest of gay rights. Marco Ruiz along with a handful of other activists and organizers founded the Movement for Homosexual Integration and Liberation (MOVILH).

⁹ *That Other Septembe 11th*

¹⁰ when I lived the Thiznau family for the first three months, we spend each evening watching the local portion of Univision (a Latin American Broadcasting network) wich had a television program devoted to addressing contemporary national politics. Within the debate there was often a stark contrast between Pinochet supporters (neo liberals) and Allende supporters (socialists).

¹¹ Carlos Sanchez, *Afuera de la LuZ*

⁵ A Nation of Enemies PP. 23, 26, 49,51,78

⁶ A Nation of Enemies – chapter 6

⁷ Sanchez, Carlos, *Afuera De La Luz*. Primera Edicion, 2002 p.19

⁸ Carlos Sanchez

According to Ruiz, the primary objectives of the organization were “to organize and unite gays and lesbians, create and educate social consciousness and awareness of the existence of gays and lesbians in Chile, to make legislative changes and to create a public environment of safe sexual expression”.¹² In 1993 MOVILH was the first gay rights organization to surface after the dictatorship, it inspired a number of other activist organizations. It is still one of the two most well known gay rights organizations in Chile. The other non-government organization is the Unified Movement of Sexual Minorities (MUMS), which was founded in 1998. Both MOVILH and MUMS serve the community with a reformist approach to politics and seek to build an “all inclusive” Chilean gay rights movement.

Introduction

As Hector Nunez and I strolled through “el Barrio Gay” in the Bella Vista district of Santiago, he pointed out to me the distinction between bars, restaurants and apartments that were *gay* and those which were just gay. With reference to the places that he considered *gay*, Hector would flip his wrist and exaggerate his stride and when speaking of places that were simply gay, he would speak and move in his natural manner. When the doors were open, we would stop in to those that Hector considered gay, often relaxed and dim, without much production, however our stroll turned into a rapid sashay as we glared past the places that he told me were “*gay*”, usually flashy bright colored discos. Hector Nunez has nothing but contempt for the recent phenomena of gay consumerist fashion and identity in Chile. He recalls

¹² Ruiz, Marco. Santiago, November 30, 2003

back to a more romantic epoch when gay identity in Chile referred to political activism, taking to the streets and resisting the every day saturation of heterosexist normativity. Drifting in his reminiscence, Hector interrupted himself to remind me that this was only how gays and lesbians saw themselves during this time, but in fact gay identity as seen through the general scope of Chilean citizens was solely constructed of factors that were projected by the church and state, factors such as deviance, immoral perversion pedophilia, etc. “Not to say that these things do not exist now” Hector Clarifies, “but with the recent ‘*gay* trend’ we have more than one identity to adopt or resist.”

This paper addresses Hector Nunez’s plight. I explore the ways in which gay Chileans perceive gay identity in Chile. In doing so it is essential to understand who constructs gay identity in Chile. Two investigative questions were created to do this:

- What are the key factors that socially construct gay identity in Chile?
- How do lesbian and gay Chileans respond to this social production of gay identity?

The following three chapters represent gay identity as addressed by Chileans.

The first chapter focuses on aspects of institutionalized homophobia that most commonly contribute to Chilean gay identity. Examined here is traditional machista¹³ culture in Chile and how this protection of masculinity enforces a degree of homophobia in Chilean society. I also consider the Catholic Church as it creates and sustains homophobia in Chilean society. With regards to homosexuality, the Roman Catholic

¹³ The word Machista is essentially the same as “machismo”, however I use “machista” because that is what is used in by Chileans.

Church stands firmly by its code of morality¹⁴. As a Catholic country, the morality of the Catholic Church has been integrated into Chilean legislature. Furthermore, I look at the ways in which legislature as well as social service workers, have historically ignored the rights of gays and lesbians.

The second chapter examines the “gay market” and its role in the national market as well as its position in creating identity. In Chile, a neo liberal economy has given way to increasing globalization, thus introducing North American consumer culture. This chapter examines how the gay market functions within the Chilean upper class and as it appears in the media, discos and Chilean Fashion stores * Also discussed in this chapter are the multiple forms of discrimination that exist within the lesbian and gay community with regards to the market and its persistent sexism. This chapter looks at the aspects of this neo-liberal market that commodify homosexuality. Examples are provided to demonstrate the agenda of capital gain, which drives this commoditization. The last section addresses an artistic response to the market by looking at the works of Pedro Lemebel and Carmen Berenguer.

The final chapter reflects Chilean lesbian and gay self-perception. This chapter looks at the ways in which machista culture, institutional homophobia and the market impact a Chilean gay identity. Many of the interviewees described the use of political strategies such as Integration, Reformism or Liberation to shape their political identities.

¹⁴ I use the phrase “morality code” in reference to the moral values that are harnessed by the Roman Catholic Church, particularly their conception of homosexuality as a mortal sin. See, Hopman, Johannes. *Culpa Christianismo e Identidad Homosexual*. University of Chile, 2003 (pp1-24)

Each individual response differs due to the intersectionality found within the lesbian and gay community. The experiences of men differ from those of woman, bisexuals to Transvestites, etc. this chapter explores those differences and the various interpretations of Chilean gay identity that they create.

Hegemonic groups-subaltern identity

Frequently the socially constructed identity for a subaltern group does not benefit that particular group, but rather serves as a stigmatic reference for the dominant culture. At the same time it is common that a subordinated culture reclaims or reinvents an identity projected by the dominant society, such as the reclamation of the word Chicano in the North American Latino civil rights movement. Just as white society projected an identity for Latinos in the US, the heterosexually dominant culture has constructed identities for gays and lesbians all over the world. As gay communities emerge globally, each develops a public identity vis a vis the dominant heterosexual culture. Chile is no exception. All interviewees unanimously agreed that homophobia is a daily struggle for gays and lesbian Chileans. Similar to the rest of Latin America¹⁵, Chile has a

¹⁵ Beserra, Bernadete R. Coming Out in Brazil. *Brazzil*. 2/28/03, V.14; N202. P.54
Aquise, Norma. Lesbian Visibility In Latin America: a Herstory. *Lesbian News*, 9/03, Vol.26, Issue 2
Sigal, Pete. To Cross the Sexual Borderlands: The History of Sexuality in the Americas. Winter 2002. *Radical History Review*, Issue 82
Lumsden, Ian. *Machos, Maricones and Gays: Cuba and Homosexuality*. Temple University Press, 1996
Carrier, Joseph. Living La Vida Loca: Latin American Gays. *Economist*, 12/18/99, Vol.353, Issue 8150

very dominant machista culture. In such an environment there is no space for the acceptance of lifestyles that challenge this culture. The existing heterosexual milieu is largely attributed to the influence of the Catholic Church,¹⁶ which for decades has provided a theology that discriminates against sexual minorities. Due to the strict and stubborn traditionalism of the Catholic Church, culturally challenging its morality code¹⁷ has become very problematic for Chile.

Institutional homophobia refers to the forms by which the government, corporations, educational system, and religious structure systematically discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation or identity. Many existing laws, codes and/or policies in Chilean legislature reinforce this discrimination. This type of institutionalized discrimination is not specific to only Chile; in fact it is rare to find a government that does not overtly discriminate sexual minorities¹⁸. This chapter proves that institutionalized homophobia cannot be solely attributed to one group, ideology or institution. This section identifies two aspects of institutional homophobia and how each

systematically function in Chilean society. The two institutions identified are the Roman Catholic Church and its influence on Chilean legislature. However to better understand these two institutions it is necessary to comprehend the machista¹⁹ climate in which they flourish. The first part of this chapter discusses the reality of machista (“machista” is a Chilean phrase equivalent to “machismo”) culture as it exists in Chile.

Most of those interviewed²⁰ chose to define homophobia simply as *hostilidad, incluye dimensiones intrapsíquicas como temor y el odio, así como los niveles sociales y culturales que comprenden la opresión prejuicio y discriminación*. (Hostility, inclusive of interpersonal dimensions such as social and cultural fear and hatred, as well as oppression, prejudice and discrimination). According to a series of surveys and the experiences of those interviewed, the homophobic threat level in Chile soars high²¹:

A survey of attitudes regarding homosexual intolerance and discrimination, conducted in 1997, indicated that 43.6% of the population of adults of both sexes, residents in the metropolitan region, showed some degree of affirmation to the statement: *Homosexuality must be*

Prieur, Annick. *Domination and Desire: Male Homosexuality and the Construction of Masculinity in Mexico. Machos Mistresses and Madonnas*, Chapter 4, Chicago Press, 1997

All of the aforementioned documents describe aspects of Machismo, Machista or Masculine identity in specific countries in Latin America.
¹⁶ Hopman, Johannes. *Culpa, Christinaismo e Identidad Homosexual*. University of Chile, 2003

¹⁷ See foot note #9

¹⁸ Even in the US, it is illegal to have rights to marriage for those who are gay. In Cuba, it is illegal for gay people to display “public ostentation”. In most of Latin America with the exception of Brazil Argentina and as for Chile, Sodomy is illegal. It is illegal in all of Latin America with the exception of the State of Buenos Aires in Argentina, to have government sanctioned same sex marriage.

3. Refer to Footnote 1

²⁰ Specifically, Johannes Hopman, Carlos Sanchez, Tatiana Roja, Rolando Himenez, Daniel Anaya, Jose Manuel Sylva and Patricia Gonzales made statements that regarded to homophobia as more that just oppression, but rather as a “social and Cultural” fear

²¹ The statement that Homophobi “soars high” in Chile is a statement that was made by Carlos Sanchez before I had made appointments for other interviews. During almost every interview after Carlos, I asked interviewees if they agreed with Carlos’ statement and everyone agreed that Chile has an exceptional amount of homophobia, in comparison with the rest of Latin America

*prohibited, because it is contradictory to human nature.*²²

A FLACSO (Faculty of Latin American Social Sciences) survey, conducted in 1995 considering both sexes, groups of socioeconomic levels and age, inquired that 74% of the population of Santiago accepted little or rejected entirely the concept of homosexuality.²³

A second measurement of intolerance and discrimination (conducted by students and faculty of the University of Chile in the year 2000, based on a sample of people inclusive of both sexes greater than 18 years of age) concludes that intolerance and discrimination against sexual minorities is not decreasing. 59.5%, that is to say 6 of every 10 people interviewed, were ranked as intolerant or discriminatory to homosexuality.²⁴

Isac Caro and Gabriel Guajardo of el corporacion chilena de prevencion del SIDA (Chilean AIDS prevention corporation), have defined homophobia as a system or process of rejection. Homophobia as a fear of association “perpetuates a rejection of homosexuality within machista culture”²⁵ in Chile. Caro and Guajardo argue that there are three levels to Chilean homophobia²⁶. The first

being clinical; a literal definition with reference to the psychological term “phobia” as a fear. The second as social; the present definition (less literal), introduces the concept that is not limited to just fear, but rather expressed as hatred, rejection, hostility, intolerance, etc. Lastly, association; homophobia with regards to the development of the AIDS pandemic and the fear that patients and/or doctors have of being associated with gay men.²⁷

According to Karren Castillo²⁸, it is not only a fear of homosexuality that perpetuates hatred in machista culture, but rather a rejection of anything that threatens the social projection of masculinity, for instance gender roles. She argues that typically in Chile, men are expected to be strong, dominant and responsible for a family income, as women are expected to be vulnerable, chaste and responsible for housework²⁹. This sort

prevention corporation in Chile. He has conducted numerous studies regarding Chilean homophobia and AIDS awareness.

²⁷ This is also from the Carro/Guajardo study. However for further support of this statement see Carrier, Joseph. Living La Vida Loca: Latin American Gays. Economist, 12/18/99, Vol.353, Issue 8150 In this article Carrier examines phenomena of men, in Chile who are married, but secretly lead gay lives. In doing so some of these men have contracted HIV/AIDS and unknowingly infect their wives. Using the Carro/Guajardo study in his article, Carrier claims that it is a “fear of association” with gay men that keeps these married men from being honest with their wives and in turn protecting them from harmful diseases.

²⁸ Karren Castillo made this statement very understandable for me, however most of those interviewed who spoke about Machista culture in Chile said the same thing.

²⁹ For the duration of the three months that I lived with the Thiznau family I never once saw my host father, Hugo, do anything that is considered housework. Not only did his wife cook for him and clean up after him, but it was ex-

²² These statistics and facts were all pulled from the same study that was conducted by a collective of students from the Universidad de Chile. The document which contained this study was found in the archives of the Facultad Latina American de los Ciencias Sociales.

²³ *ibid*

²⁴ *ibid*

²⁵ Carro, Isaac and Guajardo, Gabriel. *Homofobia Cultural en Santiago Chile*. el corporacion chilena de prevencion del SIDA, 2002

²⁶ These statements were taken from document compiled by Isaac Carro and Gabriel Guajardo called *Homofobia Cultural en Santiago Chile*. This document became a key reference guide while researching for this section. Gabriel Guajardo is chief organizer for the Chilean AIDS

of patriarchal structure determines how men relate to other men as well as women. Castillo draws a correlation between the oppression of woman and homosexuals. She describes this as a Male fear of Emasculation.³⁰

In the tradition of machista culture it is possible for a man to have sex with men and still avoid being seen as homosexual, so long as he plays the masculine role in the actual act of sex.³¹ In the roles of sex between men in machista Latin America, the top is considered "macho" as the bottom is referred to as the "maricon"³² or faggot.³³ The right of "macho" males to enjoy their sexuality as they see fit matches the power they have in society in general. Rene Leal, a Chilean professor at the School For International Training, stresses that it is impossible to pluralize the concept of

masculinity within a machista culture. There is only one kind of masculinity, which is explicitly heterosexual. This is to say that a masculine gay male cannot exist,³⁴ simply because such a recognition would be a threat to machista (heterosexual) masculinity. This is seen through the aforementioned concept of machista sexual identity. If a "macho"³⁵ man who has sex with other men could be considered gay or bisexual, there would be a lot more gay identified men in Latin America. In Leal's opinion, such a masculinization of the concept of "gay identity" would be a direct threat to machista culture as a whole.

Caro and Guajardo³⁶ apply the concept of heterosexism, ("heterosexista") to the phenomena of machista dominance in Chile. Heterosexism is the belief that heterosexuality is or should be the only acceptable form of sexual orientation. Their study refers to cultural as well as psychological heterosexism that is imbedded in Chilean culture. In their analysis Caro and Guajardo point out three cultural consequences with regards to heterosexism. First being the stigmatization of gays for erotic behavior and the perception of gays as transgressions of social norms. This refers to the labeling of gays as sexual deviants and perverts. As a result of heterosexual normativity³⁷, gays are sexualized and only thought of in the frame of sexual activ-

pected of her to do so. However this was not viewed as oppressive or unfair within the family. On several occasions I asked my host mother, Gladys, how she felt about being responsible for the house chores, she explained to me that she saw it as a sort of trade, adding that she would rather do house work than work in an office. Gladys as well as many other families I spoke with told me that this was a common model for a Chilean family.

³⁰ Karen Castillo

³¹ This was explained to me by Carlos Sanchez and Karren Castillo, Hector Nunez and Jannis Hopman. Also: Lumsden, Ian. *Machos, Maricones and Gays Cuba and Homosexuality*. Philadelphia, 1996. Page 34 supports this.

³² Literally in a North American translation Maricon means Faggot or queer. However on occasion it may be used with underlying affection by heterosexuals in a way that straight North Americans never would, as in, for example, "eres un tremendo maricon" (you are a great queen).

³³ This was explained to me by Carlos Sanchez, Johannes Hopman, Marco Ruiz and Hector Nunez. It is also documented in Joseph Carriers article, *Living La Vida Loca* as well as Bernadete Beserra's *Coming Out In Brazil* and *Machos, Maricones and Gays: Cuba and Homosexuality* by Ian Lumsden.

³⁴ Rene Leal has written a disrotation about Machista culture and the role of masculinity in Chile. The basis of this interview was about Machista culture.

³⁵ Referring to the one who plays the "top" in the role of sex between men.

³⁶ This study was found in the same document that was discussed in footnote #7

³⁷ "heterosexual normativity" refers to the concept that since Chilean culture is dominated by heterosexism, everything related to, or found within that culture assumes universal heterosexuality.

ity, which is different than sexuality. Heterosexism also allows the dominant culture to perceive homosexuality as a chosen path of non-conformity to that which is “normal” (heterosexuality). Within the perception of homosexuality as “*not* normal” or “unnatural” discrimination can easily become justified. Those who do not conform to contemporary gender roles, such as athletic women or effeminate men, are frequently equated with homosexuals and therefore stigmatized. As a result, the fear of being equated to the social status of lesbians and gays has led both gay and straight people in Chile to be extra cautious about anything that may imply or give the appearance of gender non-conformity.³⁸

Homophobia, machista culture and heterosexism all contain ideological aspects that legitimize hostility and oppression toward sexual minorities. Each refer to homosexuality as non-normative, unnatural or immoral, which suggests, in the context of social discourse, a deserving discrimination. All of them are also deeply imbedded in Chilean culture through media, legislature as well as the national religion, Roman Catholicism.

The Church and State

Chile has been a Catholic country since the early 1500s when it was first colo-

³⁸ Carlos Sanchez, 11/06/03. during a discussion on this date, Sanchez described the ways in which gay people, some of his friends, act differently when outside of social circles. “In the company of friends it is common to see men act naturally effeminate or women acting butch, but when I see them in public, they return to their prescribed gender mannerisms”. Sanchez claims this is often done as a safety precaution to protect their job or family life.

nized by Spain.³⁹ Roman Catholicism, to this day remains central to Chilean culture. Seventy seven percent of all Chileans are Roman Catholic⁴⁰. Traditional Catholic apologetics are taught in public schools in Chile.⁴¹ According to contemporary teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, homosexuality is an abomination and considered a mortal sin.⁴² The general consensus among the interviewees was that most Chileans are not only familiar with this statement, but also agree with it.⁴³

The Roman Catholic anti-gay policy is not limited to church rhetoric, it is also enforced within its own institution. Currently a movement exists in the Church to revoke the holy orders of all priests whom admit to homosexual tendencies.⁴⁴ The letter from the congregation for the divine cult and discipline of the sacraments regarding the revocation of holy orders from homosexual priests says the following:

The experience that proceeds from many causes instructed with

³⁹ See Johannes Hopman. *Culpa, Cristianismo e identidad homosexual*. Universidad de Chile.

⁴⁰ According to <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org>

⁴¹ The host brothers of the family I lived with explained to me the extent to which Catholic teachings were indoctrinated into their public education.

⁴² In the Catholic Church there are two kinds of sins, Mortal and Venial. Venial sins refer to those less serious: stealing, Lying, cheating etc. It is believed that if one dies without confessing venial sins then one spends time in purgatory until these sins are forgiven. However Mortal sins such as murder, adultery and homosexuality will cause eternal damnation, AKA hell.

⁴³ Tatiana Roja made the statement that although many Chileans are not active Catholics, most believe in and follow the teachings of the Church. Every interviewee that was asked about this statement agreed with Tatiana.

⁴⁴ See footnote #13. Hopman discusses this movement extensively in his article.

the objective to obtain dispensation of the obligations that derive from holy ordination. The ordainment to the diaconate and the priesthood of homosexual men or men with homosexual tendencies is absolutely inadvisable and imprudent and from the pastoral point of view very dangerous; a homosexual person or a person with homosexual tendency is not therefore suitable to receive the sacrament of holy order.⁴⁵

The strict catholic moral code⁴⁶ that has oppressed gay Catholics for centuries, currently oppresses non-Catholics through Chilean legislature. Essentially, the morality of the Church has become that of the State and its laws. One example of legislative moralism in Chile is the law that prohibits Chilean citizens from obtaining marital divorce. Traditionally, divorce has been condemned by the Church. It is still common to find many Roman Catholic dioceses around the world that consider remarriage after divorce subject for excommunication, however Chile is one of the only governments that still refuses to legally recognize divorce.⁴⁷ This law along with one that condemns abortion is adamantly upheld despite monthly protests and

marches.⁴⁸ In a speech by right wing senator Sergio Diaz, the collaboration of church and state is clarified. He states, "Our judicial system is humanist and rather the best because it is a Christian humanism, because this has always been a catholic country and because our right comes from the Roman Right and the Spanish Right and because the people of this countries society and their mode of thinking is Christian".⁴⁹ Oppression from the Catholic Church as an institution combined with the institution of law generates, for many gay Chileans, a sense of wide spread homophobia from a number of facets. As one interviewee put it, "with discrimination from my Catholic family as well as the Church and the Governments laws, I feel surrounded by homophobia".⁵⁰

The Chilean government, similar to most of Latin America, has a number of laws and policies that are explicitly prejudiced toward sexual minorities. Until September 1997 sodomy was illegal in Chile.⁵¹ Laws protecting civil identification are designed to prohibit the name change of a transvestite or transgender person that would be false with reference to that person's biological gender. It is however legal to do so, if

⁴⁵ See Hopman, Johannes. *Christianismo e Identidad*. University of Chile. 2003. This letter from the congregation for the divine cult and discipline of the sacraments was used in Hoppman's thesis to demonstrate action taken by the church to enforce its "moral code"

⁴⁶ See foot note #9

⁴⁷ *Durechos Humanos en America Latina y el Caribe*. Asociacion Internacional de Lesbianas y Gays (ILGA)

⁴⁸ On December 1st 2003, I attended and observed a march against the illegality of divorce. Most of the protesters were students and young people ranging in age from 18-30. after living in Chile for 6 months, I never spoke to one person who voiced an opinion of support for the divorce law.

⁴⁹ During the interview with Johannes Hopman, he discussed in great detail the issue of Chiles legislature and its Catholic influence. This quote was taken from his article.

⁵⁰ Daniel Anaya, December 2, 2003

⁵¹ Refer to Footnote #1

an operation has been conducted, which permanently alters one's anatomy. The law most commonly used by the Santiago Police Department, with regard to lesbians and gays, is article/penal code 373, which condones *ofensas a la moralidad social* (offenses to social morality)⁵². This is usually the penal code used to detain homosexuals when a more applicable reason cannot be invented. Police also use the article to break up and dismiss gay parties or public gatherings.⁵³

Often gay and lesbian Chileans refer to the existing discriminatory laws as insignificant in comparison to the amount of discrimination that is permitted due to a lack of legislative protections for sexual minorities. As pointed out by many of those interviewed, the overt social injustices that gay and lesbians face, do not only present themselves in the form of laws. It has become common for authorities to turn a blind eye to gay or lesbian distress calls.⁵⁴ Daniel Anaya stated during an interview, "Chilean police officers repeatedly ignore a call for help if they are aware that the one calling is gay". This is also found with doctors who frequently re-

⁵² "Social Morality" in the context of Chilean legislator can be interpreted as "public peace" Penal code 373 is used in similar conduct to what is known in the US as "Disturbing the Peace". Just as in the US, a person can be arrested for committing violent actions in public, in someone can be arrested for being gay in public.

⁵³ all of these legislative codes are documented in *Homofobia y Administracion de Justicia: Mirada del Movimiento Homosexual Chileno* (homophobic and the Judicial Administration: A Look at the Chilean Homosexual Movement). This is a document that was compiled by members of MOVILH and published by FLACSO.

⁵⁴ Carlos Sanchez was the first to bring this to my attention. In every interview I asked if this was true and unanimously everyone agreed, including the heterosexuals.

fuse to treat patients upon discovering the patient's sexual orientation.⁵⁵ The following are examples that comply with such heterosexism and homophobia:

- September 4 1993, in the discotheque called DIVINE located in Valparaíso, 16 people died in an arsenal fire. One paramedic of 15 available was willing to help burned victims. Police and judicial Investigations leading to possible arsonists were never taken seriously and as a result, nobody has been tried or sentenced on the matter.⁵⁶

- January 16 2000, 8 men were stopped arbitrarily in Santiago by a group of civilian men, who were later revealed as police officers. The eight men were brutally struck, beaten and detained under article 373 (offense to social morality). Five days later the men were released due to a lack of merits.⁵⁷

- March 2 2002, 3:30 in the morning, in the Providencia district of Santiago, 4 transvestites were brutally beaten with clubs and dragged over half a block by officers of the 19th street police station. The hospital reported the victims

⁵⁵ See example one, "September 4 1993..."

⁵⁶ The next three foot notes are all from the same document called *Homofobia Cultural en Santiago, Chile*, by Isaac Carro and Gabriel Guajardo. The document is a lengthy article that covers statistics and studies conducted by Carro and Guajardo. Also addressed in this document is a list of discriminatory laws in Chilean legislature as well as a list of past occurrences of hate crimes relating to homophobia which is the section where I retrieved the information on the aforementioned events of homophobia listed in this article.

⁵⁷ Currently, the most publicized gay related topic in American (North, Central and South) media is that surrounding the issue of same sex marriage. The Chilean government does not recognize same sex marriage nor does it recognize civil unions. The illegality of a civil union between two men or two women is treated similar to what is known as civil identification.

to have multiple lesions, broken bones and serious concussions with possible brain damage. The named and accused officers refused to brief that they had anything to do with the incident. No one was charged and the case was dropped.

All interviewees involved with the gay rights movement in Santiago, agree that the discrimination against gays and lesbians presented in the, penal codes, labor codes and other legislative norms are symptoms of a highly intransigent culture that condones ignorance due to institutional influences such as the Roman Catholic Church.⁵⁸ However, such ignorance can also be attributed to an overwhelming amount of conservative psychologists who agree that homosexuality is a disease or state of sexual deviation⁵⁹. This falsified theory of homosexuality as an illness is often embraced by religious politicians, to further justify their hatred. A statement made by Chilean parliament in 1998 added that these “legislative moral values” and “absolute truths” exist, not to penalize the sexual relations between gays and lesbians simply because they are “absurd”, but because “the communal property of the society demands a normal sexual life style and

the society must defend itself from the abnormal sexual lifestyle”.⁶⁰

The Market

As Hector pointed out to me the differences between *gay* and gay establishments, it became clear that there were far more shops, restaurants and discos that he described, with a flip of the wrist, as *gay*. Upon asking him for clarification, he explained to me that in an economic sense, in the last decade, Chile has seen a significant increase in gay visibility. However this visibility has been created as a result of a neo-liberal economy and has not been attributed to any decrease in legislative discrimination or social homophobia. Hector elaborated on this by giving an example of how gay bars have changed over the past decade. “Some of these discos that you see use to be the meeting places for radical activists, now most of those activists would be too disgusted to even step inside. It used to be customary for police to find out which bars were gay and then raid them, arresting people, until the bar would go out of business. Now the police just wait outside, because they know that if they were to continue raiding the bars, the tourists would not return. Our ‘protection’ is done in the interest of the economy, not in the interest of our rights”.⁶¹ Hector as well as other activists that I spoke with referred to this economic phenomenon as “el mercado” or the market.⁶²

The market is a fundamental contributor to the social construction of gay

⁵⁸ a similar question regarding reasons as to why homophobia exists as it does in Chile, was asked to all of the gay activists that were interviewed and a similar response was returned. Most of the interviewees described homophobia as a systematic sort of discrimination that begins with the state (which is interchangeable with the Church) and trickles through society. When the state is homophobic, the public doesn't feel bad or wrong about being homophobic themselves, therefore creating a cyclical system of homophobia.

⁵⁹ Refer to footnote #30, in this same document are the reports of contemporary conservative psychologists in Chile that have reverted to the belief that homosexuality is a perverted disease.

⁶⁰ Refer to footnote #23

⁶¹ Nunez, Hector. informal interview, 11/30/03

⁶² The market or el mercado is a term that was used frequently by both Carlos Sanchez and Hector Nunez to describe globalization in the realm of homosexuality. I use it in this essay with the same meaning.

identity in Chile. A large portion of the gay and lesbian community identify with a cluster of images and stereotypes that have been formed and projected by a global market of consumerism. Carlos Sanchez suggests that this image is just as much a product of heterosexism and homophobic culture as it is a product of gay consumerism.⁶³ Essentially the market is capitalistic and invites gay consumption, in which gays have responded by consuming. In Chile, as in North America, the “gay lifestyle”⁶⁴ is purchased through facets such as fashion, admission into clubs, CD’s of the music played in those clubs, restaurants, cafes, bookstores Movies, TV shows, etc. The possibilities of consumption are endless. As Hector pointed out, the phenomenon of the gay market in Chile is a result of globalization.

The controversial occurrence of globalization has permitted sexual minorities to extend their influence across borders. According to Carlos Sanchez, North America has extended a global network of gays and lesbians, unfortunately however, motivated by consumption. In this sense, globalization has been conceived as the enemy of the exploited and marginalized minorities; nonetheless this is the direct consequence of profit driven individuals who administer political and economic power in Chile. In addition, these global publicity campaigns support a proposed concept that in order for the market to profit, it must to some extent accept all that has been subordinated in the past by traditional forms of capitalist domination. Many multinational companies have decided to position themselves in

the homosexual market⁶⁵. This is done by advertising their products in gay bars and discos. Many multinational corporations fill the pages of the program guide for the Santiago pride parade with images and advertisements that convey a message of gay acceptance in consumer culture. This is often done within the explicit pretext of creating visibility and advocating for human rights for gays and lesbians. However, it is clear that the market is not founded in, nor motivated by political action.⁶⁶

Within this culture of commodified identity, a class division has separated the gay community in Chile. For instance to go to a fashionable club, dressed in the latest trends requires quite a bit of spending money. Gay fashion, as in the rest of the world, is not cheap, nor is the admission into the bars and clubs. For those who are gay and of a lower class status, it is difficult to obtain the same identity that is purchased by those of a privileged class.

Although Chile rates among countries with the most homophobia in South America⁶⁷, there is a forming trend of acceptance among the upper class. However, Chilean lesbian and gay activists remain critical to the trend. Pablo Llanes, openly gay writer of *Machos* (a popular soap opera), explains in an interview with *el Sabado*⁶⁸, a weekly

⁶⁵ In Chile many of the companies that have developed advertising campaigns that cater to gays and lesbians are Latin American companies such as Crystal beer, Alanzo de Cordova clothing, and various brands of phone card companies. These advertisements are displayed in gay bars and the program to gay pride, not in public places or on television.

⁶⁶ *ibid*

⁶⁷ Durechos Humanos en America Latina y el Caribe. Asociacion Internacional de Lesbianas y Gays (ILGA)

⁶⁸ Coddou B, Paula. La Vida Fuera del Closet. *El Sabado*. 7/18/03. ppg.33

⁶³ Sanchez, Carlos. 12/2/03

⁶⁴ “Gay lifestyle”, referring to fashion trends, music and aspects of pop culture that are stigmatized as “gay”.

magazine, his discomfort with the bourgeois trend to have a token gay friend, “Within a social group of a certain category, you cannot blame gays or lesbians. It’s considered *IN*, like a mascot or a walker and this bothers me very much. These people claim to accept the gay world yet they discriminate in ways that are so hypocritical, buying a gay friend like a decorative object or a new scarf purchased in Alonzo de Cordova [a popular *gay* fashion store]”. This is largely attributed to the success of the market, as this trend presents itself only in a market medium. That is to say that it is not *IN* to have a gay friend who does not flaunt the current *Gay* fashion. Which means that the only people eligible for this acceptance are those who can afford the “*gay* lifestyle”.

Every evening at eight O’clock in the Thiznau house⁶⁹, conversation at the dinner table would grind to a halt as the television would turn on. Along with most people in suburban Chile, the Thiznaus were obsessed with the current telenovela, *Machos*. As a cultural conversation piece, the family and I watched *Machos* closely, discussing every scene during commercial breaks. *Machos* serves as a perfect example of everything regarding the market that has been discussed thus far. It is a daily soap opera about a family with seven closely related brothers and all the drama that each brother faces. In this series there is a character by the name of Ariel who is gay. Ariel is the first gay character to ever surface in Chilean television. Because of this, Ariel has become the sole representative for all gay people to the Chilean public. Ariel, considered by most gay identified people I spoke with, is a very poor representative. This char-

acter is the only brother in the show that does not have an evident romance. Ariel is also only seen in the house, without a social life and often alone. He is also despised by most of his brothers. What may appear as a progressive step in the direction of gay visibility, only proves to do more harm than good as many Chilean gays and lesbians question; of what use is it to have a gay character on television if he is only portrayed as an outcast? Ariel is a product of the market which often uses a gay image solely for profitable gain, caring not about the political deterioration that it has imposed on gay identity.

According to Carlos Sanchez and Hector Nunez, *Machos* is not the only medium in which the gay market can be closely scrutinized. Both advised me to go to a number of different discothèques, clubs, restaurants, websites and clothing stores in order to witness the market as it functions. In each of the following three paragraphs I describe a location in which I observed the *gay* market.

I met Julie on the Bella Vista side of the Mapucho River at 11:15 PM, nothing in Santiago starts before then. Julie is a close friend of mine from Boston who was also in Chile at the same time that I was. The plan was to each conduct our own research on the best club to go to and then compare notes upon meeting. The decision was made easy since we were both told to go the same disco called Bokhara. With a map torn out of her travel guide, we had a vague idea of which direction to go. Walking through areas sprinkled with trendy restaurants and flashy cafes assured us that we were on the right path. We approached Bokhara, which would have been easy to miss had it not been for the line of super models extending from the door. Feeling very gringo, I paid the entrance fee for the

⁶⁹ I lived with the Thiznaus for 3 months, from September through November 03.

both of us. The man working the toll-booth said to me “siete mil” (seven thousand pesos, which at the time was roughly eleven dollars). Feeling cheated but not stupid I pointed to the sign in the window that read 3000 and said “porque siete mil? Quiero pagar solamente para dos personas, yo y ella? (Why seven thousand? I only want to pay for two people, me and her). He pointed to Julie and explained “para las mujeres es mas caro, mil mas para cada mujer. (For women its more expensive, one thousand pesos more for each woman). Feeling deflated we proceeded to enter the disco. Inside, men in designer clothing stood closely packed together around the bar. Bokhara has two levels, each with a bar and dance floor. Both levels are decorated with beer and fashion advertisements, mostly portraying images of undressed men. Loud Latin techno made it difficult to talk to anyone, including Julie. In between songs, Julie commented to me on her disappointment of a female absence. The occurrence of male domination became a reappearing trend as I observed other facets of the market as well.⁷⁰

Gaychile.com, founded in 1998, is the official website for the lesbian and gay community of Chile⁷¹. Any gay traveler can quickly learn about all the best restaurants clubs cafes to go to, as well as access information about Santiago based activist and HIV/AIDS organizations. One can choose from a va-

riety of sections including services, music and movie reviews even fashion advice. gaychile.com is unmistakably faithful to the market. Upon logging on to the website a barrage of images and products cluster the screen. Its difficult to ignore the masculinity of this website. Almost every advertisement uses a half naked man to sell its product. The section titled servicios (services) has lists of the best gay recreational places to spend time, however there is no mention of a lesbian bar, disco or restaurant. When I confronted Jose Victor, the owner of gaychile.com, about the absence of lesbian resources from gaychile.com, he responded, “there are many resources and websites for lesbians in Chile, we figure that since lesbians are happy using those websites we don’t need to include them on our website. There has never been a demand by lesbians to be included on gaychile.com.”⁷² When Carlos Sanchez listened to the tape of this interview, he responded, “anything that has a label as broad as “gaychile” should be inclusive of all kinds of gay people in Chile, not only those who request to be represented”⁷³. Another interviewee added that gaychile.com is a good representative of the gay market in Chile, which is created by and for men⁷⁴.

In seven different interviews, including Jose Victor, I asked where to find “gay fashion” in Chile. each person unanimously responded with “Alanzo De Cordova”. Alanzo De Cordova is a line of fashion, based in Chile that uses openly gay models to display its products. The store itself is located in a district of Santiago called Bellas Artes, which is known by Santiagans as the trendy fashion district that borders the

⁷⁰ Bokhara was not the only club that I went to nor was it the only club that charged more for females. Bunker and Fausto also charged one thousand pesos more for woman. As for female recreation, I found one bar that was exclusively for lesbians called Amor de Bueno. Other clubs that I observed were Pagano, Firranali and Diva,
⁷¹ I reviewed the gaychile.com website frequently, with reference to this study between the dates of 11/15/03 to 5/25/04

⁷² Victor, Jose. 11/20/03

⁷³ Sanchez, Carlos. 11/21/03

⁷⁴ Castillo, Karren. 11/29/03

gay district. With the permission of the man at the counter, coincidentally named Alanzo, I watched shoppers swagger in, purooz the racks and occasionally make a purchase. The entirety of clothes were for men however in the time that I spent there I did see two women purchase androgynous items such as a scarf and a hat. I politely asked the woman buying the scarf if it was for her, laughingly she replied, “no no no, es para mi esposo (no, no, no its for my husband), he likes the clothes, but hates coming in here”. After leaving, Alanzo from behind the counter confirmed that woman often shop for their husbands here because typically heterosexual men don’t like to be seen in a store associated with homosexuality. But how did this store become stigmatized for homosexuality and not *male* homosexuality? It seems that within the gay market, men are the targeted consumers under the prefix “gay”, which more commonly refers to community inclusive of all genders.

The market in Chile has not gone unnoticed by gay Chileans nor has it functioned without response. Pedro Lemebel, a famous openly gay Chilean writer, poet, artist and performer has co produced with Carmen Berenguer a series of experimental films in response to the market, titled “*Postal del Sur*”. The first of the series, produced in 1990 at the moment of Chilean transition to democracy, is related to the second, produced in 1992, and sets up questions about the relation of the human body to market-driven forms of identity. The first film presents a dull image of television snow blocked off by the letters “MU”, the written equivalent to the sound of a cow. The initial silent segment is followed by a sign that reads, “sonido de la carne en al trafico al Mercado” (sound of flesh in rout to the

market). In the second video by Berenguer and Lemebel, we see a still black and white photo of the back of a headless woman; around her neck lies a set of seven razors laced together like pendants on a necklace. The use of the razors is Unexplained to the viewer, it is also unclear who will utilize these tools in the altering or configuring of this female experience. The subsequent scene, now with human interaction and filmed in color, captures a formal shot of a woman’s torso, with seven threaded clusters taped to her chest as if they were hair or electrodes. Again, the question of female activity is still left unanswered. Nevertheless, despite the forceful dehumanization perpetrated by the cameras gaze, a resistance begins to emerge, heard in the powerful rhythms of the woman’s breathing suggestive perhaps of simple survival or the initial sound of a voice.

A Gay Chilean Response to Identity Politics

The production of culture and the definition of identity are absolutely crucial to the formation and collective action of the Chilean gay rights movement. Among gays and lesbians in Chile, there is a continual discourse involving the politics of identity. As the movement progresses and as people experience queer culture differently, various interpretations of Chilean gay Identity are emerging. Historically the politicized struggles of sexual identities have modified the conditions under which the Identities initially formed.⁷⁵ Each individual experience with homophobia from the church and state, machista culture and the market, shapes both a unique and shared sexual

⁷⁵ Escofiet, Jeff. *American Homo*. University of California, Berkely. 1998

identity. Groups such as the Movimiento Unificado de Minorias Sexuales (Unified Movement of Sexual Minorities, MUMS) and the Movimiento para Integración y Liberación Homosexual (movement for the integration and liberation of homosexuals, MOVILH) encourage people to construct personal as well as collective identities through discourse and other social interactions.

The Emergence of a Political Gay Identity

MOVILH and MUMS are the two leading organizations in the gay rights movement in Chile and both have been integral to shaping and influencing Chilean gay identities. Although equally active, these organizations differ in political strategy. As result of this difference, they have attracted a variety of activists with various interpretations of Chilean gay identity.

During an AIDS workshop in early June 1991, a heated discussion surfaced among a group of activists. Rolando Himenez recalls, "Everyone was sharing their experiences of being beaten up or tormented or just plain affected by homophobia. It got very emotional. This was not long after Pinochet had *finally* been driven out. We all agreed that for the first time in seventeen years, social change for gays and lesbians was actually possible. So we started coming up with ideas for an organization and gay rights movement." Less than a week after the AIDS workshop, MOVILH was founded and a movement began to form. In February of 1992, MOVILH held its first public conference. Marco Ruiz remembers it as a "gigantic success" and "liberating to see so many gay Chileans in one place, discussing important issues".⁷⁶ Carlos Sanchez remembers it as

a disaster, "everyone wanted liberation, looking to other countries for influences, but other countries have other political situations different from Chile. Half the conference wanted to be reformists, some wanted nothing more than integration and a few wouldn't stand for anything less than radical liberation". Political strategies became centerpieces at this conference. People's political needs varied depending on how they experienced gay life in Chile.

Carlos Sanchez described to me the arguments made by supporters of each political strategy including those of the integrationists.⁷⁷ Integrationists want to shadow the heterosexual model. The objective of integration, also known as assimilation, is for any subaltern group to integrate into the dominant culture by imitating the social norms of that culture. In the US gay rights movement Andrew Sullivan refers to this as gaining a "place at the table". Assimilation is the process of practice and negotiation⁷⁸, practicing dominant social norms (marriage or butch/femme relationships) in order to hold a better-respected position when negotiating at "the table", which is also dominated by heterosexuals. Integrationist activism seeks the recognition and respect of the oppressive heterosexist culture by demonstrating the ability to hold the same values and be just as "normal"⁷⁹ as heterosexuals. The point of being integrated is to blend, to have no visible difference and no conflict. Integrationists recognize the oppressive nature of institutions such as the Chilean government and feel that the best way to abolish it is to cooperate with and sometimes work within the institutions.

⁷⁷ Carlos Sanchez 11/11/03

⁷⁸ Cennon Pirani

⁷⁹ see Warner, Michael. *The Trouble With Normal*. New York, Free Press. 1999 (pp59-61))

⁷⁶ Marco Ruiz, 11/15/03

Tina Ruis: Integrationist Survival

Assimilation is particularly important to some “travestis” (transvestites) as well as certain members of the transgender community in Chile. I met Tina Ruis⁸⁰ at three in the morning in the Libertad district of Vina Del Mar. After walking a friend home from the bar, I got frantically lost trying to find the street corner where I could get a taxi that routed my neighborhood. I walked up and down the streets of Libertad, searching for the corner that I had seen earlier that day, but the dark of night had changed everything. After combing the avenues and boulevards for what seemed like centuries, I realized that the Libertad district turns into a transvestite sex market after midnight. Trying not to stare, I continued looking for my corner until I heard “OYE!” (“HEY!”). *Que necesitas gringo?* (What do you need gringo?). A tall woman, cock-eyed and examining me, swaggered in my direction. *Un colectivo a pararera uno* (a taxi to pararera uno), I responded. She nodded her head and smiled as if it all made sense now. *Tres cuadreas en este direccion* (three blocks in this direction), she pointed. We began walking and making small talk. She was curious to know what I was studying, so I explained to her my interest in studying the gay and lesbian community in Santiago. This got her excited and she quickly responded “*soy travesti!*” (Im a transvestite!) I pretended to be surprised. She immediately went into her life story about growing up as female in a male’s body with a patriarchal father and no place to hide. When I told her about the conversation that I recently had with Carlos Sanchez about integrationism her stride slowed down.

⁸⁰ Tina Ruiz 10/25/03

“Este es un argumento que tengo casi cada noche con otras travesties” (This is an argument that I have almost every night with other transvestites). “For me, integration is necessary for survival, sex work is my only option, sure I would love to be an accountant or work in a bank, I’m good with numbers [giggles to herself], but because of the way I look, I can not work in such places. I may look like a man dressed as a woman, but actually I am just as much a woman as any other bitch and in order for me to survive, I have to prove that to the police, the church, the government and every other jueon.” Not all Transvestites in Chile consider themselves integrationists, in fact Traves Chile, the largest transvestite rights organization in Chile describes itself as reformist. However, according to Tina Ruis and Carlos Sanchez, Integration is attractive to some Chilean transvestites due to the esthetic nature of their appearance.⁸¹

The debates and discourse that emerged at the MOVILH conference in 1992 had a dynamic impact on the gay and lesbian community. With the sobering realization that the Chilean gay and lesbian community is internally diverse, various intra-community organizations and movements, that addressed specific political needs, began to mobilize.

⁸¹ I found this interesting, particularly because it is the transvestite and transgender communities in the US that are seen as radical contributors to the gay liberation movement. With the current debate about same sex marriage in the US and its ties to assimilation politics, many have been asking: With a movement founded in assimilation, what happens to the transvestites/drag queen and transgender communities? Many of the interviewees in Chile confirmed that some transvestites and transgender people are actually seen as politically conservative because they participate in butch/femme relationships and fight for assimilation.

MUMS was founded in 1997 under the umbrella organization of the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA). Victor Albaroz⁸², one of the head organizers for MUMS in 2003, described it as a “reformist organization”⁸³. Many of the people that were present at the MOVILH conference in 1992, who were arguing against integration, now work for MUMS.

Albaroz describes reformism as being born out of the desires of sexual minorities to abolish social discrimination by making changes in legislature. Reformism, according to Albaroz, is a way to systematize counter cultural demands without conforming to social norms of the dominant culture. Reformists believe that one should not feel the need to conform (practice and negotiate) to oppressive social norms in order to establish equal rights. Rather, members of the gay and lesbian community should be able to maintain their own cultural values and traditions in coexistence with those of a heterosexual culture. Reformists believe that the only method of achieving such utopian harmony is through modifying the legislative system to recognize and respect sexual minorities as equal citizens to their heterosexual counterparts. Within this context, progressive work to amend and or eliminate the political norms that stand against the rights of sexual minorities often begin from the premise that an advancement of legal change ultimately generates cultural transformations that manifest themselves in a social ideology. The majority of organizers for the gay rights movement in Chile use a method of reformism to approach social inequal-

ity, implying that, in order to change people’s minds, you must first change laws.⁸⁴

Tatiana Roja: A Punk Rock Lesbian

I waited patiently in the Belles Artes sub-way station to meet Tatiana Roja. I knew little about her, only what Carlos had told me and the sound of her voice, from speaking with her on the phone. I knew she was in her late fifties and that she had two sons, close to my age. It was 12:15 and the lunch rush was in full swing. Being an ethnographer and historian, I love watching people especially places so crowded and busy that no one notices me. I had my gaze focused on one particular woman who had illuminating purple hair and a leather jacket decorated with political buttons on the collar and a dangling chain from the shoulder strap. Her day-glow orange tights and green combat boots made her easy to follow as she swash buckled through the crowd. Every unpolitic movement she made put a smile to my lips and at a moment, made me laugh out loud. She heard me. Like a bullet train, she was moving toward me. Bashfully, I looked at the ground and pretended to have never noticed her. “Daniel?” she yelled, “Oh my god”, I thought, “this is the woman I’m interviewing”. “Si, Tatiana?”, I responded. “Claro que si!” (absolutely!), she replied and gave me a kiss on each cheek. “Vamos!, tengo hambre (Lets go! Im hungry) she asserted while grabbing my hand and whisking me to the nearest café.

Interested in my study of Chilean gay identity, Tatiana passionately described to me the duality of her identity as a woman as well as a lesbian. Within doing so, she also lamented about certain

⁸² Albaroz, Victor. Santiago, 11/14/03. Albaroz is a primary organizer and spokes person for MUMS.

⁸³ Victor Albaroz

⁸⁴ Victor Albaroz

aspects of the existing gay rights movement in Chile. “Lesbians cannot trust organizations such as MUMS and MOVILH to fight for them because men dominate them and women are very different from men”. According to Tatiana, the success in mobilizing lesbians for their own emancipation in Chile depends upon recognition of their dual identity – as homosexuals and as women. Like gay men, lesbians in Chile suffer from religious condemnation, Machista culture and discriminatory legislation, but in decidedly different ways. Roja claims that gay men are culturally distinct from lesbians. They more commonly have open or short relationships, where as lesbians often have long term monogamous relationships⁸⁵. Such differences affect the political needs of both genders. Gay male activists in the past have lead organizations such as MUMS and MOVILH into legislative battles over police violence. This arose because men who were cruising in public parks were being attacked and beaten. The problem of promiscuity that was so central to male sexuality was of less concern to lesbians who typically do not cruise in the public parks.⁸⁶

In the early formation of the Chilean gay rights movement in Chile, Tatiana recalls numerous, often unconscious ways, gay males defined gayness in terms that negated the experience of lesbians. “The idea of building an “all inclusive organization is wonderful in theory, but impossible in reality. Woman experience gay life differently than men just as a transgender person experiences gay life differently, we need our own

organizations, but more importantly we need communal acceptance and support for our organizations.”⁸⁷ Karen Castillo added, “Lesbians have many small organizations and web sites, Colectiva Lesbica Universitaria, Colectiva Lesbica MUMS y rompiendoelsilencio.cl, but in our machista setting, these organizations don’t get the respect and recognition they need.”⁸⁸ According to these two women Lesbian life in Chile takes on forms that, although resemble those of gay men in some respects, constitute a unique social experience. Cultural definitions of female sexuality and Machista prescriptions about women’s proper place in society have profoundly impacted lesbian identity in Chile.

Luis Paez: Ant-identity liberation

The music was so loud, I could feel the beat in my veins. I leaned against the wall, watching people, mostly men, mingle and flirt with one another. I was told earlier that afternoon that Fausto was simply the best club in Santiago, but as I stood there, watching, I failed to see what separated this disco from the rest. Luis Paez walked toward me, splitting the crowd like Moses to the Red Sea. He had a drink in each hand and when he got close enough he extended one of them to me. I stood staring and surprised. He smiled and began to speak. His lips moved, but his words were muted by the Latin dance beat. Still confused, I shrugged at whatever it was that he said. With a tilt of his head, he motioned toward the outdoor patio. Stepping outside was a wonderful relief to my ears. We sat in plastic chairs, sipping on whiskey and making small talk. When I mentioned the study I was con-

⁸⁵ On the contrast between male and female relationships patterns, see Alfred Kinsey et al., *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*. (Philadelphia, 1953), pp 456-58

⁸⁶ Tatiana Roja

⁸⁷ Tatiana Roja

⁸⁸ Karen Castillo. Santiago, 11/12/03

ducting, his ears perked up and he straightened from his slouch. “Quisas puedo ayudar” (maybe I can help), he interjected, wanting the details. However as soon as I used the phrase *identidad gay* (gay identity), he sunk back into his chair and snickered “Olvida lo, no puedo ayudarte, no tengo identidad, soy bisexual. (nevermind, I cant help you. I don’t have an identity, I’m bisexual)”. Laughingly, I asked him to explain. But he was tired of talking and wanted to dance. Luis stood up and motioned that I follow him back into the deafening disco. We met for lunch the following afternoon to talk more about his discordance with identity.

Over Cheese sandwiches and coffee, Luis told me about his awkward positionality in the gay and lesbian community and his liberationist approach to politics. Similar to Tatiana Roja, Luis described to me a duality of identity. “I am seen differently by gay people than I am by straight people but discriminated just the same. When I tell someone who identifies as gay that I am bisexual, I am usually told that eventually I will “come out of the closet”, they think I’m embarrassed to say that I am gay, but the fact is, I am *not* gay, I am attracted to both sexes. Similarly, when I told my parents that I am bisexual, my father kicked me out of the house for being a maricone! Heterosexuals and homosexuals have rejected me alike, so I don’t want their identities. I am Luis Paez, that’s it.” Luis also vented his frustrations about the lack of resources for bisexuals in Chile. “How are we supposed to create some kind of *identity* for ourselves when we cant even find each other? There are no Bisexual organizations, clubs, bars or cafes. Do bisexuals even exist?” He was only further bothered when I asked him about communicating his frustra-

tions to MUMS or MOVILH. “They know about people like me, but that’s not the point. Even if I *were* gay I wouldn’t work for them, MOVILH and MUMS are blind reformists.” According to Luis, the lesbian and gay community will never be liberated by reforming legislature. “We will never be entirely free if the ones creating and changing our laws are heterosexual men of European descent.”

According to Luis Paez, liberationists take the legislative power out of the hands of “corrupt politicians” and put it into the hands of organizations that mobilize for human rights.⁸⁹ Similar to reformists, gay liberationists do not abandon their own culture by assimilating into a heterosexually dominant society. Nor do they seek the respect or acceptance of those that oppress them. Liberationists such as Paez believe that as long as the legislative system is controlled by a small percentage of the population, which historically have been racist, patriarchal and heterosexist, it is incapable of liberating sexual minorities. Paez claims, “working within the existing government has proved to be fruitless and at times disastrous, if *everyone* in the Chilean gay and lesbian community wants equal representation and rights, then we need to stop wasting our time, letting straight men change laws for gay men. We need to work as community to start changing our system of governance.” It was clear after several discussions with Luis that he experienced Chilean gay culture in ways very distinct from those who self-identified as “gay”. Cultural rejection from the lesbian and gay community combined with a hetero-

⁸⁹ “Politicos corruptos” (corrupt politicians) is a phrase that Luis Paez used to describe why reformism can not work from liberationist perspective.

sexual disregard for his sexuality, deeply impacted his anti-identity and liberationist approach to politics.

Tina Ruis, Tatiana Roja and Luis Paez all have distinct sexual identities that have been shaped by their individual experiences with Chilean homophobia from the Church and state, machista culture and the market.⁹⁰ Due to varying political agendas, central to their identity, and the difficulty of building an all-inclusive movement, certain members of the community have been left out of the Chilean gay rights movement. Political movements and identity politics are constantly evolving. Collectively these distinct identities create the social make-up of Chilean gay culture, which has been and will continue to be crucial in the comprehensive representation within the Chilean gay rights movement.

⁹⁰ There are many other factors, not mentioned in this paper such as race, class, and family, that also shape sexual identity.